

Ex Oriente Lux

The eastern models of the abbey church of Sainte-Foy
in Conques



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1st edition, june 2025

Athenanea, volume 4

Publisher

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Digital publication (E-Book)

ISBN 978-3-911792-02-8

DOI [10.5281/zenodo.15676542](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15676542)

URN [urn:nbn:de:101:1-2506161917242.136746143010](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-2506161917242.136746143010)

Athenanea publication series

ISSN 2944-0629

URL www.athenanea.net

Preface

The research of this volume was motivated by a previous study on Bamberg cathedral published as the first volume of *Athenanea*. In this earlier study, a novel semi-statistical approach was employed to identify the likely models of the late Romanesque parts of Bamberg cathedral. The method applied led to the surprising finding that most of the potential models of Bamberg are located on a specific section of the extended *Via Podiensis* ranging from Cluny to Moissac, with Conques as its culmination.

Based on the unexpected success of the method, it was a natural conclusion to also apply it to the identification of potential models of the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques. Again, the results went beyond what was expected. It is shown in this study that the abbey church of Conques has an unusual Byzantine character, in addition to its basic elements of French Romanesque architecture. Therefore, one can call the abbey church a medieval Neo-Byzantine project. In contrast, its famous tympanum of the Last Judgment turned out to be a Neo-Carolingian project. While not entirely being a new finding, the identified Neo-Carolingian character goes far beyond the inclusion of the figure of Charlemagne. Both findings combined illustrate the significant ambition of the builders of Conques that can still be felt in this extraordinary building today.

The author thanks Adrien Palladino and the other organizers of the “Conques in the Global World” project for their kind hospitality at their conferences in Conques and Rome. In particular, the author is very grateful for the opportunity to publish his findings on the artistic relationships between Bamberg, Conques, and Sélestat in the proceedings of their 2023 conference.

The author also thanks Adrien Palladino and Lei Huang for several valuable discussions on the architecture and historical context of Conques. A short exchange with Andreas Hartmann-Virnich motivated the systematic description of the method applied in the appendix to outline its potential but also to remind readers of its inherent limitations. The fact that the new method led to surprising new results twice holds the promise of more potential use cases in the future.

Table of Contents

PREFACE	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
SUMMARY	6
MODELS OF THE ABBEY CHURCH OF CONQUES FROM LATIN EUROPE	7
Potential Lombard, Merovingian or Visigothic models	8
Potential Asturian and Carolingian models	9
Romanesque models from the Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne	10
POTENTIAL BYZANTINE MODELS OF THE ABBEY CHURCH OF CONQUES	14
A short history of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land	14
Byzantine churches along the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land	16
Differentiating building elements of the abbey church of Conques	17
Byzantine precursors of the differentiating elements	18
Church of the Holy Sepulchre as potential model for chevet and nave	19
St. John in Ephesus and the Holy Apostles as potential models for the floor plan	20
Church of St. Simeon Stylites as potential model for the east and west façades	25
Hagia Sophia as potential model for the gallery windows and some decorations	27
Panagia Chalkeon as representative of the latest trends in Byzantine architecture	28
Potential Byzantine or Islamic models for the crossing tower	29
Euphrasian basilica in Poreč as potential model for a charming detail	31
Absence of prominent west towers and of a crypt	32
The Majesty of Sainte-Foy as a three-dimensional icon	33
Traces of the treasury to the Byzantine world	34
Conques as a medieval Neo-Byzantine project	34
THE CAROLINGIAN SPIRITUALITY OF THE TYMPANUM OF THE LAST JUDGMENT	36
The Last Judgment according to the sources	37
Matthew 24-25 with 19:28 and the Last Judgment	37

Book of Revelation of John or Book of the Apocalypse	38
Luke 16:19-31 and the Particular Judgment	39
Greco-Roman and Egyptian mythologies of the afterlife	40
Apocryphal apocalypses, the Church Fathers, and Anglo-Irish visions of the afterlife	40
Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife	42
Cluny and the developments of the 10 th to 13 th centuries	46
The spirituality of the afterlife around 1100	47
A short history of the iconography of the Last Judgment	48
The Good Shepherd and the Parousia of Christ in Rome and Ravenna	49
First iconographic elements of the Last Judgment in the early Byzantine era	49
Iconography of the Harrowing of Hell	51
Full development of the Last Judgment in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey	52
Further development of the iconography in the Byzantine empire	54
Adoption of the Last Judgment in Romanesque Art	57
The Formis challenge: Did a common ancestor exist in Rome?	57
The tympanum of Conques as a Neo-Carolingian project	59
Upper register: Presentation of the Cross according to Matthew 24	60
Lower register: Particular and Last Judgment according to Augustine's Enchiridion	60
Middle register: Proto-purgatory and intercession according to the Visio Wettini	62
The temporal and hierarchical orders of the tympanum	65
The historical connections of Conques to Reichenau Abbey	66
Focus on proto-purgatory and intercession	69
BUILDING THE PERFECT PILGRIMAGE CHURCH	71
APPENDIX	73
ANALYTICAL HUMANITIES: TOWARDS A NEW RESEARCH APPROACH	74
Introduction to basic concepts of Digital Humanities	74
Analytical Humanities: Semi-statistical approach to Digital Humanities	75
The relevance of Analytical Humanities for the study of Romanesque art	76
TABLES	78
FIGURES	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

Summary

The study presented employs a novel semi-statistical method to identify potential models of the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques. In a nutshell, a large number of weak traces can result in a strong overall trace if the individual traces are well aligned but individually so uncommon that a coincidental occurrence is statistically unlikely. Thereby, it is shown that the abbey church of Conques has a distinctive Neo-Byzantine character, beyond its basic elements of Romanesque architecture. This hybrid character sets it apart from most of its predecessors and successors.

To prove this Neo-Byzantine character, twenty unique or nearly unique elements of its architecture, decoration or iconography were analyzed. It is shown that all of them had prominent precursors on a prototypical pilgrimage route from Conques to the Holy Land. The most important Byzantine churches on this route seem to have left characteristic traces in Conques. In contrast, hardly any precursor was found in the Latin West. While the analysis does not permit us to draw conclusions about the model role of individual Byzantine buildings, the overall impression of a Neo-Byzantine character is quite consistent. At least, the analysis seems to suggest that the builders of Conques, who aspired to establish themselves as a pre-eminent pilgrimage destination, may have imitated the three most important pilgrimage sites of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an, and the Basilica of St. John the Apostle in Ephesus. In addition, they seem to have alluded to the two most important churches of Constantinople, the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

In contrast, the famous tympanum of the Last Judgment turns out to be a Neo-Carolingian project. From a short review of the histories of the written sources and the iconography of the Last Judgment, it is derived that the iconography of the tympanum can best be understood as a reflection of the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife. The latter matured in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey which includes St. Gall and Münstair. The main sources of this spirituality, Matthew 24-25, Reichenau's *Visio Wettini*, and Augustine's *Enchiridion* 29:109-111, provide a surprisingly detailed blueprint of the iconography of the tympanum of Conques. It is verified that Conques had unusual historical connections to the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall. The most characteristic theme of the *Visio Wettini* is its focus on the ideas of proto-purgatory and intercessions at scale by saints, martyrs, and Holy Virgins as well as by prayers for the dead. The *Visio Wettini* also demonstrates prominent concern for the soul of Charlemagne and introduces the new concept of intercessions by the Holy Virgins. These unique elements are prominently represented in the tympanum of Conques. Thereby, the tympanum can also be read as a monumental act of intercession by the abbey of Conques for its legendary founder Charlemagne.

Models of the abbey church of Conques from Latin Europe

The abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques from about 1040-1125 (Figure 1) is widely considered one of the most extraordinary churches of French Romanesque architecture.¹ It is located at the north end of Aveyron, successor of the medieval Rouergue, in the southern Massif Central. Situated on the slopes of a steep pristine valley and surrounded by a small village in equally pristine, late-medieval conditions, it makes a first-rate tourist destination.² Many of the tourists are hikers on a section of the popular Ways of St. James. Conques played an important role in the development of French Romanesque architecture, with major influence on the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

The dating of the abbey church has considerable uncertainty. Only a few historical sources exist that provide insight into the progress of its construction. The following dating model, albeit still somewhat speculative, reflects the latest insights from Huang's extensive building research.³ Here, his findings are structured along the offices of the abbots of Conques:

- Odolric (1042/51–1065): Ambulatory with radial chapels and lower parts of ground level of transepts and nave, including the portals of the transepts and the closed south portal

- Étienne II (1065–1087): Completion of ground level
- Bégon III (1087–1107): Gallery level with its sculpture (except for the two western bays of the nave), apse, tympanum of the Last Judgment, and cloister
- Boniface (1107–1125): Western part of gallery level (two bays of nave), upper portion of west façade, including the northwestern turret, crossing tower (first level), and barrel vaults

Before we turn our attention to the innovative elements of the abbey church, it is discussed which of its elements had natural models in the Latin West (Table 3).

Early Christian buildings of Rome and Ravenna do not seem to have played a noticeable model role for Conques. Their plain basilicas with columns in the nave, extensive wall paintings or mosaics, crypts, and transept-like annexes are far from the elaborate architecture of Conques with its rich sculpture.

¹ For more details see: Éliane Vergnolle, Henri Pradalier, and Nelly Pousthomis-Dalle, "Conques, Sainte-Foy. L'abbatiale Romane," in *Congrès Archéologique de France. 167e Session, 2009, Aveyron* (Paris: Société française d'archéologie, 2011), 71–160; Lei Huang, "L'abbatiale Sainte-Foy de Conques (XIe - XIIe siècles)" (Thèse de doctorat, Paris, Paris 1 Sorbonne, 2018); Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, eds., *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025).

² Thunø recently argued that the outstanding natural beauty of its site may have played an important role in the medieval development of

Conques to become a frequented pilgrimage destination. Erik Thunø, "Localism and Sainte Foy at Conques," in *Entangled Histories at Conques. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Unique Site of Medieval Heritage*, ed. Adrien Palladino, Convivium Supplementum 15 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024), 128–38.

