

Romanesque Architecture Introduction

Name:

Introduction to Romanesque Architecture

The name gives it away. Romanesque architecture is based on Roman architectural elements. It is the rounded Roman arch that is the basis for structures built in this style. It is important to note that since the life and death of Christ, almost every major artistic and architectural movement was named after a location or leader (think Byzantine and Hiberno-Saxon). The building projects during Roman and Carolingian times were often dictated from the top down. The emperor, ruler, or king, would decide what would be built, where it would be built, and how. Romanesque construction was similar to a “grass-roots” movement where each building project was similar in characteristics and elements, but varied by geographical location and cultural influence.

Ancient Roman Ruins... Now With Arches

When Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800 ce, Europe began to take its first steps out of the “Dark Ages”. The remains of Roman civilization were seen all over the continent, and legends of the great empire would have been passed down through generations. So, when Charlemagne wanted to unite his empire and validate his reign, he began building churches in the Roman style—particularly the style of Christian Rome in the days of Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor.

After a gap of around two hundred years with no large building projects, the architects of Charlemagne’s day looked to the arched, or arcaded, system seen in Christian Roman edifices as a model. It is a logical system of stresses and buttressing, which was fairly easily engineered for large structures, and it began to be used

in gatehouses, chapels, and churches in Europe.

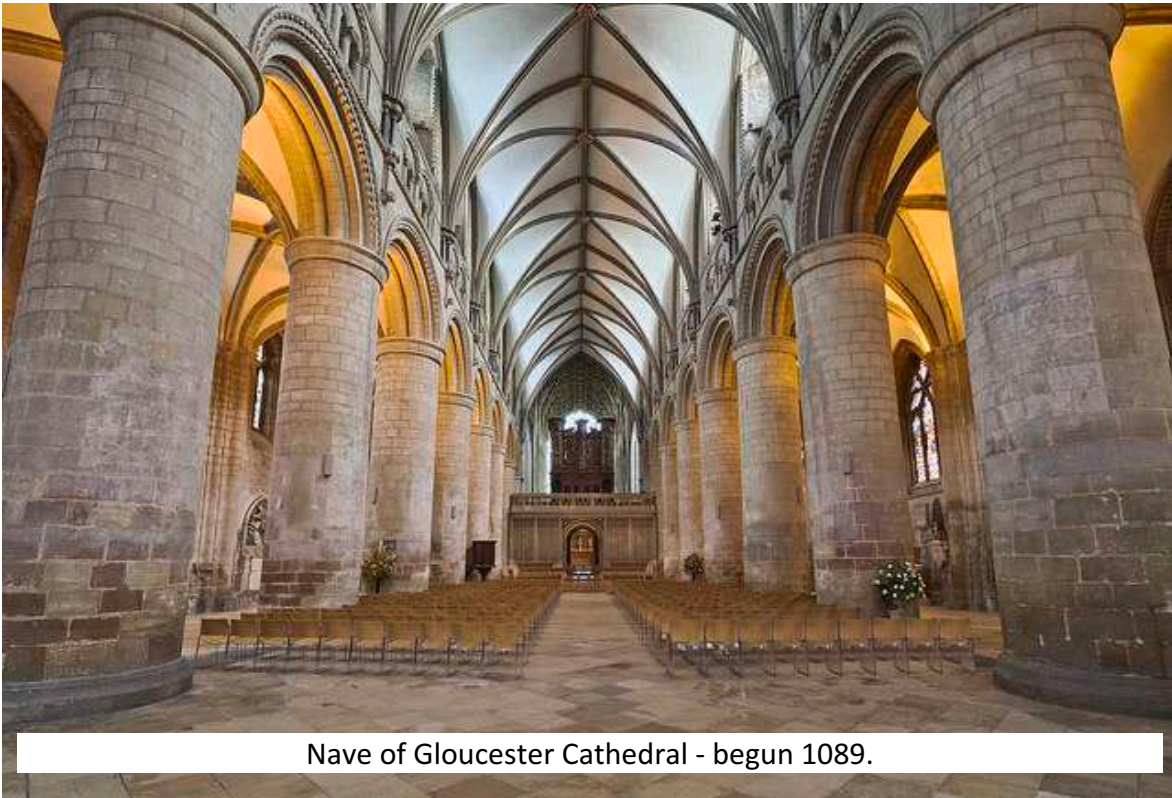


Interior of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne
Aachen, Germany (792-805)

