

- **Doc. 1 - Vézelay, Church and Hill:**

Shortly after its foundation in the 9th century, the Benedictine abbey of Vézelay acquired the relics of St Mary Magdalene and since then it has been an important place of pilgrimage. St Bernard preached the Second Crusade there in 1146 and Richard the Lion-Hearted and Philip II Augustus met there to leave for the Third Crusade in 1190. With its sculpted capitals and portal, the Madeleine of Vézelay - a 12th-century monastic church - is a masterpiece of Burgundian Romanesque art and architecture.

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- **Doc. 2 - Romanesque art in the basilica:**

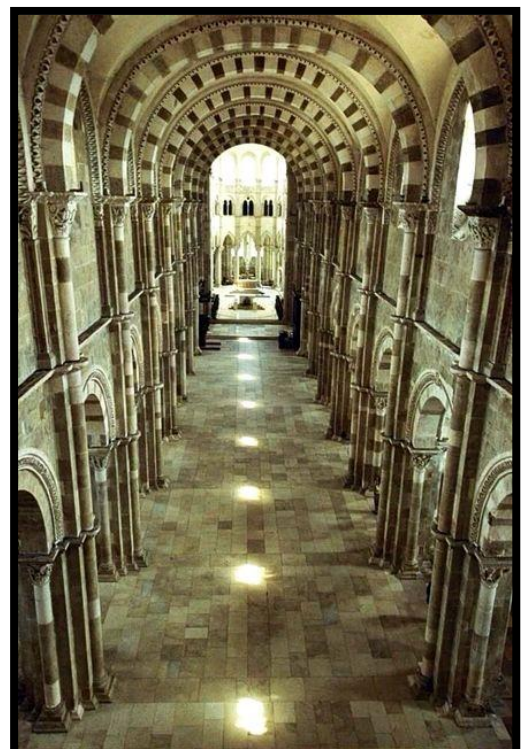
Definition



The term Romanesque is applied to the architectural, pictorial and decorative style of the period which ran, in Europe, from the emergence of the Carolingians (9th century) until the 11th century (or 12th century in some countries). This art is expressed through the monumental character of its architecture, as well as through its rich sculpture and particularly delicate painting. In France, Romanesque art also flourished from the second half of the 11th century.

Architecture

This style is above all characterized by rigour as well as relative austerity: in a society which was entirely focused on the divine, art was used to promote contemplation, prayer and meditation. Everywhere, spaces were designed around the liturgy. The role of light was central to this: greater to the East, where the Eucharist was celebrated, light beautifully illuminates the altar, functioning like a sacred emanation. The Romanesque buildings are all covered in vaulted ceilings, the scale and height of which are dictated by the timber frame, a system inherited from Antique basilicas. The wall surface tends to include wider and more numerous bay openings, to allow light into the church and reduce the monolithic aspect of the façades. The measurements of the church were carefully chosen to create a spectacular effect in the nave twice a year: at midday on the **summer solstice**, nine pools of sunlight fall upon the exact center of the nave, forming a path of light leading to the altar. At midday on the winter solstice, the pools of light fall on the upper capitals of the north arcade.



Sculpture

Romanesque sculpture blossomed through iconography which blended the mystical and fantastic figures, education and imagination. The invasion in the iconography of strange animals (dragons, griffons) was inspired by the Middle East and European folklore. Very closely linked to architecture, sculpture essentially developed on the building's structural elements. It also encouraged transmission of knowledge as a result of the subjects' symbolism or the parallels between the Old and New Testaments. The fascinating **capitals** of the nave were probably sculpted by artists from Cluny. They depict Bible stories, ancient legends and mythological creatures, often nestled within delicately carved foliage.



On the image beneath, you can recognize Samson killing the lion (Judges 14:5-6).

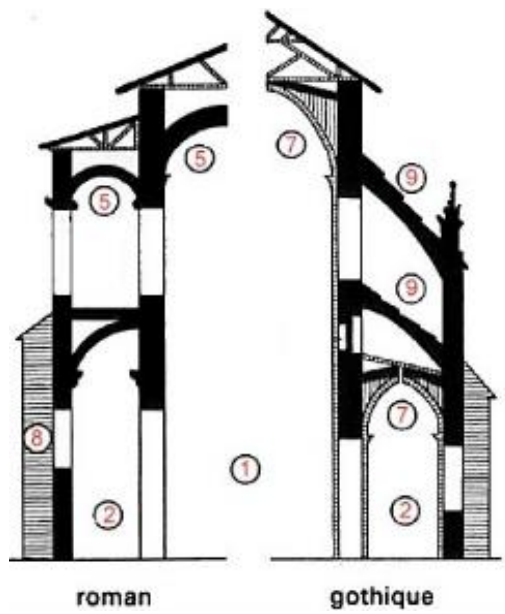
- **Doc. 3 - Gothic art in the basilica: the choir**