³ Lei Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity. Odolric's Historicism and Bégon's Promotion of Image in Romanesque Conques," in *Contextualizing Conques. Imaginaries, Narratives & Geographies*, ed. Ivan Foletti et al., Convivium Supplementum 13, 2023, 66 f., 72, 74.

Potential Lombard, Merovingian or Visigothic models

The situation is only slightly different when it comes to potential architectural models from Lombard Italy, Merovingian France or Visigothic Spain.

Conques does not exhibit the characteristic Lombard bands and pilaster strips that became so emblematic for the Salian and Hohenstaufen churches of the empire, such as Speyer or Bamberg, or for many churches in medieval Catalonia, such as Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa.

However, for the sculpture and interior decoration, Lombard models may have played a certain role. For example, the monumental reliefs of the scene of the Annunciation in Conques accompanied by John the Baptist and the prophet Isaiah constitute the earliest known examples of monumental Romanesque sculpture within the church interior. The only known European precursors existed in or close to Lombard Italy, near Cividale and in Disentis.⁴ Another specialty of Conques are the capitals with three-stranded interlace of its chevet.⁵ Similar capitals from Sant Pere of Rodes in Catalonia may be slightly older. After Conques, more of these capitals were created in the Massif Central. Their overall structure points to the interlaced basket capitals that were a hallmark of the Holy Land, Constantinople, and Egypt.⁶ However, three-stranded interlace also was a hallmark element of Lombard reliefs and later Carolingian art. In contrast, Merovingian art does not seem to have had any noticeable influence on Conques.

Visigothic architecture already knew the cruciform floor plan with a lantern tower over the crossing.⁷ However, these rather simple churches have little to do

with the sophisticated architecture of Conques. The only noticeable exception may be the figured and historiated capitals of the crossing of San Pedro de la Nave. Only very few earlier figured or historiated capitals from Roman times are still extant today. A prominent capital of San Lorenzo fuori le mura in Rome, a spolia showing Roman soldiers in armor, proves that figured capitals were already known in the classical Roman Empire.⁸ A few more extant examples existed in Coptic Egypt.⁹ Generally, it is known that in the 7th century, the era of Isidore of Seville, the culture of Visigothic Spain was heavily influenced by the Byzantine culture of Carthago, North Africa, and to a lesser extent Constantinople.¹⁰ Hence, the capitals of San Pedro de la Nave may point to North African influences. What is striking about the capitals from San Pedro de la Nave is that these are combined with richly decorated imposts. More moderately decorated imposts are known from Ravenna and Constantinople, but they typically were not combined with figured capitals. This specific combination of decorated imposts and figured capitals became emblematic for Conques and for many other Romanesque churches of Southern France or Northern Spain. In contrast, the ground-breaking figured and historiated capitals of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire do not feature such decorated imposts. Overall, the situation remains inconclusive. It would geographically be plausible if the figured and historiated capitals of Conques with decorated imposts were influenced by models from Visigothic Spain. But other traces point to the Eastern Mediterranean, for example to Egypt.

⁴ Lombard monumental sculpture still exists in Santa Mara in Valle near Cividale. Archaeological findings have provided evidence for the earlier existence of monumental reliefs in Disentis. Walter Studer, *Byzanz in Disentis: Die Reste einer plastisch unterlegten Monumentalmalerei byzantinischer Provenienz des 8. Jahrhunderts aus dem Kloster Disentis. Schlüsselergebnisse der Forschung*. (Zürich: Vdf Hochschulverlag, 2007).

⁵ Marcel Durliat, *La sculpture romane de la route de Saint-Jacques: De Conques à Compostelle* (Mont-de-Marsan: Comité d'Etudes sur l'Histoire et l'Art de la Gascogne, 2007), 52–56.

⁶ Svetlana Tarkhanova, "Early Byzantine 'Basket' Capitals in Churches and Monasteries of the Holy Land: Stylistic and Morphological Synthesis," *Liber Annuus* 72 (2022): 529–71.

⁷ Matthias Untermann, *Architektur im frühen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 65–70.

⁸ Hugo Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen in Rom: vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Der Beginn der abendländischen Kirchenbaukunst*, 3rd ed. (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2013), 265.

⁹ A particularly rich fragment of a figured capital exists in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

¹⁰ Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409–711* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 147–66.

Potential Asturian and Carolingian models

The Asturian architecture of the 9th century exhibits a few characteristic elements that became hallmark elements of French Romanesque architecture in general and of Conques in particular. These elements can prominently be seen in the palace churches of Santa María del Naranco and San Miguel de Lillo near Oviedo. Their groundbreaking architectural elements include barrel vaults with transverse arches, blind arcades at the inner walls of the building, medallions in the spandrels of arcades, mullioned windows with external columns, and oculi above mullioned or double windows.¹¹ These elements became highly relevant for Conques. Most of them have no precedence in the architecture of Rome, Ravenna or Constantinople and likely were influenced by the Early Christian architecture of Syria or Alexandria. At least, precursors for some of them are known from the so-called dead cities of Syria and from the Holy Land. Given the prominence of Oviedo for the early development of the pilgrimage of St. James, it is more likely that Asturian rather than Syrian precursors were the models for Conques. However, a combined influence cannot be excluded in view of the popular pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the first half of the 11th century.

In general, Carolingian architecture had a quite significant influence on the European architecture of the 10th and 11th century. Its most important innovations include the introduction of the so-called westwork, the double-choir basilica with one or two transepts between the nave and the apses, the hall crypt, presumably the two-towered façade, and the mullioned window with discharging arch.

It was recently re-confirmed that the concept of westwork was a genuine Carolingian invention that emerged in the 760s. Skalecki showed in his extensive study that the first proven westwork was built for Saint-Denis.¹² According to his analysis, the initial motivation for the construction of westworks was the burial of non-canonized family members *ante ecclesiam* or *ante limina*, as in the case of Pepin the Short in Saint-Denis.¹³ The gallery of the upper floor served the *laus perennis* of the buried.¹⁴ Later, westworks were used for the veneration of relics, such as the Salian westwork of the abbey church of Reichenau. After the death of Charlemagne, the veneration of relics in the westwork often led to their transformation into a second choir, such as in Fulda or Cologne.¹⁵ Early westworks, but not the earliest, were built at Saint-Riquier and the Palatine Chapel in Aachen. The latter was derived from the narthex of San Vitale in Ravenna. San Vitale introduced the attachment of round staircase towers to the narthex rather than integrating them in the core of the building, as in Roman architecture. The double-choir basilica of St. Boniface in Fulda also introduced one of the first hall crypts.

Although the origins of the two-towered façade are somewhat uncertain, it appears that it also was introduced in the Latin West by Saint-Denis.¹⁶ Finally, the discharging arches over mullioned windows, albeit derived from the mullioned windows of San Vitale in Ravenna or comparable churches in Constantinople, became an autochthonous architectural element in Carolingian times. The earliest extant windows of this kind seem to exist in the westwork of Corvey, followed by the early Ottonian examples of Gernrode. Mullioned windows with discharging arches do not seem to have existed in Byzantine architecture before the Katholikon of Hosios Loukas from 1011.¹⁷

¹¹ Untermann, *Architektur im frühen Mittelalter*, 124–32; Hans Erich Kubach, *Romanik, Weltgeschichte der Architektur* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986), 29–32.

¹² Georg Skalecki, "Turris Occidentalis. Das Phänomen Des Westbaus in Der Karolingischen Architektur. Teil 1: Die Anfänge Unter Karl Dem Großen.," *INSITU. Zeitschrift Für Architekturgeschichte* 16 (2024): 5–44.

¹³ The use of westworks for the burial of kings, abbots or other persons of high nobility can be proven at least until 888. Georg Skalecki, "Turris Occidentalis. Das Phänomen Des Westbaues in Der Karolingischen Architektur. Teil 2: Von Ludwig Dem Frommen Bis Zur Endgültigen

Reichsteilung 888.," *INSITU. Zeitschrift Für Architekturgeschichte* 17 (2025): 9.

¹⁴ Skalecki, "Turris Occidentalis. Das Phänomen Des Westbaus in Der Karolingischen Architektur. Teil 1," 11.

¹⁵ Skalecki, 23.

¹⁶ Martin Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht: Kaiserdom mit Blick nach Frankreich und Italien*, 4th ed., Athenanea 1 (Berlin: Martin Naraschewski, 2023), 29–35.

¹⁷ Pavlos Lazarides, *Das Kloster Hosios Lukas - Kurzer Bebildeter Archäologischer Führer* (Athen: Hannibal, 2008).

However, hardly any of these elements have become relevant for Conques. Its narthex is fully opened to the nave, as in most Byzantine or Early Christian churches. A westwork function of the narthex, such as the burial of clerics or the veneration of relics, has no historical indication. The cruciform floor plan of Conques with its deep sanctuary has Carolingian precursors in Saint-Denis, Saint-Riquier, and Reichenau. But in the case of Reichenau, the cross-shape can be traced back to models from Constantinople. Most likely, the cruciform floor plan of Saint-Denis and Saint-Riquier goes back to Santa Croce in Ravenna, transmitted by the Merovingian church of Sainte-Croix-et-Saint-Vincent (later Saint-Germain-des-Prés) in Paris.¹⁸ Hence, the cruciform floor plan of Conques is not a Carolingian invention. It also has little in common with the T-shaped floor plans of Fulda and later Ottonian churches. Nor does Conques have a crypt. Perhaps, the small original turret of Conques at the northwestern corner of its nave (Figure 38) can be seen as an approximation of the two-towered façade of Saint-Denis. However, we do not know whether a second turret was planned. There is no evidence that it ever existed. Finally, the significant elongation of Carolingian towers, visible at the westwork of Aachen, at the crossing tower of Germigny-des-Prés, and at many subsequent Carolingian or early Romanesque churches, has no parallel in Conques.

