Romanesque Art and Craftsmanship
in Central Europe, 900-1300
Romanesque Art and Craftsmanship in Central Europe, 900-1300: Artistic Aspects of the Style

By

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To Alice
## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................... ix

List of Maps ......................................................................................................................... xxv

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... xxvii

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One ......................................................................................................................... 11
Aspects of Romanesque

Chapter Two ......................................................................................................................... 37
Textiles

Chapter Three ....................................................................................................................... 51
The Word in Ivory

Chapter Four ......................................................................................................................... 91
Work in Precious Metals: Covers, Crosses and Crowns

Chapter Five ......................................................................................................................... 155
The Word in Bronze

Chapter Six ......................................................................................................................... 203
The Word in Wood

Chapter Seven ..................................................................................................................... 221
Illuminated Manuscripts

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 315

Notes ................................................................................................................................... 325

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 337

Index ................................................................................................................................... 341
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures and Plates

Chapter Two - Textiles

Plate II.10. Embroidered red silk cuffs and hems mounted on a tunic associated with the empress Kunigunde. Inv. No. 2728/3-33. Diözesanmuseum, Bamberg.
List of Illustrations

Plate II.17. Carpet fragments from Quedlinburg, c.1200, depicting the Marriage of Philology and Mercury in the presence of other virtues. Domschatzverwaltung Quedlinburg.
Plate II.18. Carpet fragment from Quedlinburg, c.1200, depicting the union of Mercury and Philology. Domschatzverwaltung Quedlinburg.
Plate II.19. Carpet fragment from Quedlinburg, c.1200, depicting the embrace of Pietas and Justicia. Domschatzverwaltung Quedlinburg.

Chapter Three – The Word in Ivory

Fig. III.1. Ivory casket with ten apostles in an arcade. Mid 10th century. Fulda. Inv. No. MA 174. Photo Bastian Krack. Bayrisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Courtesy Dr. Matthias Weniger.
Fig. III.2. Ivory diptych, a book cover with Evangelists and Christological scenes, c.810. The right panel was the front cover and precedes the left panel. Palace School of Charlemagne. National Museum, Prague.
Fig. III.3. Coptic ivory panel of a nude man inserted into the pulpit of Henry II in Aachen cathedral. Aachen, Domschatz. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. III.4. Coptic ivory panel of a mounted emperor hunting inserted into the pulpit of Henry II in Aachen cathedral. Aachen Domschatz. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. III.5. Byzantine ivory panel depicting the coronation of Otto II and Theophanu. Paris, Musée de Cluny. Inv. No.Cl.392. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. III.6. Byzantine ivory panel depicting the Mother of God, Maria Theotokos, set in golden embossed and gem encrusted book cover of the Gospel of Otto III. Aachen, Domschatz.
Fig. III.7. Ivory carving of the enthroned Christ. Trier/Echternach, early 11th century. Inv. No.60/53. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe.
Fig. III.8. Ivory book covers, showing Moses receiving the Commandments. Inv. No. 8505, Thomas verifying the wound of Christ. Inv. No. 8506. Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. III.9. Ivory panel showing St. Paul. Trier/Echternach, 10th century. Paris, Musée de Cluny. Inv. No. Cl. 1505 Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. III.10. Ivory panel of a sacramentary showing St. Gregory and his scribes. Trier/Echternach, c.970. Inv. No.KK 8399. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Fig. III.12. Ivory situla from Trier/Echternach. Domschatz Aachen. Photo Ann Münchow.
Fig.III.13. Ivory panel inscribed OTTO IMPERATOR showing the Ottonian imperial family. Milan 962 or 983. Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata. Inv. No. A 15. Milan.

Fig.III.14. Ivory panel showing the emperor Otto I presenting Magdebuer cathedral to Christ. Milan c.968. Inv. No. 41.100.157. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figs.III.15/16/17. Ivory panels with Christological scenes: Mary greets the pregnant Elisabeth; Christ being scourged before Pontius Pilate; Christ appears to the disciples. Milan c.968. Inv. No. 17/418-420. Photos Walter Haberland, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.

Fig.III.18. Ivory carving of the Virgin Mary and Child, of uncertain provenance, c.1020. Inv. No. O.1517. K1, Landesmuseum, Mainz. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.


