

Art analysis: aesthetics of romanesque architecture

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The Romanesque structures examined in this essay reveal how Roman-era architectural principles were developed and extended to create a whole new style of architectural masterpieces. The Roman era drew much of its inspiration from Greek and Etruscan art, extending the principles of those styles into a new philosophy of architecture. However, Romanesque designs were developed from Roman and Greek art, which placed a greater focus on construction and artistic needs, with additional elements of illumination and decoration – principally paintings, open spacing, wide windows, and mosaics – of design brought in to enrich the aesthetic of the architectural creations.

The establishment of these artistic concepts shows the major historical developments in art during the Romanesque period. Romanesque architecture displays a distinctive progression from the Roman period: a progression rooted in aesthetics. Aesthetics is defined as the visually attractive features of artistic pieces, and the principal evocative ideas behind their creation. The significant contrast between Roman and Romanesque art lies in the aesthetic values of the architecture, painting, and mosaic designs, which all convey notable qualities of space, aeration, texture, and illumination.

Romanesque Architectural Development

Romanesque art has distinct characteristics in architectural designs.

Romanesque architecture adopts the Byzantine and Roman features in developing unique designs that define its primary characteristics. For instance, Romanesque has higher construction quality than its predecessors. Besides, the era experienced large towers, groin vaults, round arches, arcades, buttresses, sturdy piers, domes and thick walls.

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Besides, every building of this age had a well-defined symmetrical plan. These two generations of architecture had experienced numerous changes to their design philosophies due to modifications in the materials used in the construction process. These new materials allowed builders to create structures that had greater structural support and that incorporated ever more elaborate additions and features to improve the aesthetics of the buildings. The new Romanesque style of architecture drew on the Roman era's celebration of artistic features, but expounded this art form by adding value according to their clients' changing needs and desires. These designs provided beauty and improved the social value and structural integrity of existing works of construction.

In Figure 1, The Saint-Étienne building shows a classic example of Romanesque architecture. The image shows the characteristic round arches on the sides of the Cathedral. Moreover, the designers left spaces that were closer to the roof. This design choice is critical for the improvement of the aesthetic features of the building.

Unlike its predecessors, Romanesque architecture constructed its vaults from stone and not concrete. The Roman Empire had originally built its vaults using reinforced struts made from timber. However, the destruction of the Canterbury Cathedral in 1174 during a large fire led to an architectural shift towards construction of vaults using inflammable materials, namely stone. The monks aimed at building a new church that was fireproof, hence inspiring the construction of stone vaults (Bertolesi, Elisa, et al. 67-65).

Thus, the replacement of timber with stone may appear as a measure of disaster prevention; however, Romanesque architecture also considered the aesthetic and construction value of stone as a material in its architectural designs and artistic philosophy. Rib vaults are imperative for supporting the heavy weight of the roof. These architectural structures transfer the weight of the roof downwards and outwards through a connection of thin stone ribs. These stone ribs further join the pillars and columns, thus distributing weight more evenly and culminating in a stronger, more reinforced building. The ribs within the interior roofing also play an influential role in establishing the beauty of the building.

Continuing this discussion on vaults, the main difference between the two styles of architecture could be found in their formation and shape.

Romanesque architectural design comprises groin vaults, while Roman architecture's primary structures are typically barrel vaults. Groin vaults are two barrel vaults joining each other at 90°. This intersection results in four curved planes that meet the center. This junction creates ribs that convey an aesthetic value. The visual analysis of these structures emphasizes the role of ambiance in architectural development. In comparison, barrel vaults occur through the bulging of a single curve along a certain distance or direction. In some cases, a pair of curves may result in a barrel. The curves take circular shapes, causing the full design to have a semi-cylindrical nature.

