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By Janetta Rebold Benton

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In the Middle Ages, art evolves as humans continue addressing the traditional and the new, including Biblical subjects, Christian dogma, and Classical mythology. This article introduces a few concepts of three periods—Early Christian, Romanesque, and Gothic. During the Early Middle Ages, the Catholic Church financed many projects, and the oldest examples of Christian art survive in the Roman catacombs, or burial crypts beneath the city. At the beginning of the eleventh century, Romanesque architecture symbolized the growing wealth of European cities and the power of Church monasteries. For example, Romanesque buildings, especially monasteries and churches, were marked by semi-circular arches, thick stone walls, and stable construction. The Middle Ages have received their name based on the impression of a relative lack of progress and productivity in the length of time between antiquity and the Renaissance. Despite the early widespread belief that these were “Dark Ages”, the art that remains testifies to a devout and creative people, more innovative than often credited. Unlike contemporary art practice when pieces are meant to be displayed in a museum or gallery, art in the Middle Ages was almost exclusively commissioned by the church. As a significant percentage of the population was illiterate, Middle Ages art became necessary for didactic purposes. Windows can be organized to relate biblical narratives such as the crucifixion or last judgment.