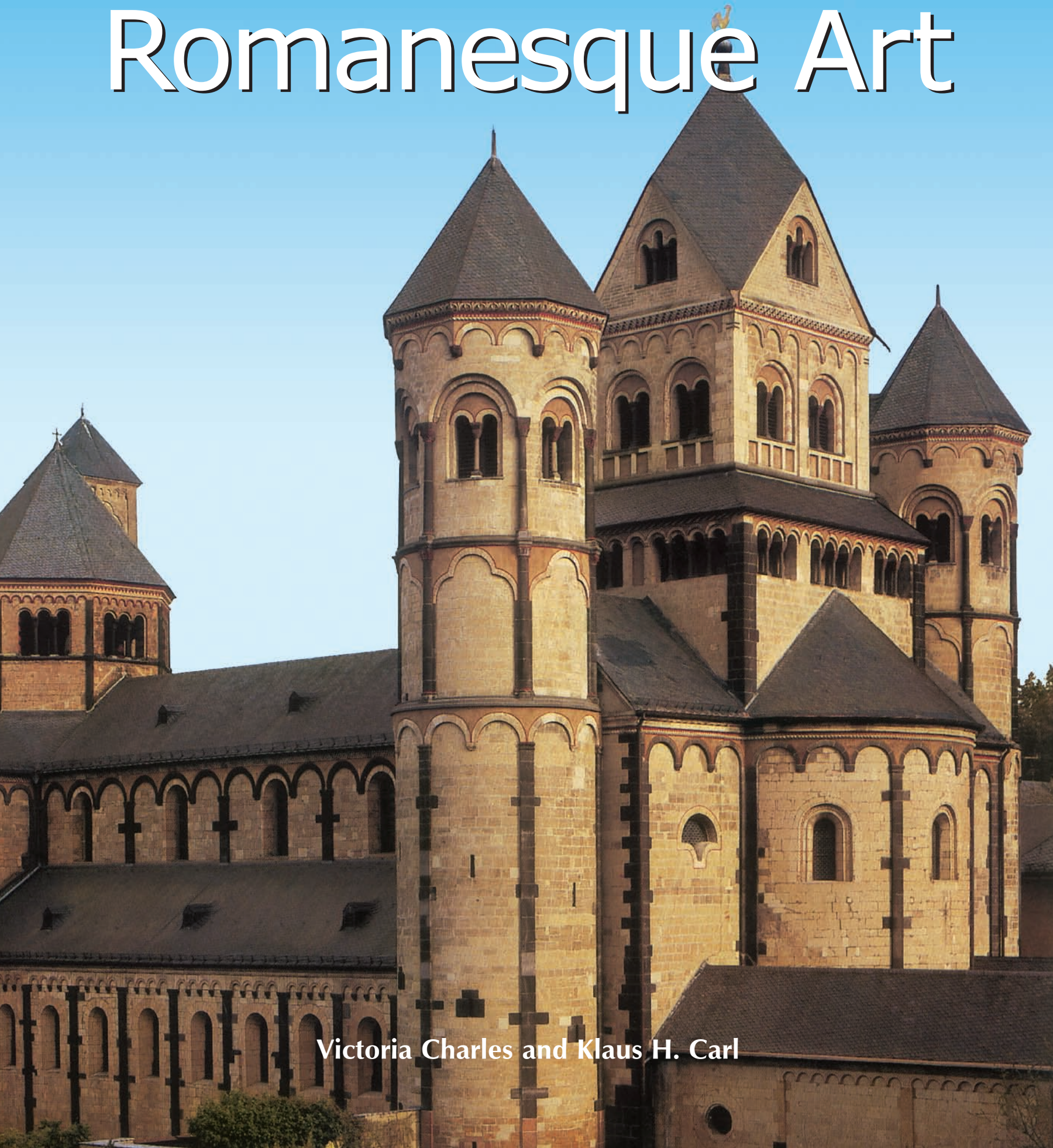


Romanesque Art



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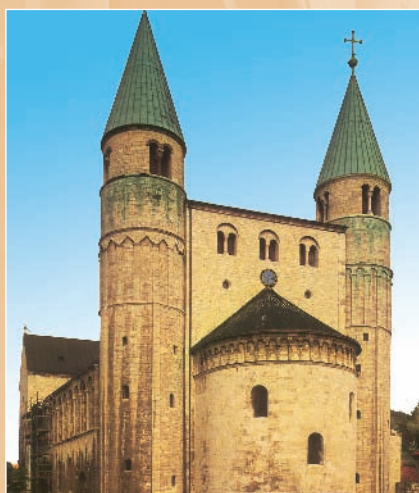
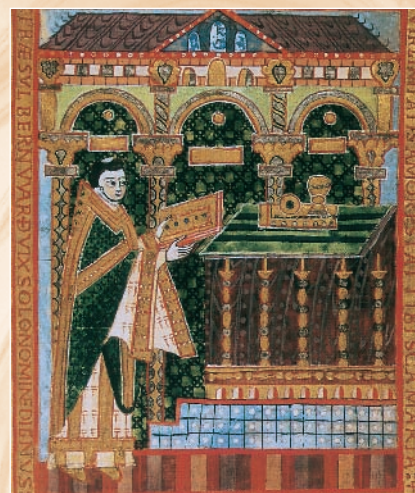
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Editor's Note:
Wherever the text refers to countries, the names of modern nations were used for better understanding. Nevertheless, the people of the time were tribesmen, generally spoke Latin and belonged to the Holy Roman Empire.