Fig.III.20. Crucifixion ivory from Cologne, c.1000. Courtesy, Musée de Cluny, Paris.

Fig.III.21. Ivory showing the baptism of Christ from Rheinau monastery, c.1000. With permission, Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich.


Fig.III.23. Ivory panel from the Maas region, c.1100, with Christological scenes in three ascending narrative tiers: Nativity, Baptism and Crucifixion. Domschatz, Aachen.

Fig.III.24. Crucifixion ivory with sun and moon representations. Panel from the Maas region, c. 1150/60. Inv. No. Kg 54:212a. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

Fig.III.25. Four panels of walrus tusk from Cologne, c.1150/60, showing Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. Inv. No. B 102, 103, 104. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne, Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne.

Fig.III.26. Bone tower reliquary from Cologne, c. 1250. Inv. No. Kg 54:226. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

Fig.III.27. Bone basilica reliquary from Cologne, early 13th century. Inv. No. KK blau 125. Baden-Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart.

Fig.III.28. Mammoth tusk casket from Bamberg cathedral. Originated in southern Scandinavia, c. 1000. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.


List of Illustrations


Chapter Four – Work in Precious Metals

Fig. IV.1. Pala d’Oro. The golden antependium, c.1000, in the Palace Chapel. Domschatz Aachen.
Fig. IV.2. Detail, Christ entering Jerusalem. Pala d’Oro. Antependium in the Palace Chapel. Domschatz Aachen.
Fig. IV.3. The golden pulpit, ambo, decorated with Ottonian glassware and Coptic ivories in the Palace Chapel. Domschatz Aachen.
Fig. IV.5. Cover of the Liber Aureus from the Benedictine monastery at Prüm, c.1101/06. Codex 1709. Stadtbibliothek Trier.
Fig. IV.6. Gold leaf reverse of the Cross of Lothair, probably from Cologne. 10th century. Domschatz, Aachen.
Fig. IV.7. Cross of Modoaldus, from the studio of Roger von Helmarshausen, c.1107. Engraved gilt copper. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. IV.8. Reverse, engraved side of the Cross of Theodoricus. Courtesy Dr. W. Wilhelmy, Diözesanmuseum Mainz.
Fig. IV.12. Engraved reverse Cross of Herimann and Ida from Cologne. Diözesanmuseum Cologne. Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne.
Fig. IV.13. Detail, engraving on the side of the portable gilt silver altar made by Roger von Helmarshausen c.1107/25 for Paderborn cathedral. Diözesanmuseum. Paderborn. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. IV.14. Baptismal bowl naming Frederick I, after 1155. Inv. No. 33, 25. Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gewerbemuseum, Berlin.
Fig. IV.15. Engraved base plate of the Barbarossa chandelier. The Annunciation by the angel to Mary. Aachen c.1165/70. Domschatz Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. IV.16. Portable reliquary altar of St. Andrew’s sandal from Echternach/Trier. Late 10th century. Domschatz Trier. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg
Fig. IV.17. Gisela cross from Regensburg, early 11th century. Munich, Schatzkammer der Residenz. Munich, Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. IV.18 Mauritius Altar, portable altar from Cologne, c.1160. side view, Schatzkammer St Servatius, Siegburg,. Courtesy Dr. W. Baumann
Fig. IV.19 Mauritius Altar, portable altar from Cologne, c.1160. Siegburg, top view, Schatzkammer St. Servatius. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.21. Gable façade of the shrine of St. Godehard showing him placed between St. Bernward and possibly pope Innocent II. Hildesheim, Domschatz.

Fig. IV.22. Gable façade of the shrine of St. Godehard showing Christ in a mandorla flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. Hildesheim, Domschatz.

Fig. IV.23. Basilica reliquary shrine of St. Hergen made in Cologne of gilt copper, gems and enamels, c.1150/70. Köln-Deutz, St. Hergen.