Since Romanesque arches were mostly semi-circular, the designers faced a design and structural challenge in handling the ribbed vault. The major obstacle that arose was that the diagonal p exceeded the normal transverse p . To overcome this challenge, Romanesque architects ensured that the

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diagonal ribs intersected at the highest central point. All surfaces' infill sloped up towards the central point, resulting in a dome: a sophisticated design choice that further improved the interior beauty of the building. The combination of the rib, groin, and barrel vaults produced a beautiful scene though its striking use of geometry and symmetry, especially when the cathedrals later introduced illumination within the buildings.

While dealing with challenges of the rib vaults, Romanesque designers developed the pointed arched vault types. These vaults' structure and appearance enabled the architects to consider pointed ribs that improved the relationship between transverse and diagonal ribs. The two positional ribs had proportional heights. For instance, the Durham Cathedral (Figure 3) depicts the beautiful nature of pointed ribs. The Cathedral has varied Romanesque structures and features.

The building is among the first to have rib groin vaults located on top of a "three-storey" nave. The architects designed the structure by replacing groin vaults within the tribune with four-sided arches. These features formed the buttresses of nave vaults. The introduction of this new structural design helped to improve the beauty of the building; what's more, this new building style helped it to accommodate a higher number of people.

While there was no major change to the existing domes of the Roman style, the Romanesque period did add features to this common structure. The domes of this era were mainly located in the crossing towers. Romanesque designers placed the structure where the church's transept and nave

intersected, a design choice that resulted in the external concealment of the domes. These domes have a blind arcade closer to the rooftop.

The architects and designers of this period used octagonal domes and corner squinches in their construction to add to the beauty in the buildings. This development arose from the prevalence of Roman domes, which were mainly semi-circular. Roman structures had originally developed these domes to create open spaces within their structures, a need borne from the religious purposes of these buildings. Worshipers who visited these buildings needed a good flow of air. Romanesque domes were more sophisticated than the Roman constructions, thus improving the building's aeration and more adequately fulfilling the needs for open, well-ventilated constructions.

The Roman Pantheon (Figure 4) underscores the central concepts of Roman architecture. The dome has an opening at the top to allow light into the building: a feature that introduced a concern for changes in weather, especially during rainy seasons. The Cathedral Complex at Pisa, Italy (Figure 5), developed in the Romanesque period, enhances the value of aesthetics in domes. The top of the dome is enclosed, and thus the structure receives light from the vaults and arches.

Another critical aesthetic feature of this architectural period is the buttress. Romanesque architecture often used buttresses in their designs, while the Roman style opted for different architectural designs (Janson and Janson 165-170). Buttresses were a structure of support, balancing the ceiling's weight-load onto the walls (Sarkisian et al. 302-307). They have semi-arches extending towards huge piers, distant from the wall. While erecting the flying

buttresses is cost-effective, much more focus was placed on their light nature and ability to act as formidable fortresses (Cain). However, in Roman architecture, the support structures of buildings were mostly large pillars contrived inside the construction itself.

The major reason for buttresses in the Romanesque period was the need for larger, more accommodating buildings. Various religious groups of this period, especially the Catholics, planned to construct large cathedrals, which could contain a great number of people inside. Religion played a crucial role in this shift in design requirements, as the growing number of worshipers pushed designers to create more elaborate, larger places of worship.

The Romanesque style developed with a concern to build massive stone housing with adequate aeration. In order to provide the necessary support to these buildings, the architects developed buttresses to effectively distribute the weight of ever larger buildings. This structural purpose was relevant in promoting the aesthetic nature of the Romanesque era. For instance, the requirement for open spaces with ideal lighting was crucial for this period, which sought sublime, open-air places that befitted the needs of a house of gods.

Romanesque architecture boasts of columns as a primary feature. Colonettes - examples of columns - and shafts were significant in structural decoration. These features of construction were evident in Early Christian and Roman architecture (Fernie 407-416). Columns were designed in different styles to create and improve the building's aesthetics, and were usually located between highly-structured piers. Salvaged columns were reused in portico-

interiors of churches. Another common feature is the alternation between columns and piers. The alternation provided greater aeration and contributed to the beauty of the interior.