VICTORIA CHARLES and KLAUS H. CARL

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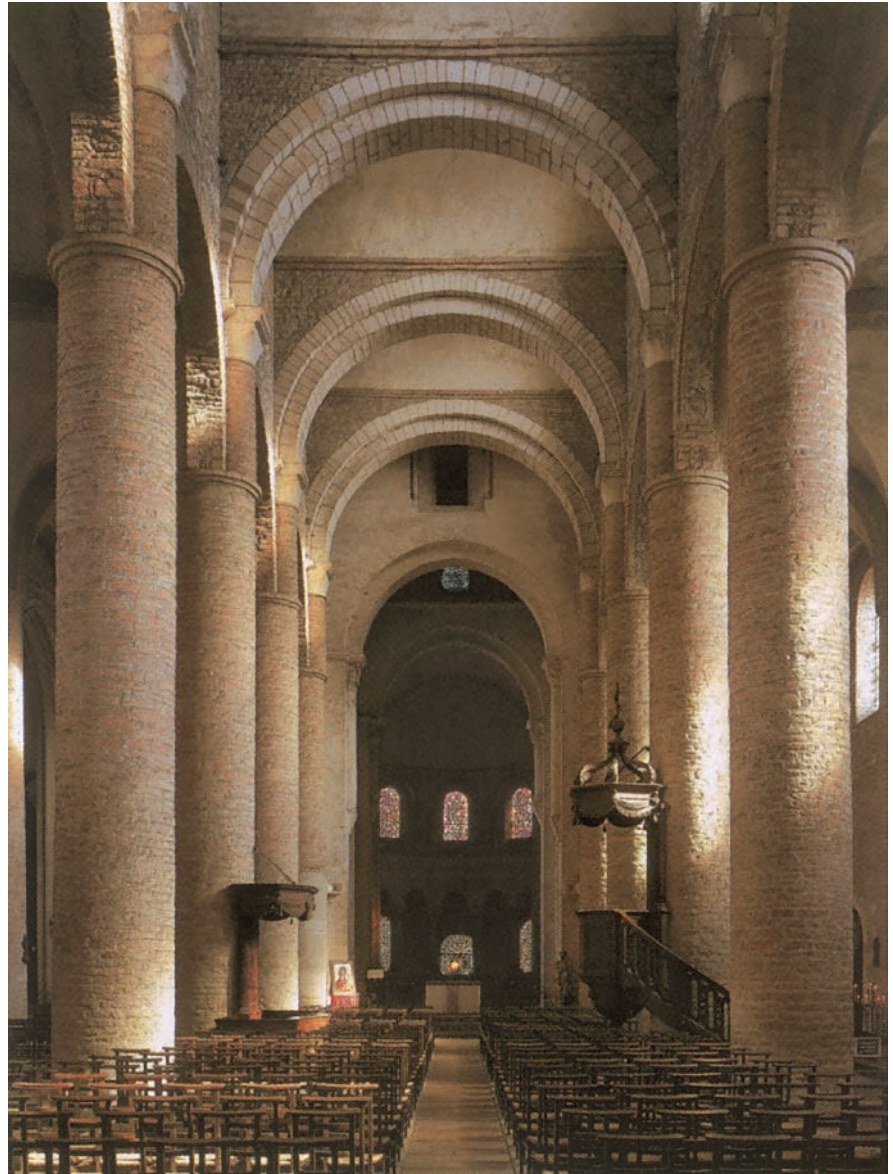
Introduction

Around the turn of the first millennium, the entire occident was encompassed by great religious, political and cultural uncertainty. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the Barbarian Invasions from 375 A.D. to 568 A.D., Roman art, too, disappeared from Western Europe. Invasions by the Huns and Germanic tribes resulted in an artistic and political vacuum, in which a variety of Christian and pagan cultures collided. In the area of modern-day France, a blend of Roman, Germanic, Merovingian and Byzantine art developed. The Viking and Saxon tribes were masters of depiction of stylised animals and invented complex abstract knotting and weaving patterns; the Germanic tribes contributed their portable art and ornamentation.

Gradually, however, ancient Roman art was rediscovered. Emperor Charlemagne, who, around 800 A.D., made every effort to revive the Roman Empire and even considered himself the successor to the Western Roman Emperors, so furthered the interest in ancient art that it can be referred to as a “Carolingian Renaissance”. He sent his people out to bring ancient artefacts back to his court, and there actually are some examples of Carolingian sculpture which, in a naive manner, emulate these models. At the same time, Carolingian portable art blossomed, and mainly produced ivory carvings and metalwork as well as a few small bronze statues. In architecture, the Roman style with its round arches, massive walls, and barrel vaults became established.