The minimal references of Conques to Carolingian architecture include the abandoned early plan of a westwork, manifested by reinforced substructures, the attached staircase tower of the southern transept as well as the discharging arches above the gallery windows. At some capitals of Conques, the interlace merges with palmettes. Such hybrid ornaments have precedents in

illuminated manuscripts from, e.g., Saint-Denis, Limoges, and Catalonia.¹⁹ To conclude, there is hardly anything Carolingian in the architecture of Conques. However, the story is quite different when it comes to the style of the sculpture and to the iconography of the tympanum of the Last Judgment, as will be discussed later.²⁰

Romanesque models from the Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne

Instead, the architecture of Conques was deeply influenced by the emerging French Romanesque architecture of the 11th century. One of its most significant innovations was the introduction of a more complex chevet with ambulatory and radial chapels. Before the construction of the ambulatory of Conques, prominent precursors already existed at Tours, Limoges, Orléans, Chartres, and several other places in northern and central France. It is believed that Saint-Martin in Tours and Saint-Martial in Limoges were the relevant models for Conques.²¹ In the early 11th century, Tours was the most important pilgrimage site in France. Limoges and Conques clearly aspired to follow its example. A direct copy of the five radial chapels and the two apsidioles of each transept of Tours could not be realized in Conques due to topographic constraints. Instead, the outer radial chapels and the inner apsidioles of Tours were merged into two relatively large inner apsidioles, one at each transept. This modification allowed the builders of Conques to create a staggered chevet, very much in line with the famous model of Cluny II.²² Thereby, the new chevet of Conques referred not only to Tours, as the most relevant

¹⁸ Alain Erlande-Brandenburg and Anne-Bénédicte Mérel-Brandenburg, *Saint-Germain-des-Prés. An mil* (Paris: Picard, 2011), 12–15; Stéphane Büttner, Sylvain Aumard, and Jean-François Goret, "Nouveaux Apports à La Connaissance Du Chantier de Construction Roman de l'abbatiale Saint-Germain-Des-Prés. Premier Bilan Du Projet Collectif de Recherches (2016-2017)," *Bulletin Du Centre d'études Médiévales d'Auxerre*, no. 22.2 (December 31, 2018): 2 f., <https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.15892>.

¹⁹ Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity," 70 f.

²⁰ TERENCE Le Deschault De Monredon, "The Influence of Carolingian Art on Some Great Romanesque Sculpture Masters in Auvergne and Rouergue," *Locus Amoenus* 13 (2015): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/locus.20>.

²¹ Éric Sparhubert, "The Chevet of Sainte-Foy of Conques and Its Models: Materializing Sanctity and Promotional Strategies in Romanesque Architecture," in *Entangled Histories at Conques. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Unique Site of Medieval Heritage*, Convivium Supplementum 15 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024), 72–88; Charles Lelong, *La basilique Saint-Martin de Tours* (Chambray: CLD, 1986); Éliane Vergnolle, "Saint-Martial de Limoges, l'abbatiale du Sauveur: Le chevet roman d'après les textes et la documentation graphique," in *Saint-Martial de Limoges: Millénaire de l'abbatiale romane (1018-2018) sous la direction d'Éliane Vergnolle*, vol. 1, Bulletin monumental 178 (Paris: Société française d'archéologie, 2020), 7–12.

²² Sparhubert, "The Chevet of Sainte-Foy of Conques and Its Models," 74 f.

pilgrimage site in France, but also to Cluny, as the most relevant mother church of a large monastic network. Around 1100, Conques seems to have achieved both ambitions, being a pre-eminent pilgrimage site and being the mother church of an extended and influential monastic network. While the chevet of Conques was no longer groundbreaking at its time in France, it was at least the earliest chevet with ambulatory south of the Massif Central.²³

The nave and transepts of Conques have barrel vaults, like its earlier or contemporary equivalents. Such advanced construction required strong buttresses to counterweigh the lateral pressure of the vaults. In Conques and its models, the function of buttresses was assumed by the vaults of the galleries. The existence of galleries has no relevant precedence in Rome or Ravenna.²⁴ The earliest extant examples in Latin Europe were introduced in the second half of the 10th century in Gernrode and Jumièges. In the first half of the 11th century, further examples followed in Dijon, Limoges, and Mont-Saint-Michel, to name a few. Presumably, galleries also existed in Tours. It is worth noting that the earliest examples of such galleries were restricted to the naves. These galleries had no supportive function since the respective churches were not vaulted. Galleries of transepts are assumed to have already existed in Tours and Limoges as well as at the cathedral of Orléans. But there is no certainty since these churches no longer exist. At least, excavations have shown that the transepts of Tours, Limoges, and Orléans had already side aisles. The existence of such wide transepts with side aisles and galleries distinguishes Conques from most other Romanesque churches. Tours, Limoges, Conques, Toulouse, and Santiago de Compostela therefore form a distinctive group, the formerly so-called churches of the ‘Pilgrimage type’.²⁵

Another significant innovation of French Romanesque architecture was the introduction of compound piers with engaged columns and pilaster strips. The engaged columns aim to emulate the columns of the arcades of early Christian basilicas in a more economical and statically more solid way. Apparently, compound piers were invented in or near the royal cities of the Capetian dynasty, Paris and Orléans. Early extant examples include Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris and Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire near Orléans, but also Auxerre in Burgundy and Bernay in Normandy among others. Compound piers very quickly became the hallmark of French Romanesque architecture.²⁶ Likewise, the pervasive use of figured or historiated capitals seems to have emerged at Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire. The famous porch tower of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire became a model for French Romanesque architecture, both with respect to its compound piers and its rich figured and historiated capitals.²⁷ The adoption of figured and historiated capitals remained largely limited to the region south of the Loire. Most likely, Conques was indirectly influenced by more recent models in Auvergne, most notably by the sculpture of Mozac.²⁸

In the first half of the 12th century, four decorative elements were developed in central France that rapidly spread from the Loire to Burgundy and to the Auvergne where they became signature elements of the respective Romanesque churches (Figure 2). These include single-row round billet moldings and square billet moldings that were used at various cornices, in particular at the eaves cornices. There, they were accompanied by shaving corbels or corbels with masks of animals or humans.²⁹

Apparently, the earliest extant realization of square billet moldings exists at an impost of the *gazofilatium*

²³ Sparhubert, 75 f.

²⁴ The galleries of San Lorenzo fuori le mura and of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura in Rome responded to very specific topographic constraints and cannot be considered relevant models for the galleries of Romanesque architecture. Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen in Rom*, 260, 266 f.

²⁵ Kenneth John Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture: 800 to 1200*, 3rd ed., The Pelican History of Art (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 157–62.

²⁶ Éliane Vergnolle, *L'Art roman en France: architecture - sculpture - peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 105–8.

²⁷ Vergnolle, 88–90, 135–39; Éliane Vergnolle, *Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire: L'abbatiale romane*, Bibliothèque de la Société Française d'Archéologie (Paris: Société Française d'Archéologie, 2018), 81–177.

²⁸ Lei Huang, “Quand Les Pierres Se Mettent à Parler: Le Chantier Roman de l'abbatiale Sainte-Foy de Conques,” in *De Saint-Gilles à Saint-Jacques. Recherches Archéologiques Sur l'art Roman*, ed. Andreas Hartmann-Virnich, Collection Ligne de Mire (Avignon: Marion Charlet, 2021), 178–82.

²⁹ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 61–63.

(treasury) of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire from 1004.³⁰ Like most of its successors, it has three rows of square billets. Simplified precursors with only two rows of billets are known from Egypt, Syria, and Armenia.³¹ A fragment of the rotunda of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon from 1018 proves that they were used in Burgundy only shortly later.³² Subsequently, square billet moldings became a hallmark decorative element of the churches of the Auvergne, from where they were eventually adopted at the radial chapels of Conques. The pervasive use of square billet moldings at the chancel screens of the abbey church of Cluny III also made them a signature decoration of monastery churches that adhered to the reform of Hirsau.³³

Closely associated with the square billet moldings was the development of single-row round billet moldings, an evolution of an ancient Roman decorative element. Apparently, it was a special innovation of Conques to combine several of such single-row billet moldings into a combined element, separated by fine lines. One can see initial attempts with two rows of round billets at the interior postament of the ambulatory of Conques. A more refined version with three rows of round billets and separating lines exists at the eaves cornice of the ambulatory (Figure 3). This specific decoration element of Conques has found further adoption at the Upper Rhine, presumably introduced by its priory in Sélestat.³⁴ In a next development step, that may have happened at Saint-Sernin in Toulouse or in Frómista, the fine separating lines were removed. As a result, the square billet moldings and the single-row round billet moldings of the Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne merged into multi-row round billet moldings. In Conques, such round billet moldings exist at the eaves cornice of the apse and

at several other places. Due to the lighthouse character of Conques and Toulouse, round billet moldings became a hallmark element of the southern Ways of St. James (*Via Podiensis*, *Via Tolosana*, *Camino francés*).³⁵ In the second half of the 12th century, they also became a hallmark element of buildings of the empire that were closely associated with the Hohenstaufen dynasty.³⁶

Often, square billet moldings were used to decorate the eaves cornices of the chevet where they were periodically interrupted by two types of corbels. The earlier type seems to be the so-called shaving corbels. One of the earliest fragments of such a corbel was found at the former rotunda of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon.³⁷ Shaving corbels may have been derived from Islamic architecture. At least, simplified precursors from the 10th century can be found at some gargoyles of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and at two Mozarabic churches in Spain.³⁸ Early on, shaving corbels were complemented and eventually replaced by corbels with masks showing the heads of animals or of human beings. One can find both types of corbels at the older parts of Conques, such as the ambulatory and the west portals of the transepts. After their use in Conques, the corbels with masks entirely replaced the shaving corbels, at least south of the Massif Central. Eventually, the combination of round billet moldings and corbels with masks became a signature decoration of the churches of the southern Ways of St. James.³⁹ Both elements were also central elements of the later ‘Hohenstaufen decoration’ in the empire.⁴⁰

The different billet moldings and corbels show how Conques took a pivotal position between the earlier Romanesque architecture of Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne and their successors of the southern Ways of

³⁰ Vergnolle, *Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire*, 27, 34.

