

Medieval (500-1500 A.D.) and Romanesque Art (1000-1200 A.D.)

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Europe entered into a period known as the **Dark Ages**. Much of the advancements fostered by Roman ingenuity disappeared.

The disintegration of the Roman Empire also brought about the loss of thousands of books gathered from the great ancient civilizations like that of Greece. Libraries that contained the wisdom of the ages were abandoned, destroyed or simply left to ruin.

Many of the works that filled these libraries disappeared for always, and only few books were preserved by being laboriously hand copied by educated monks & priests. If not for these medieval scribes, the light of ancient knowledge would have been extinguished forever.

This was known as the **ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT** and became a major art form of the early medieval era.



The Dark Ages

Although this was a dark time, many important features of the modern world were born:

- Parliamentary government
- Common Law
- Present-day languages
- Modern nation-states



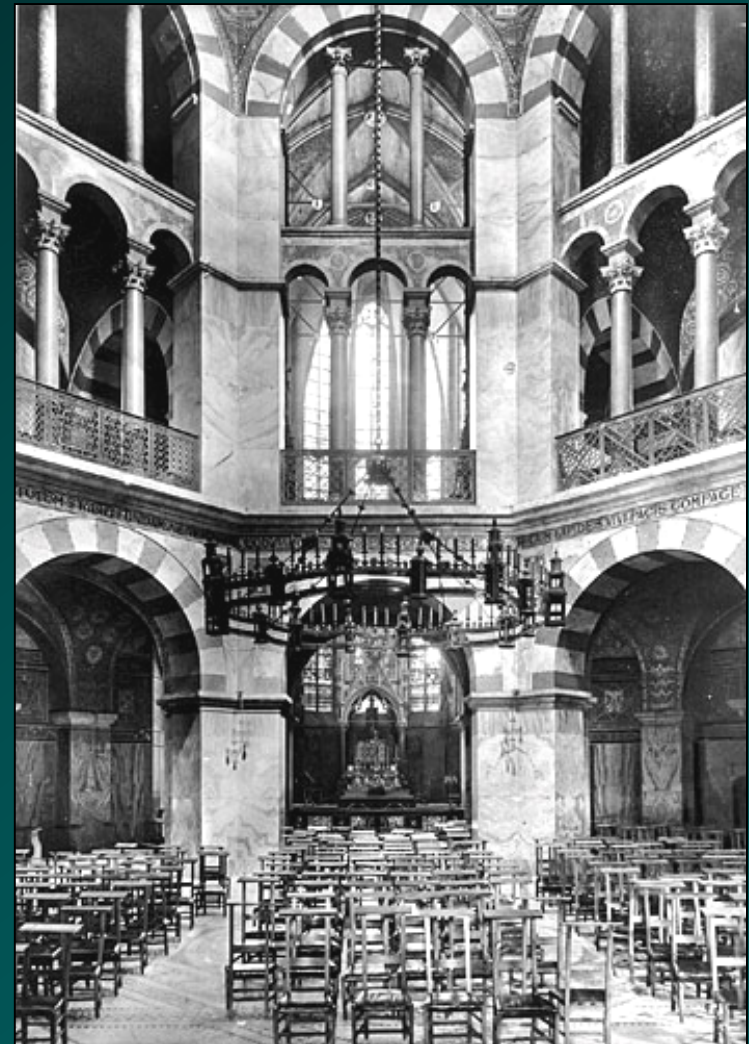
This era was also known as the Age of Faith because people were fixated on one important goal: preparation for eternal life and death.

The church was the most powerful influence since the collapse of the Roman Empire. Almost everyone was born into faith and all were expected to place loyalty to the Church above everything else.

The Periods of the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages can be broken down into the following eras

- Early Medieval (500-1500 A.D.)
- Romanesque (1000-1200 A.D.)
- Gothic (1150-1500 A.D.)



