

European gothic sculpture

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" Name and discuss in detail two Gothic sculptures making references to the period in which they were produced, their composition and style. Discuss briefly the role of a sculpture in a named Cathedral from the Gothic Period. "

The word " Gothic" was given to the style of architecture that evolved between 1150 and 1499 in Europe. It was invented by the Renaissance historians and artists to express their negative attitude to an art they thought was barbaric. Gothic culture was urban based unlike Romanesque culture which was, for the most part, rural based.

Cathedrals became retreat centers for education and political power during the Gothic period. Initially, it was slow to spread throughout Europe but it lasted for a long time. The Gothic style evolved through three distinct phases; The early or Archaic phase which retained a lot of Romanesque features such as heaviness and solidity, the middle phase which captured Gothic features and characteristics in perfect harmony and the Flamboyant phase where the features were wholly gothic and the cathedrals were mainly skeletal structures made mainly with glass.

The sculptures I will discuss from the Gothic period are the Well of Moses and the tomb of Philip the Bold, both sculpted by Claus Cluster. The hexagonal " Well Of Moses", which is now lacking the crucifixion scene it originally possessed, presents six life-sized prophets holding books, scrolls or both. The theme is that of sadness and deeper as the hexagonal base is surrounded by the figures of the six prophets who had foreseen the death of Christ on the Cross. Standing on slender colonnades on the corners between these prophets are six weeping angels.

The figures, beginning with Moses, continue anti-clockwise around the subculture to David, Jeremiah, Escherichia, Daniel vigorously points to his prophecy. On the other side of Daniel, serving to balance Daniel's passionate temperament, is the calm and reflective, Isaiah. This juxtaposition defines Cluster's use of alternating naturalistic balances. The head and torso fragment of Christ from the Calvary reveals a power and intensity of retained expression that conveys overwhelming grandeur.

Christ is portrayed as suffering and being resigned, this is epitomized by the fact that his brow is knitted, though the lower part of his face, narrow and emancipated, is calm and free of stress. In my opinion, Moses is the most accomplished figure in this sculpture as the detail in his beard is outstanding on Cluster's behalf. He is depicted as powerful being as a result of the barely noticeable pair of horns on his forehead. The detail in his face has also been beautifully executed.

The figures of the composition dominate the architectural framework but also reinforce the feeling of support that the structure provides through the figures' largeness of movement. It is unfortunate that this sculpture was damaged by weathering as a result of being coated outside and then again damaged in the 17th Century during the French Revolution as it is an extraordinary piece of work. The Tomb of Philip the Bold is located at the Dijon Cathedral in France. It was made by Claus Cluster and Claus De Were, Cluster's nephew, and commissioned by Jean De Marvel.

It is an example of Cluster's latest preserved work. Jean De Marvel was only responsible for the arcaded gallery below the slab of black marble from

Dianna. The theme of this sculpture is one of sorrow and death as it was created to hold the body of Duke Philip when he died. The tomb itself was not ready when Duke Philip died in 1404 and it was rather the Duke's son, Duke John the Fearless, who resides in it today. There are forty figures, each about 41 CM, that make up the mourning procession. These were either designed or executed by Cluster himself.

Not all of these figures are still with the tomb, however. Three are lost, three are in the Cleveland Museum of Art and one is in a French Private Collection. These figures are all unique as although Cluster did not invent the mourning procession, nor did he like it, he conceived some of the figures as weepers, of whom no two are alike. Some openly express sorrow while other contain their grief. However all are wrapped in heavy wool, draping garments that occasionally veil a bowed head and face to convey a hidden mourning.

The style is wholly gothic and intricate as the folds in the garments of the mourners are meticulously sculpted and one could mistake them easily for being real. One of the few structures to survive the Gothic period was that of Chartres Cathedral and the Royal Portal which was integrated into the design of the Cathedral after the fire in 1194. This portal which was begun in about 1150 gives us an idea of the imagery and the technical aspects of Gothic portals which were partially inherited from Romanesque portals.

The theme is a brief summing up of the Christian doctrine of the time and it illustrates the links between the New and Old Testaments. On the jambs are the prophets and the forerunners of Christ and on the tympanums from the left to the right are depicted as the Ascension, Christ of the Apocalypse and

the Mystery of Incarnation. The harmonious appearance of the facade results from the relative proportions of the central and lateral portals, whose widths are 10: 7. Although the upper parts of the portal are treated separately, two sculptural elements run horizontally across the facade, uniting its different parts.

The most obvious of these are the Jamb statues attached to the columns flanking the doorways which consist of tall, slender standing figures of kings and queens from which some think the Royal Portal got its name. Some believe these figures are the past monarchs of France and others believe they are monarchs from the Old Testament. Some also believe that the term 'Royal Portal' refers to the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven. The tympanum on the left portal shows Christ standing on a cloud, supported by two angels.

Some see this as a depiction of the Ascension of Christ while others see it as representing the Second Coming of Christ. There are angels in the upper lintel, descending from a cloud and apparently shouting to those below. The archivists on this tympanum contain the signs of the zodiac and the labors of the months. These aspects can be seen in many different gothic portals. In the centre of the tympanum Christ is depicted as being surrounded by four symbols of the evangelists. The lintels also show the Twelve Apostles while the archivists show the twenty-four Elder of the Apocalypse.

Less obvious than the Jamb statues but far more intricately carved is the image that stretches all across the facade in the sculpted capitals on top of the Jamb columns. Carved into these capitals is a very lengthy narrative depicting the life of the Virgin and the life and Passion of Christ. As we can

see, this Royal Portal on the West of CHartres Cathedral is one of the more impressive structures from the Gothic period. In conclusion, it can be clearly seen here that the sculptures from the Gothic centuries were of grandeur quality and the artwork that was executed in this time is truly amazing.