Fig. IV.24. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne, gable façade, Charlemagne flanked by Pope Leo III and Bishop Turpin. Aachen, 1165-1215. Domschatz Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.25. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne. Side view with narrative roof plates and emperor effigies. Domschatz, Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.26. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne. Narrative roof plates retelling his fictitious vita. Detail, Charlemagne dedicates the Palace Chapel to the Virgin Mary. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.27. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne showing some Ottonian ruler effigies on the side – Otto I, Otto II. Domschatz, Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.28. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne showing the ruler effigy of Henry II. Domschatz Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.29. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne showing ruler effigies of Henry V (l.) and Henry IV (r.) Domschatz Aachen, Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.30. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne showing Hohenstaufen ruler effigies of Henry VI, Frederick II. Domschatz Aachen. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.31. Basilica shrine of Charlemagne, gable façade with Virgin Mary and Child, flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Aachen Domschatz.

Fig. IV.32. Oblique view of the basilica shrine containing the relics of the Three Kings. Cologne, 1165-1215. Partly the work of Nicolaus von Verdun. Located in the choir of Cologne cathedral. Gilt silver and bronze, gems and enamels. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.33. Basilica shrine of the Three Kings, gable façade. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.34. Basilica shrine of the Three Kings. Detail of the façade, showing the Three Kings and Otto IV. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.35. Basilica shrine of the Three Kings. Effigy of the King David. The work of Nicolaus von Verdun. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.36. Basilica shrine of the Three Kings. Effigy of the Prophet Daniel. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig. IV.37. Side view, basilica shrine of the Virgin Mary, Aachen c.1236/38. Roof panels depict scenes from her Vita. Domschatz, Cologne. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Plates IV.1/2. Fire-gilt copper discs, crypt, Konstanz cathedral. 10th century.

Plate IV.5. Gospel cover of the Samuel Evangeliar from Quedlinburg, c. 1225/30. Domschatz, Quedlinburg.


Plate IV.12. Processional cross of the abbess Mathilda of Essen, c.1011, with a crucifixion scene at the center and large tetramorph enamels on the terminals. Domschatz Essen. Photo Jens Nober.

Plate IV.13. Processional cross with scarab and cameos, gem and enamel encrustation from Essen, c.1000. Domschatz Essen. Photo Jens Nober.


Plate IV.15. Imperial crown, 10th century. Inv. No. XIII, 1. Schatzkammer, Vienna.


Plate IV.25. The Verduner Altar, enamel on gilt copper, reredos by Nicolaus von Verdun in the crypt of the monastery church at Klosterneuburg, east of Vienna. Courtesy Mmag. Huber, Stift Klosterneuburg.


Plate IV.29/30. Basilica shrine with the relics of St. Godehard. Hildesheim, Domschatz.


Chapter Five – The Word in Bronze

Fig.V.1. Door knocker from Alpirsbach.

Fig.V.2. Ornamental door fittings from St. Jean-Lès-Saverne, Alsace

Fig.V.3. Candlesticks, early 11th century. Kremsmünster, Stiftsbibliothek.

Fig.V.4. Candlesticks and a bishop’s crook, part of the Bernward treasure at Hildesheim, early 11th century. Domschatz, Hildesheim. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig.V.5. Candlestick base. Detail. Domschatz, Hildesheim. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig.V.6. Pyramidal base of a cross with angels supporting the cross, writing Evangelists and Adam arising. From the Weser valley, after 1050. Inv. No. XXI a, 8. Kestnermuseum, Hanover.

Fig.V.7. Pyramidal base of a cross from the Lower Rhine, c.1060-80. Angels support the socket over Adam arising. Inv. No. 36, 1. Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gewerbemuseum, Berlin.

Fig.V.8. Candlestick base with supporting angels and overlayed foliage, mid 12th century. Cast gilt bronze. Inv. No. KG 977 Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg.


Fig.V.10. Pyramidal base of a crucifix from Westphalia or Lower Saxony, later 12th century. Inv. No.KG 625, Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Nürnberg.

Fig.V.11. Monster candlestick, bird with human torso holding a shield. Inv. No.HG 551. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg.

Fig.V.12. Monster-bird candlestick with dragon killer, Hildesheim, c.1230. Inv. No. 292. Permanent loan of the bishopric of Münster. Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster.

