Romanesque Art

4. Romanesque Art (chapter 11)

CONTEXT

Revise with the class the main aspects of religious life in Europe between the 11th and 12th centuries.

Read the text and match the sentence halves given below.

Life in the cloister

Throughout the 11th and 12th centuries there was a growing spirit of religious fervour in Europe. Groups of pilgrims embarked upon journeys to holy sites and the Crusades were organized to set the Holy Land free from the Muslims. At the same time, more and more devotees renounced the mundane world to retire into religious communities called monasteries.

Soon monks gained great influence on all aspects of contemporary society. Besides devoting themselves to a strict devotional life, they also cultivated a knowledge of both intellectual and manual work that highly contributed to the social prosperity.

Among the earliest monastic rules to be established in the Western world was that inspired to St. Augustine of Hippo, who had lived between the 4th and 5th centuries and had spread monasticism across Africa.

Around 592 St. Benedict of Nursia retired into the abbey at Monte cassino in Italy as well as the order that was named after him and followed the principle of the “ora et labora”.

Other major orders of the West were later represented by the Cistercians, the Cistercians, the Carthusians, the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

1. During the 11th and 12th centuries an intense
2. Numerous Christians refused the mundane world
3. Monks devoted part of their life to improve both intellectual and manual work
4. St. Augustine of Hippo, who had spread monasticism across Africa,
5. St. Benedict of Nursia’s order started in Italy

a. and retired into monasteries or undertook pilgrimages to holy sites.

b. and was based on the principle of the “ora et labora”.

c. spiritual drive spread across Europe.

d. inspired one of the oldest religious rules of the Western world.

e. also favoured the economy of local communities.
Activity B

Sum up with the students the main points of the topic in Italian and then invite them to skim through the passage and fill-in the gaps using the following words.

Complete the text with the right words.

**Sculpture as a sacred text**

The ……………… and exceptionality of Romanesque sculpture even surpasses that of architecture. Its value is even more outstanding if one considers that ……………… sculpture had been ousted from western art since the 6th century and …………… relief had been confined to the task of wall or …………….. ornamentation. On the other hand, miniature sculpture enjoyed great popularity in the form of small…………… and …………….. metal statuettes.

As far as architectural sculpture is concerned, its distinctive …………… lay in the expressive character aimed at provoking the viewer’s emotional response.

The repertoire of Romanesque sculpture, especially in south-western France, suggests that the ………. of the Apocalypse along with the Last Judgement feature among the most recurring, obviously due to the highly didactic …………… of these representations of Christian subjects.

The tympanum ………………… the main portal of the Church of La Madeleine at Vézelay (La Madeleine). Main portal, general view, ca 1125-1130. Vézelay.

As one may expect, Italy excelled in Romanesque architecture as other European regions.

Significant examples of Romanesque buildings are to be found in Tuscany as Pisa Cathedral and the famous Leaning Tower still provide worthy evidence today.

Both, as well as the Baptistry, designed by architect Diotisalvi in 1153, were completed towards the end of the 12th century, were built of white marble intersected by horizontal bands of inlaid green marble.

Therefore, the general effect appears more luminous and colourful than their northern counterparts.

The Leaning Tower, actually the bell tower of the Cathedral, was designed by master Bonanno Pisano in the last quarter of the 12th century, but developed a visible inclination before its completion because of the lacking quality of its foundations.

The Cathedral (erected after a project by Buscheto and completed by Rainaldo and Cuglielmo) presents a Latin cross plan with apses at both ends of the transept and is externally crowned by an elliptic dome. The façade is divided into tiers of superimposed arcades which give an airy appearance to the upper section of the building.

Inside, one cannot but notice the echo of Early Christian basilicas in the wooden roof and longitudinal rows of columns.

**ARTISTS**

Abbey Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine (La Madeleine). Main portal, general view, ca 1125-1130. Vézelay.

1. To appear =
2. To complete =
3. To crown =
4. To design =
5. To develop =
6. To divide =
7. To excel =
8. To lack =
9. To notice =
10. To provide =
The Bayeux Tapestry

The coherent linear quality and controlled contours of contemporary painting extends to other artworks such as tapestries. One of the fundamental historic events occurred during this period is the Battle of Hastings, the culminating episode in William the Conqueror’s Invasion of England in 1066. The invasion as well as the battle becomes the subject-matter of a tapestry that was displayed in the Bayeux Cathedral in France on special occasion.

The Bayeux Tapestry is an embroidered panel over 70 metres long that constitutes a continual visual narrative providing a visual documentation of the event populated by warriors, weapons, animals, fleets accompanied by a written Latin commentary.

The author of the general design has successfully managed to integrate narrative and ornamentation, consisting of two border strips respectively enlivened with birds and other animals or with dead soldiers and horses that form part of the main story.

Even tough it avoids the technical strategies of foreshortening and overlapping present in classical painting, the work mirrors a vibrant account of medieval warfare, in which the individual is accorded the importance of a potential hero.

1. What elements common to coeval painting were extended to woven tapestries?
2. What is the origin of the Bayeux Tapestry’s name?
3. What event is depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry?
4. How is the general composition organized?
5. What typical elements of classical painting are avoided in the Bayeux Tapestry?