Romanesque architecture established the capitals, a structure that designers developed from the Corinthian style. The capital is usually bottom-rounded as it rests on circular columns. The top is square so as to provide support to the arch and walls. Romanesque artists continued this trend by following the rectangular shape at the top, but chose to change the bottom to an octagonal design. The foliate capitals introduced during this period represented a revolutionary new method of improving aesthetics within the whole building.

To achieve appropriate lighting, the architects relied on reinforcing the high roofs. The cathedrals were lofty and thus ensured ample light and space for the building interior. The introduction of buttresses enhanced the use of spacing within the exterior parts of the cathedrals. For some architectural buildings, there is an open space found below the buttresses. This space has a similar role to the clerestory located inside the Cathedral. The spatial feature enabled viewers to peer through the arches.

Furthermore, the buttresses extending to higher limits are akin to the interior church pillars. These structures create a space in the upward reaches of the structure, resulting in an increased aeration for the building. Windows are another development in the architectural aesthetic value. The Roman style emphasized flat and single-dimensional spacing. Roman architecture

also had small windows with wooden window frames, making the interior of the cathedrals seemed darker.

While the Romanesque period also valued the need for space, it placed a greater focus on improving structural strength and creating a more pleasing aesthetic in the final building. The Romanesque period experienced significant improvements to the buildings' openings, especially to the windows. The fitting of these windows further improved aeration, and allowed extra light to penetrate into the Cathedral, giving the interior an airy quality.

Religious groups of the Romanesque architectural period had increased the aesthetic value of the buildings by improving decorations. Roman structures had few decorations that were simplistic in nature. Romanesque architecture, on the other hand, had decorations both in the interior and exterior of the building, with most sculptural decorations being located on the exteriors. One specific example is the "acanthus-leaf decoration." This leaf-like formation expressed the value of aesthesia in Romanesque art.

These were conceived of in the fashion of traditional architecture. The figures were curved, drilled, and then spread onto a great platform. Moreover, the artists developed acanthus structures by incorporating foliage designs into their decorative works.

Mosaic art was another significant art form in the Romanesque period, and was an artistic feature closely linked to the great love of open window designs. The artists designed these mosaic images for religious purposes, using different materials as technological improvements were discovered.

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Traditional Roman style mosaics used stone, but with time the Romanesque period showed a deep love for stained glass. While Roman art had experienced the introduction of glass, it did not have the sophisticated tools and techniques required to create complex mosaic formats.

The artists in this age used broken glass shards in developing basic mosaics; later in the period, the Roman Empire used tesserae for the specific production of mosaic art. Romanesque art, in comparison, utilized stained glass in the construction of various artistic designs, with specific kinds of glasses determining the types of image created. The mosaic objects developed during this era showed a deep value for vibrant color. One key component of aesthetics is color: color blending advances the expression and theme of beauty. For instance, the stained-glass window in the "Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France" depicts specific historical or religious events while conveying a strong sense of beauty.

Conclusion

The principal features of the Romanesque artistic period can be found in the aesthetic prominence of the architecture and other structures. These art forms include architectural structural decisions, paintings, and mosaic designs that capture and convey space, aeration, texture, and illumination. The primary characteristics delineating the two eras of Roman and Romanesque art additionally include the distinct differences in their architectural designs.

The disparities in the shapes of the arches identify the development of Romanesque architecture from the preceding principles and practices of

Roman art. These architectural features include buttress, decorative structures, capital, piers, and vaults. The more sophisticated aspects of architectural designs during the Romanesque period emphasize its love of aesthetics over mere functionality.

The structures that define the style of this period were devised to be a source of both structural support and aesthetic beauty. Spacing was also a primary design factor, which was highly relevant to the improvement of aeration within the cathedrals. The glass windows, together with improved aeration, also contribute towards the overall illumination and building aesthetics. Decorations of the buildings, too, signify the transition from Roman to Romanesque, with specific focus being placed on the texture of the artworks. Therefore, keeping all these features in mind, Romanesque art provides for greater aesthetic value as compared to the Roman artistic process.

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