³¹ Further details will be provided in a later section on the Church of St. Simeon Stylites.

³² Éliane Vergnolle, “Saint-Bénigne de Dijon: cinquante ans de recherches sur l’abbatiale de l’an mil,” vol. 2, *Bulletin monumental* 174 (Paris: Société française d’archéologie, 2016), 138 f.

³³ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 153 f.

³⁴ Martin Naraschewski, “Bamberg, Conques, and the Hohenstaufen Dynasty: A Model of Transregional Dynamics,” in *Entangled Histories at Conques. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Unique Site of Medieval Heritage*, ed. Adrien Palladino, *Convivium Supplementum* 15

(Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024), 67–69. Prominent examples can be found in Lorraine or at the cathedrals of Worms and Strasbourg.

³⁵ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 63–65.

³⁶ Naraschewski, 45–48.

³⁷ Vergnolle, “Saint-Bénigne de Dijon,” 138 f.

³⁸ These are located in San Miguel de Escalda and in Santiago de Peñalba.

³⁹ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 63–65.

⁴⁰ Naraschewski, 45–48.

St. James. Presumably, Conques played a crucial role in the transformation between both styles.

As a preliminary conclusion, it can be stated that Conques readily adopted the advanced concepts and decorative elements of early Romanesque architecture from Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne. Apparently, the builders of Conques aspired to imitate the architecture of leading churches whose spiritual or institutional models they followed. This approach is most visible in their combined adoption of the chevets of Tours and Cluny II. Earlier Lombard, Merovingian or Carolingian influences appear to be minimal at best. Only some potential influences of Asturian and Visigothic

architecture can be identified. However, most of them also have parallels in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this somewhat restricted picture, the most innovative role of Conques would have been to help proliferate the new Romanesque concepts from the Loire in southern France and northern Spain. Only the evolution from square billet moldings to round billet moldings seems to be a unique contribution of Conques. But of course, Conques would not have become as famous as it is today if it had not introduced significant innovations that go beyond the picture described. The potential origins of these rather unique innovations of Conques will be analyzed in the next two chapters.

Potential Byzantine models of the abbey church of Conques

In the 19th century, the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques was subject of a highly intrusive Neo-Byzantine reconstruction project that was fortunately not executed. The Neo-Byzantine nature of this project responded to historicist tendencies of its time, often equating Romanesque with Byzantine by default. As far as we know, the style of the reconstruction project was not the consequence of a perceived specific Byzantine character of the medieval abbey church of Conques. This observation led Palladino to conclude a paper on this reconstruction project with the provocative question: "Is there, indeed, anything "Byzantine" in Conques?"⁴¹ This chapter aims to provide an answer to his question. Surprisingly, a distinctive Byzantine character of Conques can be proven when applying a novel semi-statistical method.

The previous chapter has shown that, at the time of its construction, the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques was a rather advanced building that adopted recent architectural innovations from central France. Its chevet suggests that the monks of Conques imitated the designs of Tours and Cluny to prominently display their ambition of becoming a pre-eminent pilgrimage destination and the center of an extended and influential monastic network. Beyond that, the abbey church of Conques features several highly innovative architectural or decorative elements that do not have any relevant precedence in Latin Europe. Some have not found any succession either. These innovative elements

established the art-historical fame of Conques and gave it a unique character.

In the following sections, it is shown that these elements have relevant precursors on a prototypical pilgrimage route from Conques to the Holy Land (Figure 4). In fact, it seems that the half-dozen most important Byzantine churches along this route have left characteristic traces in Conques (Table 1). While the available data are not sufficient to prove the model role of the individual churches beyond doubt, a new overall picture emerges: The entirety of its innovative elements provides Conques with a consistent Byzantine character distinguishing it from most other Romanesque churches in France or Spain (Table 2). Some of these elements have contemporarily or later found adoption at Saint-Sernin in Toulouse, San Martín in Frómista, and the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela as well as some smaller churches along the southern Ways of St. James. However, none of them is as consistently Byzantine as Conques.

A short history of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Before the individual decorative elements of Conques are analyzed, the importance of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the time of its construction is briefly outlined. Due to repeated violent conflicts with the Islamic inhabitants of the Holy Land, the European pilgrimage to its Holy Places saw several phases of

⁴¹ Adrien Palladino, "Byzance à Conques? An Unrealized Dream of 'Neo-Byzantine' Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France," in

Contextualizing Conques. Imaginaries, Narratives & Geographies, ed. Ivan Foletti et al., Convivium Supplementum 13, 2023, 40.

‘boom’ and ‘bust’.⁴² A 7th century pilgrimage report from the Gallic bishop Arculf already included a detailed floor plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Figure 5). This report is preserved in a 9th century copy from Reichenau Abbey.⁴³ The renewed exchange between emperor Otto I and his Byzantine counterpart led to an increased interest in the pilgrimage to the Holy Land as well as to significant cultural imports from the Byzantine world to the empire. For example, it is known that abbot Gausmarus of Savigny, count Guillermus of Vienne, Adalpertus, a monk of St. Emmeram in Regensburg, Hidda of Eastphalia, sister of margrave Gero I, a close confidant of emperor Otto I and founder of Gernrode, duchess Judith of Bavaria, grandmother of emperor Henry II, bishop Conrad of Constance, and abbot Guarin de Lézat of Cuxa undertook successful pilgrimages to the Holy Land in the two decades from 960 to 980. At least some of these pilgrimages must have occurred under difficult circumstances. Anti-Christian riots destroyed the dome of the Anastasis in 966 killing patriarch John VII.

Fatimid domination of the Holy Land from 979-1009 temporarily impeded pilgrimages. The Jubilee year 1000 revitalized western interest in the Holy Land. The known pilgrims of this period include abbot Gunterius of Angers near Tours, bishop Radulf of Périgueux, bishop Alduin of Limoges, abbot Gauzlin of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, and bishop Stephen II of Apt. This prominent list is quite remarkable since groundbreaking Romanesque buildings were erected shortly thereafter in Tours, Limoges, Benoît-sur-Loire, and Périgueux. At least in Tours, Limoges, and Périgueux, influences from the Byzantine world are quite likely, as will be discussed below. It is no less

remarkable that the groundbreaking innovations of the porch tower of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, compound piers and figured or historiated capitals, were preceded by a pilgrimage of its builder to Jerusalem. This short boom phase lasted until the far-reaching destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009 under caliph Al-Hakim which also led to a temporary ban of Christian pilgrimages.

Pilgrimages resumed in 1027, for example by archbishop Poppo of Trier and larger groups of pilgrims from Aquitaine, Normandy, and Germany. The millennial anniversary of the passion of Christ in 1033 triggered another wave of pilgrims, as documented by Rodulfus Glaber. The most prominent of them included abbot Wino of Helmarshausen, bishop Berengar of Elne, and duke Robert I of Normandy. Monks of Reichenau Abbey embarked on pilgrimages to the Holy Land at least three times in the years from 1038 to 1053.⁴⁴ Eventually, the Anastasis of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was reconstructed in 1048, financed by the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos.

The well-publicized near failure of the prominent pilgrimage under the leadership of the bishops Gunther of Bamberg and Siegfried I of Mainz in 1064/65, due to a raid by Bedouins, certainly reduced the western propensity for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.⁴⁵ With reported participants in the order of 7,000-12,000, this pilgrimage is considered the largest of the 11th century.⁴⁶ Eventually, the conquest of Jerusalem by the Turkish Seljuks in 1071 inhibited further pilgrimages and preempted the era of the Crusades. At the same time, it sparked European interest in the pilgrimage of St. James. After the Christian reconquest of Jerusalem,

⁴² The following summary is mainly based on: Max Ritter, “A Desire against All Odds and Difficulties? The Presence of Christian Pilgrims in Early Muslim Jerusalem, Seventh to Tenth Century,” in *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem: Journeys, Destinations, Experiences across Times and Cultures. Proceedings of the Conference Held in Jerusalem, 5th to 7th December 2017*, ed. Falko Daim et al., Byzanz Zwischen Orient Und Okzident 19 (Mainz, 2020), 87–108; David Jacoby, “Bishop Gunther of Bamberg, Byzantium and Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Eleventh Century,” in *Zwischen Polis, Provinz Und Peripherie: Beiträge Zur Byzantinischen Geschichte Und Kultur*, ed. Anuscha Monchizadeh and Lars Martin Hoffmann, Mainzer Veröffentlichungen Zur Byzantinistik 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 267–86.

⁴³ Matthias Untermann, “Ein Kloster, sieben Kirchen: Einführung in die Baugeschichte der Reichenau,” in *Die Klosterinsel Reichenau im*

Mittelalter: Geschichte - Kunst - Architektur, ed. Wolfgang Zimmermann, Olaf Siart, and Marvin Gedigk (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 125 f.

⁴⁴ Michael Borgolte, “Die Abtei Reichenau in der Globalgeschichte des Mittelalters: Eine zögernde Öffnung von der Insel zur Welt,” in *Welterbe des Mittelalters: 1300 Jahre Klosterinsel Reichenau*, ed. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 57.

⁴⁵ Other co-leaders of this pilgrimage included bishop William of Utrecht and bishop Otto of Regensburg.

⁴⁶ Likely these numbers were inflated. They nevertheless attest how large the pilgrimage movement had become by that time.

pilgrimages to the Holy Land resumed in the years of 1099-1187.