Fig.V.13. Base of a cross with Adam arising, attributed to Maastricht, early 12th century. Inv. No.KG 159. Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Nürnberg.
Fig.V.14. Aquamanile, griffon, workshop of Roger von Helmarshausen, mid 12th century. Inv. No. KK 83. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.
Fig.V.15. Aquamanile, lion-dog motif in bronze, northern Germany, early 13th century. Inv. No. KG 493. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg.
Fig.V.16. Aquamanile, mounted knight, Scandinavian, c.1200. Inv. No. 9094. Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen.
Fig.V.17. Gilt copper ‘Cappenberg’ bust of the emperor Frederick I. Probably from Aachen, c.1160. Cappenberg, church of St. John the Evangelist. Kreisverwaltung Unna.
Fig.V.18. Gilt head reliquary from the convent at Fischbeck on the Weser River. Third quarter 12th century. Inv. Nr. 1903.37. Kestnermuseum, Hanover. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig.V.19. Bronze doors of Mainz cathedral, dated 1008, attributed to bishop Willigis. Courtesy Dr. W. Wilhelm, Diözesanmuseum, Mainz
Fig.V.20. Embossed sheet bronze covered wooden doors. Augsburg cathedral, early 11th century. Diözesanmuseum, Augsburg. Courtesy Kunstverlag Josef Fink,
Fig.V.21. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward doors of solid bronze, c. 1015, unique embossing technique. Interior.
Fig.V.22. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward door panels showing the episode around the Tree of Knowledge, discovery, and expulsion from Paradise.
Fig.V.23. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward door panel. Detail showing Adam laboring in the fields and Eve nursing her baby, Cain and Abel's offering and the murder of Abel.
Fig.V.24. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward door panel showing the Nativity with the arrival of the Three Kings.
Fig.V.25. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward door panel showing Christ being led before Pontius Pilate.
Fig.V.26. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward door panel showing Pontius Pilate sitting in judgment being influenced by a demon.
Fig.V.27. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column with narrative frieze erected in Hildesheim cathedral c.1020.
Fig.V.28. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column base. Detail of one of the Rivers of Paradise.
Fig.V.29. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing Christ calling his disciples.
Fig.V.30. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing Christ speaking to the woman at the well.
Fig.V.31. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing John the Baptist admonishing Herod for having murdered his brother and married his wife Herodias.
Fig.V.32. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing John the Baptist being lowered into the prison.
Fig.V.33. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing Salome's dance.
Fig.V.34. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing Christ restoring sight to the blind man.
Fig. V.35. Hildesheim cathedral. Bernward column showing Christ's Transfiguration.
Fig. V.40. Grosskomburg, chandelier, ‘bastion’, with the effigy of a prophet or apostle. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. V.41. Grosskomburg, chandelier, ornamented and inscribed ‘wall’. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. V.42. Grosskomburg, chandelier, ornamented base plate.
Fig. V.43. Chandelier commissioned by Barbarossa, after 1165. Domschatz Aachen, Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.
Fig. V.44. Osnabrück cathedral. Bronze baptismal font with Sts. Peter and Paul, c. 1226.
Figs. V.45/46. Osnabrück cathedral. Bronze baptismal font showing figural detail on the exterior: baptism of Jesus and John the Baptist pointing to Jesus.
Fig. V.47. Bremen cathedral. Bronze baptismal font, c.1220/30.
Fig. V.48. Bremen cathedral. Bronze baptismal font. Detail of the supporting lions.
Figs. V.49/50. Bülkau, church of St. John the Baptist Bronze baptismal font, 13th century.
Fig. V.51. Rostock, church of St. Mary. Bronze baptismal font, c.1290.
Fig. V.52. Rostock, baptismal font, details of the tiered sides – sixteen Christological scenes – the Flight to Egypt.
Fig. V.53. Rostock, church of St. Mary. Bronze baptismal font and details of the lid – Baptism of Christ.
Fig. V.54. Rostock, church of St. Mary. Bronze baptismal font, details of the lid – Christ's ascent.
Fig. V.55. Hildesheim, bronze baptismal font, lid and supports, early 13th century. Hildesheim cathedral.
Fig. V.56. Essen, bronze candelabrum in the Ottonian arcade, c.1000. Detail of the base, with a demonic miniature of the north wind. Essen Cathedral.
Fig. V.57. Braunschweig cathedral. Bronze candelabrum in the high choir, c.1170/80.
Fig. V.58. Braunschweig cathedral. Bronze candelabrum, dragons and lions of the base.
Figs. V.59/60. Braunschweig cathedral. Bronze candelabrum, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic details of the pyramidal base.
Fig. V.61. Bronze crucifix, c.1060. Schatzkammer St. Ludgerus, Essen-Werden. Photo Ansgar Hoffmann
Fig. V.62. Detail of the crucifix. Schatzkammer St. Ludgerus, Essen-Werden. Photo Ansgar Hoffmann.
Fig. V.63. Minden cathedral. Bronze crucifix, c. 1070/80.
Fig. V.64. Magdeburg cathedral. Bronze grave cover effigy of bishop Friedrich von Wettin, after 1152.
Fig. V.65. Magdeburg cathedral. Detail showing boy extracting a thorn.
Fig. V.66. Magdeburg cathedral. Bronze grave cover effigy of bishop Wichmann, c. 1192.
List of Illustrations