After the disintegration of the Charlemagne’s global empire, the Germans emerged almost unscathed. On 8 August 870 A.D., the treaty of Meerssen (near Maastricht in the modern-day Netherlands) also conjoined them into a political unit, the Kingdom of the East Franks, which included the Bavarian, Frankish, Saxon, Swabian, Alamannic, and Lorrain Franconian tribes. During the war turmoil of the ensuing decades, however, this federation disbanded again. Only two tribes, the Franks and Saxons, stood so firmly together that after the death of the last Carolingian who was able claim the rule of the East Franks, they first elected as king Duke Conrad of Franconia, who subsequently died in 918 A.D., and after his death the energetic Duke Henry I of Saxony in 919 A.D. With him began the line of Saxon rulers, whose dynasty would hold the throne for more than a century. He succeeded in reuniting all German tribes, as under Charlemagne, and giving them an awareness of their national unity. Otto I, of course, the most talented and successful of the Saxon kings, also intended to achieve the revival of the Carolingian Empire as his highest political ideal. Like his role model Charlemagne, he sought to locate his centre of gravity in Rome. After Otto was crowned Emperor there in 962 A.D., he founded the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation as the spiritual legacy of the

Nave, Abbey Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa,
Codalet (France), c. 1035.



Nave, Saint-Philibert de Tournus,
Tournus (France), c. 1008-1056.

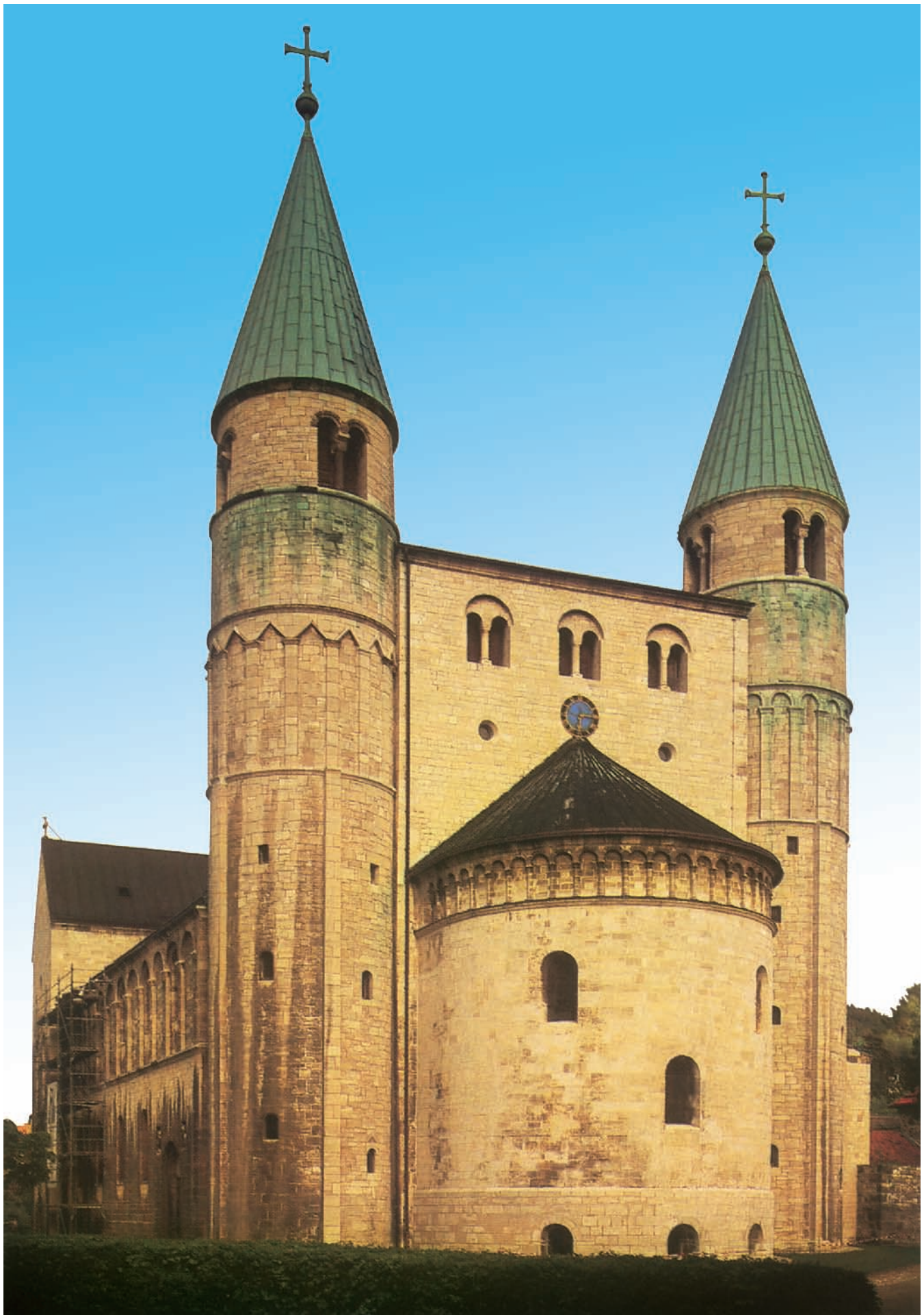
Eastern view of nave, Church of
St Cyriacus, Gernrode (Germany),
959-1000.

