

Unit 4: Post Classical Europe and Islamic Art



Unit Reading Packet #3

58. Church of Sainte-Foy. Conques, France.

Romanesque Europe. Church: c. 1050–1130 C.E.; Reliquary of Saint Foy: ninth century C.E., with later additions. Stone (architecture); stone and paint (tympanum); gold, silver, gemstones, and enamel over wood (reliquary).

G15, 340-342, 344; G14, 334, 335, 336, 353

S5, 464, 467

A3, 369-374

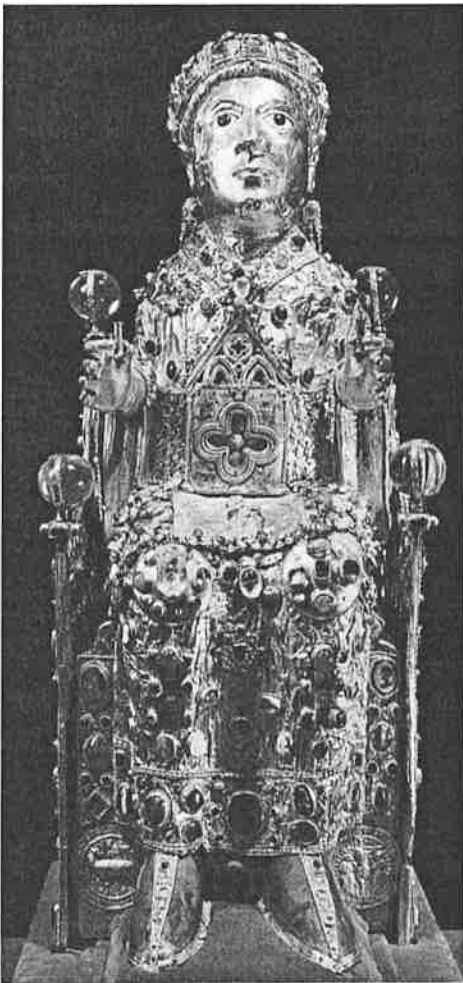
GW, 280

SH

Pins [Plan](#) [Exterior](#) [Aerial View](#) [Tympanum](#) [Tympanum hi res](#) [Nave](#) [Reliquary](#) [Video](#) [Video of procession](#) [Photo tour](#) [Sainte Foy video](#)



Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. 3rd edition, 2011. p. 461.



Relics and Reliquaries: Christians turned to the heroes of the Church, the martyrs who had died for their faith, to answer their prayers and to intercede with Christ on their behalf. In the Byzantine Church, the faithful venerated icons, that is, pictures of the saints, but Western Christians wanted to be close to the saints' actual earthly remains. Scholars in the Church assured the people that the veneration of icons or relics was not idol worship. Bodies of saints, parts of bodies, and things associated with the Holy Family or the saints were kept in richly decorated containers called reliquaries. Reliquaries could be simple boxes, but they might also be given the shape of the relic-- the arm of St. John the Baptist, the rib of St. Peter, the sandal of St. Andrew. By the eleventh century, many different arrangements of crypts, chapels, and passageways gave people access to the relics kept in churches. When the Church decided that every altar required a relic, the saints' bodies and possessions were subdivided. In this way relics were multiplied; for example, hundreds of churches held relics of the true cross.

Owning and displaying these relics so enhanced the prestige and wealth of a community that people went to great lengths to acquire them, not only by purchase but also by theft. In the ninth century, for example, the monks of Conques stole the relics of the child martyr Sainte Foy (St. Faith) from her shrine at Agen. Such a theft was called "holy robbery," for the new owners insisted that it had been sanctioned by the saint who had communicated to them her desire to move. In the late ninth or tenth century, the monks of Conques encased their new relic --the skull of Sainte Foy-- in a gold and jewel statue whose unusually large head was made from a reused late Roman work. During the eleventh century, they added the

crown and more jeweled banding, and, over subsequent centuries, jewels, cameos, and other gifts added by pilgrims continued to enhance the splendor of the statue.

This type of reliquary -- taking the form of a statue of the saint -- was quite popular in the region around Conques, but not everyone was comfortable with the way these works functioned as cult images. Early in the eleventh century, the learned Bernard of Angers prefaces his tendentious account of miracles associated with the cult of Sainte Foy by confessing his initial misgivings about such reliquaries, specifically the way simple folks adored them. Bernard thought it smacked of idolatry: "To learned people this may seem to be full of superstition, if not unlawful, for it seems as if the rites of the gods of ancient cultures, or that the rites of demons, are being observed" (*Book of Sainte Foy*, p. 77). But when he witnessed firsthand the interaction of the reliquary statue with the faithful, he altered his position: "For the holy image is consulted not as an idol that requires sacrifices, but because it commemorates a martyr. Since reverence to her honors God on high, it was despicable of me to compare her statue to statues of Venus or Diana. Afterwards I was very sorry that I had acted so foolishly toward God's saint." (*ibid.*, p. 78)

Adams, Laurie Schneider. *Art Across Time, Third Edition*. 2007. pp. 369-374.

Romanesque Architecture

In addition to accommodating the Rule of an Order, Romanesque architects had to construct churches big enough for the influx of pilgrims. At the same time, churches had to be structurally sound and adequately illuminated. The availability of materials often presented problems because of the great increase in building activity. More subjective consideration such as aesthetic appeal also had to be taken into account. These might be influenced by the wishes of a local religious order or a wealthy patron.

Sainte-Foy at Conques

Communication along the pilgrimage routes must have been constant, with pilgrims, masons, and other craft men continually traveling back and forth. It is thus not surprising that many Romanesque churches had similar features. The earliest surviving example of a pilgrimage church is dedicated to Sainte Foy, a third-century virgin martyr known in English as Saint Faith. She was martyred in 303 while still a child because she refused to worship pagan gods. In the ninth century, her relics were transported to Conques. The Church of Sainte-Foy, which belonged to the Benedictine order, was erected over her tomb and stands today in Conques, a remote village on the pilgrimage route from Le Puy in southeastern France.



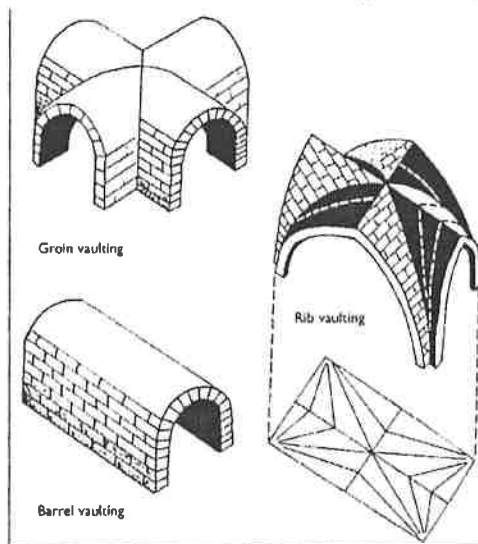
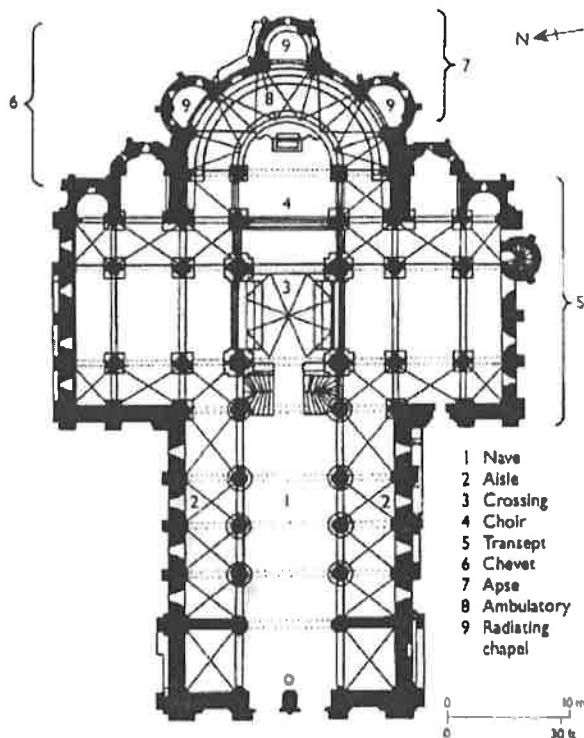
The single most important attraction for pilgrims to this church was the saint's relics. They were contained in an elaborate gold reliquary statue, the head of which is believed to have been formed around the saint's skull. Its large size-- it is a late antique mask that has been reused-- accentuates the impression of aloof power conveyed by the statue. The figure is made of gold repoussé, with several sheets of gold placed over a wooden core for stability. The saint sits frontally as if enthroned, wearing a martyr's crown and a rich, gold robe covered with gems and Roman cameos.

The builders of Sainte-Foy, and of all pilgrimage churches, had to accommodate large crowds without interfering with the duties of the clergy. The plan shows how the traditional Latin-cross basilica was modified by extending the side aisles around the transept and the apse to form an ambulatory. This permitted the lay visitors to circulate freely, leaving the monks undisturbed access to the main altar in the choir. Three smaller apses, or **radiating chapels**, protrude from the main apse, and two chapels of unequal size have been added at the east side of the transept arms. Essentially, such architectural arrangements accommodated two social and temporal systems. One was based on the social world of the laity, while the other provided an architectural space for those whose daily lives followed another "order" of business and a liturgical calendar.

A new architectural development in Romanesque churches was the replacement of wooden roofs by stone barrel vaults, which lessened the risk of fire and improved the acoustics (music, particularly Gregorian chant, was an integral feature of the Christian liturgy). The stone vaults required extra support, or **buttressing**, to counteract the lateral thrust (sideways force) they exerted against the walls. At Sainte-Foy, **transverse ribs** cross the underside of the **quadrant**--i.e., the half-barrel vaults of the nave. They are supported by **cluster piers**, each of which is reinforced by four engaged half-columns. The piers accent the corners of the groin-vaulted wall sections, or **bays**, of the side aisles.

Romanesque churches were decorated with sculpture, painting, and wall hangings through which an illiterate general population could "read" the images. Tapestries, most of which are now lost, often hung along the aisles, adding color and warmth to the church interiors.

An important Romanesque development was the use of architectural sculpture, animating surfaces and illustrating Bible stories and saints' lives. Most pilgrimage churches had images carved in relief at the main entrance. The area immediately around the doorways, or **portals**, would have contained the first images encountered, and the reliefs were therefore intended to attract the attention of the worshiper approaching the church. The general layout of medieval church portals is fairly consistent; what varies



10.7 Diagram of the three main Romanesque vaulting systems: barrel vaulting, groin vaulting, and rib vaulting.

from building to building is the program-- the arrangement and meaning of the subjects depicted on each section.

At Conques, the relief sculpture on the western portal is confined to the tympanum and the lintel. The most usual scenes on Romanesque tympanums depicted Christ in Majesty or, as at Sainte-Foy, the *Last Judgment*. It conforms to iconographic convention in its overall arrangement. The figures on Christ's right (the viewer's left) and on his level are saints and churchmen. Above them, angels hold scrolls that form arches. Below, also on Christ's right, are figures framed by semicircular arches. A figure of Sainte Foy is shown prostrated before the hand of God. Christ's left hand is lowered toward hell. His gesture directs the viewer's attention to the damned souls falling and being tortured by devils. In the center of hell, on the viewer's right, is the crowned frontal figure of Satan. The punishments in hell are designed to fit the earthly crimes of the damned. Thus, at the far left, a prideful knight tumbles from his horse as a devil spears him with a pitchfork. Next on the (viewer's) right, a lustful woman is yoked to her lover by the neck. On the other side of Satan, reading from right to left, a devil forces molten metal down the throat of a forger; two devils roast a poacher with the head of a rabbit; and a man guilty of greed hangs with a purse (also hanging) around his neck. Note that the saved souls on Christ's right are neatly arranged under framing devices, whereas the damned, on Christ's left, appear jumbled and disordered.

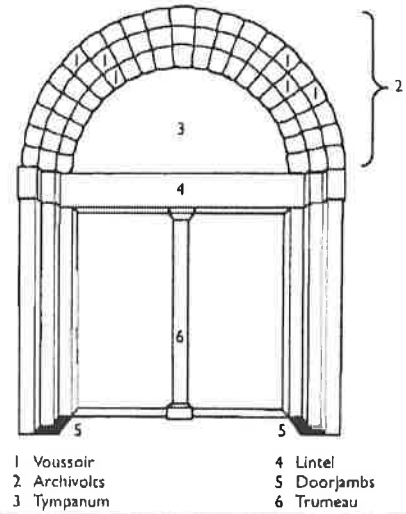
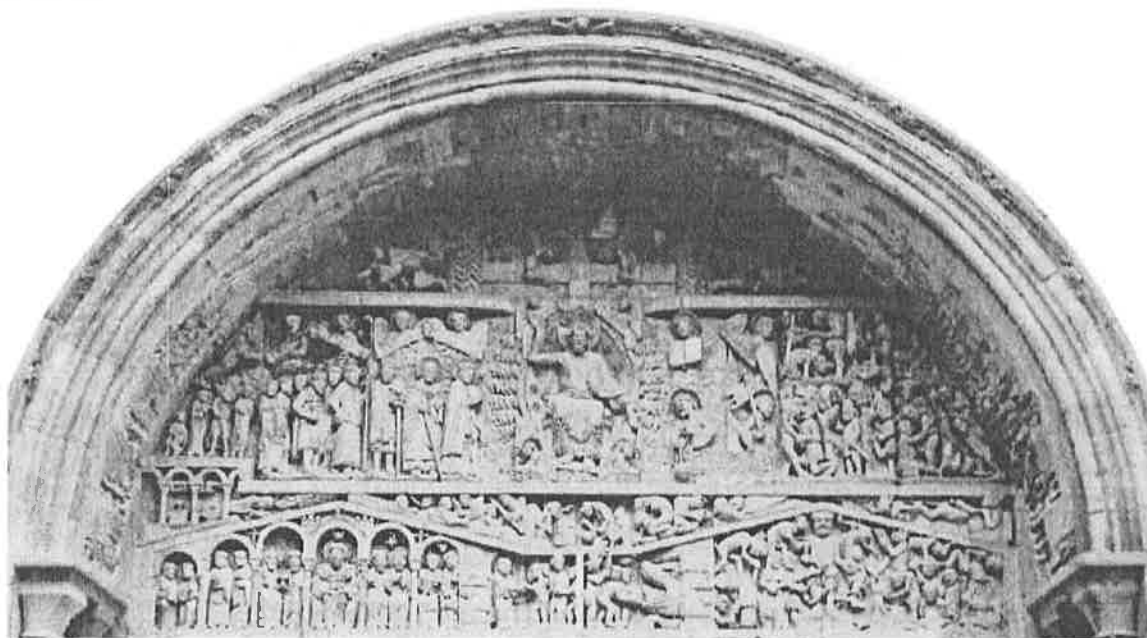


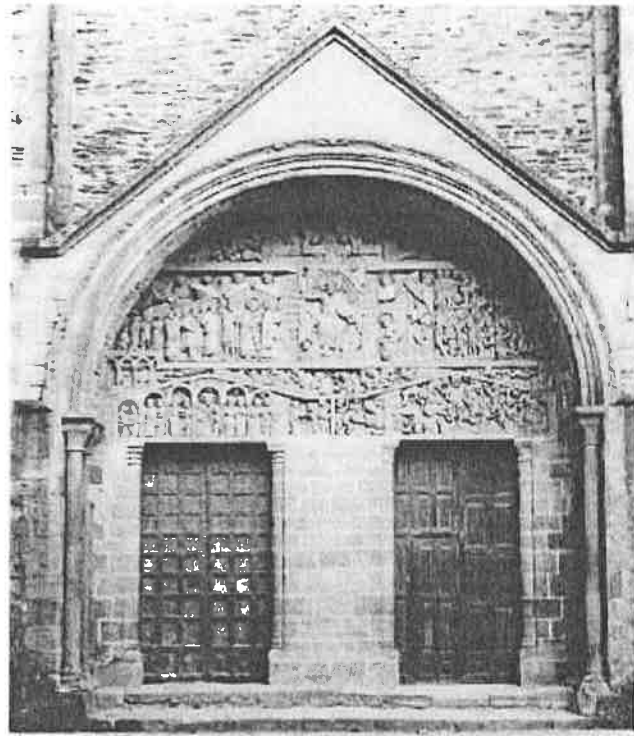
Diagram of a Romanesque portal.



10.11 *Last Judgment*, tympanum of the west portal, Sainte-Foy, Conques, c. 1130. Jesus is both the central and largest figure. He is surrounded by a mandorla, an oval of light (an Eastern motif), and his halo contains the Cross. He raises his right hand, reminding the viewer that the souls on his right will be received in heaven—a visual rendition of the advantages of being “on the right hand of God.”

At the center of the lintel, directly below Christ, the traditional right-left Christian symbolism is maintained. Two individual scenes are divided by a vertical. On Christ's right angels welcome saved souls into heaven. On his left, a grotesque devil with spiked hair and a long nose brandishes a club at a damned soul. The latter bends over as if to enter the gaping jaws of a monster, which pokes its head through a doorway. This iconography conflates the Christian metaphors of the "gate of hell" and the "jaws of death."

Images of heaven and hell vary as Christian art develops. The basic arrangement of the *Last Judgment*, however, is fairly constant. It is a reminder of the passage of time and of the belief that the unrighteous will be condemned to "everlasting punishment: but the righteous [will enter] into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).