Fig.V.67/68. Augsburg cathedral. Bronze grave cover effigy of bishop Wolfhart von Roth, c.1302. Augsburg, Diözesanmuseum.

Fig.V.69. Merseburg cathedral. Bronze grave cover effigy of the anti-king Rudolf von Rheinfelden, c.1080/85. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig.V.70. Reconstruction of the Salian throne in Goslar, c. 1060/80, in the entrance hall of the palace church of St. Simeon and Judah in Goslar.

Fig.V.71. Bronze sides and backrest of the Salian throne in Goslar.

Fig.V.72. Bronze lion monument set up by duke Henry the Lion outside of Braunschweig cathedral in the Pfalz Dankwarderode. Years after this photo was taken the monument was moved indoors and replaced by a replica.

Plates V.1/2. Hezilo chandelier, with ornamental details of gates to the Heavenly Jerusalem, c.1160/70, Domschatz Hildesheim, Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.


Chapter Six – The Word in Wood

Fig.VI.1. Wooden Virgin Mary and Child, c.1051/56, associated with bishop Imad of Paderborn. Diözesanmuseum. Paderborn. Bildarchiv Fotomarburg.

Fig.VI.2. Detail of the Imad Madonna. Diözesanmuseum Paderborn.

Fig.VI.3. Wooden crucifix, walnut, c. 1067, for the church of St. George in Cologne. Inv. No. A 9. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne. Rheinisches Bildarchiv.

Fig.VI.4. Detail of the head of the crucifix from the church of St. George. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne. With permission Rheinisches Bildarchiv.

Fig.VI.5. Wooden door panels with polychrome, carved Christological reliefs. From the bottom - Presentation in the temple paired with Christ’s baptism by John the Baptist; the Massacre of the Innocents; the Flight to Egypt. St. Maria im Kapitol, Cologne.

Fig.VI.6. Door panel. Central motif – the Flight to Egypt. St. Maria im Kapitol, Cologne.

Fig.VI.7. Door panel. Presentation in the Temple and Baptism. St. Maria im Kapitol, Cologne.

Fig. VI.8. Door Panel. Last Supper, Crucifixion, the Three Maries meet the Angel at the empty grave, Ascension. St. Maria im Kapitol, Cologne.

Fig. VI.9. Braunschweig cathedral. Wooden crucifix by Imervard, c.1200.

Fig.VI.10. Wooden choir stall terminal, c.1284, from Pöhlde, showing a king Henry. With permission, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover.

Fig.VI.11. Wooden choir stall terminal, c.1284, from Pöhlde, showing Synagoga. With permission, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover.

Fig.VI.12. Wooden choir stall terminal, c.1284, from Pöhlde, showing a monk in his workshop. With permission, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover.

Fig.VI.13. Wooden choir stall with mounted knight, St. George, from Wassenberg, c. 1290/1300. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne. Rheinisches Bildarchiv.
Fig. VI.14. Wooden choir stall with Virgin Mary and donor from Wassenberg, c. 1290/1300. Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne. Rheinisches Bildarchiv.
Plate VI.2. Wooden crucifix, oak, associated with bishop Gero, c.970. Cologne cathedral.
Plate VI.3. Wooden lectern with the four evangelists. Stadtkirche, Freudenstadt.