Roman and Carolingian empires. It lasted, if only in name, until 1806. Otto's coronation brought about a new stability in the arts, politics and economy, and thus the Ottonian style. Huge cathedrals were created, as well as monastic churches and other ecclesiastical structures. The secular world – knighthood was in its prime – showed its power by building castles and palaces.

Intense fighting accompanied the first two Saxon kings throughout almost all of their reigns. It finally ended in victory over the rivals within their own ranks and, in 955 A.D., in the battle of Lechfeld, where they were victorious over the tribes of Southeastern Europe, who had relentlessly been attacking the empire's borders.

In Germany, as the empire was henceforth known, a culture blossomed which also became the foundation for a new development in the fine arts. Architecture took the leading role, with such predominance that it gave direction to all the other arts. Even though it was still connected to the art of the Carolingian age, which had been modelled





after Roman examples, under the Saxon kings it increasingly took on national characteristics, eventually penetrating the traditional forms and giving rise to a new, local art, as diverse as the characteristics of a landscape and its inhabitants. Since late Antiquity, monasteries, which covered Central and Western Europe in an ever denser network, were and continued to be the patrons of occidental culture.

Yet this art, which was predominant during the first half of the Middle Ages, approximately from the middle of the tenth until the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, was given the name Romanesque art. The term was introduced by a French scientist, Charles de Gerville, around 1818, based on its kinship to Roman architecture, with its round arches, piers, columns and vaults, and has been in general use since 1835. This designation was based on the factually incorrect assumption that this medieval art had developed from the Roman. It is a philological coinage and denotes works of architecture as well as of sculpture and painting. The term was also retained because it had become established and attained legitimacy as it kept alive the memory of the origins of the art. In other countries, too, such as in southwestern France and in parts of Italy, the Romanesque style appeared as a continuation of Ancient Roman art.

In Germany, the transition from the Pre-Romanesque to the Romanesque style took place between 1020 and 1030; in France around the year 1000. In Poland, the year 1038 with the coronation of Casimir I, the Restorer, is thus recorded. The Romanesque style has numerous special forms and regional expressions. Influences become apparent, such as those of Byzantine, Islamic, Germanic or Roman art. On German soil, Romanesque architecture also produced structures that are not only an expression of the peak of highest artistic accomplishment of the style, but also some of the most brilliant examples of art history in general. This unusual variety of creations was achieved because, unlike its successor, the Gothic style, it was not bound by any strict systems. In the different landscapes it took on its own expressions, which make up the inexhaustible attraction of the works of the Romanesque style. The same attitude which caused so many difficulties in politics for the Germans, that is the tenacious insistence on regional peculiarities and local customs, created an advantage in the art of the Romanesque age, which retained its creative originality until the very end. This given that it was initially interrupted in its development and finally completely dispelled by the Gothic style, which was introduced in France in the middle of the twelfth century. In England, the transition to the Gothic style can be dated back to around 1180 and in Germany to around 1235. Works of art from the Romanesque period can still be found today in France, not only but principally in Normandy, Auvergne and Burgundy. In Italy they are found mainly in Lombardy and Tuscany, in Germany in Saxony and the Rhine valley, as well as in some other European countries and in England and Spain.

Western door, Church of St Cyriacus,
Gernrode (Germany),
959-1000.



I. The Romanesque System of Architecture

Widely spread all over Christian Europe, the Romanesque style was the first independent, self-contained and unified style. Architecture dominated Romanesque art, and all other artistic movements such as painting and sculpture, which often demonstrated dramatic motifs, were subordinated. The Romanesque style is predominantly a certain use of forms, which branches out into different peculiarities. Nonetheless, most Romanesque structures have certain essential features in common, according to which a system of Romanesque architecture can be established.

Romanesque architecture can be divided into the Early, High and Late Romanesque periods, whereby the Pre- and Early Romanesque periods can also be subdivided according to dynasties; Merovingian (up to 750 A.D.), Carolingian (750-920 A.D.) under Charlemagne's rule, and Ottonian (920-1024 A.D.). In the different European countries, different starting dates are used to mark the beginning of the Romanesque period. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon period in England ends in 1066 with the Battle of Hastings. In Germany, the Romanesque period begins with the end of the Ottonian dynasty (1024), and in France the first vaulted buildings (Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa (p.6) in the Pyrenees and Saint-Philibert in Tournus (p.8)) appeared.