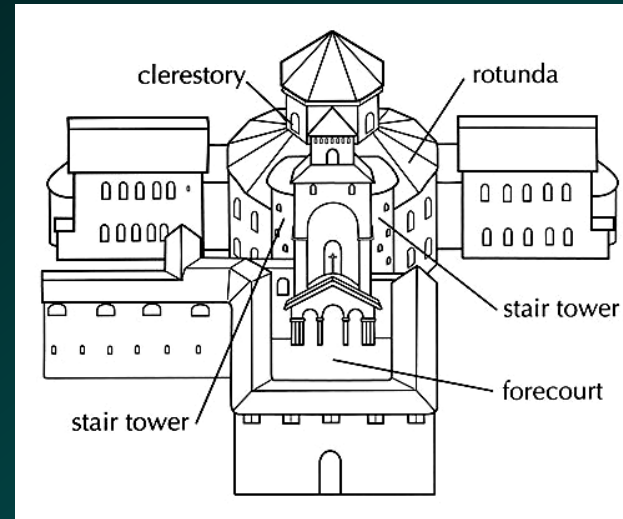
The Role of Charlemagne

Charles the Great or Charlemagne was crowned emperor by the pope on Christmas Day in the year 800 A.D. Under his reign an efficient government and remarkable level of law and order was witnessed.

Beyond this he was known for encouraging learning and the arts. He is also responsible for the preservation of ancient manuscripts. It is because of him that we have access to old texts.

This strong government however ended shortly after his death in 814 AD, returning western Europe to the shambles it was before.

Equestrian Statuette of Charlemagne.
Circa 800 A.D., bronze.
Sculpture, 9.5 x 6.75 x 3.75”
Louvre, Paris, France



Palace-Chapel of
Charlemagne
792-805 A.D.
Aachen, Germany
Fasioned after St. Vitale,
Ravenna, Italy

The Rise of Feudalism

FEUDALISM was a system in which weak noblemen gave up their lands and much of their freedom to more powerful lords in return for protection. The former owner could remain on the land as his administrator or vessel (servant).

Those who did not have land to give were known as SERFS, poor peasants who worked the land and were handed over with it.

Not only was he a great emperor but he encouraged learning and the arts more than anyone before him. His most important achievement however was the preservation of ancient manuscripts.

Unfortunately after his death, his strong government system collapsed. Leading to a need for protection and the formation of the governmental system known as FEUDALISM.



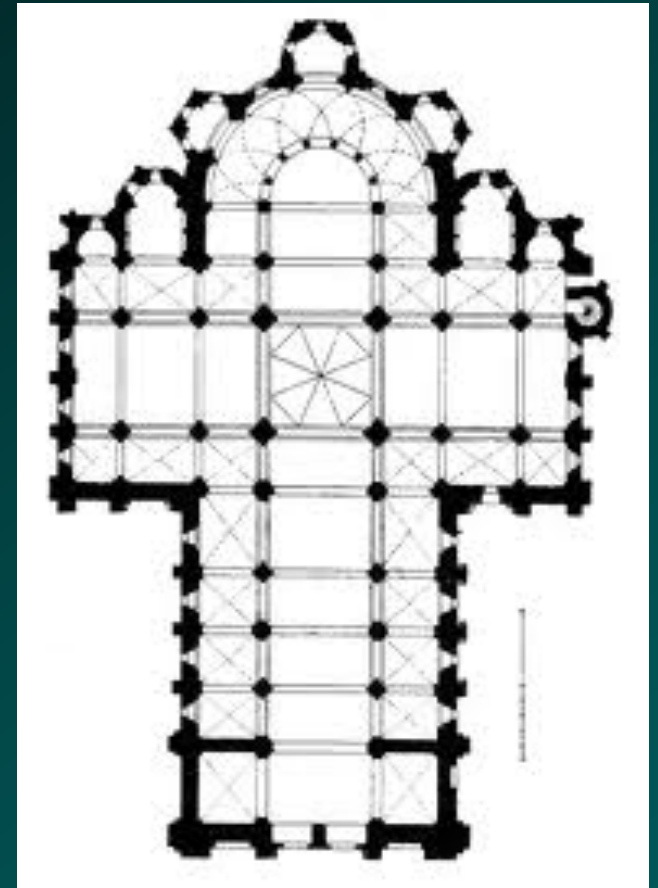
Equestrian Statuette of Charlemagne. Circa 800 A.D., bronze.
Sculpture, 9.5 x 6.75 x 3.75”
Louvre, Paris, France

Church Design

Similar to the designs we saw throughout the early Christian & Byzantine style, Medieval churches were built using Roman models. Here we see a continuation of the civic Basilica as the most popular type of structure for religious purposes.

The Basilica featured a rectangular plan which was divided on the inside to form a nave (long central hallway), and two or more side aisles. Windows located high on the walls of the nave lit the interior of the building.