For the purposes of our analysis, it can be concluded that the nearly four decades of 1027-65 were a phase of high European interest in the pilgrimage to the Holy Land with its culmination around 1047-65. This time frame perfectly coincides with the construction of the ambulatory and the lower parts of the abbey church of Conques under abbot Odolric. It is noteworthy that many pilgrims from Aquitaine are recorded for this period. The period after the resumption of the pilgrimages in 1099 coincides with the completion of the construction of Conques, including the cloister, the portal of the Last Judgment, the vaulting, and the octagonal crossing tower. In contrast, the years in which the gallery level of Conques was built fell into the period of inhibited pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Byzantine churches along the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land

Most likely, a prototypical mid-11th century pilgrim from the abbey of Conques would have taken the following travel route to the Holy Land (Figure 4). He first would have crossed the Alps and northern Italy to reach the Adriatic Sea. While the lagoon of Venice and Ravenna had long ceased to be part of the Byzantine Empire, the cultural influence of Byzantium could still be felt, as is visible at the Basilica of San Marco in Venice from the second half of the 11th century. Most likely, he would have boarded a ship in the lagoon of Venice and sailed along the Croatian coast to a harbor in or near today's Albania. Alternatively, he could have taken the land route via Italy to Brindisi and crossed the Adriatic Sea by ship from there. He would then have taken the land route through Macedonia to Constantinople. The capital of the Byzantine empire was a worthy travel destination of its own. From Constantinople, he could have taken different land or sea routes through or around Asia Minor to reach the coastal area of today's Lebanon. From there, he would have taken the land route to Jerusalem.

Given the extended duration of such a pilgrimage, our traveler would have made extended stops to visit the many other memorable sites along his route. Undoubtedly, the most frequented independent pilgrimage destinations in the Eastern Mediterranean were the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'an near Antioch, and the Basilica of St. John the Apostle in Ephesus. All three of them had architecturally important buildings and could be visited with only minor detours from the described pilgrimage route. While it is not very likely that our pilgrim would have visited the Ummayyad mosque in Damascus, we add it to the list of investigated buildings. As the former Basilica of St. John the Baptist, it still had importance for Christians. But more importantly, it can be considered a Byzantine building from an architectural perspective. As the primary mosque of the Ummayyad dynasty, it had a cultural influence that ranged from Syria via North Africa to the caliphate of Córdoba in Spain, even including Toledo. Thereby, it may have also influenced the vanished Islamic architecture of the Holy Land. Certainly, our pilgrim would have spent considerable time in Constantinople. Its most extraordinary churches included the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles. But the city also offered a significant number of other important churches. We only mention the monastery of Stoudios as a prominent example of an early Byzantine basilica and the Myrelaion as one of the earliest Byzantine churches of the cross-in-square type. The presumed earliest church of this type, the Nea Ekklesia, also existed in Constantinople but is no longer extant. On the midway of the land route through Macedonia, the pilgrim would have made an extended stop in Thessaloniki, the second most important city of the Byzantine empire. The basilica Hagios Demetrios is another example of a typical early Byzantine church. The relatively small church Panagia Chalkeon represented the latest innovations of Byzantine architecture. It was one of the most recent Byzantine churches and features several decorative innovations that would dominate the style of Byzantine architecture for the rest of the 11th and 12th centuries. While sailing across the Adriatic Sea, the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč would have provided an attractive harbor stop. Finally,

the pilgrim could have gained first impressions of Byzantine art and architecture in the lagoon of Venice before boarding his ship. In the first half of the 11th century, the Basilica of San Marco in Venice was yet to be built. At this time, Torcello with its adjacent churches of Santa Maria Assunta and Santa Fosca would have been a more relevant place to be visited. But the Basilica of St. Marco in Venice might have been relevant for the later construction phases of Conques. It will be briefly touched as well.

In the following sections, we will demonstrate how each of the mentioned churches may have influenced the architecture of the abbey church of Conques. The list of investigated buildings does not only include most of the leading buildings of Byzantine architecture. One can even show that each of them had at least one characteristic element that also exists in Conques, but hardly anywhere else in Romanesque architecture. In some cases, like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Church of Simeon Stylites, some of the elements investigated were unique. In most others, the analyzed buildings were chosen as leading representatives of common characteristics of Byzantine architecture. To summarize, the list of investigated Byzantine buildings along the described pilgrimage route includes:

- Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem
- Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an
- Umayyad mosque in Damascus, successor of the Basilica of St. John the Baptist
- Basilica of St. John the Apostle in Ephesus
- Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople
- Hagia Sophia in Constantinople
- Myrelaion in Constantinople
- Monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople
- Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki
- Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki
- Euphrasian basilica in Poreč
- Santa Fosca in Torcello
- San Marco in Venice

The itinerary described was one of the major traffic routes of the medieval world. It was not only driven by the pilgrimage to the Holy Land but also by economic and political exchanges with Constantinople. In medieval times, ideas travelled with people. Hence, major traffic routes must have played a critical role in the dissemination of cultural innovations.

Differentiating building elements of the abbey church of Conques

The abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques possesses a significant number of architectural, decorative or iconographic elements that were unusual if not unique at the time of its construction. Some of these elements can also be found at Saint-Sernin in Toulouse, San Martín in Frómista or the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela which were built in close conjunction with Conques. While the construction site of Conques was opened first, some of the other construction sites may have progressed faster, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, the relative dating of the construction phases of these buildings is still subject of debate.⁴⁷ Hence, any mention of an innovative or groundbreaking feature of Conques tacitly includes the possibility that it was rather introduced in Toulouse, Frómista or Compostela and adopted shortly thereafter in Conques.

To provide a complete picture, the following analysis includes four architectural elements that were already introduced in a few places like Tours and Limoges or in the Ottonian architecture of the empire. They are included here since they presumably had Byzantine models as well:

- Chevet with ambulatory and radial chapels
- Galleries of the nave
- Cruciform floor plan with wide transepts featuring side aisles and galleries
- Alternating supports of the arcades of the nave

⁴⁷ Lei Huang and Éric Sparhubert, "Building the Abbey Church," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st*

Centuries), ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 145.

The list of building elements that are characteristic of Conques is as follows. The famous tympanum of the Last Judgment has a more complex background and will be discussed in the next chapter.

- Octagonal crossing tower with squinches
- Single-story crossing tower as lantern tower
- Blind arcade of the apse (façade)
- Stacked columns of the radial chapels
- Eyebrow shaped cornices of the windows of the radial chapels
- Stepped profiles of windows and portals
- Framed group of windows with oculus of the west façade
- Oculus in spandrels of the cloister portal and of the double windows of the west façade
- Coupled columns of gallery and cloister windows
- Sculptures of angels in the squinches of the crossing tower
- Basket capitals with interlace
- Personifications of curiosity at the archivolt of the tympanum of the Last Judgment
- Absence of Carolingian westwork or of prominent west tower(s)
- Absence of a crypt, permitting veneration of Sainte-Foy in the sanctuary
- The Majesty of Sainte-Foy as a three-dimensional icon
- Traces of the treasury to the Byzantine world

In total, 20 characteristic elements of Conques will be analyzed, most of them are architectural or decorative elements of the abbey church. By applying a method of Analytical Humanities, as described in the appendix, it will be shown that the entirety of these elements provides the abbey church of Conques with a distinctive Neo-Byzantine character, going beyond the elements of the Romanesque architecture described in the previous chapter.

As a caveat, it needs to be noted that the semi-statistical method applied only allows conclusions to be drawn regarding the overall style of the abbey church in Conques. Neither can it be derived that the chosen Byzantine precursor buildings were the actual models of

Conques, nor can it be assumed that the adoption of these elements was the result of a real pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Due to their prominence, they may have influenced other buildings that may have been more accessible, but may be lost by now. Also, knowledge about the identified building elements may have spread to Conques in a more complex way combining information from several sources or from several journeys to the Eastern Mediterranean. Selected building elements may even have been invented in Conques autonomously or may have been a result of the topographic constraints of the site. Nevertheless, the overall impression of the known medieval building is very consistent. It leads to the conclusion that the construction of the abbey church of Conques was a medieval Neo-Byzantine project.

Byzantine precursors of the differentiating elements

In order to take the perspective of a medieval traveler, the differentiating building elements of Conques will be discussed in conjunction with the Byzantine buildings that feature them. The focus will be on the three most important pilgrimage sites of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus, and the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'an. The Basilica of St. John also serves as a substitute for the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople which no longer exists. In Constantinople, the focus will also be on Hagia Sophia. Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki represents the latest trends in Byzantine architecture. The unusual crossing tower of Conques is discussed in conjunction with the Ummayyad mosque in Damascus and the Myrelaion in Constantinople. The Euphrasian basilica in Poreč adds an interesting iconographic detail. The other churches investigated have overlapping elements with the churches just mentioned. They will be introduced in the context of these major churches.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE AS POTENTIAL MODEL FOR CHEVET AND NAVE

The basic architecture of the abbey church of Conques, including the ambulatory with radial chapels, the transepts, and the nave with galleries, bears a significant structural resemblance to the Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Even some decorative elements of Conques point in this direction. The Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulchre consisted of the Anastasis, a rotunda with the presumed tomb of Jesus at its center, and a large basilica with galleries (Figure 6).⁴⁸ Both buildings were connected by an atrium. Recent research on the potential origins of the Romanesque chevet with ambulatory and radial chapels by Vergnolle and others suggests that the ambulatory may have been a reference to the Anastasis.⁴⁹ The existence of three radial chapels at some of the earliest ambulatories would speak for this hypothesis. An important supportive indication is the lost but highly influential abbey church of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon from 1001-18. It consisted of a rotunda that was directly attached to a cruciform basilica with galleries.⁵⁰ Apart from the missing atrium, Saint-Bénigne must have been a rather close approximation of the overall disposition of the Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulchre. If one interprets the transepts of Sainte-Foy as a vaulted copy of the atrium of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the analogy becomes even closer.

On the other hand, the architecture of the Anastasis corresponded to the standard type of Roman mausoleum. Mausoleums of that type also existed in Rome, such as the Mausoleum of Helena, Santa Constanza or Sant'Andrea of Old-St. Peter. All of them were connected to larger churches. Another very prominent example must have been the Mausoleum of

Constantine that was attached to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.⁵¹ There are indications that it may also have had three apsidioles. Therefore, the identification of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Holy Apostles as a potential model of Conques is somewhat interchangeable. The Holy Apostles will be addressed in more detail in the next section.