The only structures that can initially be considered, however, are exclusively ecclesiastical buildings, since the Early Romanesque style everywhere in Europe was developed mainly by young monastic communities, as was intellectual and spiritual life in general. They are thus, in their majority, ecclesiastical art. The more the riches of the church grew, the more magnificent the structures became. The ecclesiastical building's basic form is the basilica with its often cross-shaped floor plan, whereby the choir and nave are located in the long arm, while the transept forms the short arm of the cross. The so-called overstorey or clerestorey windows are located in the nave above the side aisle roof.

The westwork was considered a symbol of secular power. Thus, it was where the Emperor was seated during mass. The choir represented ecclesiastical power. Secular buildings – castles, fortresses, princely palaces, *Pfalzen* (secondary seats of power) and urban residences – are only preserved from the end of the Romanesque period and only in very scarce numbers. The massive, well-fortified and fortress-like walls (particularly in the westwork), the round arches on windows and doors, the small windows, and, though only in the later periods, the cushion-cap capitals on top of often delicate columns are typical of Romanesque architecture. The most important achievement of Romanesque architecture is, without doubt, the vault.

Nave, St Michael's Abbey Church of Hildesheim, Hildesheim (Germany), 1010-1033.

The Early Romanesque period (from around 1024 until 1080) is characterised by flat, wooden coffered ceilings, which were in constant danger of fire. The walls made of smooth stone blocks were unadorned and more like those of a fortress than an ecclesiastical building. The first towers were attached to buildings often even their multiples. During the High Romanesque period (from around 1080 to 1190) groin vaults appeared as well as architectural ornamentation and free-standing figurative sculptures. The subsequent Late Romanesque period, which ended around 1235, preferred the variety of lavishly decorated structures and interiors. During the Late Romanesque period one can already find Gothic elements, such as pointed arches or ribbed vaults; the massive walls and small windows, however, remained. During this time, magnificent twin tower façades also appeared, as well as richly-formed crossing towers. The church of the Romanesque Middle Ages did not develop from the Carolingian central structures, but from the monastic churches, which had quickly become places of worship for the masses through the monks' culture of pastoral activities of encouragement and conversion.

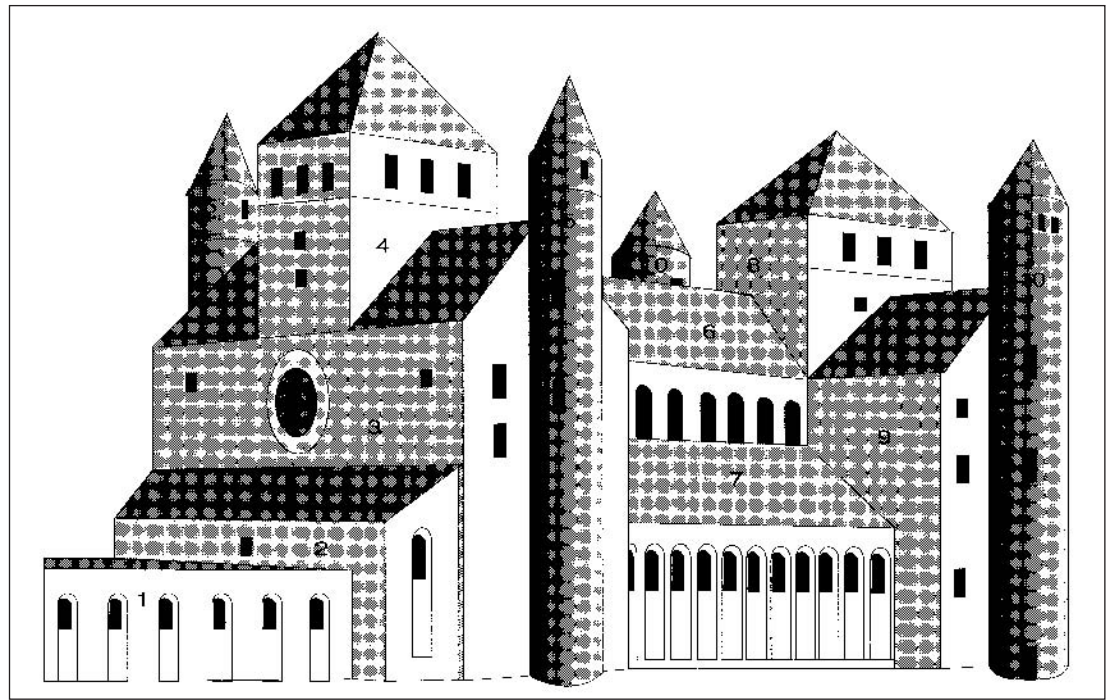
The basilica form was also the foundation of the new system, but was often expanded and enriched by new forms. The old main elements – choir, nave and transept – were retained. The choir, however, was regularly enlarged by the insertion between the transept and the choir of a rectangular room, whose size corresponded largely to that of a square created by the intersection of the nave and transept, the crossing. In this manner, for example, a floor plan in the shape of the Latin cross, developed for the monastic plan of St Gall, appeared, which replaced the T-shaped floor plan and remained authoritative throughout the Middle Ages. The enlarged choir, whose expansion had become necessary due to the constant growth of the clergy and was thus marked as a preferred place for them, was separated from the crossing by several steps. This raising of the choir above floor level was also done for another reason. The Romanesque period had adopted the idea of the crypt from the Carolingian basilica, and it is present in all but a few churches of the Early Romanesque period.