These early examples may be referred to as pre-Romanesque because, after a brief spurt of growth, the development of architecture again lapsed. As a body of knowledge was eventually re-developed, buildings became larger and more imposing. Examples of Romanesque cathedrals from the early Middle Ages (roughly 1000-1200) are solid, massive, impressive churches that are often still the largest structure in many towns.

Side Note: *In Britain, the Romanesque style became known as “Norman” because the building scheme in the 11th and 12th centuries were instigated by William the Conqueror, who invaded Britain in 1066 from Normandy in northern France. (The Normans were the descendants of Vikings—Norse, or north men—who had invaded this area over a century earlier.) Durham and Gloucester Cathedrals and Southwell Minster are excellent examples of churches in the Norman, or Romanesque style.*

The arches that define the naves of these churches are well modulated and geometrically logical—with one look you can see the repeating shapes, and proportions that make sense for an immense and weighty structure. There is a large arcade on the ground level made up of bulky piers or columns. The piers may have been filled with rubble rather than being solid, carved stone. Above this arcade is a second level of smaller arches, often in pairs with a column between the two. The next higher level was again proportionately smaller, creating a rational diminution of structural elements as the mass of the building is reduced.



Nave of Gloucester Cathedral - begun 1089.

The decoration is often quite simple, using geometric shapes rather than floral or curvilinear patterns. Common shapes used include diapers—squares or lozenges—and chevrons, which were zigzag patterns and shapes. Plain circles were also used, which echoed the half-circle shape of the ubiquitous arches.

Early Romanesque ceilings and roofs were often made of wood, as if the architects had not quite understood how to span the two sides of the building using stone, which

created outward thrust and stresses on the side walls. This development, of course, didn't take long to manifest, and led from barrel vaulting to ribbed vaulting, which became ever more adventurous and ornate in the Gothic.

Questions:

1. What does the term Romanesque mean?
2. Describe why the building projects by Charlemagne are often described as "pre-Romanesque".
3. Using the reading above, list some of the key elements or characteristics of Romanesque architecture.
4. Describe why you believe Romanesque buildings had thick walls and columns.

Romanesque Architecture: Two Situations

Read through the following prompts and answer them fully and thoughtfully.