On one end of the nave was the entrance, at the opposite end was a semicircular area known as the apse where the altar was placed.



Medieval Basilica Plan

Changes in Church Design



Early Romanesque church of
San Clemente
Tabull, Spain
Showing detached bell tower

During Charlemagne's reign, some churches were built with a TRANSEPT (another aisle that cut directly across the nave and the side aisles). This was placed in front of the apse. From a bird's eye view, this addition gave the church the shape of the cross.

The transept increased space and gave the church a symbolic appearance.

We also saw the addition of tower which influences church construction in Western Europe for centuries. Most churches however, during this time were made from timber most of which were destroyed by accidental fires.

Monasteries

Monastery of San Juan de la Pena
circa 922



Practicing art during this time became a strong focus for many people, mostly monks. MONASTICISM refers to the way of life in which individuals gather together to spend their days in prayer and self-denial.

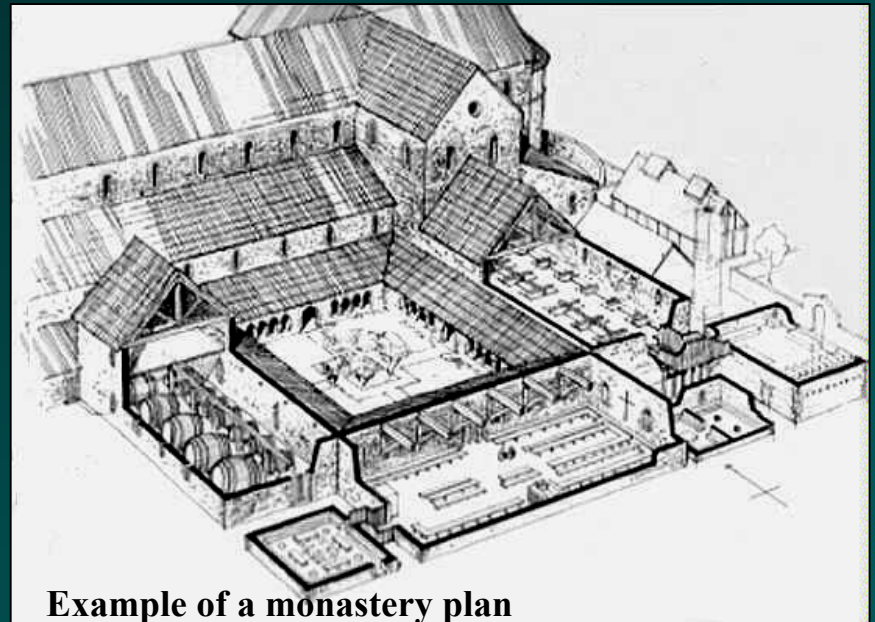
Monks built their monasteries in remote locations, often in deep forests or in the mountains. The MONASTERY OF SAN JUAN DE LA PENA is one of few of these remaining and is located in the foothills of Pyrenees, Spain. These are now ruins that are over 1000 years old.

Monasteries

ARCHITECTURE

The exterior of the monastery has the look of a fortress with thick stone walls and small windows. The interior of the building is dark and damp, walls marked with smoke stains from torches that were used for light.

The interior housed a CLOISTER (an open court or garden and the covered walkway surrounding it). Most prayer and contemplation practices were done in this area of the building.



Example of a monastery plan

Illuminated Manuscript

The Illuminated Manuscript is a handwritten book with pictures and decoration painted or drawn in gold & silver leaf & bright colors. This illuminated, or lit up, the page (hence its name).

Except for wall frescos illuminations were the only other form of painting in medieval times (up to 13th century).

As paper was not invented until the 12th century, vellum (parchment made from thinly scraped calf, goat or sheep skin) was used for the pages or *leaves* of manuscripts.

A calligrapher or scribe would copy the text on the parchment with a reed or quill pen. As most of the European population was illiterate, it fell to the religious orders to preserve written knowledge.

