The Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry was probably commissioned in the 1070s by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, half-brother to William the Conqueror. It is one of the first known tapestries, called a tapestry. It is in fact an embroidered, horizontal wall hanging made of woolen yarn on linen. Some historians argue that it was embroidered in Kent, England. The original tapestry is on display at Bayeux in Normandy, France. This is one of the first recordings of an historical event shortly after it happened.

Elements of Romanesque Architecture

The Romanesque style and how it differs from Classical architecture and Gothic architecture, which students will learn about in the next chapter, is the single most important concept that students should remember from this period. The text provides excellent and concise explanations on pp. 511–513 and p. 517. Students should be adding to their notes on the characteristics of different styles of architecture.

Deciphering Christian Symbolism

New images of Christian iconography appear in Romanesque art. Gislebertus’s Last Judgement, from Autun (p. 520) is a good example of the evolving body of Christian symbolism.

Regional Differences

The stylistic differences between cathedrals in France and in Italy need to be understood and recognized by students. This regionalization will become even more pronounced during the Gothic period, as students will see in the next chapter. Students should add the characteristics of different cathedral styles to their notes on architectural innovations.

11 Important Aspects of Romanesque Architecture

1. “Romanesque” is the first international style since the Roman Empire. Also known as the “Norman” style in England.
2. Competition among cities for the largest churches, which continues in the Gothic period via a “quest for height.”
3. Masonry (stone) the preferred medium. Craft of concrete essentially lost in this period. Rejection of wooden structures or structural elements.
4. East end of church the focus for liturgical services. West end for the entrance to church.
5. Church portals as “billboards” for scripture or elements of faith.
6. Cruciform plans. Nave and transept at right angles to one another. Church as a metaphor for heaven.
7. Elevation of churches based on basilican forms, but with the nave higher than the side aisles.
8. Interiors articulated by repetitive series of ribbed vaults. Nave and transept, and occasionally the choir, sometimes have light walls, with heavy masonry behind them.
9. Small windows in comparison to buildings to withstand weight.
**Church of St. Etienne**
Caen, France
1115-1120

**ROMANESQUE ART**

This church was first constructed in the honor of the city’s first bishop, St. Saturninus, who was martyred in the middle of the third century. The church served as an escape route for people fleeing to Toulouse for protection from the northern invaders.

Pilgrims would flock to this church in the masses, and the church had been designed specifically to accommodate them. The plan of this church closely resembles that of Santiago de Compostela's and Saint Martin at Tours and exemplifies what has come to be called the “pilgrimage type.”

**Aerial view (southwest) of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, France ca 1070-1120**

Identify THESE parts of the church layout!

**Bernardus Geldunius, Christ in Majesty, Saint-Sernin, ca 1096.**

This is one of seven marble slabs, representing angels, apostles, and Christ, made for the great pilgrimage church of Saint-Sernin at Toulouse. An inscription on a marble altar, part of the group, states that the reliefs date to the year 1096 and that the artist was a certain BERNARDUS GELDUNIUS.

Christ sits in a mandorla (a medieval Christian artistic convention by which an oval or almond-shaped area or series of lines surrounds a deity, most commonly Jesus.) His right hand raised in blessing, his left hand resting on an open book inscribed with the words “Pax vobis” (“peace be unto you”).

The signs of the Four Evangelists occupy the slab’s corners. Above are the eagle of Saint John and the angel of Saint Matthew. Below are the ox of Saint Luke and the lion of Saint Mark.

**West facade of Saint-Étienne, Caen, France, begun 1067**

Most critics consider the abbey church of Saint-Étienne at Caen the masterpiece of Norman Romanesque architecture. It was begun by William of Normandy, in 1067 and must have advanced rapidly, as he was buried there in 1087.

The spires were added to the towers during the Gothic age in an attempt to bring the structure closer to the heavens. The use of stone in the nave was a common practice. A more spacious feel and allowed for the addition of large windowed arches in the third story. The result reduced the interior wall surface and gave Saint-Étienne’s nave a light and airy quality that is unusual in the Romanesque period.

**Interior of Saint-Étienne, Caen, France ca 1115-1120**

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**Cathedral Complex, Pisa, Italy**

Cathedral begun 1063, baptistry begun 1153, campanile begun 1174

Save for the upper portion of the baptistry, with its remodeled Gothic exterior, the three structures are stylistically Romanesque. The construction of this cathedral in Pisa began in the same year as that of Saint Mark’s in Venice.

The goal of the project was not only to create a monument to God, but also to bring credit to the city. The cathedral’s campanile, detached in the standard Italian fashion, is the famous “Leaning Tower of Pisa.” The tilted vertical axis is the result of a settling foundation. It began to “lean” even while under construction and now inclines some twenty-one feet out of plumb at the top.

The “Leaning Tower” is highly complex in its rounded form, as its stages are marked by a grid of arcaded galleries that repeat the cathedral’s facade motif and effectively relate the tower to its mother building.
ITALIAN ROMANESQUE

Italian provinces developed a great diversity of Romanesque architectural styles.