Ambulatories also existed in Rome at some circiform funerary basilicas from the early Christian period. However, these buildings were lacking radial chapels and they served a different liturgical purpose. In the Eastern Mediterranean and Caucasus, ambulatories existed in several centralized churches of the tetraconch type. Particularly relevant examples are the tetraconch of Pelusium (Tell el-Farama) at the border between ancient Palestine and Egypt, that even had a cruciform floor plan, and the tetraconch of the Syrian pilgrimage complex in Resafa.⁵² Eventually, influences from the Holy Land, Constantinople, and Rome may have played a combined role in the invention of the Romanesque ambulatory with radial chapels. Given the outstanding religious significance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the latter continues to be the most important model.

Galleries of the nave were a common feature of many early Byzantine basilicas, such as the monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople or Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki, to name a few prominent examples. There are no known precursors in the Early Christian architecture of the Latin West. The galleries of San Lorenzo fuori le mura and Sant'Agnese fuori le mura in Rome have a very specific topographic background and are no suitable counterexamples.⁵³ Hence, the galleries of Conques are a rather strong indicator of Byzantine

⁴⁸ Jürgen Krüger, *Die Grabeskirche zu Jerusalem: Geschichte, Gestalt, Bedeutung* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2000), 39–60; Robert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands*, Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28–34.

⁴⁹ Éliane Vergnolle, "Les tribunes de chevet dans l'architecture romane du début du XI^e siècle," in *Saint-Martial de Limoges: Millénaire de l'abbatiale romane (1018-2018) sous la direction d'Éliane Vergnolle*, vol. 1, Bulletin monumental 178 (Paris: Société française d'archéologie, 2020), 103–19.

⁵⁰ Vergnolle, "Saint-Bénigne de Dijon."

⁵¹ Mark J. Johnson, "Constantine's Apostoleion: A Reappraisal," in *The Holy Apostles: A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Robert G. Ousterhout, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020), 79–98.

⁵² Charles Bonnet, "Topographie Chrétienne de l'Antique Péluse (Farama) en Égypte," in *Architecture paléochrétienne*, ed. Jean-Michel Spieser, Collection Grèce-Rome-Byzance. Études fribourgeoises d'Histoire, d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art (Gollion: Infolio, 2011), 68 f.

⁵³ Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen in Rom*, 260–73.

influence, albeit only indirectly via the earlier churches in Tours and Limoges.

A significant architectural innovation of the decades around 1100 was the addition of blind arcades with half columns to the façades of apses. Conques counts among the earliest of them (Figure 26). Other contemporary examples include Pisa cathedral, Speyer cathedral, and Saint-Eutrope in Saintes. A rare historical source suggests that these blind arcades were deliberate references to the arcade of the Anastasis. The apse of the cathedral of Elne in medieval Catalonia from around 1040 has such a blind arcade as well, albeit realized in a simplified way with undecorated pilaster strips. A historical source claims that it was modeled after the Holy Sepulchre following the return of bishop Berenguer from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.⁵⁴

To conclude, the combination of an ambulatory with radial chapels, transepts, galleries in the nave, and a blind arcade at the exterior wall of the apse has a highly significant parallel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

It was already mentioned that the capitals of the chevet adorned with interlace (Figure 7) are a special characteristic of Conques. The sheer existence of interlace as a decorative element cannot be considered a trace of Byzantine influence. In fact, excavations of the 1970s have shown that interlace was already employed as a decorative element at the earlier abbey church of Conques.⁵⁵ Only the use of three-stranded rather than two-stranded interlace might be an indication of inspirations from the east. But the view to Lombard Italy would already be sufficient to find potential models. Further examples existed in Carolingian art. It is the way in which interlace is used at the capitals of Conques which points beyond Lombard Italy.

The capitals of Conques are reminiscent of the finely crafted basket capitals of the Byzantine empire. Prominent examples of such basket capitals existed at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.⁵⁶ Recent research has shown that basket capitals with interlace also exist at

the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and were rather frequent in the Holy Land.⁵⁷ It is not secured that the basket capitals of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre go back to the days of Constantine. But similar basket capitals from St. Stephen in Jerusalem can confidently be dated to 460. They are even older than the extant examples from Constantinople or Egypt. Hence, the basket capitals with interlace of Conques need to be considered explicit references to the Byzantine empire, if not to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself. The basket capitals of the Holy Land also provide a natural explanation for the fusion of interlace and palmettes at Conques. Many of the corresponding capitals of the Holy Land literally show baskets made of wickerwork with plants and sometimes animals in them. The fusion of interlace and palmettes of Conques only required omitting the edge of the baskets from earlier capitals.

ST. JOHN IN EPHEBUS AND THE HOLY APOSTLES AS POTENTIAL MODELS FOR THE FLOOR PLAN

The floor plan of Conques also has significant structural similarities with the Basilica of St. John the Apostle in Ephesus. To a lesser degree, these similarities also exist with the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Leaving the chevet with ambulatory and radial chapels aside, the floor plan of Conques has the shape of a Latin cross (Figure 10). In contrast to nearly all other cruciform churches of the Latin West from before 1100, the transepts of Conques have the same width as the nave which provides the floor plan with a rather ideal shape of a cross. The unusual width of the transepts is caused by their side aisles and galleries. The galleries were structurally needed to absorb the lateral pressure of the massive barrel vaults, both in the nave and in the transepts. Transepts with galleries were characteristic features of the five churches of the formerly so-called 'Pilgrimage type'.⁵⁸

Similarly, transepts with galleries were a characteristic feature of the Basilica of St. John the

⁵⁴ André Escarra, "L'abside majeure de la cathédrale d'Elne," *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 32 (2001): 46 f.

⁵⁵ Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity," 70.

⁵⁶ Tarkhanova, "Early Byzantine 'Basket' Capitals in Churches and Monasteries of the Holy Land," 533.

⁵⁷ Tarkhanova, "Early Byzantine 'Basket' Capitals in Churches and Monasteries of the Holy Land."

⁵⁸ Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 157–62. These include Saint-Martin in Tours, Saint-Martial in Limoges, Sainte-Foy in Conques, Saint-Sernin in Toulouse, and the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The earlier cathedral of Sainte-Croix in Orléans is lost.

Apostle in Ephesus where they were needed to absorb the lateral pressure of its large domes (Figure 8).⁵⁹ A 6th century source saw in the Basilica of St. John a close copy of the lost Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.⁶⁰ According to recent research, St. John may even have been the earlier of the two churches.⁶¹ San Marco in Venice (Figure 9) from the second half of the 11th century was reported to be another near-copy of the Holy Apostles.⁶² For the purposes of our discussion, St. John, the Holy Apostles and, for the later construction phases of Conques, San Marco form a rather homogeneous group of potential models. In contrast to widespread misconceptions, all three of them were built on the floor plan of a Latin Cross.⁶³ Given the higher similarity with the floor plan of Conques, the following analysis will focus on St. John in Ephesus. There is some uncertainty whether the Church of the Holy Apostles was closer to St. John or to San Marco. Its current reconstruction by Karydis sees a higher degree of similarity with San Marco while some of the following conclusions suggest that it may have been closer to St. John.⁶⁴

Ephesus was the most important pilgrimage destination in Asia Minor and one of the most important of all Christianity. It received a significant imperial donation at the end of the 8th century and attracted pilgrims until the 15th century.⁶⁵ Apart from the tomb of St. John the Apostle, it offered several further attractions, such as the tomb of Maria Magdalena and the tomb of the apostle Timothy. Ephesus gained particular importance as a pilgrimage destination during the Crusades. For example, it is known that in 1147, the German and French kings

Conrad III and Louis VII celebrated Christmas in Ephesus.⁶⁶ Ephesus also had significant importance for the propaganda of the pilgrimage of St. James. According to the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, which promoted the biased perspective of Compostela, the three apostolic burial sites of Santiago de Compostela, Rome, and Ephesus represented all Christianity.⁶⁷ Compostela stood for the evangelization of the West, Ephesus for the evangelization of the East, while Rome only presided over them without significant impact on the ground. We cannot necessarily assume that the monks of Conques shared this perspective. The *Liber Sancti Jacobi* was only written in the 12th century anyway. Nevertheless, this prominent mention proves the importance and visibility of Ephesus in the High Middle Ages in southern France and northern Spain.

Apart from the existence of galleries in the transepts, it is another analogy between Ephesus and Conques that the nave without narthex has about twice the length of the transepts.⁶⁸ These harmonic proportions of the floor plan are accentuated by the fact that both churches had alternating supports in the nave.

In the case of St. John, the nave consisted of two modules of equal size each carrying a dome (Figure 8). The arcades of the nave were restricted to the respective modules with a piece of wall at their juncture. Modules of similar size also formed the crossing, the transepts and the eastern arm. In total, St. John was composed of six modules of somewhat equal size each carrying a dome. The Holy Apostles and San Marco only had five

⁵⁹ Originally, the burial site in Ephesus referred to St. John the Theologian, the presumed author of the Apocalypse. However, due to earlier confusion with St. John the Evangelist, the medieval connotation of Ephesus was with St. John the Apostle in a broader sense. Andreas Thiel, *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos*, Spätantike, frühes Christentum, Byzanz / B 16 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005), 100.

⁶⁰ Nikolaos Karydis, "Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles: A New Reconstruction Proposal," in *The Holy Apostles: A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Robert G. Ousterhout, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020), 103.

⁶¹ Karydis, 104; Robert G. Ousterhout, "The Church of the Holy Apostles and Its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture," in *The Holy Apostles: A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Robert G. Ousterhout, Dumbarton Oaks

Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020), 215.

⁶² Karydis, "Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles," 112.

⁶³ Karydis, 113–19.

⁶⁴ Karydis, 114–19.

⁶⁵ Clive Foss, "Pilgrimage in Medieval Asia Minor," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 130, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1291859>.

⁶⁶ Thiel, *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos*, 106.