Born from the Romanesque movement, Gothic art developed in France by the middle of the twelfth century. Gothic art was first witnessed in sculpture, particularly the monumental sculptures of cathedrals or even abbeys. The main structural characteristics of Gothic architecture arose out of medieval masons' efforts to solve the problems associated with supporting heavy masonry ceiling vaults over wide spans. Medieval masons solved this difficult problem about 1120 with a number of brilliant innovations. First, they developed a ribbed vault, in which arching and intersecting stone ribs support a vaulted ceiling surface that is composed of mere thin stone panels. This greatly reduced the weight of the ceiling vault, and the vault's weight is now carried at discrete points rather than along a continuous wall edge. The round arches of the barrel vault were replaced by pointed (Gothic) arches which distributed thrust in more directions.

In Vézelay, the Gothic **choir** was rebuilt in 1170-1210 (according to Conant) or 1185-1215 (Strafford) and is very similar to the one in the nearby cathedral of Sens. It is an important example of the early adoption of the Gothic style in Burgundy. It has few decorations and no stained-glass windows, relying entirely on its graceful lines and use of light for its beauty.

- Doc 4 - Differences between Romanesque and Gothic art :



- 1 - nave
- 2 - side aisle
- 5 - barrel vault
- 7 - ribbed vault
- 8 - buttress
- 9 - flying buttress

- **Doc. 5 - Must-watch: The tympanum**

The spacious narthex (porch) contains three richly sculptured portals, dating back around 1115.

Central tympanum in the narthex depicts Pentecost or the Mission of the Apostles. In the centre is Christ, inside a mandora (almond-shaped halo). Bolts of light are shooting out Christ's hands to the apostles' heads.



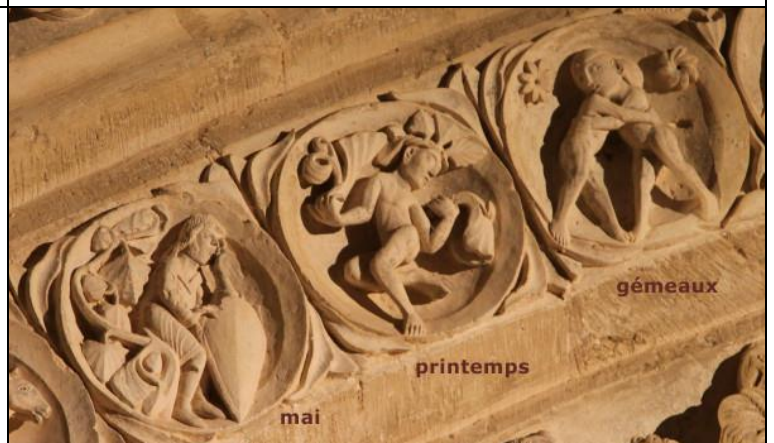
On the left, the apostles are holding open books, whereas closed books on the right.



The inner archivolt and the lintel below are populated with the people of the world who will hear the message of Christ. This provides a fascinating insight into medieval worldviews and popular legends.



In the outside arch, we can notice alternatively the signs of the Zodiac and seasonal works in the fields.



- **Doc. 6 - Must-see: the crypt and St Mary Magdalene relics**

The basilica's Carolingian **crypt** has a reliquary holding small **relics** of St. Mary Magdalene. These are not the original relics that brought thousands of medieval pilgrims to Vézelay as they were burnt by French Calvinists during the 16th century Wars of Religion. The present relics were given in 1876 by the Archbishop of Sens. The relics were originally a gift from Pope Martin IV to the Diocese of Sens in 1281.



Saint Mary Magdalene was a Jewish woman who traveled with Jesus as one of his followers and was a witness to his crucifixion, burial and resurrection. According to the Holy Scriptures, she is meant to be the first human witness of Christ's resurrection.

What happened to the relics?

It was around the eleventh century that the monks of Vézelay recorded an account according to which the tombs of Sts. Maximinus and Magdalene, at **St-Maximin in Provence**, had been opened and their bodies removed to Vézelay. Shortly afterwards, a second account relates that only the body of St. Magdalene was taken.

For two centuries, the account of the monks of Vézelay was accepted. Papal bulls of Lucius III, Urban III, and Clement III confirmed the statement that they possessed the body of St. Mary Magdalene. The pilgrimage worshipping Mary Magdalene, leading to the town of Vézelay increased the monastery's power and prestige. The constructions on the present basilica **started in 1096** under Abbot Artaud to properly honor the sacred relics and welcome the many pilgrims.

The prestige of the abbey started to decrease in **1280** when the Dominicans of St. Maximin in Provence claimed that the true body of St. Mary Magdalene had been discovered in their church. Consequently, the number of pilgrims in Vézelay sharply declined during the 14th and 15th centuries.