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1. Introduction

From the ancestral times to the present, people have used art and design to come up with structures that provide shelter for different human activities. During the building process, designers usually combine the usefulness of a building with its beauty to put up unique structures. The architecture of Western Europe in the middle ages was greatly influenced by the growth of the Christian Church and the emergence of feudalism. This saw the growth of the Romanesque style between the 9th and the 12th centuries. This later developed into the Gothic style between the 12th and 16th century.

This paper seeks to compare and contrast some important works of art that developed in these periods, Saint Sernin and Chartres Cathedral.

2. Cultural Context

Saint Sernin was build at a time when there was resurgence in music, education and art in Europe. There was also widespread manual labor and self denial from the people who provided cheap labor. It was a time when monasteries housed relics of saints, the cult of relics greatly influenced architectural style because many Christians paid pilgrimages to these places to see the relics, which they believed to have healing powers.

The routes that these people used later became trade routes. Saint Sernin was built in its design to meet the needs of the many travelers who came there. At this time the building structure preferred were the huge ones. It was also built at the time of crusaders who stimulated trade that generated wealth that was used in the construction (Romanesque 1). Chartres on the other hand was the most important building, a center of the economy of the

town. It functioned as a market place where different commercial activities were distributed in its many portals. Those who sold textile were stationed at the north transept. The south porch was designated for those who sold meat, vegetables and fuel.

The west portal was for the money changers because at the time each town had its own currency. The nave was for those who sold wine. The town was under the jurisdiction of the Counts of Blois, but the cathedral and the surrounding area was a free trade zone under the eye of the church authority.

The church collected taxes as a source of income. It was also a place of pilgrimage who visited the “ The well of the strong saints”. It is also believed that the cathedral housed the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary. These relics made it an important pilgrimage destination. The cathedral also functioned as a school in the middle ages (Chartres 1).

3. Stylistic Characteristics

St. Sernin Church was built in a typical pilgrimage style. The plan of its floor was made in a Latin cross that has clearly defined parts. It is basically a Basilica plan that was modified to accommodate large crowds of people. It has aisles on four sides, which form a continuous circuit around the nave and transept. The ambulatory aisle was made to enclose the choir, which is the area on the east of the transept. These two are separated by a screen to ensure that monks have their privacy during mass or other activities.

The structuring of the building is in such a way that walking can be carried out without any disruptions. St Sernin Church also has radiating chapels,

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these were made because at the time, churches were in the relics business, this meant that the many relics churches had, the more income they got. They therefore created chapels for the different relics that were funded by wealthy individuals. The nave was made with a rhythmic vertical motion with two story elevations, a gallery and a nave arcade.

The gallery was structured in a way to provide overflow space on special occasions that attracted large crowds such as feast days. It has heavy buttressed walls that provide strong support to the stone vaults (Romanesque 1). The plan of the Chartres cathedral is also a Latin cross but with only three aisles, an ambulatory and a short transept. Its east end has five radiating chapels semicircular in shape. It has a high nave that is supported by double flying buttresses. It has three facades each with three portals that open into the transepts from the north and south, and into the nave from the west. The central portal in each facade is large and was only meant for special occasions whereas the smaller portals gave daily access to the many people that used the cathedral. It has large stained windows that give it a distinctive feature.

The windows are 176 in total all with equally dense stained glass that creates a dark interior but rich in color. The windows are the only source of illumination (Chartres 1).

4.

Subject Matter

The Chartres cathedral has tall towers that were made specifically to make people look upwards and think of God. In the ancient times people viewed

the earth as God. The church was therefore a place for everyone. St. Sernin was built in medieval ages where people believed in permanency, stability and eternity. This explains why it very spacious internally. Both the buildings had large spaces to accommodate pilgrimages (Vago 1).

5. Function and Possible Meaning

When looking at St. Sernin, one sees the round embracing Romanesque style. Its windows are just slits that make it look like a fortress with solid walls. To a Christian, its interior gives a sense of warmth and strength.

The light inside is modified by the color of the big walls that makes one feel the strength of the surroundings. The sculptures were made to represent biblical personages and scenes. For instance, the ascension of Christ can be seen on the south portal. The two towers on Chartres cathedral stand for God and its creation and between them there is the rose window, which represents Mary, the rose of creation.

There is a labyrinth engraved on the floor, this represents the dark forces associated with hell. This meant that for people to escape the entrapments of hell, they had to put their faith in Mary (Hankey 1).

6. Similarities and Differences

Most of the features of St. Sernin are close to those of Chartres cathedral. It has a cross shaped plan, its walls are made of brick; it has a vaulted ceiling, buttresses, an ambulatory and also radiating chapels. These are all found in Chartres cathedral.

A significant difference between these two is the height; the Chartres Cathedral has higher walls that are supported by the buttresses. The walls of St. Sernin carry all its mass together with the drum vault therefore, they are not tall.

St. Sernin has plane and geometrical decorations, but the Chartres cathedral has lots of sculpture with delicate ornaments. Chartres cathedral has big windows made of stained glass, whereas the thick walls on St.

Sernin made it impossible to open big window spaces on it (Architecture 1).

7. Conclusion

We have that the gothic architecture was used to build the Chartres cathedral. It shows some great improvement from the Romanesque style that was used in building St. Sernin Church. This is because Chartres was build almost five centuries after St.

Sernin. Both architectural designs have great similarities and differences, but the fact remains that they are all great pieces of art that have demonstrated great resistance.

Works cited

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