Crypts were originally used to hold martyr relics, over top of whose resting places stone sarcophagi were erected. Later on, noblemen and other high-ranking individuals, such as founders and benefactors of churches, were also buried in crypts. Thus, for example, King Henry I of Saxony and his wife Mathilda have their final resting place in the crypt of the Stiftskirche (collegiate church) of Quedlinburg, which they had founded, in present-day Saxony-Anhalt. This crypt, which was later renovated, is one of Germany's two oldest crypts, the other being St Wiperti Church in Quedlinburg, which was also founded by Henry I and remained preserved in its original form. This quaint little town with a current population of nearly 25,000 used to be the capital of Germany at the time for more than 200 years, and is now part of UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage.

Relatively close in age is the crypt of the Stiftskirche (collegiate church) of Gernrode in the Harz region, built from 961, which retained its overall original character in all other parts also. From this structure, one can appreciate to what degree the spatial effect of the

South-East façade, St Michael's Abbey
Church of Hildesheim, Hildesheim
(Germany), 1010-1033.





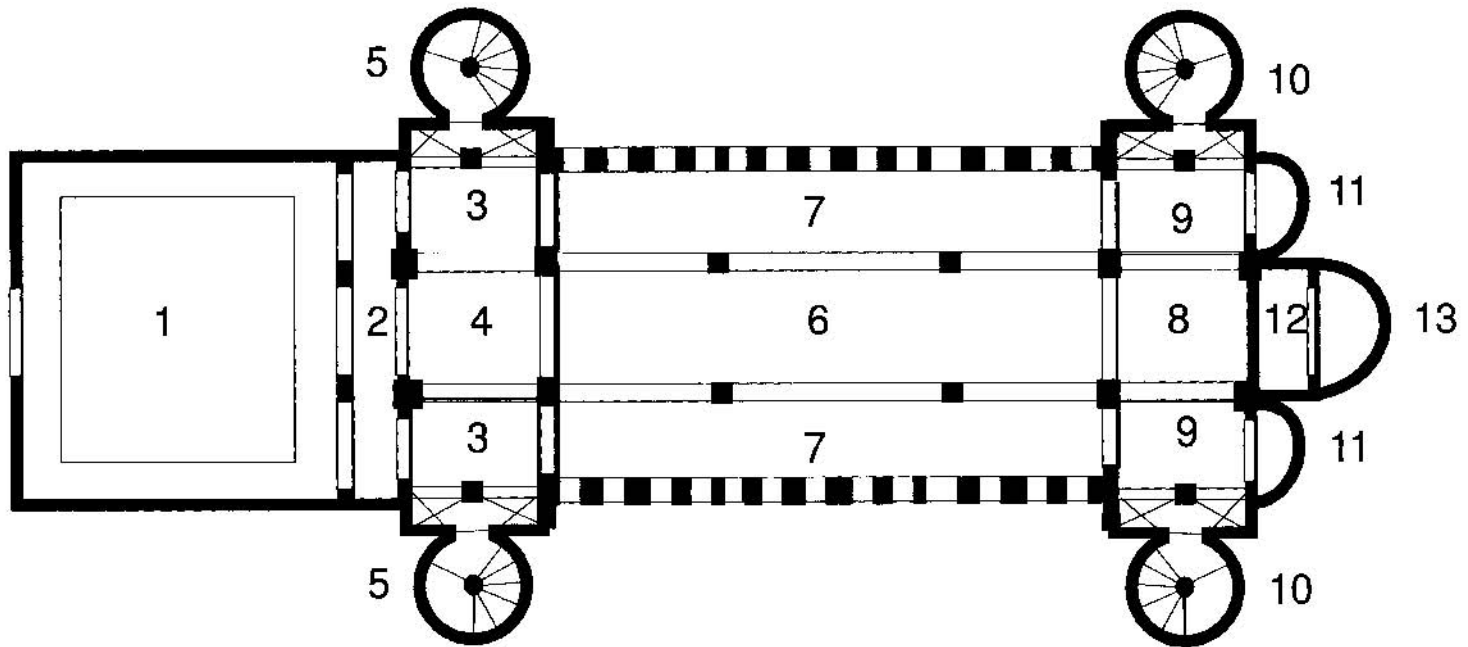
interior as well the monumentality of the exterior appearance of Romanesque architecture had already blossomed on German soil in the tenth century.