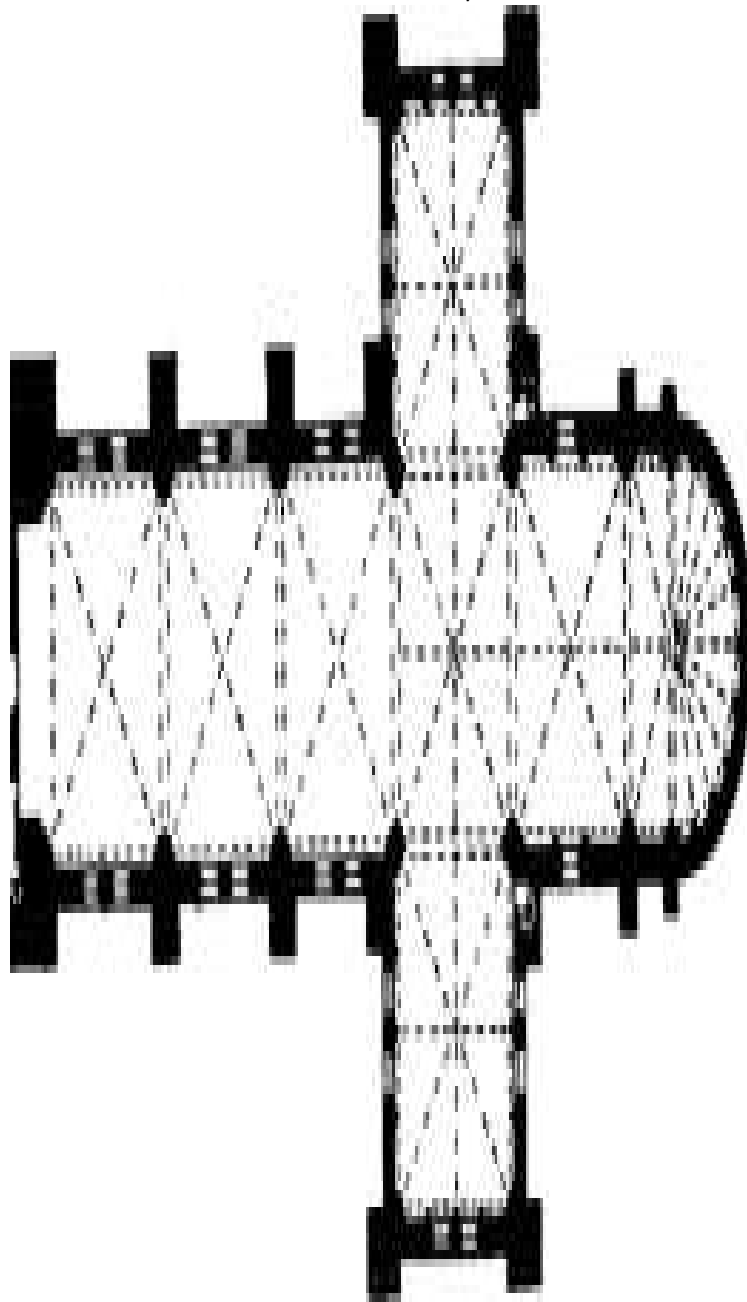
1. The year is 1000 ce. You have lived your whole life in the village that you were born in. You were raised to be a god fearing, hard working, individual, but you have sinned by stealing early in your life to feed yourself and your siblings. You sometimes do not pray because you are tired from working. Around the village you hear whispers that people are fearful for the return of Christ. It has been 1000 years since the death of Jesus and some people are discussing the possibility of the Last Judgment.

You think about your past and how you never atoned for your sins. You quickly realize that if the Last Judgment were to take place tomorrow, there is a chance that you may not enter into Heaven. You panic and begin to think of how you could make the wrongs of your past correct. Below, explain what you would do in this situation and how you would go about making things right with the creator and his messenger.

2. The year is 1000 ce. You are a monk that is residing in Toulouse, France. You have been a teacher of Christ since you were a teenager. Recently, your small basilica church, Church of the Montee Kewgar has acquired the bones of St. Lewgoh, a martyr who was killed by ravaging, bloodthirsty, coldhearted, barbarians that he was trying to educate in a study he called “Aye Pee Ar-ht Hystorie”. The bones of St. Lewgoh are said to have mystical healing powers and some even say that they can make miracles happen simply by viewing them or praying in their vicinity.

The leader of the church, Father Ohstyng, has asked for your help. He wants you to draw out a church plan that will follow the cruciform, basilica, plan that already exists, but he needs to you to find a way to accommodate the large swaths of people who will be making the pilgrimage to the Church of the Montee Kewgar to view, pray, and be near the relics of St. Lewgoh. Using the cruciform plan below, make additions to the church to achieve the following:

1. Services, funerals, and other common activities that take place in the church must still be able to take place on a daily basis.
2. Pilgrims who are venturing to this church must NOT intrude on the daily services but must find some way to view the relics.
3. The relics must be housed INSIDE the church in their individual rooms.
4. Pilgrims can only enter through the main entrance. Additional doors cannot be built.



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