⁶⁷ Klaus Herbers, "Codex Calixtinus. The Book of the Church of Compostela," in *Compostela and Europe: The Story of Diego Gelmírez* (Milano: Skira, 2010), 125.

⁶⁸ This statement refers to the external dimensions of the two churches. In Ephesus, the two modules of the nave are slightly smaller than the ones of the transepts. This reduction in length is largely compensated by a side aisle between narthex and the inner part of the first module. Such an additional aisle does not exist in Conques.

domes necessitating the domes of the nave and the crossing to be larger to form a Latin Cross.⁶⁹

Conques also has alternating supports in the nave, a fact which has attracted little attention in recent literature. But in contrast to St. John, these are not the result of its underlying architecture but of a decorative nature. In Conques, the central pier of the arcade of the nave is lacking engaged columns. The same applies to the outer piers. If one reads the engaged columns as mimicry of a classic column, the arcade of Conques has the pseudo-sequence of pier – column – pier – column – pier, starting from the pier of the narthex (Figure 12). In the Ottonian architecture of the empire, such a sequence is known as Rhenish alternating supports. In contrast to the Ottonian architecture, alternating supports were very infrequent in French Romanesque architecture. The only prominent examples exist at Notre-Dame in Jumièges and at Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers.

At first glance, this fact may rather point towards models in the German empire than to Byzantine models. However, the genesis of the alternating supports in the German empire conveys a different picture. The presumably earliest known example of alternating supports in the Latin West existed at the Carolingian abbey church of Reichenau, the *Heito Münster*.⁷⁰ The latter was a highly innovative building that introduced the cruciform floor plan, alternating supports, and the separated crossing to the East Frankish kingdom. In contrast to Conques, the transepts did not have side aisles and there are no indications for the existence of galleries. In addition to its alternating supports of the nave, the *Heito Münster* had the same harmonious proportions between east arm, transepts, and nave as St. John in Ephesus or Conques leading to a rather short nave compared to other Carolingian or Romanesque churches.⁷¹ Abbot Heito dedicated the abbey church in 816, five years after

he had returned from an envoy mission to Constantinople on behalf of Charlemagne.⁷² His successor added a separate westwork, in line with Carolingian practices. The unusual characteristics of the *Heito Münster* point to models in the Byzantine empire. In fact, some believe that the Münster was built according to the model of the Holy Apostles.⁷³ At this early period, no other cross-shaped church from Constantinople is known that could have served as alternative model.⁷⁴ The Nea Ekklesia of Basil I, the assumed prototype of the cross-in-square churches, was yet to be built. The same applies to the Carolingian precursor of San Marco in Venice which potentially also followed the model of the Holy Apostles.⁷⁵ The only somewhat close precursor would have been the church of St. Sophia in Sofia from the 6th century. But around 811, Bulgaria did not constitute a safe travel route for Christian pilgrims. Furthermore, St. Sophia does not have the same harmonious proportions between transepts and nave, nor does it have a separated crossing or alternating supports in the nave. It will be shown later that the *Heito Münster* of Reichenau Abbey may have been known in Conques.

The innovative features of the *Heito Münster* did not find any notable succession in the East Frankish kingdom. Only in the early Ottonian period, a similar church was constructed in Gernrode. The collegiate church of St. Cyriac has the same features as described for the *Heito Münster* of Reichenau (Figure 11). In addition, its nave is crowned by galleries. Such galleries were already identified as Byzantine elements in the context of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The church of Gernrode was built in the second half of the 10th century by margrave Gero I, a close confidant of emperor Otto I, in a period of significant Byzantine influences. Emperor Otto I married his son Otto II to the Byzantine princess Theophanu to establish closer ties with the Byzantine empire. Gero's sister Hidda became

⁶⁹ As a consequence of having only one dome in the nave, San Marco has no alternating supports in the nave. The situation of the Holy Apostles with respect to alternating supports is unknown.

⁷⁰ Marlene Kleiner, "Keine Gründung auf der grünen Wiese? Neue Thesen und offene Fragen zur Baugeschichte des Reichenauer Münsters," in *Die Klosterinsel Reichenau im Mittelalter: Geschichte - Kunst - Architektur*, ed. Wolfgang Zimmermann, Olaf Siart, and Marvin Gedigk (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 143–47.

⁷¹ This only holds if one measures the dimensions at clerestory level, without the side aisles of the nave.

⁷² Untermann, "Ein Kloster, sieben Kirchen," 123.

⁷³ Untermann, 123.

⁷⁴ John Freely and Ahmet Sefik Çakmak, *Byzantine Monuments of Istanbul* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23–168; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 175–257.

⁷⁵ Ousterhout, "The Church of the Holy Apostles and Its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture," 215.

one of the first pilgrims to the Holy Land who is known by name. Hence, the construction of the collegiate church of Gernrode also has a distinctive Byzantine connotation. The churches of Reichenau and Gernrode later influenced the design of the first cathedral of Bamberg, the much-praised *Heinrichsdom*, a lighthouse building for the adoption of the cruciform floor plan in the empire.⁷⁶

From the very prominent examples of Reichenau and Gernrode, one can conclude that the combination of a cruciform floor plan with a nave twice the length of the transepts and accentuated by alternating supports was considered a reflection of Byzantine architecture in the empire. Presumably, it constituted a copy of the Church of the Holy Apostles or the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus. Recent findings even suggest that the larger width of the west arms of Reichenau and Gernrode, caused by their side aisles, may have had correspondence at the Holy Apostles too.⁷⁷

In any case, alternating supports can be considered an element of Byzantine architecture on their own. One can find alternating supports at the arcade of the Anastasis as well as at the arcade of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. They existed at the atrium of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and still exist at its equivalent of the Ummayyad mosque in Damascus. Alternating supports can also be found at several early Byzantine basilicas such as Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki.

The abbey church of Jumièges, one of only two other prominent examples of alternating supports in France, provides another hint in Byzantine direction. In contrast to virtually all other French Romanesque churches, the mullioned gallery windows of Jumièges have three rather than two window openings. Mullioned windows with three openings are a characteristic feature of early Christian or Byzantine architecture, as

can be seen at San Vitale in Ravenna and many other Byzantine churches.

The other prominent example of alternating supports in French Romanesque architecture is the collegiate church of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand in Poitiers. It was built until 1049 with significant funding from Agnes of Burgundy, the mother-in-law of emperor Henry III. In the 1040s, she had spent several years at his imperial court. These were years in which the creation of copies of the Anastasis or of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne was very fashionable, as will be outlined later. Initially, Saint-Hilaire had an ideal cruciform shape without side aisles such as Santa Croce in Ravenna.⁷⁸ In 1060-80, it was remodeled in a very unusual way. Barrel vaults supported by detached columns were inserted into the nave. Side aisles were added to it.⁷⁹ The openings from the nave to the side aisles had the form of mullioned portals with discharging arches, like the gallery windows of Conques. The use of mullioned portals instead of an arcade introduced alternating supports to the nave (Figure 14). In view of the former contacts of Agnes to the empire, such an approach could have been known from Ottonian churches such as St. Vitus in Drübeck near Gernrode. However, at this time, alternating supports were no longer fashionable in the empire. The Salian dynasty had their cultural view firmly directed towards northern Italy, for example to Pomposa. At Saint-Hilaire, the alternating supports were executed in a peculiar manner. The western walls of the transepts also have side aisles with a fake arcade and fake gallery windows. When viewed from the crossing, the transepts of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand (Figure 15) look a bit like Conques (Figure 13) or its predecessors in Tours and Limoges. The side aisles of the transepts open themselves to the nave through a separate arch. The sequence of mullioned portals of the nave only starts after this separate arch. This configuration with a

⁷⁶ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 22-29.

⁷⁷ Ancient foundations of the former Fatih Camii, the successor of the Holy Apostles, suggest that the latter may have had exterior porticoes around its west arm, similar to the corresponding porticoes of San Marco in Venice. See Julian Raby, "From the Founder of Constantinople to the Founder of Istanbul: Mehmed the Conqueror, Fatih Camii, and the Church of the Holy Apostles," in *The Holy Apostles: A Lost*

Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past, ed. Margaret Mullett and Robert G. Ousterhout, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020), 271-77.

⁷⁸ Marie-Thérèse Camus, "La reconstruction de Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand de Poitiers à l'époque romane: la marche des travaux (suite et fin)," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 99-100 (1982): 242.

⁷⁹ Camus, 239 f.

singular arch at the crossing is also known from the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus, from San Marco in Venice and from the current reconstruction of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. In the same spirit, the somewhat artificial alternating supports of the nave of Conques have their oriental ‘pier’ only after a singular arch that connects the nave to the side aisle of the transept (Figure 13).

Whether these structural similarities are mere coincidence or whether they can be read as a joint reference of Saint-Hilaire and Conques to St. John in Ephesus or to the Holy Apostles needs to be left open.

