

# Romanesque Art

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Romanesque art has elements that act as areas of display for religious components of this art. This lesson will cover:



### BIG IDEA

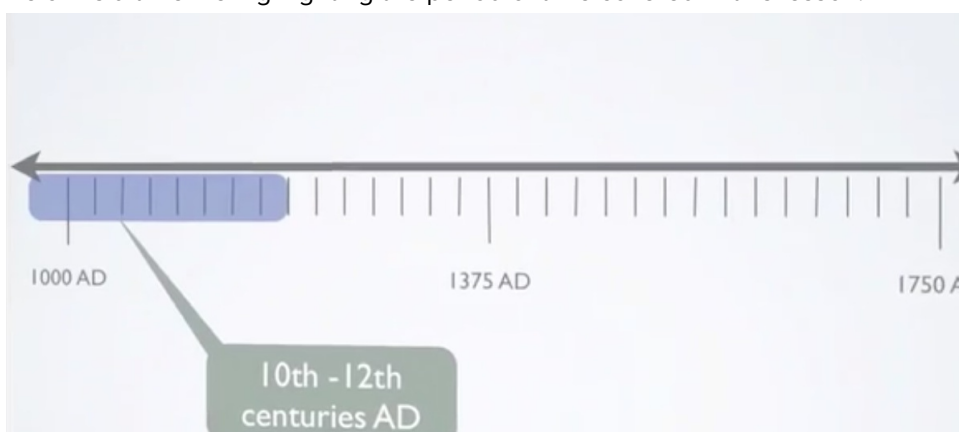
The tympanum, archivolt, and jambs of Romanesque architecture were important areas for the display of religious art.

## 1. Period of Time and Location: Romanesque Art

The art covered in this lesson originates from the 10th to 12th centuries, and all of the art was located within three cities in France:

- Conques
- Bayeux
- Autun

Below is a timeline highlighting the period of time covered in this lesson:



## 2. Bayeux Tapestry

The first piece of art that this lesson will explore is the Bayeux Tapestry, or Bayeux Embroidery. This is a magnificent example of art. It details the events leading up to and during the Battle of Hastings, which resulted

in the Norman conquest of England and the eventual crowning of William the Conqueror as the king of England.



William the Conqueror and Harold from Bayeux Tapestry

1066-1082 AD

Bayeux, France

The tapestry is 200 feet long, and it is an important cultural reservoir that supplements what we know historically. It depicts distinct types of clothing and armor.



Battle of Hastings from Bayeux Tapestry

1066-1082 AD

Bayeux, France

An interesting scene is depicted below





Men staring at Halley's Comet from Bayeux Tapestry

1066-1082 AD

Bayeux, France

The people on the left are pointing skyward and appear alarmed. Interestingly, they are pointing at the famous Halley's Comet, which would have passed by the earth during this time on its 75- to 76-year-long orbit around the sun.



