

# Gothic Architecture

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will discuss the influences of the development of the Gothic style and describe some of the design innovations of Gothic architecture. The objectives for this tutorial include:



## BIG IDEA

The overall effect of Gothic architecture is light and spacious compared to Romanesque architecture.

## 1. Period and Location: Gothic Architecture

The time frame for this tutorial is very small, from 1140 to 1144 AD. The tutorial will focus on one church in Paris, France.



## 2. Influences of the Development of Gothic Style

Gothic is an architectural style originating in France during the 12th century. Traits of Gothic include the use of the pointed arch, flying buttress, rib vault, and a general emphasis on space and verticality. Scholasticism was a form of theology and philosophy taught at universities during the Middle Ages based on Aristotelian logic.

The term was coined by Giorgio Vasari, the Italian author who used the term disparagingly during the Renaissance to refer to this type of architecture.



## DID YOU KNOW

Today, gothic is strongly associated with the dark and fantastical, but ironically, it's a design intended to bring a sense of religious light and airiness to Christian architecture. It was a departure from the comparatively darker, heavier style of Romanesque architecture that was a consequence of the construction limits of that time. As you can see, it is kind of the opposite of what is known in the mass mainstream today!

The stylistic changes of the Gothic are also related to the sociopolitical happenings of the time. Cities were getting bigger and bigger, and urban cathedrals were becoming more important as religious institutions versus monasteries. There was also the establishment of urban universities, like the University of Bologna in Italy. Monasteries, instead of universities, had been the primary educational repositories for centuries.



University of Bologna

1088 AD

Bologna, Italy

## 2a. Scholasticism

The Crusades brought Europeans into contact again with the work of Greek philosophers, which forced the contemporary religious thinkers to incorporate scientific thought into their philosophies. This resulted in a sort of hybrid of theology and philosophy called **scholasticism**, a common area of study at universities.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Scholasticism

A form of theology and philosophy taught at universities during the Middle Ages based on

## 2b. Pseudo-Dionysus

Lastly, let's discuss the influence of Pseudo-Dionysian light mysticism, a form of mysticism concerning the important association with light and God--specifically, that light was a physical manifestation of God. This was attributed to the 5th century author **Pseudo-Dionysus**, who combined elements of Greek philosophy with Christianity. His work would have been known to the Abbot Suger, the person primarily responsible for the Gothic style at Saint-Denis.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Pseudo-Dionysus**

A Christian philosopher mystic and theologian during the late 5th century

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## 3. Characteristics of Gothic Architecture



**Basilica of Saint Denis**

**1140-1144 AD**

**Paris, France**



Saint-Denis was an important church in Paris, originally founded during the 5th century. The use of architectural elements largely associated with the Gothic style, like the pointed arch, ribbed vaults, and flying buttresses, had already been used in other Romanesque-style buildings in one way or another.

➔ **EXAMPLE** An example would be Durham Cathedral with its ribbed vaults.

However, it was here at Saint-Denis, specifically in the reconstruction of the church's **choir**, that they were combined in a way that allowed for greater expanses of open space. This space could be filled in with stained glass and yet still exist within a structurally sound building.





**Rib vaulting at Saint-Denis**

The **rib vaulting** channeled most of the downward force into the supportive columns, rather than the walls. Walls had a minimum load bearing in Gothic architecture as opposed to Romanesque style buildings where the exterior walls were primary load-bearers.



Pointed arch at Saint-Denis

The **pointed arch** allowed for the expanses to stretch upwards, creating more space. The use of the flying buttress as an exterior supportive element allowed walls of glass and light, as opposed to walls of stone. The

overall effect was that of something light and spacious compared to the Romanesque style of architecture.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Choir

Architecture, a part of the cruciform church east of the crossing

### Rib Vault

Architecture, a vault supported by or decorated with diagonal ribs

### Pointed Arch

Also referred to as the "ogival arch," a primary characteristic of Gothic architecture; also seen in Islamic architecture



## SUMMARY

The **gothic architecture** style originated in France during the 12th century. **Influences of the development of gothic style** include a hybrid of theology and philosophy called **scholasticism** and a form of mysticism developed by 5th century author **Pseudo-Dionysus**, concerning the important association with light and God.

**Characteristics of gothic architecture** include rib vaulting, flying buttresses, and the pointed arch to create space.

The big idea for today is that the overall effect of Gothic architecture is light and spacious compared to Romanesque architecture.

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