10.10 West portal with tympanum, Sainte-Foy, Conques, c. 1130. Stone, approximately 12 × 22 ft. (3.66 × 6.71 m).

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/latin-western-europe/romanesque1/a/church-and-reliquary-of-saintefoy-france>

Church and Reliquary of Sainte-Foy, France

On the Road: Imagine you pack up your belongings in a sack, tie on your cloak, and start off on a months-long journey through treacherous mountains, unpredictable weather and unknown lands. For the medieval pilgrim, life was a spiritual journey. Why did people in the Middle Ages take pilgrimages? There are many reasons, but visiting a holy site meant being closer to God. And if you were closer to God in this life, you would also be closer to God in the next.



A Romanesque pilgrimage church: Saint-Foy, Conques

Located in Conques, the Church of Saint-Foy (Saint Faith) is an important pilgrimage church on the route to Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain. It is also an abbey, meaning that the church was part of a monastery where monks lived, prayed and worked. Only small parts of the monastery have survived but the church remains largely intact. Although smaller churches stood on the site from the seventh century, the Church of Saint-Foy was begun in the eleventh century and completed in the mid-twelfth century. As a Romanesque church, it has a barrel-vaulted nave lined with arches on the interior.

Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070-80, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high (Bayeux Museum)

Measuring twenty inches high and almost 230 feet in length, the Bayeux Tapestry commemorates a struggle for the throne of England between William, the Duke of Normandy, and Harold, the Earl of Wessex (Normandy is a region in northern France). The year was 1066—William invaded and successfully conquered England, becoming the first Norman King of England (he was also known as William the Conqueror).

The Bayeux Tapestry consists of seventy-five scenes with Latin inscriptions (*tituli*) depicting the events leading up to the Norman conquest and culminating in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The textile's end is now missing, but it most probably showed the coronation of William as King of England.

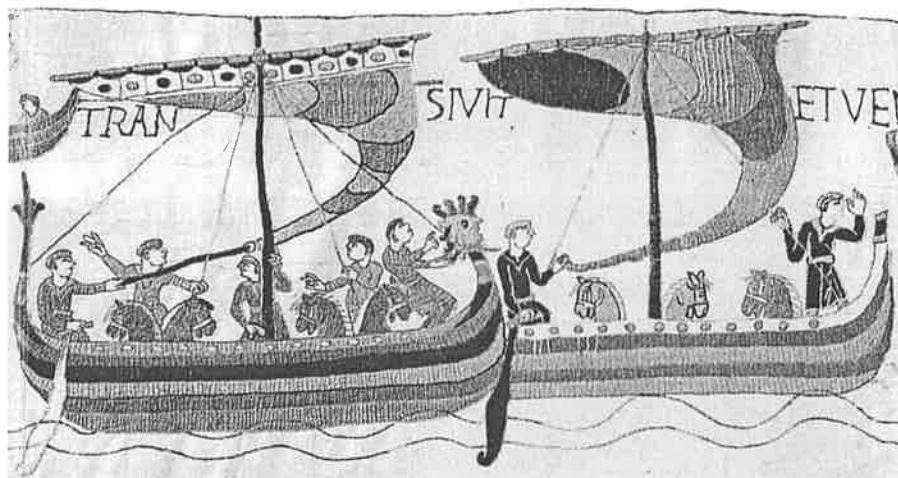


Falconer (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high (Bayeux Museum)

Although it is called the Bayeux Tapestry, this commemorative work is not a true tapestry as the images are not woven into the cloth; instead, the imagery and inscriptions are embroidered using wool yarn sewed onto linen cloth.

The tapestry is sometimes viewed as a type of chronicle. However, the inclusion of episodes that do not relate to the historic events of the Norman Conquest complicate this categorization.

Nevertheless, it presents a rich representation of a particular historic moment as well as providing an important visual source for eleventh-century textiles that have not survived into the twenty-first century.



Normans with horses on boats, crossing to England, in preparation for battle. Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high (Bayeux Museum)

The Bayeux Tapestry was probably made in Canterbury around 1070. Because the tapestry was made within a generation of the Norman defeat of the Anglo-Saxons, it is considered to be a somewhat accurate representation of events. Based on a few key pieces of evidence, art historians believe the patron was Odo, Bishop of Bayeux. Odo was the half-brother of William, Duke of Normandy. Furthermore, the tapestry favorably depicts the Normans in the events leading up to the battle of Hastings, thus presenting a Norman point of view. Most importantly, Odo appears in several scenes in the tapestry with the inscription ODO EPISCOPUS (abbreviated "EPS" in the image below), although he is only mentioned briefly in textual sources. By the late Middle Ages, the tapestry was displayed at Bayeux Cathedral, which was built by Odo and dedicated in 1077, but its size and secular subject matter suggest that it may have been intended to be a secular hanging, perhaps in Odo's hall.



The inscription above Odo (partially cut off in the reproduction above) reads, "Here, Odo the Bishop, with a staff (baculum) encourages the young warriors," Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high

We do not know the identity of the artists who produced the tapestry. The high quality of the needlework suggests that Anglo-Saxon embroiderers produced the tapestry. At the time, Anglo-Saxon needlework was prized throughout Europe. This theory is supported by stylistic analysis of the depicted scenes, which draw from Anglo-Saxon drawing techniques. Many of the scenes are believed to have been adapted from images in manuscripts illuminated at Canterbury.



The death of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high (Bayeux Museum)

The artists skillfully organized the composition of the tapestry to lead the viewer's eye from one scene to the next and divided the compositional space into three horizontal zones. The main

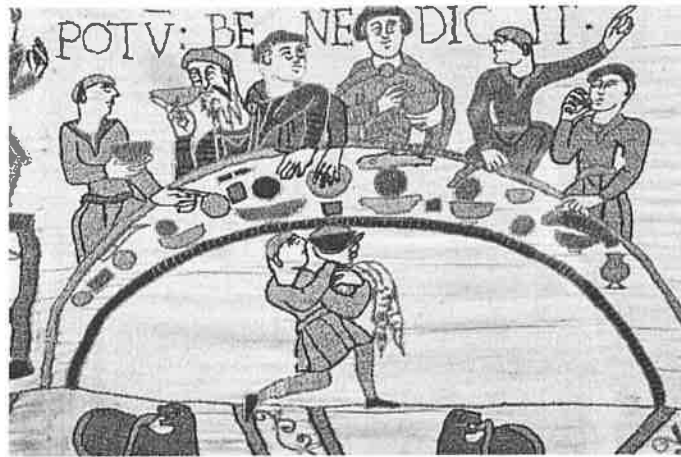
events of the story are contained within the larger middle zone. The upper and lower zones contain images of animals and people, scenes from Aesop's Fables, and scenes of husbandry and hunting. At times the images in the borders interact with and draw attention to key moments in the narrative (as in the image above of the battle).

The seventy-five episodes depicted present a continuous narrative of the events leading up to the Battle of Hastings and the battle itself. A continuous narrative presents multiple scenes of a narrative within a single frame and draws from manuscript traditions such as the scroll form. The subject matter of the tapestry, however, has more in common with ancient monumental decoration such as Trajan's Column, which typically focused on mythic and historical references.



Servants preparing food (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches

The embroiderers' attention to specific details provides important sources for scenes of eleventh-century life as well as objects that no longer survive. In one scene of the Normans' first meal after reaching the shores of England, we see dining practices. We also see examples of armor used in the period and battle preparations. To the left of the dining scene, servants prepare food over a fire and bake bread in an outdoor oven (above). Servants serve the food as the tapestry's assumed patron, Bishop Odo, blesses the meal (below).



Normans first meal in England (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high

Immediately after dining, William and his half-brothers Odo and Robert meet for a war council. Preparations for battle flank both sides of the first meal episode. Here we see visual evidence of eleventh-century battle gear and the construction of a motte-and-bailey to protect the Normans' position. A motte-and-bailey is a fortification with a keep (tower) situated on a raised earthwork (motte), surrounded by an enclosed courtyard (bailey). Images of battle horns, shields, and arrows as crucial ammunition shed light on military provisions and tactics for the time period.



Preparations for war, including the building of a motte-and-bailey (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high

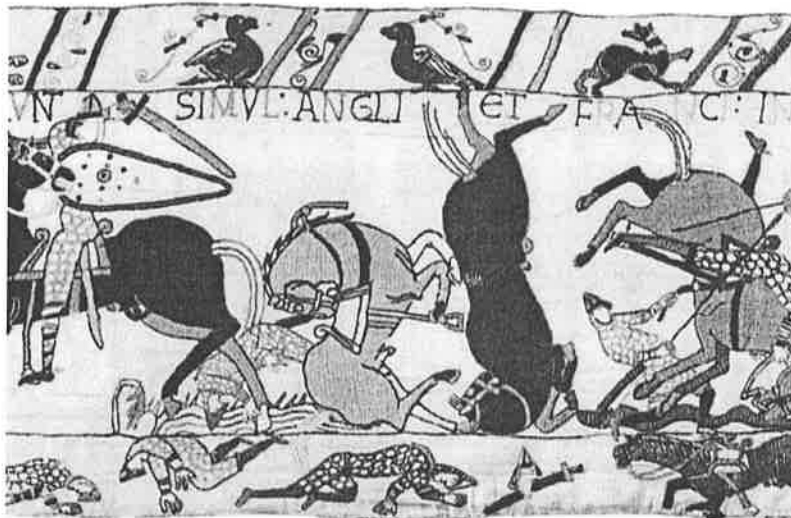
William's tactical use of cavalry is displayed in the "Cavalry" scene. The cavalry could advance quickly and easily retreat, which would scatter an opponent's defenses allowing the infantry to invade. It was a strong tactic that was flexible and intimidating. Although foot soldiers are included in the tapestry, the cavalry commands the scene, thus presenting the impression that the Normans were a cavalry-dominant army.



Cavalry and foot soldiers in battle (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high

In addition to depicting military tactics used in the Norman Conquest, the scene also provides visual evidence for eleventh-century battle gear. Cavalrymen are shown wearing conical steel helmets with a protective nose plate, mail shirts, and carrying shields and spears whereas the foot soldiers are seen carrying spears and axes. Representations of the cavalry show that the soldiers were armored but the horses were not. The brutality of war is evident in the battle scenes.

Figures of mortally wounded men and horses are strewn along the tapestry's lower zone as well as within the main central zone.



Wounded soldiers and horses (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high

The Bayeux Tapestry provides an excellent example of Anglo-Norman art. It serves as a medieval artifact that operates as art, chronicle, political propaganda, and visual evidence of eleventh-century mundane objects, all at a monumental scale. This astounding work continues to fascinate.

GOTHIC: BUILDING LITE

Abbot Suger had a problem. On feast days, his church was packed to the brim. Among “the crowded multitude . . . who strove to flock in to worship and kiss the holy relics,” he wrote, “no one among the countless thousands of people because of their very density could move a foot.”

Enlarging the church was an obvious solution. But in remodeling, Suger had a vision. He wanted to tear down bulky walls, enlarge teensy windows, and disperse the general gloom of Romanesque abbeys. The French abbot imagined an interior where space would flow unimpeded by partitions, where walls would be thin and skeletal, where—above all—the light of God would figuratively and literally fill the church. When Suger reconstructed the choir of his church at St.-Denis (1135–44) along these lines, he invented the Gothic style. Within fifty years, officials who attended the consecration ceremony were building cathedrals of their own. From Scandinavia to Spain, edifices consciously imitated St.-Denis, growing progressively larger and lighter.

The Gothic style spread like measles across the face of Western Europe. From its origin near Paris in the twelfth century, for four hundred years it dominated construction of churches, town halls, hospitals, and universities. The desire and means to build on a monumental scale, over multiple generations, were new. This commitment reflected revived confidence in technology and human capacities. Aided by the growing wealth of cities and increasing power and patronage of the church

and monarch, Gothic architecture became the quintessential urban mode.

The Gothic cathedral represented the Middle Ages’ overriding concern: religious faith. A cathedral’s magnificence symbolized the Heavenly Citadel, where virtuous souls would reside after death. Its very grandeur—especially the impossibly high vaults that served no utilitarian purpose—showed how immortality could transcend earthly limitations.

ENGINEERING: THE TRIUMPH OF LIGHT. The mania for Gothic cathedrals started soon after the first Crusaders returned from Constantinople. Awed by the splendor of Hagia Sophia, knights spread the word about architectural wonders in the East. They brought back new technology, like winches to hoist heavy stones. The West learned the science of geometry in a new translation of Euclid’s *Elements*.

What made the lightness of Gothic architecture feasible were both structural and aesthetic elements: the pointed arch and rib vault, flying buttresses, and thin walls pierced by expansive stained-glass windows. Other characteristics of Gothic style were an integration of structure and ornament, a sense of interior unity (replacing the compartmentalized Romanesque layout), elaborate entrances covered with sculpture, and a pronounced vertical emphasis.

POINTED ARCH, RIB VAULT, AND FLYING BUTTRESS. To produce the Gothic miracle of height and light, master masons used ribbed, groined, four-sided (quadripartite) vaults. In each vault, two half-cylinders intersect at groins. The arched ribs along two diagonals give greater rigidity to the vault in the direction of the groins. The vault’s weight is channeled

toward the four corners, where it is supported by vertical piers. To resist the outward thrust of the arches, external supports called flying buttresses were devised. Wall-like pillars braced nave walls through curved half-arches supporting the groin vaults like giant fingers. The cathedral looked pure and uncluttered on the inside, while the outside bristled with a briar patch of bridges linked to pillars and pinnacles.

The pointed arch added greater flexibility to the modular system of construction, since pointed arches can span different distances while keeping their keys at the same height. By varying the angle of the arch, cross-vaults could be erected over bays of any shape or size. Visually, pointed arches look lighter than rounded arches. Their upward-pointing tip has a buoyancy to enhance the impression of lift.

Architect-engineers based their practice on trial and error, as well as on trade secrets passed down through the apprentice system. They chose to err on the side of conservatism, with masonry overbuilt and stressed only to a fraction of its capacity. Gradually, structures became leaner and more daring. In a century and a half, from Chartres (1194) to Palma de Majorca (1350), cathedral piers became three and a half times thinner. Before flying buttresses were invented at Notre-Dame in Paris, walls were 5 feet thick, but with the new technology used at Mantes, walls shrank to 16 inches.

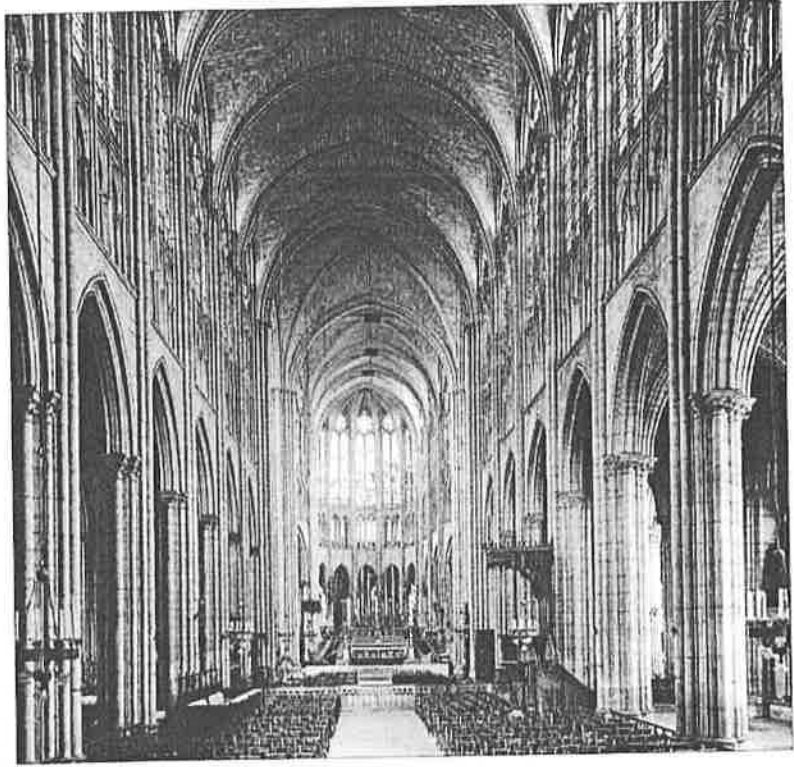
The system of construction was audacious. Stability depended on interaction of all factors. If even a minor component failed, the whole frame was vulnerable. (See page 42, Beauvais Cathedral goes bust.) Architects pushed materials and methods to the limit to reach aesthetic goals: higher, lighter, grander, more ornate. The result was some of the most extravagant architecture ever created.

ST.-DENIS: THE FIRST GOTHIC CATHEDRAL. In renovating his church, Abbot Suger used the essential elements of Gothic style—the pointed arch and rib vault—to further his theological beliefs. He wrote, “Man may rise to the contemplation of the divine through the senses.” The visual experience of lavish beauty in architecture of color, light, line, and space would make the mind ascend from material glory to immaterial faith. Or, as Suger put it, the churchgoer would be “transported from this inferior to that higher world. . . .”

Equating God with “super-essential light,” Suger replaced stone walls in radiating chapels with stained glass symbolizing divine light. He substituted thin columns for heavy piers in the ambulatory. He subordinated all parts to a holistic design to create a single spacious volume, where crowds and light flowed smoothly from chapels to altar. Increasing the size and number of windows and reducing the chapels’ outward projection so they almost merged with the ambulatory made light flood the whole east end. Rebuilding the west facade, he installed the first rose window between two towers, other Gothic hallmarks.