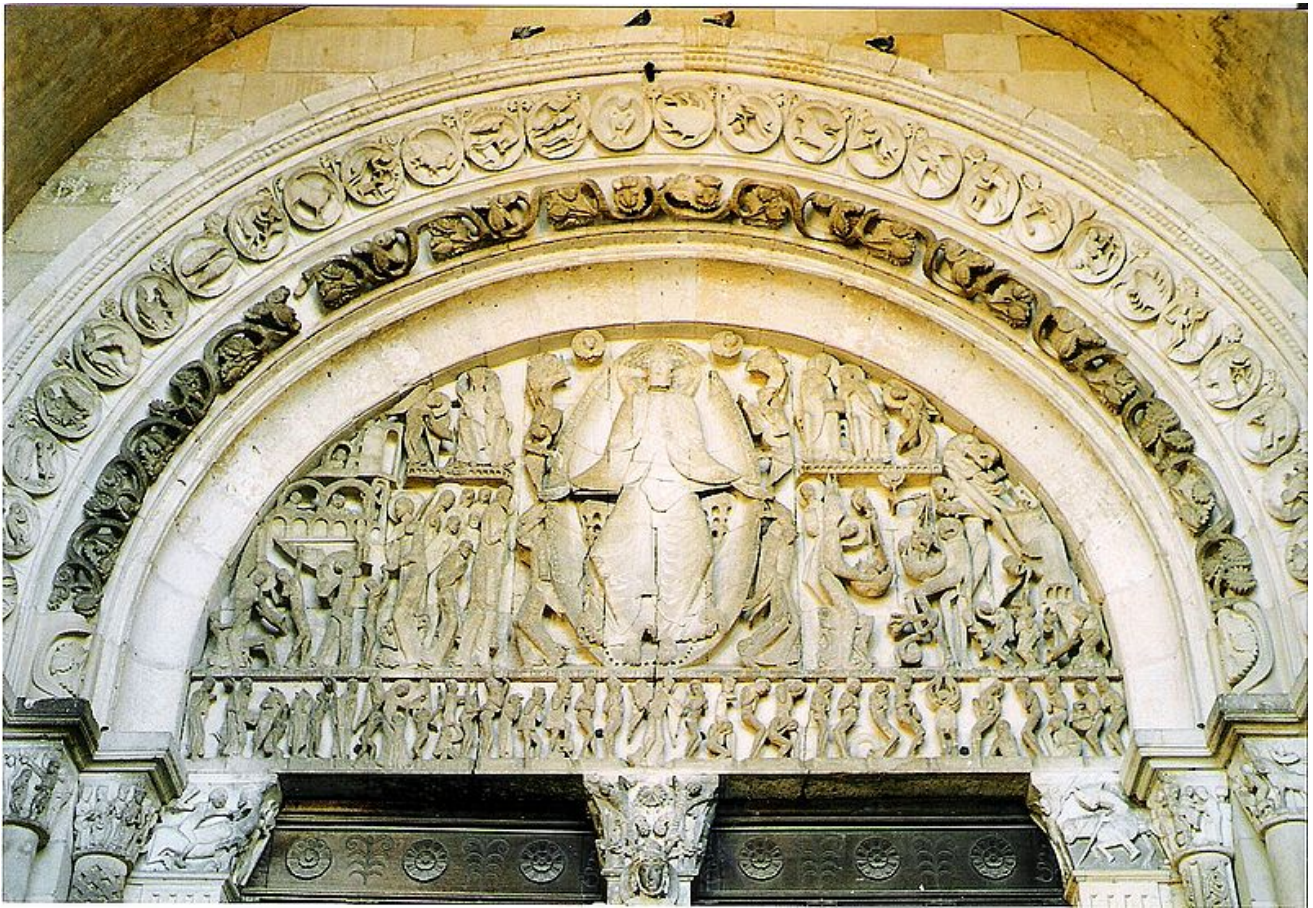
#### DID YOU KNOW

It was taken as a bad omen, and one of the individuals ran to tell the current King Harold the terrible news. Underneath Harold's feet are the wispy-looking images of ships which foreshadow the arrival of William in the battle to come.

## 3. Last Judgment Tympanum at Autun

This next image is from the Western entrance to Autun Cathedral in Autun, France:





Western entrance to Autun Cathedral

1120-1146 AD

Autun, France

### IN CONTEXT

This above image is essentially an elaborate rounded archway, a series of incised rounded arches setting up on decorative **jamb**s on either side of the doorway. Artists use these spaces to create narrative, symbolic, or other types of Christian imagery that serve both religious and decorative purposes.

The artist Gislebertus created this Last Judgment scene in the semicircular area above the doorway, which is called the **tympanum**, around 1120 AD. The decorative semicircular bands above it are called **archivolts**. The jambs are cropped out of this picture, unfortunately.