During the early period of the Romanesque style, church interiors were less ornate than their exteriors. Thus, for example, the exterior façade of the Stiftskirche of Gernrode (p.10), the most imposing building in Saxony at the time, is only made up of pilasters bearing round arches. These round arches with their painted ornaments or diverse stone inlays did not only serve a decorative purpose, but they also contributed to the building's structural stability. Two round towers with cone-shaped roofs frame the high-rising western façade, which is attached in its current form to an apse dating from the twelfth century. Initially, these towers were only used for the practical purpose of housing the bells and the stairs leading up to the bell cage, but they soon achieved artistic importance in church architecture. The master builder of the church in Gernrode was obviously very keen to connect the towers not only with the entire structure into a unified whole, but also to animate the massive walls with unique ornamentation. The towers are divided into tiers, where each one is different from the next in its structure. In doing this, one did not even pay particular attention to symmetry, since the second tier of one tower shows pointed arches in its arcades, and that of the other round arches. In contrast to the open arched windows of the upper tower tiers, through which the ringing of the bells was to echo through the lands, these closed arches are called "blind arcades".

The two towers framing the western façade were main elements of church architecture during the prime of the Romanesque style. In the course of the Gothic period, they developed into splendid specimens throughout ecclesiastical architecture, behind which the rest of the structure was sometimes even neglected. The western towers, however, did not remain alone even during the Romanesque period. Among the master builders a demand

Western view, with atrium and narthex,
St Michael's Abbey Church of
Hildesheim, Hildesheim (Germany),
1010-1033.

1. Porch/atrium
2. Narthex
3. Western façade
4. Tower crossing the West
5. Western turrets
6. Central nave
7. Collaterals
8. Tower crossing the East
9. Western transept
10. Turrets of the eastern transept



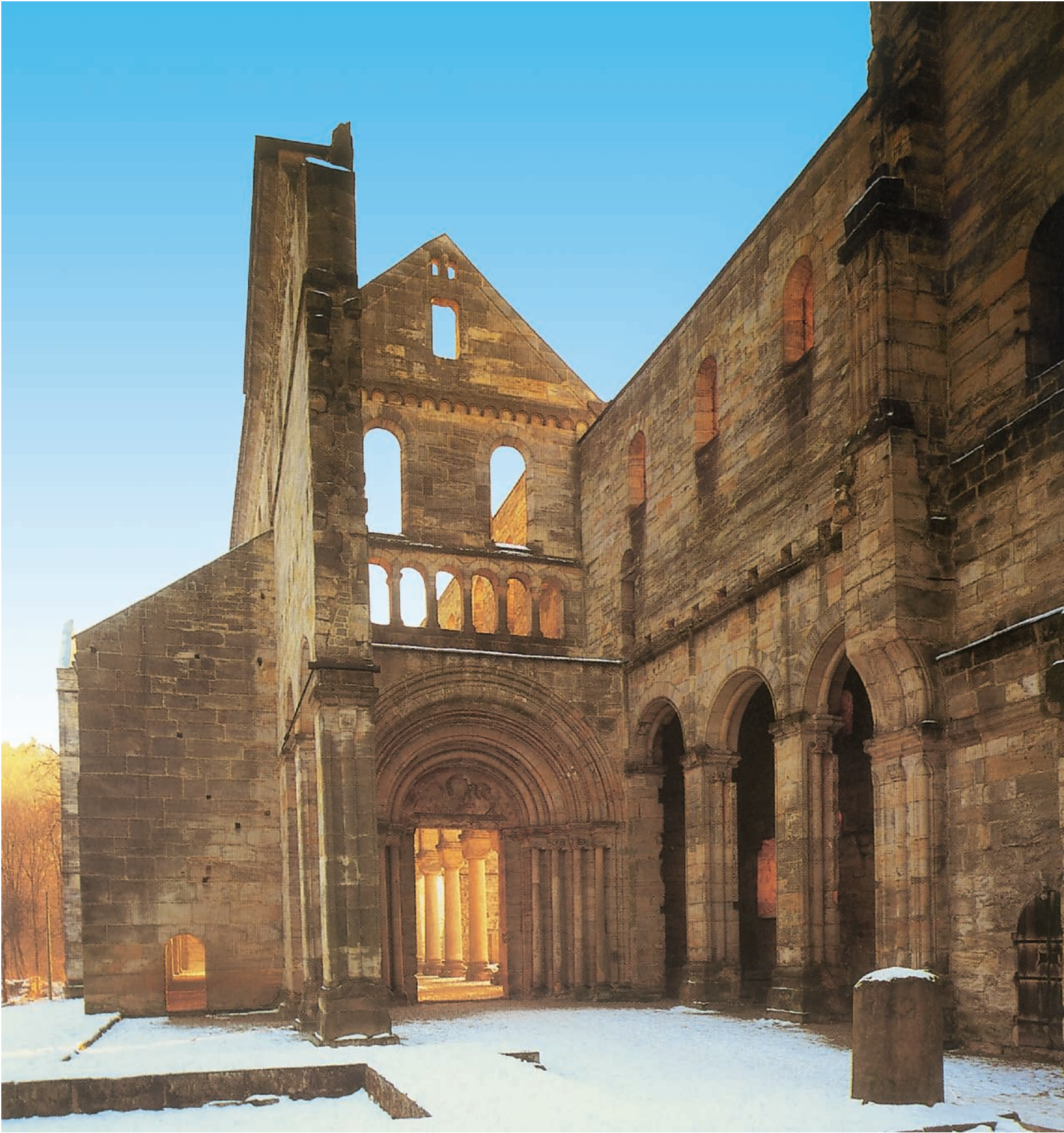
circulated, based on their early aesthetic considerations, to interrupt certain parts of the church roof, which usually appeared monotonous with its steeply rising gable forms, with tower-like structures and to thus denote these parts as extraordinarily pleasant and important. One location emerged as particularly suitable; the intersection of the nave and transept roofs above the crossing. In the older days, only a small tower lodged on the roof ridge, the so-called ridge turret, was installed, which was also still used later when lacking funds prevented the erection of a massive tower of imposing size.