The abbey church of St.-Denis set the pattern for Gothic cathedrals. Although ornament became more complex as the style evolved and each country contributed its individual fillip, the signature elements remained the same. A three-level elevation became standard inside, with an arcade of tall pointed arches, a narrow passage (the triforium), and huge clerestory windows with delicate stone tracery. Clustered colonnettes affixed to piers rose from floor to vaults, creating a continuous line of uplift. Cathedrals retained the Romanesque format of nave with side aisles, but transept arms became much shorter, reinforcing the sense of an inner spatial whole. Most striking was the virtual disappearance of walls, which became mullions for stained glass.

Profuse exterior sculpture, like the homilies in stained glass, illustrated Bible tales so the entire building became a teaching aid for illiterate masses. Not sure about the wages of sin? Check out the Last Judgment carving, generally in the tympanum above the main portal. A wavering varlet could see monstrous devils snatching sinners off to hell, while Jesus weighs souls and sends the virtuous wafting upward.



Nave, abbey church of St.-Denis, France, c. 1135–44

The flow of space and light through ambulatory, chapels, and choir was made possible by removing thick walls, enlarging windows, and thinning supports. The new style invented at this church was later termed Gothic.

The Architect

At the beginning of the Gothic period, architects were called master masons. (A tombstone inscription for architect Pierre de Montreuil calls him *doctor lathomarum*, master stonemason.) They learned their craft through long apprenticeships before rising to the rank of master. Although trained in carpentry or stonecutting, master builders also possessed intellectual, specialized knowledge (*scientia* in Latin). They were literate and skilled in the liberal arts. Architects occupied a privileged position as designer, contractor, and supervisor of enormous projects.

In some churches, architects are buried with signs of high honor. On tomb effigies, they are dressed like great lords, holding tools like a compass, measuring rod, or model of a building. The French King Charles V was godfather to the son of his architect, Raymond du Temple.

Things could be dicey in the building biz. One hazard was that the better the work, the riskier the reward. The countess of Bayonne had her architect beheaded after he erected a fine tower, to keep him from repeating the miracle for another. Since architectural principles were not founded on factual knowledge but empirical experience, hiring the right architect meant success or failure on a construction site. Tricks of the trade were so jealously guarded, one architect killed his own son for leaking secrets to a bishop.

By the second half of the eleventh century, the architect was a professional in the modern sense, and a quantum leap in the level of originality occurred. Buildings became increasingly sophisticated and daring, less reliant on tradition and more on an individual's powers of invention and intuition.

NOTRE-DAME OF PARIS: THE GOLD STANDARD. Victor Hugo called it “a vast symphony of stone.” It must have seemed even vaster in the Middle Ages, for Notre-Dame (1163–1250) was the first cathedral of colossal scale and the prototype for all that followed. One French cathedral that preceded it, at Senlis (begun 1153), had “gigantic” 69-foot-high vaults. With its 115-foot-tall nave vault, imagine the awe that greeted Notre-Dame—the highest and longest edifice then attempted.

Its architect designed Notre-Dame in a compact plan, as one huge space with transept arms that do not project past the side aisles. He integrated large volumes by applying ornament to suggest lines of construction and stress the continuity of space. Shallow chapels hardly radiate; they sweep around the east end in a gentle curve.

With such enormous height and length, an aesthetic problem arose: how to blend great expanses of wall into the total conception. The solution: to balance horizontal and vertical lines so neither predominates, producing a harmonious whole. Nave walls are a series of recessions with little blank surface. The horizontal zones (arched arcade, tribune gallery, clerestory) lead the eye from entrance to the altar’s crescendo. At the same time, vertical lines of triple colon-

nettes rise from floor to vaults to create an impression of dynamic upsurge. Thin moldings and exaggeratedly slender arches dematerialize walls, making them seem delicate and without depth. Wide clerestory windows further reduce the weight of masonry walls.

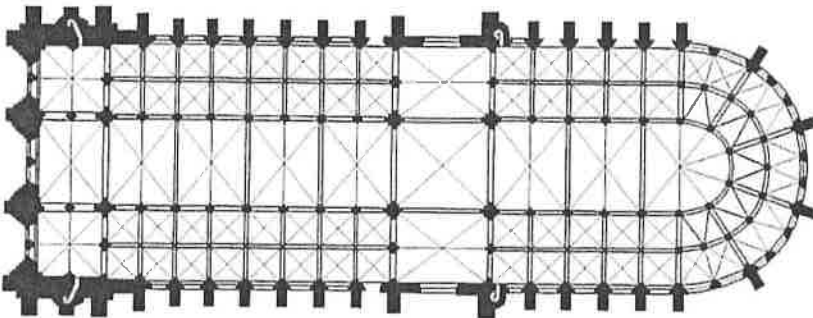
Flying buttresses were first used at Notre-Dame and span 50 feet on the outside of the church. Before, arches in the second-story gallery served as supports for vaults and nave walls. When windows in the tribune gallery increased in size (sacrificing solid walls to allow more light), nave vaults needed additional bracing. The taut buttresses transmit lateral thrust of roof and vaults to exterior pillars. Through this device, Notre-Dame achieves its grand scale without a massive shell.

Notre-Dame, Paris, France, 1163–1250

With its flying buttresses to support walls and vaults, the Cathedral of Notre Dame became the prototype of subsequent Gothic architecture.

Plan, Notre-Dame, Paris

Its compact plan with a continuous ring of chapels and nonprojecting transepts reinforces the sense of one vast but coherent, unified space.



CHARTRES: THE QUINTESSENTIAL GOTHIC CATHEDRAL. Looking at Notre Dame de Chartres, said the writer Henry James, “makes the act of vision seem for the moment almost all of life.” As the most unaltered example of Gothic architecture, Chartres Cathedral (1194–1220) displays all the classic elements of early Gothic design in unparalleled purity.

Built to house one of the most sacred relics of Christendom, the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to Christ, officials planned a suitably grand edifice after most of the original Norman structure burned down. Since cathedrals were also the heart of a medieval village and symbol of civic pride, funds to rebuild poured in from all classes of society. From lords and ladies to peasants, townspeople harnessed themselves to wagons to drag stones from quarry to construction site.

The main innovation of the design was elimination of the tribune level, with a low triforium (passageway over the slanted arcade roof) substituted. Because flying buttresses made a tribune structurally unnecessary, the designer was free to enlarge the arcade and clerestory to monumental size. With flying buttresses for external support, the clerestory windows became as tall as the main arcade of the first floor. This expansion transformed the upper story into a light show of supreme beauty. The chief glory of Chartres is its 26,000 square feet of stained-glass windows. “Flaming jewellery,” the critic John Ruskin called the windows—90 percent original—because of their luminous blues and reds, which soften the cold stone of the interior.

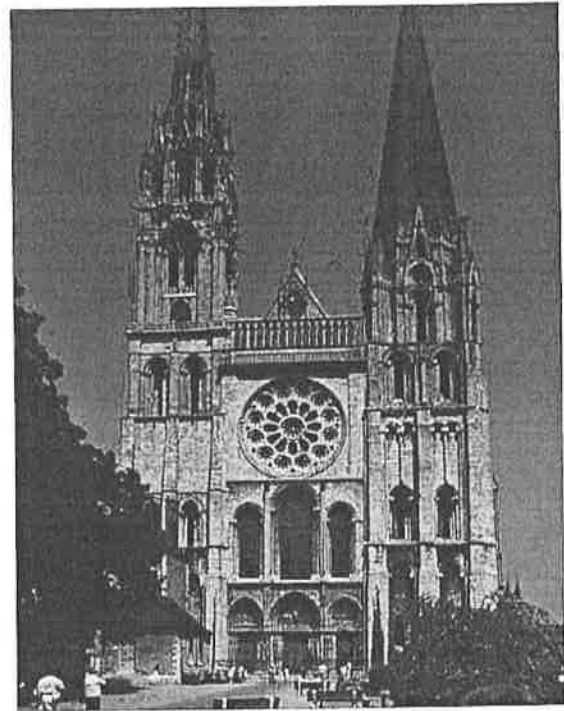
Replacing the redundant tribune with a small-scale triforium also simplified nave walls and reduced the number of masonry elements, while maintaining a balance between horizontal (the three-tier elevation) and vertical (piers, vaults) elements. The triforium perforates the wall, making masonry less a dead zone than a pause between giant windows.

Chartres maximizes the vertical impulse of Gothic architecture with another contribution: *piliers cantonnés*, columns surrounded by four thin shafts, evenly spaced. These shafts rise uninterrupted to the springing of the vaults, like lines of energy spraying toward the sky.

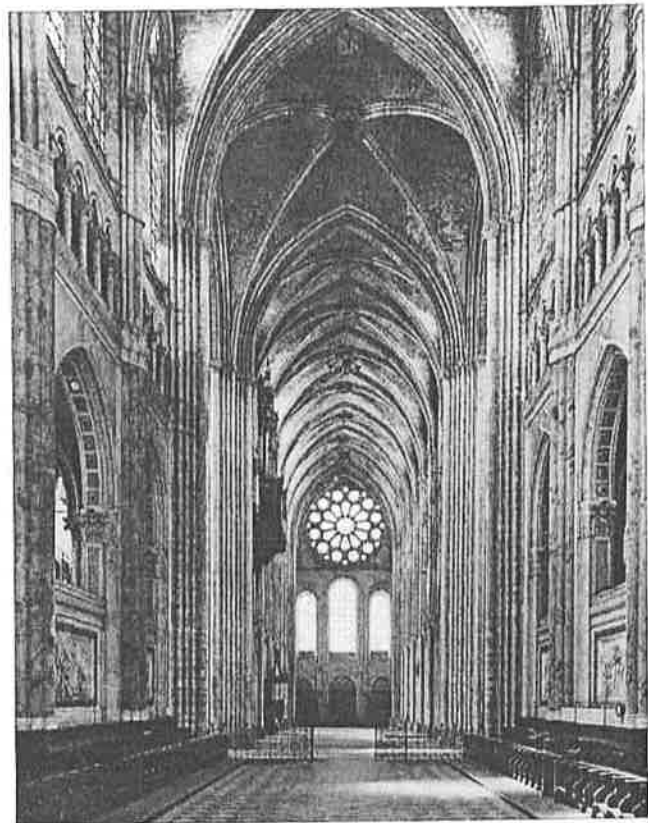
Another reason to consider Chartres the epitome of Gothic design is its exterior sculpture. Around the portals, thin, columnar statues of Old Testament royalty, prophets, and apostles reinforce the structural lines of the building. Architectonic rather than superfluous, the statues are essential for the design’s visual coherence. Sharply carved figures mold the facade into a play of light and shadow, animating the surface and banishing the monotony of flat planes.

Chartres Cathedral, nave interior

Chartres brought together all the Gothic elements of exterior flying buttresses, pointed arches, rib vaults, three-part elevation, stained glass, and vertical accent.



Cathedral of Notre Dame, Chartres, France, 1194–1220
Chartres Cathedral exemplifies classic Gothic features with its central rose window, three sculpted portals, and paired towers. The south spire (on the right), constructed c. 1160, represents the simplicity of early Gothic, while the ornate northern tower (1507), capped with a Flamboyant spire, is High Gothic.



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61. Dedication Page with Blanche of Castile and King Louis IX of France and Scenes from the Apocalypse, from a *Bible moralisée*. Gothic Europe. c. 1226–1234 C.E. Illuminated manuscript (ink, tempera, and gold leaf on vellum).

G14, 384-386

S5, 514-515

SH

Pins [Blanche Apocalypse Video Article](#)

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/latin-western-europe/gothic1/a/blanche-of-castile-and-king-louis-ix-of-france>

Blanche of Castile and King Louis IX of France

Blanche of Castile and King Louis IX of France; Author Dictating to a Scribe, Moralized Bible, France, probably Paris, ca. 1230, 14 3/4 x 10 1/4 inches / 37.5 x 26.2 cm (The Morgan Library & Museum) Blanche of Castile and King Louis IX of France; Author Dictating to a Scribe, Moralized Bible, France, probably Paris, c. 1230, 14 3/4 x 10 1/4 inches / 37.5 x 26.2 cm (The Morgan Library & Museum)

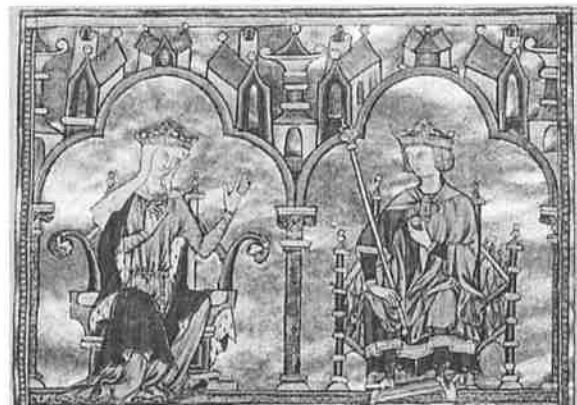
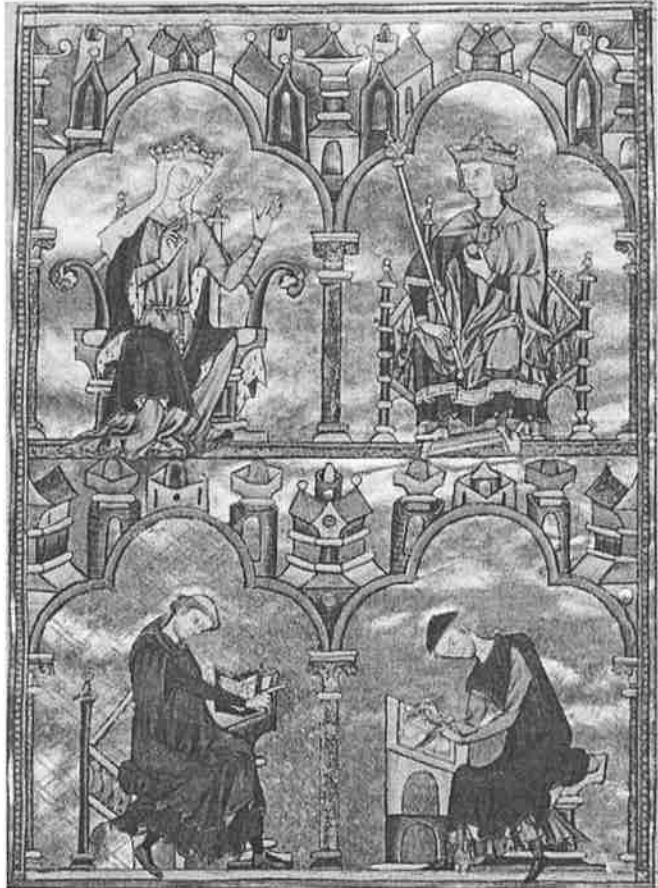
Blanche of Castille

In 1226 a French king died, leaving his queen to rule his kingdom until their son came of age. The 38-year-old widow, Blanche of Castile, had her work cut out for her. Rebelling barons were eager to win back lands that her husband's father had seized from them. They rallied troops against her, defamed her character, and even accused her of adultery and murder.

Caught in a perilous web of treachery, insurrections, and open warfare, Blanche persuaded, cajoled, negotiated, and fought would-be enemies after her husband, King Louis VIII, died of dysentery after only a three-year reign. When their son Louis IX took the helm in 1234, he inherited a kingdom that was, for a time anyway, at peace.

A manuscript illumination

A dazzling illumination in New York's Morgan Library could well depict Blanche of Castile and her son Louis, a beardless youth crowned king. A cleric and a scribe are depicted underneath them. Each figure is set against a ground of burnished gold, seated beneath a trefoil arch. Stylized and colorful buildings dance above their heads, suggesting a sophisticated, urban setting—perhaps Paris, the capital city of the Capetian kingdom (the Capetians were one of the oldest royal families in France) and home to a renowned school of theology.



A moralized Bible

This last page the New York Morgan Library's manuscript MS M 240 is the last quire (folded page) of a three-volume moralized bible, the majority of which is housed at the Cathedral Treasury in Toledo, Spain. Moralized bibles, made expressly for the French royal house, include lavishly illustrated abbreviated passages from the Old and New Testaments. Explanatory texts that allude to historical events and tales accompany these literary and visual readings, which—woven together—convey a moral.

Assuming historians are correct in identifying the two rulers, we are looking at the four people intensely involved in the production of this manuscript. As patron and ruler, Queen Blanche of Castile would have financed its production. As ruler-to-be, Louis IX's job was to take its lessons to heart along with those from the other biblical and ancient texts that his tutors read with him.

King and queen

In the upper register, an enthroned king and queen wear the traditional medieval open crown topped with fleur-de-lys—a stylized iris or lily symbolizing a French monarch's religious, political, and dynastic right to rule. The blue-eyed queen, left, is veiled in a white widow's wimple. An ermine-lined blue mantle drapes over her shoulders. Her pink T-shaped tunic spills over a thin blue edge of paint which visually supports these enthroned figures. A slender green column divides the queen's space from that of her son, King Louis IX, to whom she deliberately gestures across the page, raising her left hand in his direction. Her pose and animated facial expression suggest that she is dedicating this manuscript, with its lessons and morals, to the young king.

Louis IX, a trefoiled open crown atop his head, returns his mother's glance. In his right hand he holds a scepter, indicating his kingly status. It is topped by the characteristic fleur-de-lys on which, curiously, a bird sits. A four-pedaled brooch, dominated by a large square of sapphire blue in the center, secures a pink mantle lined with green that rests on his boyish shoulders.

In his left hand, between his forefinger and thumb, Louis holds a small golden ball or disc. During the mass that followed coronations, French kings and queens would traditionally give the presiding bishop of Reims 13 gold coins (all French kings were crowned in this northern French cathedral town.) This could reference Louis' 1226 coronation, just three weeks after his father's death, suggesting a probable date for this bible's commission. A manuscript this lavish, however, would have taken eight to ten years to complete—perfect timing, because in 1235, the 21-year-old Louis was ready to assume the rule of his Capetian kingdom from his mother.