Chapter Seven – Illuminated Manuscripts

Plate VII.3. Quedlinburger Evangeliar, the Evangelist John in his formal writing-pose with his tetramorphic emblem. fol. 149v. Domschatz Quedlinburg.
Plate VII.8. The apotheosis of Otto III. Page from the Liuthar gospel dedicated to Otto III, fol. 16r. Domkapitel Aachen. Photo Anne Münchow.
Plate VII.11. Christ crowns Henry II. Sacramentary of Henry II. Clm. 4456, fol.11r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Plate VII.15. Henry III and Agnes are crowned by Christ. From the Codex Caesareus, commissioned in Echternach by Henry III, c.1050. Cod. C.93, fol.3v. Universitetsbiblioteket, Uppsala.


Plate VII.35. Christ calms the storm at sea. Codex Egberti. Cod. 24, fol. 24r. Stadtbibliothek Trier.
Plate VII.42. Crucifixion with Stephaton extending the sponge and gambling soldiers, Gospel of Otto III. fol. 232r. Domkapitel Aachen. Photo Anne Münchow.
Plate VII.45. Eighth canon table with vignettes of workmen on roof, Gospel of Otto III. Clm.4453, fol.18r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.46. Tenth canon table with vignettes of peacocks, Gospel of Otto III. Clm.4453, fol.20r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.57. Nativity superimposed over the Annunciation to the shepherds. Lectionary from Reichenau, c.1000. Guelf. 84.5, Aug 2, fol.1v. Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel.
Plate VII.64. Crucifixion with Greek inscription. Sacramentary of Henry II. Clm. 4456, fol.15r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.66. AGNUS DEI, Sacramentary of Henry II. Clm. 4456, fol. 21v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.72. Dedication page showing the abbess Hitda donating her gospel to St. Walburga, the patron of her convent. Hitda Codex, Cologne, c.1000/20. Cod. 1640, fol.6r. Hessische Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek, Darmstadt.
Clm.13601, fol.1v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.76. Dedication to the Virgin Mary. Uta Codex. Clm.13601, fol.2r.
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.77. Crucifixion. Uta Codex. Clm.13601, fol.3v. Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.78. The Evangelist Matthew. Uta Codex. Clm.13601, fol.5v. Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.79. Ornate capital initial L. Uta Codex. Clm.13601, fol.6r. Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek, Munich.
Plate VII.80. Two abbots present their book to the enthroned Henry III. Book of
Pericopes of Henry III. Echternach, c.1039/43. Ms. b.21, fol. 125r. Staats- und
Universitätsbibliothek, Bremen.
Plate VII.81. Arrival of Gisela, the empress mother at Echternach. Book of
Pericopes of Henry III. Ms. b.21, fol.3r. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek,
Bremen.
Plate VII.82. The scriptorium at Echternach. Book of Pericopes of Henry III. Ms.
b.21, fol.124v. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Bremen.
Plate VII.83. Henry and Agnes dedicate their codex to the Virgin Mary. Codex
Aureus Escorialensis, the Golden Gospel of Henry III for Speyer cathedral,
Echternach 1045. Today in Madrid. Real Bibliotheca de San Lorenzo El
Escorial. Cod. Vitrinas 17, fol.3r. Patrimonio Nacional.
91v. Patrimonio Nacional.
Plate VII.85. The Adoration of the Magi. Codex Aureus Escorialensis. Cod.Vit. 17,
fol. 24r. Patrimonio Nacional.
Patrimonio National.
Patrimonio Nacional.
Patrimonio Nacional.
Plate VII.89. Henry III presents his codex to Sts. Simon and Judas Thaddeus.
Codex Caesareus, commissioned in Echternach by Henry III, c.1050. Cod.
C.93, fol.4r. Universitetsbiblioteket, Uppsala.
Plate VII.90. Ornamental initial with King David and musicians. The Stammheim
Missal, Hildesheim St. Michael's, c.1170. Ms.64, fol.12. The J. Paul Getty
Museum, Los Angeles.
Plate VII.91. The Creation. Stammheim Missal. Ms.64, fol. 10v. The J. Paul Getty
Museum, Los Angeles.
Plate VII.92. The Wisdom of Creation. Stammheim Missal. Ms.64, fol. 11r. The J.
Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
Plate VII.93. The Crucifixion. Stammheim Missal. Ms.64, fol. 86r. The J. Paul
Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
Plate VII.94. Christ enthroned in the mandorla. Stammheim Missal. Ms.64, fol.
Plate VII.95. The triumph of the archangel Michael. Stammheim Missal. Ms.64, fol. 152r. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
LIST OF MAPS