In the Romanesque style's further development, the slender, delicate ridge turret turned into a short rectangular or octagonal tower, which was frequently topped off with a pyramid-shaped spire or simply closed off with a gable roof. As the master builders became more aware of how much the churches' artistic effect could be increased by the addition of towers, the more daring they became, whenever the means permitted it. The towers' original practical purpose was completely forgotten. The aesthetic function was chiefly considered; the heightening of the overall picturesque impression and the joy that was granted to the town's residents in particular by the wide views into the land. At the same time, however, the tall tower gave guards the opportunity to give early warning to the town about approaching enemies or predatory hordes. In addition to the set of towers framing the western façade and the crossing tower, further towers were added on both sides of the transept or the choir. In the prime of the Romanesque style in Germany, which is represented by the Cathedral in Limburg an der Lahn for example, even that number was found to be unsatisfactory, and the transept gables were framed with two towers each, bringing the total number of towers to seven.

Neither did the ornamentation of the walls fall behind this increase in the richness of the exterior structure. The structuring of the walls by projection and pilasters was expanded

Horizontal plan, St Michael's Abbey
Church of Hildesheim, Hildesheim
(Germany), 1010-1033.

1. Porch/atrium
2. Narthex
3. Western façade
4. Tower crossing the West
5. Western turrets
6. Central nave
7. Collaterals
8. Tower crossing the East
9. Western transept
10. Turrets of the eastern transept
11. Apsidiole
12. Chancel
13. Apse





with round arch friezes; a sequence of small, semicircular arches, which initially only ran underneath the roof cornice, but later underneath all the cornices, in particular also those which separated the towers' individual tiers. During the later periods of the Romanesque style, decorative ornamentation was added on the exterior. It was, however, limited to initially simple portals, which then developed increasingly into magnificent examples of Romanesque sculpture. With the meaningful subject matter in their reliefs, they were intended to augment the churchgoers' reverent mood prior to entering the place of worship. The lateral walls of the portals, which were closed off with a rounded arch, were staggered or stepped off toward the interior and fitted with small columns and figures. The meaning behind these was connected with the relief image, which mostly decorated the arch area above the horizontal lintel; the tympanum. Gradually, this visual décor expanded into continuous stories from the Old and New Testaments. Certain doctrines and moral teachings, which could not be conveyed to the largely analphabet masses by the preachers' verbal attempts, became more commonly known and understood by viewing the readily accessible picture sequences on the portals. This pictorial language quickly became popular and was of great importance for the dissemination and reinforcement of religious ideas before the

Western portal with narthex,
Abbey of Paulinzella, Rottenbach
(Germany), 1105-1115.

South-East view, Abbey of Paulinzella,
Rottenbach (Germany), 1105-1115.



Transept and apse, church ruins of Hersfeld Abbey, Bad Hersfeld (Germany), 1038- end of the 12th century (burned down in 1761).

invention of the printing press. It was later continued during the Gothic period and used in richer forms of expression. Romanesque art, thus, had a definite didactic purpose.

The twin-choir churches, which have been used to describe the main elements of the Early Romanesque style, are really only characteristic of Saxony. In other German regions, churches show a simpler floor plan and usually only have one choir. This type of church is also often found in Saxony, but is so considerably different in detail that no uniform type with common characteristics can be established. There is no standard church that unifies all the characteristic peculiarities of the Romanesque style. All the churches of the Late Romanesque style have only the vaulted ceiling in common, which from the eleventh century replaced the flat wood-beam ceiling in Germany, and was formed into a generally observed system. Originally only used for narrow aisles, they also encompassed the wide central nave once the builders had learned to master the construction challenges. The heavy stone vault was immense in weight, which is why the walls had to be so massive in order to withstand the enormous pressure. For the same reason, there are few windows and doors in Romanesque buildings. The arched windows