A link between earth and heaven

Coronation of the Virgin, tympanum of central portal, north transept, Chartres Cathedral, c. 1204-10

Queen Blanche and her son, the young king, echo a gesture and pose that would have been familiar to many



Christians: the Virgin Mary and Christ enthroned side-by-side as celestial rulers of heaven, found in the numerous Coronations of the Virgin carved in ivory, wood, and stone. This scene was especially prevalent in tympana, the top sculpted semi-circle over cathedral portals found throughout France. On beholding the Morgan illumination, viewers would have immediately made the connection between this earthly Queen Blanche and her son, anointed by God with the divine right to rule, and that of Mary, Queen of heaven and her son, divine figures who offer salvation.



A cleric and an artist

The illumination's bottom register depicts a tonsured cleric (churchman with a partly shaved head), left, and an illuminator, right.

The cleric wears a sleeveless cloak appropriate for divine services—this is an educated man—and emphasizes his role as a scholar. He tilts his head forward and points his right forefinger at the artist across from him, as though giving instructions. No clues are given as to this cleric's religious order, as he probably represents the many Parisian theologians responsible for the manuscript's visual and literary content—all of whom were undoubtedly told to spare no expense.

On the right, the artist, donning a blue surcoat and wearing a cap, is seated on cushioned bench.

Knife in his left hand and stylus in his right, he looks down at his work: four vertically-stacked circles in a left column, with part of a fifth visible on the right. We know, from the 4887 medallions that precede this illumination, what's next on this artist's agenda: he will apply a thin sheet of gold leaf onto the background, and then paint the medallion's biblical and explanatory scenes in brilliant hues of lapis lazuli, green, red, yellow, grey, orange and sepia.



Advice for a king

Blanche undoubtedly hand-picked the theologians whose job it was to establish this manuscript's guidelines, select biblical passages, write explanations, hire copyists, and oversee the images that the artists should paint. Art and text, mutually dependent, spelled out advice that its readers, Louis IX and perhaps his siblings, could practice in their enlightened rule. The nobles, church officials, and perhaps even common folk who viewed this page could be reassured that their ruler had been well trained to deal with whatever calamities came his way.

This 13th century illumination, both dazzling and edifying, represents the cutting edge of lavishness in a society that embraced conspicuous consumption. As a pedagogical tool, perhaps it played no small part in helping Louis IX achieve the status of sainthood, awarded by Pope Boniface VIII 27 years after the king's death. This and other images in the bible moralisée explain why Parisian illuminators monopolized manuscript production at this time. Look again at the work. Who else could compete against such a resounding image of character and grace?

Essay by Louisa Woodville

64. Golden Haggadah (The Plagues of Egypt, Scenes of Liberation, and Preparation for Passover). Late medieval Spain. c. 1320 C.E. Illuminated manuscript (pigments on vellum).

Pins [Plagues](#) [Liberation](#) [Preparation](#) [Website](#) [Article](#)

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/golden.html>

Golden Haggadah

The extravagant use of gold-leaf in the backgrounds of its 56 miniature paintings earned this magnificent manuscript its name: the 'Golden Haggadah'. It was made around 1320, in or near Barcelona, for the use of a wealthy Jewish family. The holy text is written on vellum pages in Hebrew script, reading from right to left. Its stunning miniatures illustrate stories from the biblical books of 'Genesis' and 'Exodus' and scenes of Jewish ritual. [Enlarged image](#) [Zoomable high-resolution image](#)



Golden Haggadah. Biblical scenes based on Genesis, 19-37. Northern Spain, probably Barcelona, c.1320
British Library Add. MS. 27210, ff.4v-5
Copyright © The British Library Board

What does this page show?

Counterclockwise from top right: Adam naming the animals, the Creation of Adam and Eve, the Temptation, Cain and Abel offering a sacrifice, Cain slaying Abel, and lastly Noah, his wife and sons coming out of the ark. God's image is forbidden in Jewish religious contexts, and is totally absent in all the miniatures here. Instead, angels are seen intervening at critical moments.

What is a haggadah?

A haggadah is a collection of Jewish prayers and readings written to accompany the Passover 'seder', a ritual meal eaten on the eve of the Passover festival. The ritual meal was formalized during the 2nd century, after the example of the Greek 'symposium', in which philosophical debate was fortified by food and wine.

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word 'haggadah' is a 'narration' or 'telling'. It refers to a command in the biblical book of 'Exodus', requiring Jews to "tell your son on that day: it is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt".

Perhaps because it was mainly intended for use at home, and its purpose was educational, Jewish scribes and artists felt completely free to illustrate the Haggadah. Indeed it was traditionally the most lavishly decorated of all Jewish sacred writings, giving well-to-do Jews of the middle ages a chance to demonstrate their wealth and good taste as well as their piety. The man for whom the 'Golden Haggadah' was made must have been rich indeed.

What is Passover?

Passover commemorates one of the most important events in the story of the Jewish people. Like Christianity and Islam, Judaism traces its origins back to Abraham. He was leader of the Israelites, a group of nomadic tribes in the Middle East some 4,000 years ago. Abraham established a religion that

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distinguished itself from other local beliefs by having only one, all-powerful God. According to a Covenant made between them, the Jews would keep God's laws, and in return they would be protected as chosen people.

The Israelites were captured and taken as slaves to Egypt, where they suffered much hardship. Eventually, a prophet called Moses delivered the Jews from their captivity with the help of several miraculous events intended to intimidate the Egyptian authorities. The last of these was the sudden death of the eldest son in every family. Jewish households were spared by smearing lambs' blood above their doors - a sign telling the 'angel of death' to pass over.

Who made the Golden Haggadah?

The illumination of the manuscript - its paintings and decoration - was carried out by two artists. Though their names are unknown, the similarity of their styles implies they both worked in the same studio in the Barcelona region. The gothic style of northern French painting was a strong influence on Spanish illuminators, and these two were no exceptions.

There is also Italian influence to be seen in the rendering of the background architecture. Differences between the two artists may be attributed to their individual talents and training. The painter of the scenes shown here tends towards stocky figures with rather exaggerated facial expressions. The second artist has a greater sense of refinement and achieves a better sense of space.

Why was a Jewish manuscript made in Spain?

The wandering tribes of Israel finally settled in the 'promised land' after their delivery from captivity in Egypt. But the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah were to fall to the Assyrians and Babylonians. Then, in 63 BC, the region came under the governance of the Roman Empire. In 70 AD, the Roman army destroyed the Second Jewish Temple and sacked Jerusalem; in 135 AD they crushed a Judean uprising. As a result of this many Jews went into exile.

Some migrated across north Africa to Spain. For many centuries, these 'Sephardic' Jews lived peacefully and productively under both Christian and Islamic rulers. The Jewish community in Barcelona had been established since Roman times and was one of the most affluent in Spain by the time the 'Golden Haggadah' was produced.

Jews acted as advisers, physicians and financiers to the Counts of Barcelona, who provided economic and social protection. They grew attuned to the tastes of the court and began commissioning manuscripts decorated in Christian style. Though the scribe who wrote its Hebrew text would have been a Jew, the illuminators of the 'Golden Haggadah' are likely to have been Christian artists, instructed in details of Judaic symbolism by the scribe or patron.

How did the 'Golden Haggadah' come to the British Library?

Islamic rule in Spain came to an end in 1492, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (the Catholic Monarchs) defeated the Muslim army at Granada and restored the whole of Spain to Christianity. Months later the entire Jewish population was expelled. The manuscript found its way to Italy and passed through various hands, serving as a wedding present at one stage. In 1865, the British Library (then the British Museum Library) bought it as part of the collection of Hebrew poet and bibliophile Giuseppe (or Joseph) Almanzi.

How can I see more of this book? We have created a digital version using [Turning the Pages™](#).

<http://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=47111807-4e9a-43de-be65-96f49c3d623c&type=book>

The Golden Haggadah

The Golden Haggadah is one of the finest of the surviving Haggadah manuscripts from medieval Spain. The Haggadah, which literally means 'narration', is the Hebrew service-book used in Jewish households on Passover Eve at a festive meal to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. It is one of the most frequently decorated Jewish prayer books. The fact that it was intended for use at home and its main aim was to educate the young, provide ample scope for artistic creativity. The Golden Haggadah was probably made near Barcelona in about 1320. In addition to the Haggadah text itself the manuscript contains liturgical Passover poems according to the Spanish rite. The text is preceded by a series of full-page miniatures depicting scenes mainly from the Book of Exodus. These sumptuous illuminations set against gold-tooled backgrounds earned the manuscript its name and were executed by two artists in the northern French Gothic style. The 17th-century Italian binding has an elaborate border on each cover. Hebrew is written from right to left, so the Golden Haggadah opens from the right.

The Plagues of Egypt, folios 12v - 13.

The ongoing conflict between Pharaoh and Moses culminates in a series of devastating plagues. Blighted by disasters, humans, animals, and nature are rendered by the second artist in the naturalistic manner specific to the northern French Gothic style. These miniatures display other distinctive marks of the artist's skill and style, such as the flowing drapery, and the well-proportioned figures with thick, wavy hair and expressive faces and gestures. folio 12v Here the plague of frogs is initiated by Moses, not Aaron as indicated in the Bible. Green frogs leap everywhere and nobody is spared, not even Pharaoh. The plague of lice attacks both humans and animals, and Pharaoh and his magicians seem helpless. According to Jewish tradition, the plague of arov denotes wild beasts. Moses looks on as Pharaoh and his attendant are attacked by wild animals. In Latin manuscripts, this plague is usually the plague of flies. This panel shows the plague on livestock. The man wiping away tears, the man tearing his shirt, and the lifeless animals on the ground are realistically executed. folio 13 Moses throws ashes out of a bowl, initiating the plague of boils. On the left, a barefoot Pharaoh covered with spots consults a physician. Two episodes are featured here: on the left a powerless Pharaoh watching the onset of the plague of hail and flaming fire; on the right, Moses, lifting his hands in prayer, asks God to stop the plague. Aaron looks on as Moses touches the ground with his staff and triggers the plague of locusts. There are two scenes based on midrashic legends: above, Pharaoh and his courtiers are immobilized by the plague of darkness, while, below, the Israelites carry away the Egyptians possessions.

Liberation and Preparation, folios 14v - 15.

In this last opening of the sequence of full-page miniatures, the artist concentrates on two themes: the Israelites' liberation and joyful departure from Egypt, and preparations for the Passover Festival. The artist's mastery of contemporary Italian techniques, aimed at creating space and depth, can best be seen in the miniatures on the left-hand page. Here, architectural backgrounds of niches, arched windows, coffered ceilings, and canopies create a distinct sense of space lacking elsewhere in the manuscript. folio 14v This illustrates the plague of the first-born. In the upper-right scene, a man is struck by an angel's sword; in the left scene, the queen mourns her baby lying lifeless on a nurse's lap; the third scene, not recorded in the Bible, probably represents the funeral of the first-born. Pharaoh, on a battlement, orders the Israelites to leave Egypt. Followed by Moses, the Israelites, holding lumps of dough, walk with hands raised illustrating the verse: 'And the children of Israel went out with a high hand'. The pursuing Egyptians are depicted as contemporary knights led by a crowned king. The heraldic devices in Hebrew medieval manuscripts portrayed personal arms, but the impossibility of identification

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has reduced most of them to a purely decorative role. The Israelites' safe crossing of the Red Sea is shown. Moses, holding his rod, turns back and takes a last look at the drowning Egyptians. folio 15 Miriam, Moses' sister, holding a timbrel decorated with an Islamic motif, is joined by maidens dancing and playing contemporary musical instruments. In this ritual scene of preparations for Passover, the master of the house, sitting under a canopy, orders the distribution of matsah (unleavened bread) and haroset (sweetmeats) to the children. A family prepares the house for Passover. The man holding a candle searches for leaven on the night before Passover, helped by a boy. The woman cleans the coffered ceiling, while a girl sweeps the floor. Sheep are slaughtered and prepared for Passover in the building on the right. Beneath a baldachin, a man purifies utensils in a cauldron over a fire.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/latin-western-europe/gothic1/a/golden-haggadah>

The Golden Haggadah Essay by Dr. Elisa Foster

The preparation for the Passover festival: upper right: Miriam (Moses' sister), holding a timbrel decorated with an Islamic motif, is joined by maidens dancing and playing contemporary musical instruments; upper left: the master of the house, sitting under a canopy, orders the distribution of matzoh (unleavened bread) and haroset (a sweet made from nuts and fruit) to the children; lower right: the house is prepared for Passover, the man holding a candle searches for leavened bread on the night before Passover and the woman and girl clean; bottom left: sheep are slaughtered for Passover and a man purifies utensils in a cauldron over a fire. From the Golden Haggadah, c. 1320, northern Spain, probably Barcelona (British Library, MS. 27210, fol. 15 recto)



On the eve of the Jewish holiday of Passover, a child traditionally asks a critical question: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" This question sets up the ritual narration of the story of Passover, when Moses led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt with a series of miraculous events (recounted in the Jewish Bible in the book of Exodus).

189. Bahram Gur Fights the Karg, folio from the Great Il-Khanid Shahnama.

Islamic; Persian, Il'Khanid. c. 1330–1340 C.E. Ink and opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper.

Pins [Whole page Image only](#) [Harvard page](#)

<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/afrasiyab-killing-naudar-a-folio-from-the-great-mongol-shahnama-book-of-kings/JAEvOnDbVQ6iFA7h=en>

[T]he Shahnama [is] the great Persian epic that tells the stories of the ancient kings and heroes of Iran, both historic and mythical. Perhaps to legitimize themselves as foreign rulers now in control of Persia, the Mongol court in Iran commissioned several manuscripts of the Shahnama. The Great Il-Khanid (Great Mongol) Shahnama [is] the largest and grandest of these volumes. The Mongols brought examples of Chinese painting and textiles with them across Asia to their court in Iran, which likely provided inspiration for the silk textiles worn by these figures and the craggy, ink-painted rocks in that form the background of this scene.

<http://www.worcesterart.org/collection/Islamic/1935.24.html>

Bahram Gur, whose name means "wild ass," was a Sassanian king (reigned A.D. 430-38) renowned by legend for his hunting prowess. Having performed a miraculously difficult shot, he acknowledged the divine aid involved in his skill by ordering six hundred wild asses branded with his name and six hundred marked with gold earrings and distributed to the people.

[There are] fifty-eight remaining miniatures from an early illustrated example of the Persian national epic, this particular manuscript known as the "Demotte" Shahnama (after the art dealer Georges Demotte, who separated and sold the folios individually). The work is believed to have been commissioned by Ghiyath-al-Din, a high official (*vizier*) at the Ilkhanid court at Tabriz. Its large and sumptuous pages illustrate the introduction to Persian painting of conventions, especially in landscape depiction, derived from Chinese art. Providing the cultural links for such artistic influence were the Mongol conquests of Asia and Europe in the thirteenth century and their control of China, Central Asia, and Persia.

<http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/169542>

Title Bahram Gur Fights the Horned Wolf (painting, verso; text, recto), illustrated folio from a manuscript of the Great Il-Khanid Shahnama (Book of Kings) *Other Titles Series/Book Title:* Shahnama, *Classification:* Manuscripts. *Work Type:* manuscript folio, *Date:* c. 1330-1340. *Places:* Creation Place: Middle East, Iran, Tabriz. *Period:* Ilkhanid period, *Cultural:* Persian. *Medium:* Opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. *Dimensions:* folio: 41.5 x 30 cm (16 5/16 x 11 13/16 in.)

Description This folio is from a celebrated copy of the text known as the Great Ilkhanid Shahnama, one of the most complex masterpieces of Persian art. Because of its lavish production, it is assumed to have been commissioned by a high-ranking member of the Ilkhanid court and produced at the court scriptorium. The fifty-seven surviving illustrations reflect the intense interest in historical chronicles and the experimental approach to painting of the Ilkhanid period (1256–1335). The eclectic paintings reveal the cosmopolitanism of the Ilkhanid court in Tabriz, which teemed with merchants, missionaries, and diplomats from as far away as Europe and



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China. Here the Iranian king Bahram Gur wears a robe made of European fabric to slay a fearsome horned wolf in a setting marked by the conventions of Chinese landscape painting.

The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353. By Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). 2002. p. 257.

Disguised as an envoy of the shah of Iran, Bahram Gur made his way to the court of Hind, ruled over by an unjust king, Shangul, to observe the kingdom and its troops. One evening after a sumptuous banquet, Bahram Gur mistakenly displayed his prowess and aroused the suspicions of the king, who tried to trick Bahram into revealing his identity. When this ruse fails, Shangul decided to dispatch the hero by sending him to slay a fearsome horned wolf. Bahram Gur pierced the wolf with arrows and cut off its head with his sword.

Unlike other scenes of Bahram Gur's hunting triumphs, this miniature does not show him in the act of slaying his prey. Instead, a relaxed, confident Bahram Gur is depicted after the deed, with mace in hand, a quiver full of arrows, and a sheathed sword. The still-writhing corpse of the wolf figures prominently in the foreground, a feature that is not specifically mentioned in the text.



<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/shahnameh/index.html>

The most important creation of New Persian literature – the *Shahnameh*, or the 'Book of Kings' – has been defined as the national epic of the Iranian people, their 'identity card' (*shenas-nameh*) and an encyclopedia of Iranian culture. It celebrates the survival of a civilization that originated some 7,000 years ago at a dynamic crossroads of cultures, the Iranian Plateau, extended at its peak from Anatolia and the Caucasus across Transoxiana to China, withstood countless invasions, absorbed diverse influences, and conquered its conquerors by virtue of its timeless values.