Illuminated page
BOOK OF KELLS
Representing the four
Evangelists/gospel
writers:

St. Matthew = Angel

St. Mark = Lion

St. Luke = Ox

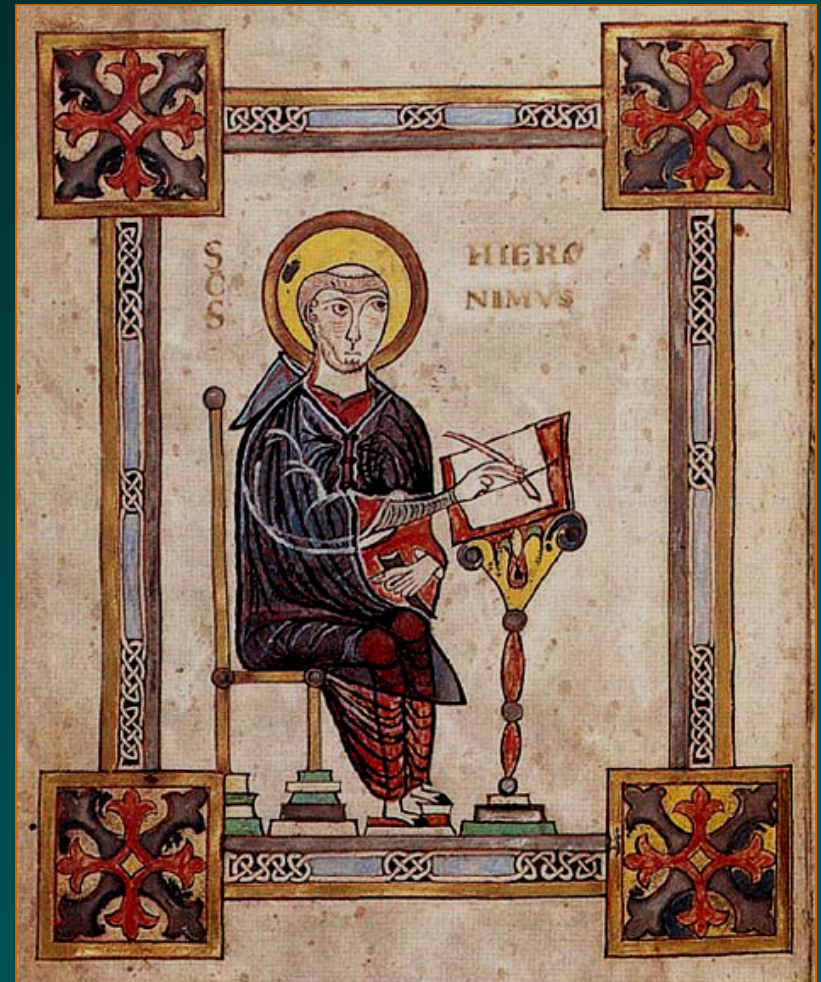
St. John = Eagle



Illuminated Manuscript

Manuscripts continued to be illustrated with paintings and drawings in the Middle Ages, but illumination was further extended to the ornamentation of the text through the use of initial letters that were oversized and lavishly decorated, and through the framing of text and with elaborate decorative borders.

The production of medieval manuscripts became a function of the Christian church by the 7th century and was carried out for the most part in monasteries until the 13th century, when it was taken over by secular (non-religious) scribes and artists working for book dealers or individual patrons like the nobility & wealthy merchants.



Illuminated Manuscript

ST. MATTHEW, FROM THE GOSPEL BOOK OF
ARCHBISHOP EBBO OF REIMS
CIRCA 830
APPROX. 10 X 8"
EPERNAY, FRANCE

This work focuses on depicting movement. The drapery swirls around the figure, while sketchy lines behind seem to push upward. This motion underscores Matthew's excitement as he works furiously at the moment of inspiration to record the sacred message.

His wide-open eyes, furrowed brow and rumpled hair indicate his intense concentration. His huge, clumsy hand guides the pen rapidly across the pages.

It is Matthew's responsibility to pass these words on to the world. His expression and actions show that he is painfully aware of this responsibility.



Relief Carvings

ADAM AND EVE EATING THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT
RELIEF CARVING ON A CAPITAL FROM THE CLOISTER
SANTES CREUS MONASTERY
12TH CENTURY
TARRAGONA, SPAIN



Here we see a depiction from the story of Adam and Eve. An angel is seen driving them away from the garden of paradise.

IN CONCLUSION

The Church was the center for art and learning as well as religion during the Medieval Times. It favored art that could teach and inspire the people of their faith. The written portions of manuscripts were meant for the few people who could read, whereas the illustrations were intended for those who could not. The messages presented in the illustrations had to be simple and familiar so everyone could understand them.

The pictures often told the same Scripture stories that the people heard every Sunday in church sermons. These stories were also expressed in carvings and relief sculptures.