The central, largest, and most important element within this above composition is Jesus Christ in the traditional orant prayer gesture, seated within a mandorla of inscribed Latin text. To his right is the Virgin Mary, his mother, enthroned next to the angel there.

The whole idea of right as good and left as bad is a type of symbolism that itself is cross-cultural and ancient, and even retains its significance to this day.

Saint Peter, who monitors the gates of heaven, is shown here holding keys. Notice the use of hieratic

scale. More important figures like Christ, Mary, the saints, and even the angels, are shown comparatively larger. They are shorter or taller, relative to each other, but all of them are larger than the human beings being judged. The righteous are being led into heaven.

There is an angel that helps to divide the composition. If you look closely, you can see how he or she is almost shoving one of the figures to the left. It is apparent that this person has been judged as unrighteous, as being directed into the unhappy line of individuals on their way to hell.

If you look closely, you can see the disembodied hands that are plucking individuals up to the next level, and the cowering souls waiting in line. The Devil is coming out of a Roman-style basilica to grab hold of the soul for the unpleasantness to come. It was this juxtaposition of good and evil, or rather, salvation and damnation, that reminded individuals coming into the church of the reward of piety and faith in Christ and the consequences of turning from him.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

**Jamb**

Pillar, frame, post, lintel on either side of a doorway, window, or arch.

**Tympanum**

In architecture, a semicircular space above a doorway that is often decorated with sculpture.

**Archivolts**

In architecture, a decorated band that forms an arch-like frame for an opening.

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## 4. St. Foy Reliquary at Conques

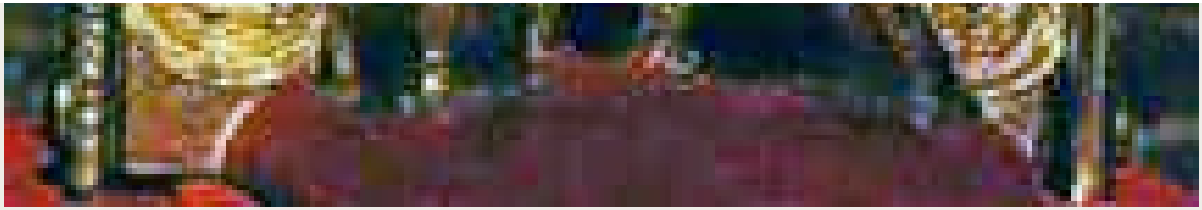
This last image is of an elaborate Christian reliquary, or container of a relic.

### IN CONTEXT

Specifically, this is an image of Saint Foy, or Saint Faith, as she would be known in English:







### Reliquary of Saint Foy

980 AD

Wood, gold, silver, and precious stones

Conques, France

Saint Foy, or Saint Faith, was a young woman who was tortured and martyred by the Romans. The reliquary holds the supposed head of Saint Foy behind the obviously gilded mask of a male, interestingly enough.

Relics and the reliquaries that hold them were very important objects for veneration in Christianity. In fact, possession of relics was considered so important and the supply so limited that shady under-dealings are as much a part of the history of relics in the church as the actual relics themselves. This also explains why the relics themselves can seem so odd or macabre with no given context.

The relics had to be a physical object of an important Christian saint. These had to be something touched by them, or a piece of them, or related to Christ, like a piece of the True Cross, for example. Examples of relics that actually exist and are considered sacred in the Christian church include:

- Teeth of a saint
- Hand of a saint
- Hair of a saint
- A piece of the True Cross
- Bones of a saint

These relics were not considered idolatry, but instead were considered the veneration of a sacred object. The object is a means of communication to God, not an object of worship itself.



## SUMMARY

There are many religious aspects and components displayed in Romanesque art. In this lesson, you learned about the **period of time and location of Romanesque art**.

In this lesson, you explored three Romanesque works of art:

- **Bayeux Tapestry.**
- **Last Judgment Tympanum at Autun**
- **St. Foy Reliquary at Conques**



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