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Twice as long as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* taken together, the *Shahnameh* blends Iran's ancient myths and legends with accounts of major events in its past. Its 55,000 rhyming couplets chart the history of the Iranian world from its creation to the fall of the Persian Empire in the seventh century. The Arab conquest led to fundamental changes in economic, social, and cultural life, including the replacement of Zoroastrianism with Islam and of Middle Persian (Pahlavi) with Arabic as the dominant language. But the *Shahnameh* offered Iran's new rulers a model of wise kingship, preserved the Persian language and identity, and spread their cultural influence well beyond Iran's shrinking political borders. It was translated into Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and many of the world's modern languages. A millennium after its completion, the Persian 'Book of Kings' remains one of the most popular texts of secular poetry in Southwest Asia. Its enduring appeal points to a core of meaning – the eternal strife between good and evil – that transcends specific time and place.

<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/shahnameh/vgallery/section2.html>

The earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* dating to the thirteenth century were not illustrated, but by that time its stories were inspiring the decoration of ceramics and metalwork. The Mongol conquests, beginning under the leadership of Chingiz [Ghenghis] Khan (1162–1227), brought Iran into the Mongol Empire, which stimulated dynamic cultural exchanges across Asia. The regeneration of Iran's political identity under the Mongol Il-Khanid dynasty (1256–1353), within borders comparable to those of its pre-Islamic past, coincided with the promotion of the *Shahnameh* as the princely manual for Iran's new rulers and with the emergence of Persian manuscript painting. The earliest illustrated copies, the so-called 'Small' *Shahnamehs* with their numerous paintings, date to c.1300. Soon afterwards more majestic manuscripts were produced, including the 'Great Mongol' *Shahnameh* and copies made for the Inju rulers in Shiraz. Chinese influence is strong in the illustration of these manuscripts. Their text is written in the *naskhi* script, which remains legible when copied at speed. Kings and heroes are constantly engaged in feasting and fighting, the key elements of the warrior code and pastimes of the ruling elite. They also find time for romance and women are central to many of the episodes. The conflicts between rulers and heroes inspire captivating stories and reflections on the timeless themes of power, loyalty and love.

<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/shahnameh/patronage.html>

Among the greatest upheavals in Iran's history were the Mongol conquests. The first took place in the lifetime of Genghis (Chinghiz) Khan (1162-1227), between 1219 and 1221, and brought destruction to the great cities of Transoxiana and eastern Iran: Samarqand, Bokhara, Balkh, Herat, Merv and Nishapur. The second culminated in the sack of Baghdad in 1258 and the fall of the 500 year-old dynasty of the 'Abbasid Caliphs, titular heads of the Muslim world. The Mongols were not Muslim and their conquests put an end to the old order, in which rulers enjoyed legitimacy by virtue of the delegated authority of the Caliph. The status of the new rulers, the Il-Khans (meaning 'subordinates to the Great Khan'), was based on their descent from Genghis Khan and on their conquests. They brought Iran into the fold of the Mongol Empire, which stretched from China to southern Russia and Eastern Europe. Iran regained something of its ancient position as a power united under a strong ruler within a territory comparable to its pre-Islamic borders.

Until the end of the thirteenth century the Il-Khans practiced different religions, including Buddhism, Shamanism and Nestorian Christianity, and tolerated cultural pluralism. Their court in Tabriz attracted leading Iranian intellectuals some of whom became their most trusted ministers and steered successive rulers towards adopting the role of traditional Persian monarchs. Foremost among these advisors were the Joveynis, the chief minister Shams al-Din (d. 1284) and his brother 'Ala al-Din (d. 1283), governor of Baghdad and author of a history of the Mongol conquests. Completed in 1260, Joveyni's history was peppered with quotations from the *Shahnameh*. They were selected to recount Iran's ancient struggles against Turan (the Turkic nomads) on the one hand, and,

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on the other, to offer the Il-Khanids models of good rule and the attendant association with the glory of imperial Persia. The conquering Mongols might have been perceived by Joveyni's long-suffering compatriots as the ancient enemy. But they were also encouraged to identify with the interests of their new Persian subjects and to assume the historic role of Iranian shahs. The Joveynis were great patrons of historians and poets, and it is no mere chance that the first complete text of the *Shahnameh* to survive is a copy dated 1276, when they were at the peak of their influence.

Likewise, it is hardly a coincidence that the first known illustrated copies of the *Shahnameh* date from c.1300, shortly after the Mongols' conversion to Islam under Ghazan Khan (1295–1304). Ghazan and his successors, down to the collapse of the dynasty in 1335, took to art patronage as a reflection of their majesty. The text that received the most attention from patrons and artists alike was Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Given the devastation caused by the Mongol invasions and the destruction of rich libraries, it is possible that earlier copies, including illustrated ones, had been lost. On the other hand, the emergence of Persian manuscript painting at the same time as the regeneration of Iran's political power under the Mongols is a logical development.

The *Shahnameh* served as a source of pride for Iran, which was recovering its territorial, political and cultural history. The time was ripe for artistic skills to flourish alongside the revival of Persian identity.

...The most celebrated work of Il-Khanid painting is the 'Great Mongol' *Shahnameh*, also known as the Demotte *Shahnameh* after the French dealer Georges Demotte, who dismembered it around 1910. Only fifty-seven miniatures are known to survive today, divided among public and private collections around the world. The manuscript was probably made in Tabriz for the last Il-Khanid ruler, Abu Sa'id (1316–1335), and may have been associated with his vizier, Ghiyath al-Din, Rashid al-Din's son. The cycle of illustrations, thought to reflect the patron's life and times, is a work of majesty and solemnity surpassing all manuscript painting created in the Islamic world up to that point.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/khan6/hd_khan6.htm

The most elaborate and luxurious manuscript of the Ilkhanid period is a fourteenth-century copy (now dispersed) of the *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*), known today as the Great Mongol *Shahnama*. It exists today in the form of 57 illustrations and several text pages scattered among public and private collections. Extensive study of the manuscript has revealed that the original was probably two volumes of about 280 large folios and 190 illustrations.

In the early twentieth century, Paris dealer Georges Demotte took the manuscript apart, splitting some folios with illustrations on both sides and selling the resulting two leaves individually. He commissioned new text pages to paste on the backs of the undamaged split leaves; when these were damaged, the salvaged image was pasted onto a newly commissioned folio. As a result, some paintings are unrelated to the accompanying text, while others have incomplete text.

The frontispiece and the colophon, which might have revealed information about the patron, the calligrapher, and the date and place of production, are lost. Most scholars agree that the manuscript dates to the 1330s and was perhaps commissioned by the vizier Ghiyath al-Din, son of Rashid al-Din of Tabriz.

The *Shahnama*, the poet Firdausi's masterpiece in Persian verse written around 1000, tells the stories of ancient heroes and kings of pre-Islamic Iran; it is rich with exploits of love and betrayal, courage, and valor that lend themselves to illustration. This epic work remained one of the most popular in Iran, and the first-known illustrated copies date to the Ilkhanid period. As no illustrated copies of the *Shahnama* are known from before the early 1300s, the manuscript might not yet have had an established iconography, leaving the Ilkhanid patron and the best artists at court free to experiment with the choice of pictorial events, styles, and themes.

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The pages of the Great Mongol *Shahnama* are large in format and most of the space is often entirely painted. The figures possess a monumental quality, and the use of such devices as the extension of trees and battle standards beyond the picture frame and the truncation of human and animal figures imparts a sense of barely contained energy. The frequent depiction of figures seen from behind pulls the viewer into the picture space, enhancing the drama. The innovative Ilkhanid artists combined the traditional style of Persian painting with elements borrowed from other traditions—costumes, rocks, trees, and clouds from Chinese art; compositions from Western painting—to produce a unique and unparalleled visual expression. The *Shahnama*, with its rich detailing of the largely lost material culture of the Mongol court, presents a view of the contemporary Ilkhanid world, transforming a popular text into a splendid visual document of the period. Stefano Carboni and Qamar Adamjee, Department of Islamic Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/khan2/hd_khan2.htm

The arts of the book in the Ilkhanid period reached unparalleled levels, not only in quantity but also in quality. The new rulers gave impetus to book production after they settled in their capitals of Maragha, Tabriz, and Baghdad and developed an interest in historical writings as a means to further their claim to rule over a foreign land. Not surprisingly, they chose the *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*) as a sort of official dynastic history in which the Ilkhanids identified themselves with kings and heroes of the Iranian past.

The Mongols' attitude toward the power of the word and the image, however, is not sufficient to explain the unprecedented use of high-quality paper, the richness of illumination, the refinement of calligraphy, and the blossoming of illustration that Iran and Iraq witnessed during the Ilkhanid period (34.24.1; 34.24.3). The Mongols clearly brought with them an excitement about the art of painting. Local artists readily absorbed the new artistic influences from China, transmitted through scrolls (1989.363.5) and drawings, and integrated them into the type of painting with which they were most familiar, book illustration. At the end of the thirteenth century, the early integration of foreign elements was awkward (*Tarikh-i jahan-usha*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris). Within two decades, however, artists had created a new eclectic style that reached a high point with two masterpieces of Ilkhanid painting: Rashid al-Din's *Jamī' al-tavarikh* and the Great Mongol *Shahnama* (33.70; 52.20.2).

The dynamic, almost dramatic phase of Ilkhanid painting would slowly be replaced during the waning years of the dynasty with a new, understated, and more refined style that provided the basis for developments in the following two centuries. Later Persian scholars were so keenly aware of the importance of these changes that they described the Ilkhanid period as the time when "the veil was lifted from the face of Persian painting."

It was in the capitals Tabriz and Baghdad that Ilkhanid art flourished at its highest levels, reaching an apex with the production of the Great Mongol *Shahnama*. Its dramatic style of painting was replaced by a quiet world that suited the vision of the newly arrived Mongol patrons, the Jalayirids (1340–1411), who were captivated by Persian poetry, in which illustrations of battle scenes and heroic feats became merely symbolic and almost motionless (2008.31). The Jalayirids played an important role in providing a bridge between the Ilkhanids and Timur (Tamerlane), who saw himself and his dynasty, the Timurids (1370–1507), as the rightful successors of the Mongols.

<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1943.658.b>

Iranian painting during the Mongol period borrowed stylistic and spatial elements from Chinese models, such as the rock formations, tree trunk, and dragon. The surging landscape and writhing dragon create a painting of extraordinary vitality and unity. Bahram Gur (ruled 420-438 CE) was a popular king from pre-Islamic Sassanian Iran and a great hunter. He took the name "Gur," meaning onager (a wild ass), because it was his preferred game—although he also excelled at killing dragons.

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190. *The Court of Gayumars*, folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*. Sultan Muhammad. c. 1522–1525 C.E. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper.

G14, 302-303

S5, 289

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<http://www.akdn.org/museum/detail.asp?artifactid=1730>

Folio From The Shahnama Of Shah Tahmasp: The Court Of Gayumars, Iran, Safavid, circa 1522-25 CE

Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. 47 x 31.8 cm

This is the first painting to appear after the prefatory matter introducing Firdawsi's *Shahnama*. It depicts the first king, Gayumars, enthroned before his community - its members clad in leopard furs and skins - his son Siyamak seated to his left, and grandson Hushang standing to his right. Though the composition implies the just succession between father and son, signified by the spatial position between them (where left is favored), we know that this will never take place, emphasizing the inherent tragedy of the tale. The angel Surush informed Gayumars that the Black Div, son of the demon Ahriman, would murder Siyamak. Even at the beginning of human time, forces of good contend with forces of evil, inaugurating a struggle without end. This sense of loss is heightened by an idyllic landscape, where human beings gather alongside animals of various species; even the rocky landscape is constructed to suggest the harmony between human and natural order. Though the painting lacks a signature, it is one of very few mentioned by a contemporary. In his treatise on art history, written in 1544-45 CE, Dust Muhammad praises Sultan Muhammad for his creations, calling him "the rarity of the age," and singles out "The court of Gayumars" as a painting that humbles all artists who see it. It is easy to understand why. His painting combines an ingenious composition with a broad palette dominated by cool colors, each element minutely and precisely rendered in a technique that defies comprehension. Though the painting is large and even spills out into the gold-flecked margins, Sultan Muhammad populates the scene with countless figures, animals, and details of landscape, but in such a way that does not compromise legibility. The level of detail is so intense that the viewer is scarcely able to absorb everything, no matter how closely he looks.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd_shnm.htm

The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp

With its 50,000 rhyming couplets the *Shahnama*, or "Book of Kings," is one of the most voluminous epics of world literature. The poem narrates the history of the ancient kings of Iran from the mythical beginnings to the Arab conquest in 651 A.D. It was completed around 1010 A.D. by Abu'l Qasim Firdausi Tusi (935–1020), and was dedicated to the Ghaznavid ruler Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 998–1030), who had succeeded in gaining power over eastern Iran and modern-day Afghanistan by the end of the tenth century. In the eyes of the poet, this king appeared as the long-awaited ruler who could end dynastic strife and reunify the region. Thus, he seemed the ideal dedicatee for a work meant to celebrate Iran's past glory. Unfortunately, the ruler's response was not as enthusiastic and generous as expected. According to some sources, before dying, the poor and sick Firdausi voiced his disappointment for the little compensation received in a harsh satire against the sultan.



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In addition to being a great work of literature, in fact, the poem can also be considered a successful example of "mirror for princes," a popular genre in the medieval and early modern Islamic world intended for the education and edification of rulers.

The history of Iran recounted in the *Shahnama* unfolds in fifty kingdoms, which are divided into three successive dynasties: the Pishdadiyan (1970.301.13)—the early legendary shahs, who established civilization (1970.301.2) and fought against the forces of evil (1970.301.3); the Kayanids—the principal protagonists of the enmity with Turan, the first and foremost antagonist of Iran (1970.301.36); and the Sasanians—the last glorious dynasty to rule a unified Iran before the advent of Islam (1970.301.62). The last section of the poem is considered to be the more historical one, and was occasionally referred to by medieval Islamic historiographers. Yet, the poem also revives pre-Islamic traditions, folklore, and oral literature. Kings and heroes are engaged in battles against foreign monstrous enemies (1970.301.4) and supernatural creatures (1970.301.51; 1970.301.3) that threaten their lives and the survival of their reigns. At the same time, the poem meditates on more profound human experiences and narrates the moral struggles, romantic interludes, and deaths of its many protagonists (1970.301.35).

With its interplay of lore and history (1970.301.73), the *Shahnama* offers models of conduct and rulership that inspired numerous generations of rulers. In addition to being a great work of literature, in fact, the poem can also be considered a successful example of "mirror for princes," a popular genre in the medieval and early modern Islamic world intended for the education and edification of rulers. The teachings and moral exempla offered by the virtuous kings and paladins of the *Shahnama* are among the aspects that explain its great success throughout history.

All kings who ruled Iran, both local and foreign, continued to commission the production of new copies of the epic, which were often lavishly illustrated and illuminated. By appropriating this cultural treasure and assimilating its ideas and values, many foreign rulers also used it as an ideological tool, one that allowed them to establish their legitimate succession to the kings of the past. Prestigious manuscripts such as the so-called Great Mongol *Shahnama* (ca. 1330), also in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, the Baysunghur Mirza *Shahnama* (1430), and the Shah Tahmasp *Shahnama* (1520–40) (see below)—sponsored, respectively, by the Ilkhanid (1256–1353), Timurid (1389–1501), and Safavid dynasties (1501–1736)—survive as evidence of this practice, and as testaments to the cultural and artistic importance of this literary masterpiece through the centuries.

The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp

The *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76), also known as the *Shahnama-yi Shahi*, is arguably the most luxuriously illustrated copy of Firdausi's epic ever produced in the history of Persian painting (1970.301.21). Its pages, with outstanding measurements for an illustrated book (approximately 48 x 32 cm), are made of fine paper enriched with large gold-sprinkled borders and lavish illuminations. Accompanying the 759 folios of text, written in superb nasta'liq script, are 258 paintings of exquisite quality and artistic originality.

This project was realized at the royal atelier in Tabriz, the first capital of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736), and involved two generations of the most renowned artists of the time. Among them were Sultan Muhammad, Mir Musavvir, and Aqa Mirak, who succeeded each other as directors of the project through the years. Scholars still disagree about the actual dates of execution of the manuscript. It was

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begun around the early 1520s, probably under Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–24), the founder of the dynasty, and carried out for at least another twenty years under Shah Tahmasp, the manuscript's dedicatee and principal sponsor.

The artistic importance of this manuscript cannot be overestimated. It is considered one of the highest achievements in the arts of the book for its superb calligraphy, painting, and illumination. From a pictorial point of view, it also marks the synthesis of the two most important phases of the Persian tradition—the Turkman style, which developed in Tabriz and Shiraz, and the Timurid style, associated with Herat. These two strains were absorbed into the new artistic idiom of the early Safavids. Thus, the lively treatment and bright colors of landscape (1970.301.2;1970.301.21) and surfaces (architecture: 1970.301.13; 1970.301.35; textiles: 1970.301.2; 1970.301.51) inspired by the Turkman school, coexist with the more sober palette and balanced compositional layout (1970.301.62) of the Herat school, whose impact is particularly evident in some of the later paintings (1970.301.73).