Map 1: Archiepiscopal provinces and bishoprics in Central Europe........ 22
Map 2: Major locations mentioned in the text.............................. 23
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INTRODUCTION

The images made during the Romanesque period were intended for symbolic use. Consequently, to determine the character of Romanesque, the emphasis should rest on the examination of such related material cultural indicators as history, literature and architecture. The concern would then lie with the mosaic of visual cultural aspects which can be assembled under the term Romanesque and which offer a variety of vantage points from which to consider the period. As a transmitted assembly, they form a “language”, which circumscribes and helps to define the transmissions concerning the nature of cultic things, and to constitute the bridges which link the parallel concepts, which underlay and animated the period from c.900 to c.1300.

By necessity, the discussion focuses on that region of Central Europe, which came to be contained within the Medieval Empire in Central Europe. To some readers Central Europe is located further east. However, very little information can be provided here for East-Central Europe - Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, as before the 13th century, most of the evidence is of a sparse archeological sort, reflecting assortments of portable objects and artifacts reminiscent of the migration period, an earlier archeological and historic period, rather than the later period of monumental expression.

Because man is a maker of images and symbols, the examples of his artistry, skilled craftsmanship reflected in the robust construction of so many architectural monuments with their seemingly infinite variety of artistic and architectural ornamentation are staggering in their display of a vibrant imagination, largely in the service of the church, its dogma and the faith. It was the religious community, which largely promoted and carried this European culture – Romanesque. The amount of scholarly reconstruction is quite beyond any attempts at summarization.

The works of art which once embellished the cathedrals and churches of the Romanesque period illustrate the perception that architecture can be seen as the synthesizing frame within which all the arts are assembled. These inventories demonstrate the gradual stylistic enriching transition of artistic forms within the increasing complexity of Romanesque ornamentation evolving from rudimentary decorations towards the stylistic sophistication of Gothic. As has been shown elsewhere, with astonishing splendor and
majestic proportions, Romanesque contributed to the projection of the elating image of an ideal space quite successfully, as it transformed the real space of the church interior into an ecstatic vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem. In this regard, the arts, within the context of church architecture, are tools of the faith. In their tectonic majesty Romanesque religious edifices could have persuaded the worshipper, that the imperious structures were at the same time instruments of the state, thus presenting a reconciled image of the *Imperium Christianum* as its fulfillment on earth.

It can be imagined, that the progressive and ambitious artisans and decorators, responding to the urgent dynamism of things, were made to feel the restraints and censorship of more conservative ecclesiastics, traditionally hesitant regarding the use of images within the cult. Although it is too early to speak of audio-visual methods, ideal spaces, such as the anticipatory vision of Jerusalem, were created by liturgical means, projected through sight and sound. Seeing was reinforced by hearing. The mystifying activities of the initiates, shrouded in a mysterious language, enveloped in the fragrant haze of incense, contributed to the creation of a place of great mystery, for those kept beyond the roodscreen. The artistry of such vocal music as that of monastic chant and especially the ethereal vocalizations of Hildegard von Bingen, dealt with elsewhere, combined with the visionary mysteries to offer a unifying spiritual and sensory experience.

This book continues chronologically the survey of Central European cultural history from prehistoric and early historic beginnings in the region, such as *The Carolingians in Central Europe, their History, Art and Architecture*, more recently with *The Medieval Empire in Central Europe: Dynastic Continuity on the Post-Carolingian East Frankish Realm, 900-1300*, more recently with *Mystic Women and Lyric Poets in Medieval Society: The Literary View of Medieval Culture during the Romanesque Period in Central Europe, 900-1300*, and most recently with *Romanesque Architecture and its Artistry in Central Europe, 90-1300*. As was apparent in the earlier books, it will be found here too, that man's images were intended for symbolic use. Consequently the primary emphasis rests on the examination of related material cultural indicators with ties to archeology, but mainly to anthropology. Here the concern lies with the innumerable images and objects, textual illustrations, designs and monuments, serving as artifacts and material cultural instruments, which offer a variety of vantage points from which to consider the Romanesque period. As a transmitted assembly, they form a “language”, which circumscribes and helps to define the transmissions concerning the nature of cultic things,