Tuscan and Roman churches featured classical Corinthian capitals and sculptural borders, as well as colored marbles in geometric patterns and galleries, and facades with sculpted figures in relief.

In southern Italy, a rich style combining Byzantine, Roman, Arabic, Lombard, and Norman elements was created, with lavish use of mosaic decorations and interlaced pointed arches.

**Pisa Baptistery**

- *Pisa, Italy*
- *Baptistry begun 1153*

**Pisa Cathedral Complex**

- *Pisa, Italy (begun in 1063)*

**Baptistry of San Giovanni**

- *Florence, Italy, ca 1059*

Florence is always associated with the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries, but it was already an independent city-state during the Romanesque era.

This structure was dedicated to the patron San Giovanni (St. John) by Pope Nicholas III in 1059.

Freestanding Italian baptistries such as this and the one at Pisa are unusual and reflect the great significance the Florentines and Pisans attached to baptisms.

In plan, San Giovanni is a domed octagon, enwrapped on the exterior by a graceful arcade, three arches to a bay. It has three entrances, one each on the north, south and east sides. On the west side an oblong sanctuary replaced the original semicircular apse.

**Christ in Majesty**

- *Saint-Pierre Moissac, France, ca 1115-1135*

This frieze, in southwestern France, announces the end of the human race (the Last Judgment) and the end of the world and of human life.

This church was an important stop along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela.

The monks, enriched by the gifts of pilgrims and noble benefactors, adorned their church and its cloister, with one of the most extensive series of sculptures of the Romanesque age.

**Christ in Majesty**

- *Saint-Pierre Moissac, France, ca 1115-1135*

This scene depicts the Judgment in progress, announced by four trumpet-blowing angels.

Once again, Christ sits enthroned in the center of the tympanum in a mandorla that angels support. He presides over the separation of the Blessed from the Damned.

On the left, when facing the tympanum, an obliging angel boosts one of the Blessed into the heavenly city. Below, the souls of the dead are lined up to await their fate.

On the left end of the lintel, two men carry bags with a cross and shell, symbolic of the pilgrims to Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela. Those who had made the difficult journey would be judged favorably.

To their right of the two men are three small figures begging to an angel to intercede on their behalf. The angel responds by pointing to the Judge above.

To Christ's left, are all those condemned to Hell. One poor soul is plucked from the earth by giant hands. Angels and devils contest at the scales, each trying to manipulate the balance for or against a soul.

**Lion and Old Testament Prophet (Jeremiah, Isaiah?)**

- *Moissac, France, ca 1115-1130*

The figure on this trumeau is debatable. Some scholars believe it to be Jeremiah, and others think it to be Isaiah. Whoever the prophet is, he displays the scroll where his prophetic vision is written.

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**Gislebertus, Last Judgment**

- *Ca 1120-1135*

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**Lincoln, Last Judgment**

- *Christ Church, Lincoln, England, ca 1330-1350*

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On the left, when facing the tympanum, an obliging angel boosts one of the Blessed into the heavenly city. Below, the souls of the dead are lined up to await their fate.

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To their right of the two men are three small figures begging to an angel to intercede on their behalf. The angel responds by pointing to the Judge above.
To Christ’s left, are all those condemned to Hell. One poor soul is plucked from the earth by giant hands! Angels and devils contest at the scales, each trying to manipulate the balance for or against a soul.

Key Questions When Studying ROMANESQUE ART

- **PILGRIMAGES…**
  - Why were there so many?
  - How did they affect the building of Churches?

- **CHURCHES…**
  - Why were Churches at this time given the name ‘Romanesque’?
  - What were the common elements of a Romanesque Church?

- **HISTORY…**
  - How did William the Conqueror’s victory in England affect them?
  - What is the Bayeux Tapestry, and what’s so special about it?

DO YOU KNOW THESE Art History TERMS?

- trumeau
- lintel
- campanile
- buttress
- cloisonné
- ribs
- mandorla
- lantern
- clustered pier
- undercutting
- groin vault
- voussoir
- jamb

Blues’ Guide to Understanding Romanesque Art

- Spans across many countries & styles
- Small Windows, thick stone walls
- Many Churches had Gothic spires added later
- Long Ribbed Vaults in the Nave
- Small piers used as buttresses
- Decorative Tympanums & Portals
- More side aisles and ambulatories to meet needs of pilgrimages (i.e. outside galleries)
- Addition of the separate Baptistry
Before the 10th century, most English buildings were wood; stone buildings were small and roughly constructed. The Norman Romanesque style replaced the Saxon style in England after the Norman Conquest in 1066, and from about 1120 to 1200 builders erected monumental Norman structures, including numerous churches and cathedrals. These buildings were characterized by heavy walls and piers, rectangular apses, double transepts, and deeply recessed portals. Naves were covered with flat roofs, later replaced by vaults, and side aisles were usually covered with groined vaults.

Worms Cathedral
(Worms, Germany)