Not long after its completion, the manuscript left Iran and was sent as a gift on the occasion of the accession of the Ottoman sultan Selim II (r. 1566–74). Contemporary Ottoman and European sources document the arrival of the Iranian embassy in Edirne on February 21, 1568, and even record the thirty-four camels bearing luxurious gifts that accompanied it. The *Shahnama-yi Shahi* is explicitly identified in one account as a lavish copy of the *Shahnama* in the name of Shah Tahmasp with 259 (*sic*) miniatures, and listed along with the Holy Qur'an, oriental porcelains, precious textiles, brocades, and silk carpets, also part of the gift. Until the early twentieth century, the manuscript remained in the library of the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, where it continued to entertain generations of rulers. The inserts with commentaries and descriptions of the paintings in Ottoman Turkish, which were added sometimes around 1800, bear witness to the artistic curiosity and intellectual inspiration this work provided many centuries after its production. Today the manuscript is dispersed among private and public collections. The Metropolitan Museum has seventy-eight of the pages with paintings in its collection.

Francesca Leoni

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<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140302/spectrum/main2.htm>

The travels of a work of art: The movement of *Houghton Shahnama* manuscript from Iran to Turkey to Europe and then to the United States, besides the movement of 'peerless' artists working on it, raises the question of how art travels Sunday, March 2, 2014

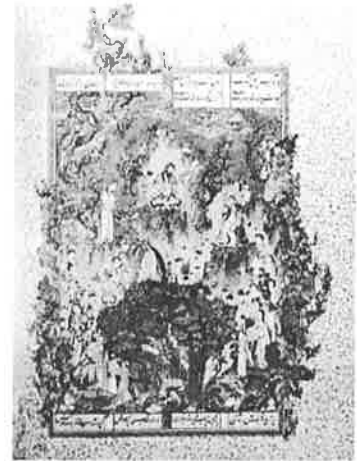


I was very intrigued when I chanced upon a news item that a single folio from an illustrated manuscript of the *Shahnama*, the national epic of Iran, was recently sold at an art auction in England for more than seven million pounds. That is a serious amount of money. I knew something about that particular *Shahnama* copy, having seen some images from it in published histories, and having admired these, but truly speaking, I did not know a great deal.

That it was referred to often as the *Houghton Shahnama* was something I definitely knew but suddenly I wanted to get close to it, well beyond the title of the painting which had fetched that price: "*Faridun in the Guise of a Dragon tests his Sons*".

The Court of Gayumars. Folio from the Shah-Tahmasp-Houghton Shahnama. Attributed to Sultan Muhammad. Iran, ca. 1522-25

What I learnt was fascinating, for there was in the accounts a whole history of the travels of that manuscript: who commissioned it, how it went from the original patron first to one owner, then to another, how it was dispersed, how many folios of it reached some museum/s and others which landed up in the hands of different collectors. This particular folio with the price tag I have mentioned was picked up by an anonymous buyer but the guess is that it is now in a museum of Islamic art in one of the oil-rich Sheikdoms of the Arab world. The bare facts of its provenance first. This Shahnama is known to have been originally commissioned by the Safavid ruler of Persia, Shah Ismail, who had attracted to his court some of the greatest artists then active in the Islamic world. Started in 1522, it was not, however, finished under that Shah, and is generally believed to have been completed under his son, Shah Tahmasp, another great patron of the arts, somewhere between 1525 and 1540. That Shah, however, made a present of this sumptuous manuscript to the Ottoman ruler of Turkey, Sultan Selim II, in 1568.



For hundreds of years, it remained in the Islamic world till the very beginning of the 20th century when it left Istanbul. The year was 1903: in that year it was sold in Paris and a great collector and bibliophile, Baron Edmund de Rothschild, picked it up. Till 1934, it remained with that baron and upon his death; it was inherited by Baron Maurice de Rothschild, who kept it with himself from 1934 to 1957. Upon his demise, it became part of his estate of great books and manuscripts which was sold: this time a celebrated American collector, Arthur A. Houghton Jr, acquired it.

The Simurgh flies towards Zal (Detail). From the Shah-Tahmasp- Houghton Shahnama. Iran, ca. 1530-35



To the generation of art collectors and scholars active at that time, it started becoming known as the *Houghton Shahnama*, the name by which I have referred to it above. Some would call it the *Shah Tahmasp-Houghton Shahnama*, but by and large, the name of the original patron was brought in as a matter of courtesy. The American collector's name, already linked to the great Houghton Library at Harvard, came to stay. While with him the manuscript was 'unbound', so to speak, so that different folios could be shown at different locations, including the celebrated Pierpont Morgan Library, and the Grolier Club.

Later, in 1971, a number of pages went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; some landed up in other museums and private collections. Scholars pored over the pages of this '*King's Book of Kings*'; connoisseurs savored them, those who could not secure them — that is, if they could have afforded them — or have access to them, suffered pangs of envy. For 400 years, the prestige of this remarkable work, described as the very "apogee of Persian art", "a monumental achievement of artistic skill and patronage" had gone on rising in the eyes of the world. In the corridors of international scholarship, it was constantly being classed with the great illuminated manuscripts of medieval Europe, like the *Belles Heures of Duc de Berry*.

The movement of the manuscript from Iran to Turkey to Europe and then to the United States is one matter; there is also the phenomenon of the movement of the 'peerless' artists working on it. One has to know Persian art to get a sense of the incredible wealth of talent that was involved in the making of this manuscript.



←

The Rocks (detail). From the Shah Tahmasp-Houghton Shahnama. Iran, ca. 1530-35

→
Zal and the Simurgh. Folio from the Shah- Tahmasp- Houghton Shahnama. Iran, ca. 1530-35



The iconic figure of Bihzad — that great master against whose work so much of Persian art is judged — was not directly involved in this enterprise but his spirit loomed over it. The painter with whom, at least at the beginning, the manuscript is most associated is Sultan Muhammad; then there were other great names: Aqa Mirak, Dust Muhammad, Mir Musawwir, among them. There is the movement of artists from Tabriz and Shiraz to Herat, from the Turkman aesthetic to the Timurid, and so on. For fifteen years, it is believed, work went on: painters, calligraphers, illuminators, page-makers, book binders, all involved. It is stated that when, due to political considerations, the owner of this manuscript, *Shah Tahmasp*, had to send some of the choicest gifts to the Sultan of Turkey, those gifts arrived on the back of 34 camels, and at the very top of those gifts were not jewels or priceless carpets but a copy of the *Holy Koran* believed to have been scripted by the great Imam, 'Ali, in his own hands, and "a manuscript of the *Shahnama*". That *Shahnama*, even though it is not named was, most scholars believe, the *Shah Tahmasp-Houghton Shahnama*.

I realize that there is not enough room left in this column to speak of the qualities of the work that made up this manuscript. It is also not easy, I am equally aware, for eyes used to Indian aesthetics to immediately enter the world of that of Persia: of that another time, perhaps.

It might be best, therefore, simply to draw attention to how one of the paintings in it — the Court of Gayumars — was described by contemporaries and later chroniclers. The work has been attributed to the master painter, Sultan Muhammad, in which he shows us the primordial 'court' of the first of kings, Gayumars, untouched by evil, attended upon by all kinds of people clad only in the skins of animals.

Of this painting, another master painter, Dust Muhammad, wrote in florid fashion to his patron, that "painting rises to the heights, where skies, for all their thousand-starred eyes, have yet to see the like", and added: "Lions fierce in the field of painting, as awesome tigers drawn to the arts, stung at heart by the smart of his brush, cower in hurt, overpowered by this work".

The work, with its "candle-flame composition" as one scholar put it, deserves close, very close, attention. But while one steps oneself into it, or in another work from the same manuscript that shows Zal and the Simurgh, one should not omit to see the myriad figures of beasts and unearthly beings that the painter has hidden into the mysterious world of crystalline rocks that occupy so much of space in the folios.

191. The Ardabil Carpet. Maqsud of Kashan. 1539–1540 C.E. Silk and wool.

SH

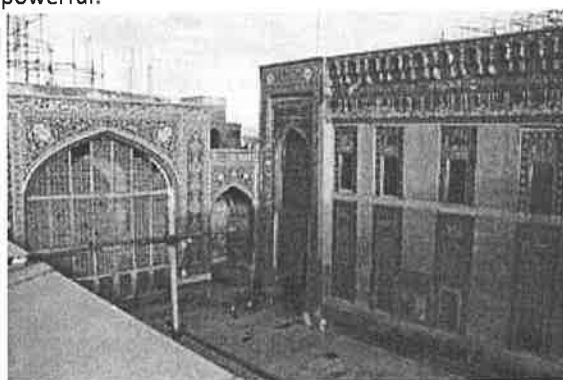
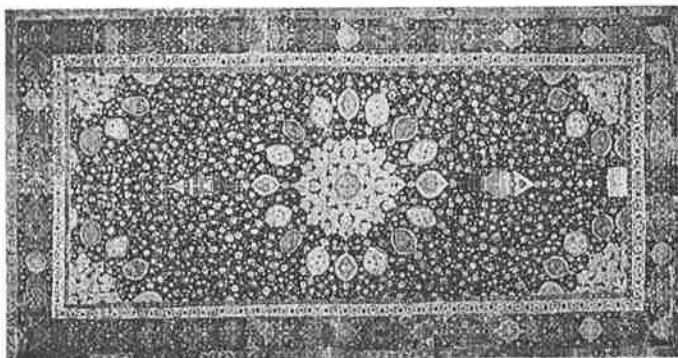
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<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/History-of-the-ardabil-carpet/>

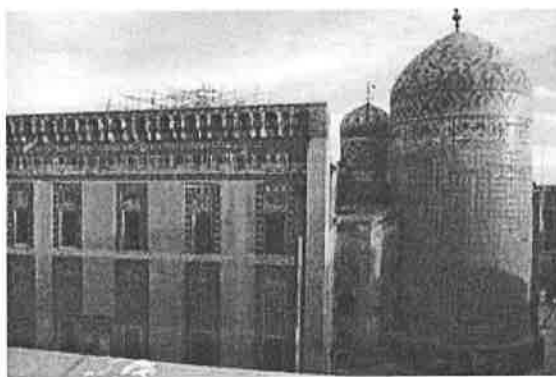
History of the Ardabil Carpet

Why the Ardabil Carpet was made

One of the main sights in the town of Ardabil in north-west Iran is the shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili, who died in 1334. The Shaykh was a Sufi leader, who trained his followers in Islamic mystic practices. After his death, his followers remained loyal to his family, who became increasingly powerful.



Anteroom to the tomb of Shaykh Safi al-Din, commonly called the Hall of Lamps



The shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili (the impressive tomb tower on the right in this photograph). The other shrine buildings were added around it.

In 1501, one of his descendants, Shah Isma'il, seized political power. He united Iran for the first time in several centuries and established the Shi'i form of Islam as the state religion. Isma'il was the founder of the Safavid dynasty, named after Shaykh Safi al-Din.

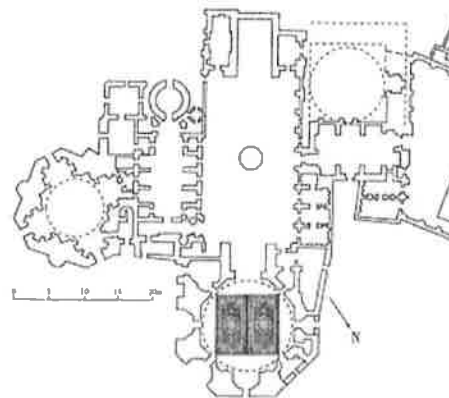
The Safavids, who ruled without a break until 1722, promoted the shrine of the Shaykh as a place of pilgrimage. In the late 1530s, Isma'il's son, **Shah Tahmasp**, enlarged the shrine, and it was at this time, too, that the carpet was made as one of a matching pair.

Plan of the shrine at Ardabil, showing where the carpets were situated

The completion of the carpets was marked by a four-line inscription placed at one end. The first two lines are a poetic quotation that refers to the shrine as a place of refuge:

'Except for thy threshold, there is no refuge for me in all the world.
Except for this door there is no resting-place for my head.'

The third line is a signature, 'The work of the slave of the portal, Maqsud Kashani.' Maqsud was probably the court official charged with producing the carpets. He was not necessarily a slave in the literal sense but called himself one to express



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humility, while the word for 'portal' can be used for a royal court or a shrine. Perhaps Maqsud meant both, as in this case the court was the patron of the shrine.

The fourth line contains the date 946 in the Muslim calendar, which is equivalent to AD 1539 - 1540.

The Ardabil Carpet and the V&A

The Ardabil Carpet on display in the Jameel Gallery, V&A



The two Ardabil carpets were still in the shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din in 1843, when one was seen by two British visitors. Thirty years or more later, the shrine suffered an earthquake, and the carpets were sold off, perhaps to raise funds for repairs. The damaged carpets were purchased in Iran by Ziegler & Co., a Manchester firm involved in the carpet trade. Parts of one carpet were used to patch the other. The result was one 'complete' carpet and one with no border.

In 1892, the larger carpet was put on sale by Vincent Robinson & Co. of London. The designer William Morris went to inspect it on behalf of this Museum. Reporting that the carpet was 'of singular perfection ... logically and consistently beautiful', he urged the Museum to buy it. The money was raised, and in March 1893 the Museum acquired the carpet for £2000.

The second, smaller carpet was sold secretly to an American collector, and in 1953 it was given to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The Ardabil carpet hung on the wall in this gallery for many years. In 2006, the Museum created the extraordinary case in the centre of the gallery so that the carpet could be seen as intended, on the floor. To preserve its colors, it is lit for ten minutes on the hour and half-hour.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-49/the-ardabil-carpet-a-new-perspective/>

The Ardabil Carpet - a new perspective. Lynda Hillyer, **Head of Textile Conservation.** Boris Pretzel. **Materials Scientist**

The Ardabil carpet will form the centre piece of the new Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the V&A which opens in July 2006. This most famous of Persian carpets has been the subject of endless copies ranging in size from small rugs to full scale carpets. There is an 'Ardabil' at 10 Downing Street and even Hitler had an 'Ardabil' in his office in Berlin. ¹ The real Ardabil was first seen in London in 1892 when it was exhibited in a dealer's showroom in Wigmore Street. William Morris described it as 'a remarkable work of art. . the design is of singular perfection . . its size and splendor as a piece of workmanship do full justice to the beauty and intellectual qualities of the design'. It was Morris, in his capacity as one of the V&A's Art Referees, who persuaded the Museum to raise, with the aid of public subscription, the then vast sum of £2000 to purchase the carpet in March 1893.

The Ardabil carpet measures 10.51m x 5.34m (34' 6" x 17' 6") and is thought to be one of the largest carpets in the world. Unknown to the Museum at the time, there was a second Ardabil, more finely knotted, which is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This carpet has lost its borders and part of its central field; a portion of the missing areas are thought to have been used to repair the carpet owned by the V&A. ² Occasionally fragments originally taken from the Los Angeles carpet have appeared on the open market. The two carpets were almost certainly a royal commission and would have taken about four years to weave. Their origins remain

unclear but they are said to have come from a complex of shrines and mosques at Ardabil in North West Persia, burial place of Shaikh Safi al-Din, ancestor of Shah Ismail, founder of the Safavid dynasty. At one end of the Ardabil carpet, a cartouche contains an inscription which dates it to 1539/40 AD. The large central medallion is characteristic of carpets woven in Tabriz (North West Persia) and the fantastic design of the ground of the carpet consisting of two layers of swirling leaves, stems and flowers is typical of the art of the early Safavid dynasty.

After its acquisition the Ardabil carpet was given a linen support and repairs were carried out in silk thread. It was attached to a 3 fold frame and placed behind glass in Gallery 42 where it remained on display until 1974, when it became obvious that the repairs were failing and that the carpet needed further support. Furthermore it was very dirty and lacked the clarity of its sister carpet in Los Angeles which had been wet cleaned. The Museum had no facility to clean an object of this dimension and it was taken to Birmingham where it was washed outside on a specially constructed ramp using local water which comes directly from the Welsh mountains and is low in mineral and chlorine content. After its support and repair it was attached to a secondary support of Terylene sheeting which was lashed to a new 12 section metal frame using pre-shrunk Terylene ropes around all 4 sides. A series of ties connected the carpet and the sheeting to the frame at regular intervals.³

The work carried out on the Ardabil in 1974 ensured its safe display for 30 years. However, the real beauty of the Ardabil carpet has never been seen in the Museum. The glazing which protected it had a slightly green tinge and obscured the vibrancy and harmony of its ten colors and the brilliance of its design. The carpet was designed to be seen flat; the difference in size between the two lamp motifs is deliberate and counteracts the foreshortening of the design along its length. This was achieved at a time when the use of perspective in Safavid art was uncommon. Low cushions would have been placed on the end of the carpet where the weaving began; thus the carpet would have been viewed against the pile, making the colors appear even more luminous.

Figure 1. Pulleys and ropes in position ready to lower the Ardabil carpet.
Photography by Paul Robins V&A photographic studio.



The Jameel Gallery will allow the Ardabil to be seen horizontally for the first time since 1892. The carpet was de-installed in June 2004 and was the last object to be taken out of Gallery 42 to clear the space for its refurbishment. The whole operation was filmed just as its installation had been filmed 30 years earlier. Preparatory work in the first half of June released the ties which secured the carpet and its Terylene support to the multiple section frame. On de-installation day, the frame carrying the carpet was pulled out on its runners to the east side of the Gallery. Eight pulleys had been attached to the high framework supporting the runners. The lacing which held the Terylene support to the top of the frame was undone and the carpet and its support were gradually transferred with new lacing to a two part baton made of wood faced with aluminum. Eight ropes were threaded through the pulleys, attached to the top of the baton and tensioned on eight anchor points on the Gallery floor. The remaining lacing on the sides and bottom of the Terylene was undone so that the carpet and support were then totally suspended from the baton (Figure 1). Slowly and gently this huge and very fragile object was gently lowered by a team of technicians under the expert and appropriate guidance of Marion Kite (Marion had been involved in the installation of the carpet 30 years earlier) (Figure2). The carpet was moved safely to a larger central space in the Gallery on a large polyester floor cloth, made especially for the de-installation by a sail maker. The stitching which attached the carpet to its Terylene support was released and the carpet was rolled and taken to the Textile Conservation studio.

The Ardabil carpet will be one the star objects of the Jameel Gallery. It will be displayed flat under a suspended canopy. Its central position in the new Gallery will ensure that it can be viewed from all sides. The canopy forms the top of the case which will enclose the Ardabil and will thus protect the carpet from general gallery lighting. Glazing will be of low-iron glass with an anti-reflective coating applied to both sides. Adjustable fiber optic lighting will illuminate the carpet but extensive testing is necessary to determine the level of lighting.

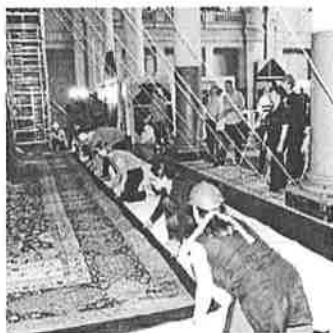


Figure 2. Lowering the carpet onto the Gallery floor. Photography by Paul Robins V&A photographic studio.

Given the size of the carpet, its prominence in the new Gallery, and its importance to the collection, it will not be possible to rotate this artefact or take it off display after a few years. It is therefore essential that the Museum is aware of the long term consequences for the carpet of continued illumination and the likely benefits that might be gained by different lighting proposals. The response of four of the ten colors present in the carpet will be established using the equipment originally designed to determine the response of William Morris's Bullerswood carpet, presently on display in the British Galleries.⁴The equipment consists of a dual beam UV-visible-near infrared spectrometer coupled to an external integrating head using optical fibers. The external integrating head is used both to concentrate intense illumination (from a Schott microscope illuminator fitted with a tungsten halogen lamp) on to selected areas of the carpet and, periodically, to measure the reflectance spectrum of the area under consideration to determine color changes as a function of exposure. The equipment was designed specifically to allow the response to illumination at levels likely to be encountered in the museum to be determined from the exposure trials with a high degree of precision, thereby allowing extrapolation of data well beyond the exposures actually used in the experiments. Although the process does induce some limited damage to the selected areas (as they are exposed to up to 8 mlx.h of illumination), judicious choice of measurement areas (in the present instance, on the back of the carpet) limits the damage to the artefact. Measuring the response of actual areas on the carpet guarantees that the results are applicable to it in its current condition.

The experiments will take place over the course of the next three months and will feed directly in to the decisions on how best to illuminate the carpet. As it will not be possible to take the carpet off display once the Gallery has opened, it is also the intention to provide means to blackout the carpet in its new display case, allowing the illumination to be restricted if this should become necessary.

Technical details

Warp: cream or undyed silk. 35 threads per square inch

Weft: cream or undyed silk. 3 paired shoots after each row of knots

Knot: asymmetrical; 340 per sq. inch

Pile: wool, 3 shades of blue, 3 shades of red, yellow, green, black and white

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jennifer Wearden for advice and information

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2. Wearden, Jennifer, 'The V&A Ardabil: The Early Repairs', Hali, Issue 80, 1995 pp 102-107.
3. Landi, Sheila, 'The Textile Conservators Manual', Second Edition. 1992. pp 277-285.
4. Pretzel, Boris, 'Determining the Lightfastness of the Bullerswood Carpet' in: Roy, A, and Smith, P, (editors), Tradition and innovation: Advances in Conservation, Contributions to the Melbourne Congress, 10 - 14 October 2000, pp 150 - 154, IIC, 2000.

Marsha K. Russell
St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Austin, TX

62. Röttgen Pietà Late medieval Europe. c. 1300–1325 C.E. Painted wood.

G14, 396

S5, 557-558

GW, 65

Pins [Image](#) [Article](#)

<http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/mother%E2%80%99s-loss-medea-and-roettgen-piet%C3%A0>

A Mother's Loss: The Medea and The Roettgen Pietà

What is it like for a mother to lose a child? How can that suffering be captured in stone or paint, wood or words? A sculpture recommended in Art Hum captures such loss with astonishing poignancy. The Roettgen Pietà, created ca. 1325 by an unknown German artist, represents the moment of despair when Mary recognizes the depth of her loss. This representation of the lamentation lacks the calm idealization of the Art Hum work, Michelangelo's early (Vatican) Pietà (1499), where Mary is a beautiful young woman coolly offering us her son. Instead, our unknown German sculpture asks us to participate in a particular moment of maternal despair. The work captures the instant of the most severe pain of this mother for the loss of this adult child. Not only are we invited to join Mary in her profound loss, we are asked to share in the recognition of his torture. The gruesome details of his wounds engage us in his former pain and thereby magnify hers.

For Christians, of course, the subject matter is doubly meaningful because they are asked to join Mary in the lamentation of the dead Jesus who died for the sins of humanity. But the expressive force of the work is available to everyone.

My Art Hum students have found this work enormously moving. How does this 88 cm piece of wood pack such an emotional punch? Consider first the work's sculpted instability. Mary sits on what appears to be a thrown stone slab. Like its stone slabs, the weight of the lower part of her body seems solid enough. But the deeply carved and asymmetrical rhythms of her robe undermine this solidity and create a taut instability. The base on which the stone sits also seems stable and symmetrical until the viewer notices the terrifying similarity between the exploding wounds of the stigmata and the rosettes of the base. The odd center of gravity of the upper half of the work increases this visual strain. Not only would Mary's weight and strength not sustain this dead body, the awkward angle of Jesus' head magnifies the drama of the central part of the sculpture. The rigidity of the son's limbs conflict both with his head's arc and with the naturalness of Mary's arms. On a purely formal level, the Pietà contains three incompatible triangles: one formed by Mary's knees and head, the other by Jesus' arms, and the third by the two heads along with the diagonal thrust of Jesus' body. This formal incongruence, combined with the work's gravitational oddity, creates dramatic visual tension. Finally, consider Mary's gaze. She is staring neither at her son nor at any point within her physical space. Given the horrors he suffered, she is now overwhelmed by her own pain. Her misery has taken her to another place. With her unfocused eyes, open mouth, and head bent to echo the unnatural tilt



Marsha K. Russell
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of her son's, she crumples into her thrown in despair. She enlists us in her pain by vaguely staring in a place outside her realm, on the border of ours.

This combination of representational features, formal elements, and psychology subtlety move the viewer to understand something of this mother's loss.

Professor Christia Mercer, Columbia University
Date: Tuesday, June 29, 2010

The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections "Ugly Beauty in Christian Art," John W. Cook.

The Roettgen Pieta

On exhibition today in the Landesmuseum in Bonn, Germany, the *Roettgen Pieta* is a wooden figure from the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Nearly three feet in height, this sculpture originally stood in a side chapel or on a secondary altar in a church. It was created to be a devotional image, that is, an image before which one meditated upon the event which it depicts and the relation of that event to one's life. Such devotional images, known in Germany as "Andachtsbilder," flowered in the fourteenth century in northern Europe, and, among those that have survived, the Roettgen figure is considered the most graphic and grotesque.

Pietà, by far the most widespread subject represented in "Andachtsbilder," referred to Mary holding the dead body of Christ on her lap. The grief of Mary and the death of Christ were presented in order to kindle empathetic meditation on the part of one who prayed. They were venerated regularly, but special attention was given them during the season of Holy Week, especially Good Friday, and their primary purpose was for the faithful to contemplate the redemptive wounds of Christ.

Ugly Beauty in Christian Art

133

The scene is not taken directly from the New Testament, but first appears in literature in the writings of a tenth-century Greek theologian, Simeon Metaphastes. He is the first, or among the first, to describe Mary holding the dead Christ on her lap when he wrote that Mary said to Jesus, "You have often slept on my lap the sleep of infancy, but now you sleep on my lap the slumber of death."⁷ In Italian literature, the episode appears in the writings of an anonymous Franciscan monk in the second half of the thirteenth century in a text entitled "Meditations on the Life of Christ," and in Germany, Saint Mechthild of Hackeborn (1241-89) is said to have meditated on Good Friday on the wounds of the dead Christ as he lay on his mother's lap.

Eventually the scene became associated with the liturgy of vespers, specifically in relation to the Passion cycle in the Breviary, as it refers to

Mary's last farewell in the Good Friday vespers.

Artistic rendering of the scene first appears in Byzantine art in the twelfth century and first in Europe in the thirteenth. Gertrud Schiller, in volume 2 of *Iconography of Christian Art*, says the first Pietà came into existence around 1300 in German convents and was first mentioned in liturgical texts in 1298.⁸

If we estimate the date of the *Roettgen Pietà* to be around 1370, as Schiller suggests, this work represents that tradition as it was expressed in Germany some seventy years after it first began to appear. The subject, liturgical setting, and function were well established prior to this artist's interpretation. We do not know the name of the artist who created this sculpture, but we become vividly aware of the expressive interpretation he brings to the task of creating it.

Bent sorrowfully over the rigid, emaciated body of Jesus on her lap, Mary is a study in grief expressed in the posture and attitude of her body as well as in the mask of twisted sadness that is her face. The artist captures the sense of a person whose body has gone limp on the moment that she contemplates the full awareness of what she has experienced and observed. In the original setting of this piece, the candlelight of the altar area in the chapel would have played directly on the face of Mary, and would have made even more vivid the sense of anguish in her face.

7. See Frederick Hartt, "Introduction," *Michelangelo's Three Pietas* (New York: Abrams, 1975).

8. Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London, 1972), 2:179.

More important for the original purposes of such a piece is the Christ figure. As noted above, these figures "were venerated not primarily on account of Mary's grief, but for Christ's redemptive wounds."⁹ As Mary holds the figure, she simultaneously displays it for our contemplation. The figure appears rigid, with the head fixed at an awkward angle. Exaggerated in size and grotesquely expressive in detail, the wounds in Christ's hands, feet, and side appear to gurggle with bloody details. Such placement, color, and scale of the wounds would have made them stand out ghoulishly in candlelight.

9. Schiller, p. 179.

The beauty of this work provides a background for the grotesquely ugly presentation of Christ. He stands out by virtue of the contrast between the two figures and fulfills the medieval interest in concentrating primarily on the evidence of his sacrifice.

One of the uses of this figure explains the exaggerated scale of the wounds. The one in Christ's side, elevated and slightly to the left of center in the composition, is an open hole. In the Good Friday liturgy, the host was placed in the wound, according to Schiller, thereby equating the consecrated bread of the Eucharist with the broken and bleeding body of Christ. One's experience with the expressionistic impact of this work became more empathetic and physical as the bread and wine were taken in its presence.

The juxtaposition of the ugly and the beautiful in the *Roettgen Pieta* challenges an observer with its graphic presentation of the grotesque while seducing one with its beautiful details and representation of human emotion. In its original setting, it must have served as a visible manifestation of a powerful cultic piety, and stood as an artistic gloss on the Passion narratives in the liturgy.

Not representing an episode from the New Testament, the popular figure filled a place in medieval religious sensibilities suggested by the liturgical texts. I refer to it as a gloss on the Scripture because, presumably, it led those who meditated on it to a deeper contemplation of the crucifixion and its meaning for their lives. This is yet another type of subject in the history of Christian iconography that was used to enhance the theological teachings and proclamation of the church that, while not originating in Scripture, exerted great influence on the culture in which it was produced. Its power was achieved in part by the manner in which the ugly beauty of it was presented.

65 - Alhambra Palace. Granada, Spain, Nasrid Dynasty, 1354-1391 CE Whitewashed adobe stucco, wood, tile, paint, and gilding
G15, 298-300; G14, 295-297
S5, 280-281

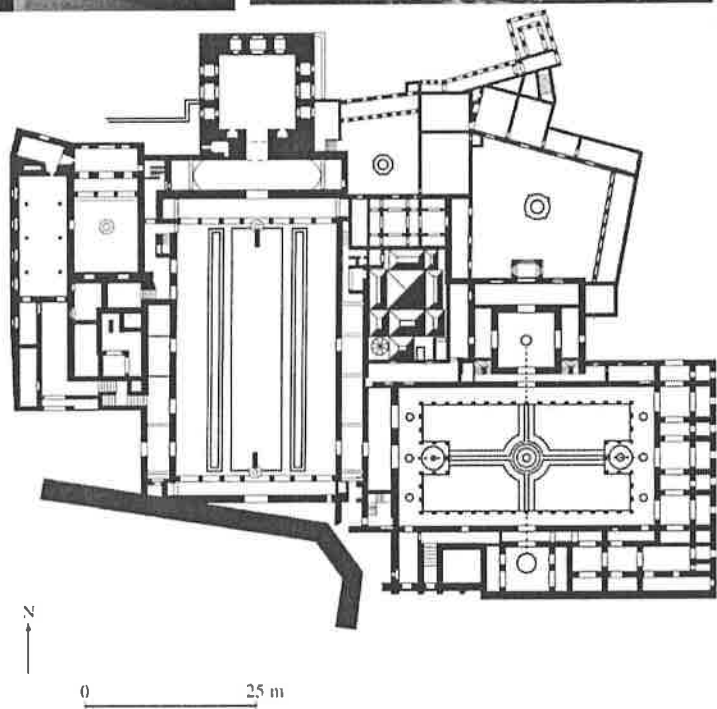
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Pins [Aerial view](#) [Image 1](#) [Image 2 – Court of the Lions](#) [Image 3 Hall of Two Sisters](#) [Hall of Sisters, higher res](#) [Hall of Sisters dome](#) [Image 4 – Plan](#) [Hi Res Plan w Labels](#) [Video](#) [Video](#) [Video](#) [Walking Tour](#) [Interactive Map](#)



Stokstad, Marilyn. Art History. 3rd edition, 2011. pp. 273-275.

THE ALHAMBRA. Muslim patrons also spent lavishly on luxurious palaces set in gardens. The Alhambra in Granada, in southeastern Spain, is an outstanding example of beautiful and refined Islamic palace architecture. Built on the hilltop site of an early Islamic fortress, this palace complex was the seat of the Nasrids (1232-1492), the last Spanish Muslim dynasty, by which time Islamic territory had shrunk from covering most of the Iberian Peninsula to the region around Granada. To the conquering Christians at the end of the fifteenth century, the Alhambra represented the epitome of luxury. Thereafter, they preserved the complex as much to commemorate the defeat of Islam as for its beauty. Essentially a small town extending for about half a mile along the crest of a high hill overlooking Granada, it included government buildings, royal residences, gates, mosques, baths, servants quarters, barracks, stables, a mint, workshops, and gardens. Much of what one sees at the site today was built in the fourteenth century or by Christian patrons in later centuries.

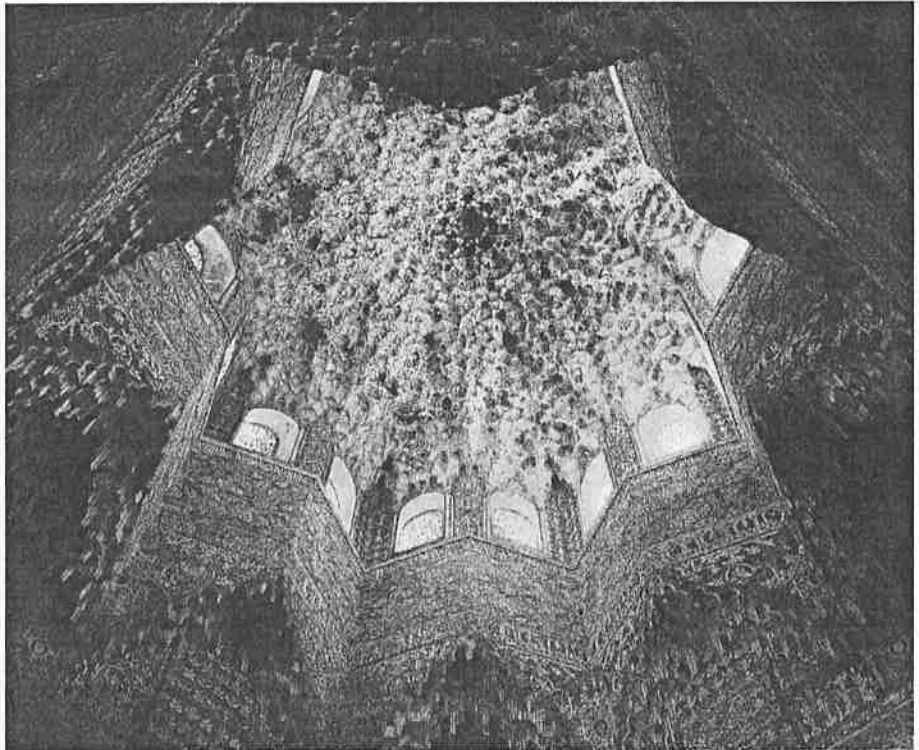


The Alhambra offered dramatic views to the settled valley and snow-capped mountains

around it, while enclosing gardens within its courtyards. One of these is the Court of the Lions which stood at the heart of the so-called Palace of the Lions, the private retreat of Sultan Muhammad V (r. 1354-1359 and 1362-1391). The Court of the Lions is divided into quadrants by cross-axial walkways a garden form called a *chahar bagh*. The walkways carry channels that meet at a central marble fountain held aloft on the backs of 12 stone lions. Water animates the fountain, filling the courtyard with the sound of its life-giving abundance. In an adjacent courtyard, the Court of the Myrtles, a basin's round shape responds to the naturally concentric ripples of the water that spouts from a central jet. Water has a practical role in the irrigation of gardens, but here it is raised to the level of an art form.

The Court of the Lions is encircled by an arcade of stucco arches embellished with **muqarnas** and supported on single columns or clusters of two and three. Second-floor **miradors** windows that frame specifically intended views look over the courtyard, which was originally either gardened or more likely paved, with aromatic citrus confined to corner plantings. From these windows, protected by latticework screens, the women of the court, who did not appear in public, would watch the activities of the men below. At one end of the Palace of the Lions, a particularly magnificent *mirador* looks out onto a large, lower garden and the plain below. From here, the sultan literally oversaw the fertile valley that was his kingdom.

On the south side of the Court of the Lions, the lofty Hall of the Abencerrajes was designed as a winter reception hall and music room. In addition to having excellent acoustics, its ceiling exhibits dazzling geometrical complexity and exquisitely carved stucco. The star-shaped vault is formed by a honeycomb of clustered *muqarnas* arches that alternate with corner **squinches** that are filled with more *muqarnas*. The square room thus rises to an eight-pointed star, pierced by 16 windows, that culminates in a burst of *muqarnas* floating high overhead, perceived and yet ultimately unknowable, like the heavens themselves.

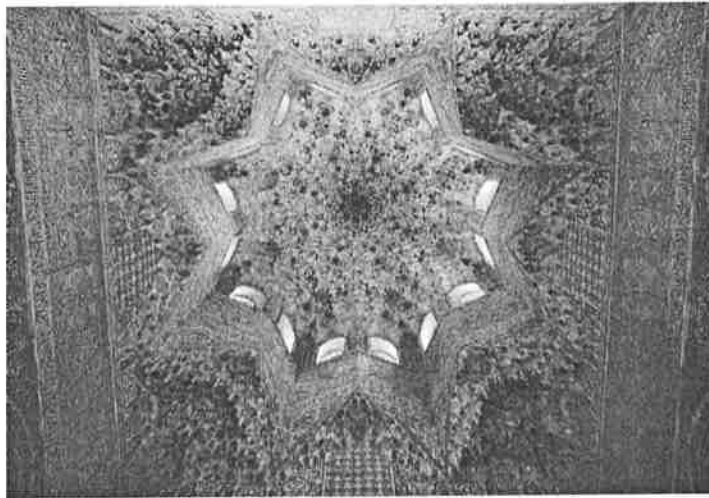


Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, 13th Enhanced ed. 2011, pp. 352-353.

Architecture In the early years of the 11th century, the Umayyad caliphs' power in Spain unraveled, and their palaces fell prey to Berber soldiers from North Africa. The Berbers ruled southern Spain for several generations but could not resist the pressure of Christian forces from the north. Córdoba fell to the Christians in 1236. From then until the final Christian triumph in 1492, the Nasrids, an Arab dynasty that had established its capital at Granada in 1230, ruled the remaining Muslim territories in Spain.

ALHAMBRA On a rocky spur at Granada, the Nasrids constructed a huge palace-fortress called the Alhambra (“the Red” in Arabic) because of the rose color of the stone used for its walls and 23 towers. By the end of the 14th century, the complex, a veritable city with a population of 40,000, included at least a half dozen royal residences. Only two of these fared well over the centuries. Paradoxically, they owe their preservation to the Christian victors, who maintained a few of the buildings as trophies commemorating the expulsion of the Nasrids. The two palaces present a vivid picture of court life in Islamic Spain before the Christian reconquest.

The Palace of the Lions takes its name from its courtyard that boasts a fountain with marble lions carrying a water basin on their backs. Colonnaded courtyards with fountains and statues have a long history in the Mediterranean world, especially in the houses and villas of the Roman Empire (see Chapter 10). The Alhambra’s lion fountain is an unusual instance of freestanding stone sculpture in the Islamic world, unthinkable in a sacred setting. But the design of the courtyard is distinctly Islamic and features many multilobed pointed arches and lavish stuccoed walls in which calligraphy and abstract motifs are interwoven. The palace was the residence of Muhammad V (r. 1354–1391), and its courtyards, lush gardens, and luxurious carpets and other furnishings served to conjure the image of Paradise.



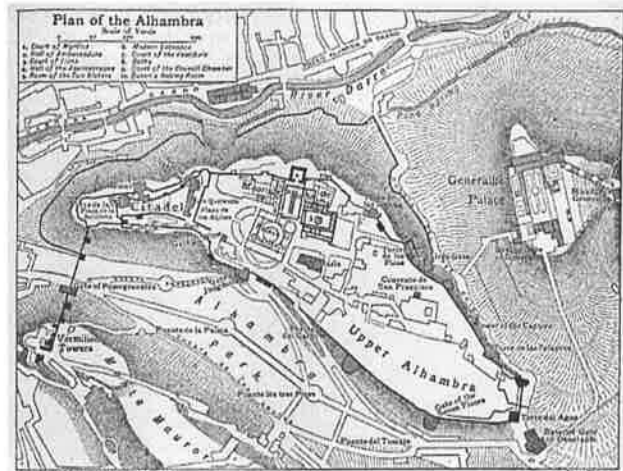
The Palace of the Lions is noteworthy also for its elaborate stucco ceilings. A spectacular example is the dome of the so-called Hall of the Abencerrajes. The dome rests on an octagonal drum supported by squinches and pierced by eight pairs of windows, but its structure is difficult to discern because of the intricate carved stucco decoration. The ceiling is covered with some 5,000 *muqarnas*—tier after tier of stalactite-like prismatic forms that seem aimed at denying the structure’s solidity. The *muqarnas* ceiling was intended to catch and reflect sunlight as well as form beautiful

abstract patterns. The lofty vault in this hall and others in the palace symbolized the dome of Heaven. The flickering light and shadows create the effect of a starry sky as the sun’s rays glide from window to window during the day. To underscore the symbolism, the palace walls bear inscriptions with verses by the court poet Ibn Zamrak (1333–1393), who compared the Alhambra’s lacelike *muqarnas* ceilings to “the heavenly spheres whose orbits revolve.”

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/ap-art-islamic-world-medieval/a/the-alhambra>

The Alhambra in Granada, Spain, is distinct among Medieval palaces for its sophisticated planning, complex decorative programs, and its many enchanting gardens and fountains. Its intimate spaces are built at a human scale that visitors find elegant and inviting.

The Alhambra, an abbreviation of the Arabic: Qal’at al-Hamra, or red fort, was built by the Nasrid Dynasty



(1232-1492)—the last Muslims to rule in Spain. Muhammad ibn Yusuf ibn Nasr (known as Muhammad I) founded the Nasrid Dynasty and secured this region in 1237. He began construction of his court complex, the Alhambra, on Sabika hill the following year.

Plan of the Alhambra and Generalife 1,730 meters (1 mile) of walls and thirty towers of varying size enclose this city within a city. Access was restricted to four main gates. The Alhambra's nearly 26 acres include structures with three distinct purposes, a residence for the ruler and close family, the citadel, Alcazaba—barracks for the elite guard who were responsible for the safety of the complex, and an area called medina (or city), near the Puerta del Vino (Wine Gate), where court officials lived and worked.

The different parts of the complex are connected by paths, gardens and gates but each part of the complex could be blocked in the event of a threat. The exquisitely detailed structures with their highly ornate interior spaces and patios contrast with the plain walls of the fortress exterior.

Three Palaces

The Alhambra's most celebrated structures are the three original royal palaces. These are the Comares Palace, the Palace of the Lions, and the Partal Palace, each of which was built during 14th century. A large fourth palace was later begun by the Christian ruler, Carlos V.

El Mexuar is an audience chamber near the Comares tower at the northern edge of the complex. It was built by Ismail I as a throne room, but became a reception and meeting hall when the palaces were expanded in the 1330s. The room has complex geometric tile dadoes (lower wall panels distinct from the area above) and carved stucco panels that give it a formality suitable for receiving dignitaries (above).

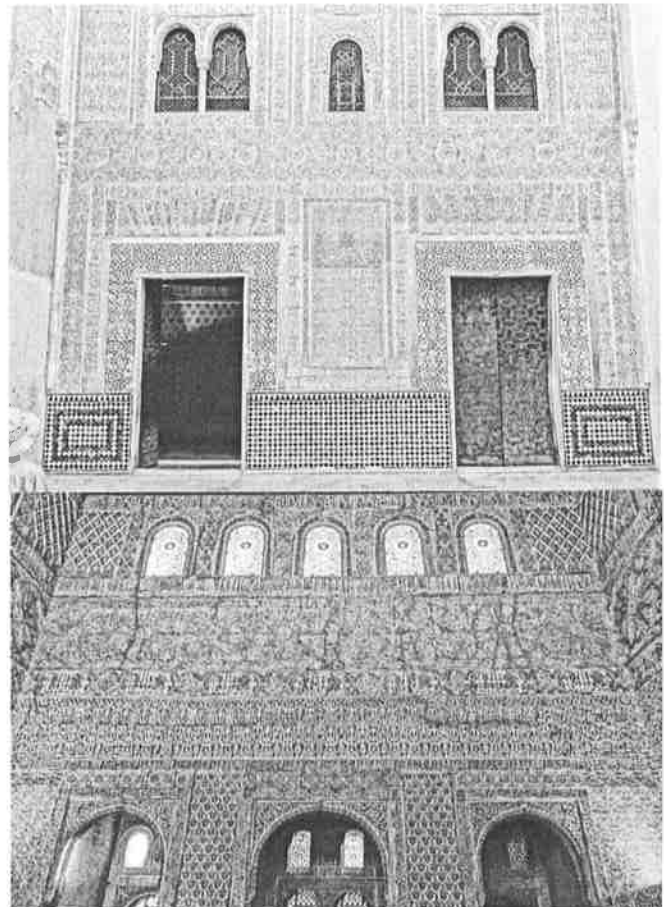
The Comares Palace

Behind El Mexuar stands the formal and elaborate Comares façade set back from a courtyard and fountain. The façade is built on a raised three-stepped platform that might have served as a kind of outdoor stage for the ruler. The carved stucco façade was once painted in brilliant colors, though only traces remain.

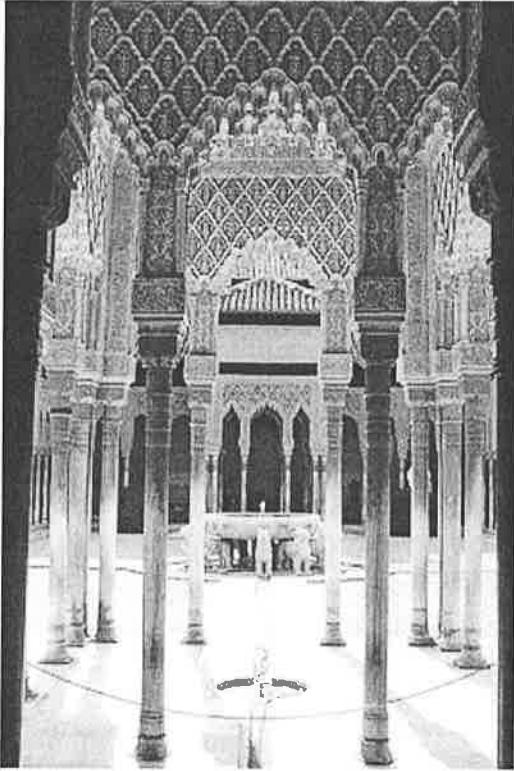
A dark winding passage beyond the Comares façade leads to a covered patio surrounding a large courtyard with a pool, now known as the Court of the Myrtles. This was the focal point of the Comares Palace.

The Alhambra's largest tower, the Comares Tower, contains the Salón de Comares (Hall of the Ambassadors), a throne room built by Yusuf I (1333-1354). This room exhibits the most diverse decorative and architectural arts contained in the Alhambra.

The double arched windows illuminate the room and provide breathtaking views. Additional light is



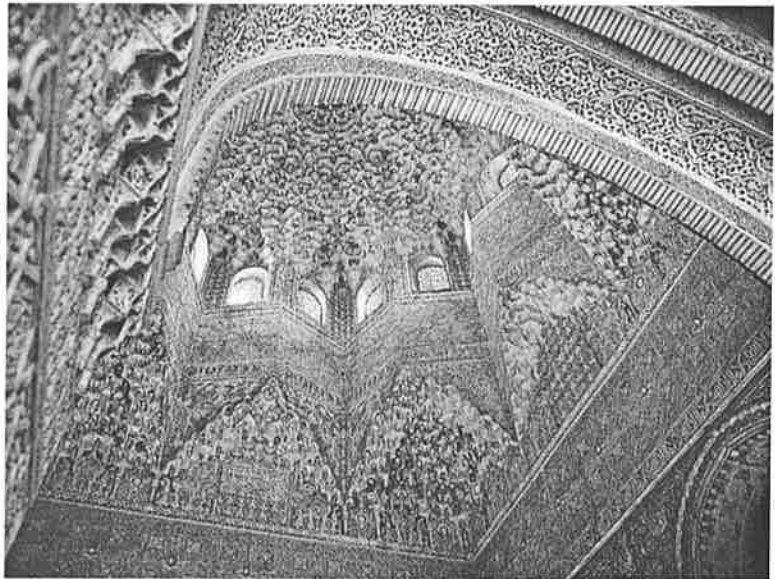
provided by arched grille (lattice) windows set high in the walls. At eye level, the walls are lavishly decorated with tiles laid in intricate geometric patterns. The remaining surfaces are covered with intricately carved stucco motifs organized in bands and panels of curvilinear patterns and calligraphy.



Palace of the Lions

The Palacio de los Leones (Palace of the Lions) stands next to the Comares Palace but should be considered an independent building. The two structures were connected after Granada fell to the Christians.

Muhammad V built the Palace of the Lions' most celebrated feature in the 14th century, a fountain with a complex hydraulic system consisting of a marble basin on the backs of twelve carved stone lions situated at the intersection of two water channels that form a cross in the rectilinear courtyard. An arched covered patio encircles the courtyard and displays fine stucco carvings held up by a series of slender columns. Two decorative pavilions protrude into the courtyard on an East–West axis (at the narrow sides of the courtyard), accentuating the royal spaces behind them.



To the West, the Sala de los Mocárabes (Muqarnas Chamber), may have functioned as an antechamber and was near the original entrance to the palace. It takes its name from the intricately carved system of brackets called "muqarnas" that hold up the vaulted ceiling.

Across the courtyard, to the East, is the Sala de los Reyes (Hall of the Kings), an elongated space divided into sections using a series of arches leading up to a vaulted muqarnas ceiling; the room has multiple alcoves, some with an unobstructed view of the courtyard, but with no known function.

This room contains paintings on the ceiling representing courtly life. The images were first painted on tanned sheepskins, in the tradition of miniature painting. They use brilliant colors and fine details and are attached to the ceiling rather than painted on it.

There are two other halls in the Palace of the Lions on the northern and southern ends; they are the Sala de las Dos Hermanas (the Hall of the Two Sisters) and the Hall of Abencerrajas (Hall of the Ambassadors). Both were

residential apartments with rooms on the second floor. Each also have a large domed room sumptuously decorated with carved and painted stucco in muqarnas forms with elaborate and varying star motifs.

The Partal Palace

The Palacio del Partal (Partal Palace) was built in the early 14th century and is also known as del Pórtico (Portico Palace) because of the portico formed by a five-arched arcade at one end of a large pool. It is one of the oldest palace structures in the Alhambra complex.

Generalife

The Nasrid rulers did not limit themselves to building within the wall of the Alhambra. One of the best preserved Nasrid estates, just beyond the walls, is called Generalife (from the Arabic, Jannat al-arifa). The word jannat means paradise and by association, garden, or a place of cultivation which Generalife has in abundance. Its water channels, fountains and greenery can be understood in relation to passage 2:25 in the Koran, "...gardens, underneath which running waters flow...."

In one of the most spectacular Generalife gardens, a long narrow patio is ornamented with a water channel and two rows of water fountains. Generalife also contains a palace built in the same decorative manner as those within the Alhambra but its elaborate vegetable and ornamental gardens made this lush complex a welcome retreat for the rulers of Granada.



Interior and Exterior Re-imagined

To be sure, gardens and water fountains, canals, and pools are a recurring theme in construction across the Muslim dominion. Water is both practical and beautiful in architecture and in this respect the Alhambra and Generalife are no exception. But the Nasrid rulers of Granada made water integral. They brought the sound, sight and cooling qualities of water into close proximity, in gardens, courtyards, marble canals, and even directly indoors.

The Alhambra's architecture shares many characteristics with other examples of Islamic architecture, but is singular in the way it complicates the relationship between interior and exterior. Its buildings feature shaded patios and covered walkways that pass from well-lit interior spaces onto shaded courtyards and sun-filled gardens all enlivened by the reflection of water and intricately carved stucco decoration.

More profoundly however, this is a place to reflect. Given the beauty, care and detail found at the Alhambra, it is tempting to imagine that the Nasrids planned to remain here forever; it is ironic then to see throughout the complex in the carved stucco, the words, "...no conqueror, but God" left by those that had once conquered Granada, and would themselves be conquered. It is a testament to the Alhambra that the Catholic monarchs who besieged and ultimately took the city left this complex largely intact.

Text by Shadie Mirmobiny

The following excerpts were compiled by Douglas Darracott, Plano West Senior High School, Plano, TX.

1. "At the beginning of the diary he wrote on the voyage which led to the European invasion of the Americas, Columbus recorded how, a few months before setting sail in August 1492, he saw the Spanish royal banners 'victoriously raised on the towers of the Alhambra'. At the same moment the last Muslim emir of Granada came