But it is known that similar Byzantine influences manifested themselves in the vicinity of Conques shortly before the completion of its abbey church. From 1110 on, about sixty Romanesque churches of a new type were built to the west of Conques and further to the north, about half of them in the Perigord.⁸⁰ In them, the barrel vaults of Conques and of other Romanesque churches were replaced by a sequence of round domes. It is generally believed that these domes were derived from San Marco, the Holy Apostles, St. John in Ephesus or from some smaller churches in Cyprus or in western Asia Minor.⁸¹ One of the earliest of them, if not the earliest, was erected in Cahors.⁸² Cahors is the next major stop on the *Via Podiensis* after Conques. In 1112, the bishop of Cahors returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land that he had undertaken with the count of Toulouse.⁸³ He brought with him relics of the headcloth of Christ’s burial. The construction site of the cathedral of Cahors was opened when he had left in 1109. Its two massive domes may have been built around 1140. Roughly at the same time, similar domes were constructed at the (former) cathedrals of Angoulême and Périgueux.⁸⁴ From about 1120–70, an even more ambitious project was undertaken in Périgueux. The

collegiate church and current cathedral of Saint-Front (Figure 16) was erected as a simplified version of San Marco in Venice or potentially even of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, albeit based on a Greek rather than a Latin Cross.⁸⁵ No other Romanesque near-copy of the Church of the Holy Apostles with such proximity is known in the Latin West. Périgueux, about 180 km northwest of Conques, was a prominent stop on the *Via Lemovicensis*, one of the four major Ways of St. James in France. Hence, it was an important competitor of Conques in the ‘pilgrimage business.’ If the builders of Saint-Front aspired to build a near-identical copy of San Marco or of the Holy Apostles, not even to talk about the more modest project in neighboring Cahors, why shouldn’t the builders of Conques have had the same idea less than a century earlier?⁸⁶

To complete the picture, several domed churches were built in Apulia in the 11th and 12th centuries.⁸⁷ Also here, connections to Cyprus or to the Holy Apostles and its two discussed copies are assumed. The most prominent of them is the cathedral of San Sabino in Canosa. Its 11th century floor plan exhibits a Latin Cross with five domes.⁸⁸ The distribution of domes mirrors the situation of St. John in Ephesus, albeit without a dome over the apse. The nave of San Sabino also had a very unusual mixture of piers and columns, somewhat resembling the situation of Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers. This is another indication that cruciform churches that were built after the examples of the Holy Apostles or of St. John in Ephesus often exhibited a certain alternation of piers and columns in the nave.

For the sake of completeness, it shall be noted that the alternating supports of Conques are limited to the arcades of the ground floor. At gallery level, there is no alternation (Figure 12 and Figure 13). In contrast, the alternating supports of Gernrode, Hagios Demetrios in

⁸⁰ Tassos Papacostas, “The Medieval Progeny of the Holy Apostles,” in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 389–95.

⁸¹ Ousterhout, “The Church of the Holy Apostles and Its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture,” 217–22.

⁸² Camille Enlart argued that Cahors was the earliest of the French domed churches. Papacostas, “The Medieval Progeny of the Holy Apostles,” 392–94.

⁸³ Mireille Bénéjean-Lère, “La cathédrale Saint-Étienne de Cahors,” in *Congrès archéologique de France. 147^e session, 1989, Quercy* (Paris: Société Française d’Archéologie, 1993), 10 f.

⁸⁴ Vergnolle, *L’Art roman en France*, 217–22.

⁸⁵ Palladino, “Byzance à Conques?,” 26 f.

⁸⁶ The notion of near identity only applies to the general architectural structure of the interior of Saint-Front. The exterior, particularly its roofing, looked quite different in medieval times. The current exterior visibility of the domes is the result of a 19th century reconstruction.

⁸⁷ Papacostas, “The Medieval Progeny of the Holy Apostles,” 395–402.

⁸⁸ Papacostas, 397; Ousterhout, “The Church of the Holy Apostles and Its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture,” 221.

Thessaloniki, and presumably St. John also existed at gallery level. This is an indication that the imitation of Byzantine models had a particular importance under abbot Odolric but maybe less under abbot Bégon III. At the begin of his office, the pilgrimage to the Holy Land was suppressed by Islamic opposition until the reconquest of Jerusalem in 1099.

Even the liturgical disposition within the abbey church of Conques seems to have been analogous to the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus. In the latter, the *bema* was located in the crossing, above the sepulchral catacomb (Figure 8).⁸⁹ The *bema* was limited at the transition to the eastern arm of the church by the *synthronon*. As a result, no major liturgical use of the eastern arm and of the apse is known. According to a recent reconstruction of the liturgical disposition of Conques from the 11th and 12th centuries, the sanctuary occupied the crossing and the first two bays of the nave.⁹⁰ The main altar was positioned at the western end of the eastern arm, comparable to the position of the *synthronon* in Ephesus. An additional altar for Sainte-Foy is assumed in the center of the hemicycle of the ambulatory. Such a position would reflect the typical location of a tomb in Roman mausoleums such as the Holy Sepulchre in the center of the Anastasis. The liturgical disposition of Conques is even closer to the reconstructed disposition of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. According to a historical source, its *bema* was also located in the crossing.⁹¹ The eastern arm of the church was used as a passageway to the attached mausoleum of Constantine, which is reconstructed as a rotunda. Before Conques, a similarly novel liturgical disposition already existed at Saint-Martin in Tours. Contemporary examples are known from Toulouse and Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe.⁹² All of them have an ambulatory with radial chapels, a potential reference to the Anastasis in Jerusalem.

Finally, the floor plans of Conques and Ephesus exhibit another subtle analogy that was unusual in Romanesque architecture. In Ephesus, the central

portals of the narthex, on its exterior and interior side, are split into three separate bays. The west portal of Conques demonstrates a similar split, albeit into two bays. The separating wall between them is significantly more substantial than the typical trumeau of Romanesque or Gothic churches. During the restoration of 1879, a piece of masonry was found in the ground of the nave which indicates that an equivalent separation into two bays was also planned or even existed at the interior portal from the narthex to the nave.⁹³ Apparently, this trumeau-like wall was not executed or was removed when the final plans for the tympanum of the Last Judgment altered the internal geometry of the entrance.

The considerations above suggest that the floor plan of Conques may have been a deliberate reflection of the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus or of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Certainly, these anecdotal observations do not permit us to draw conclusions with confidence. But at least, the uncommon alternating supports of Conques can be considered another dedicated element of Byzantine architecture.

CHURCH OF ST. SIMEON STYLITES AS POTENTIAL MODEL FOR THE EAST AND WEST FAÇADES

The decoration of the radial chapels and of the west façade of Conques appears to be a near-copy of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an in Syria. The Church of St. Simeon Stylites was one of the most frequented pilgrimage destinations of the Eastern Mediterranean. It was constructed on the site of the pillar of St. Simeon Stylites. Due to its location in the *hinterland* of the metropolis of Antiochia, it was well connected to important traffic routes including the land route from Constantinople to Jerusalem. The large complex of the monastery of St. Simeon was already built in the second half of the 5th century. It predated the important churches of the Justinian era by nearly a

⁸⁹ Thiel, *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos*, 37, 63, Tafel I, II.

⁹⁰ Lei Huang and Éric Sparhubert, "Staging the Sacred: Liturgical Displays and Spatial Devices," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 160–68.

⁹¹ Karydis, "Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles," 115.

⁹² Huang and Sparhubert, "Staging the Sacred," 166 f.

⁹³ Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity," 68.

century, such as the Hagia Sophia, the Holy Apostles or St. John in Ephesus. The monastic complex was fortified before 969 due to continued Islamic attacks and seriously attacked by the emir of Aleppo in 985.⁹⁴ From 1017-47, it was temporarily under Islamic rule.⁹⁵ However, in this period, Islamic rulership did not prevent Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem either.

The Church of St. Simeon Stylites was one of the early prototypes of a Christian martyrion. It consisted of an octagon built around the pillar of St. Simeon with four basilicas attached to it (Figure 17). This martyrion was a precursor of the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus and of the Church of the Holy Apostles, since it had a cruciform floor plan made of four basilicas with side aisles, albeit without galleries. The existence of transepts with side aisles constitutes a first parallel with Conques. But more importantly, the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an may have been the primary decorative model for the east and west façades of Conques.

The radial chapels of Conques feature two elements that have no precedence in Romanesque architecture, although they were known in Roman architecture. They are decorated with stacked half columns standing on pedestals (Figure 19). In Rome, stacked half columns on pedestals can be found at the Flavian Amphitheater and at the Theater of Marcellus. Detached columns on pedestals exist at the Arch of Constantine, next to the Flavian Amphitheater. Shortly after Conques, stacked half columns were adopted at Saint-Sernin in Toulouse and at San Martín in Frómista. A further evolved adaptation can also be found at the central apse of the priory church of Conques in Sélestat and at a few dependent apses in Lorraine.⁹⁶ In these Romanesque examples, the upper row of half columns stands on the eyebrow shaped cornices of the windows rather than on a separate entablature, as was the case in Roman times. Hardly any other Romanesque examples exist. While

Rome would be a natural model location for Conques, the question remains why the builders of Conques would choose the decoration of an amphitheater, in which Christians died as martyrs, as a model for a radial chapel. A more straight-forward answer can be found in Syria near the discussed pilgrimage route. Stacked columns on pedestals decorate the central apse of the eastern basilica of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an (Figure 18). The association of the site with the stylite Simeon provides a natural motivation for such a decorative element. An even earlier model can be found at the pilgrimage site of Qalb Loze which was associated with St. Simeon Stylites too.⁹⁷ Qalb Loze is located half-way between Antioch and Qal'at Sim'an.

Another innovative feature of the radial chapels of Conques are the eyebrow shaped cornices around their windows. The shape of these cornices is also known under the term Syrian Arch. Such cornices are frequently found in Syria, Armenia, and Georgia as well as at the central apse of St. Simeon Stylites (Figure 18). Contemporary eyebrow shaped cornices are only known from Saint-André-de-Sorède and from Arles-sur-Tech in medieval Catalonia. No confirmed Romanesque predecessor of Conques has been identified yet. In total, the radial chapels of Conques look like a height-compressed copy of the apse of the Church of St. Simeon in Qal'at Sim'an. This combination of two rare elements makes the Church of St. Simeon Stylites a much more obvious model than the identified precursors in Rome.

The main entrance to the Church of St. Simeon Stylites existed at the façade of its south basilica. Instead of a narthex, it had a porch with three gable roofs and three portals at the front and one portal at each side (Figure 20).⁹⁸ The three portals of the porch led to four doors of the basilica. Hence, the central portal led to two doors. The west portal of Conques (Figure 21) has striking similarity with the projected appearance of the central portal of Qal'at Sim'an,

⁹⁴ Ignace Peña, *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria* (Reading: Garnet, 1997), 140.

⁹⁵ Jacques Jarry, "Trouvailles épigraphiques à Saint-Syméon," *Syria. Archéologie, Art et Histoire* 43, no. 1-2 (1966): 108-10, <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1966.5840>.

⁹⁶ Naraschewski, "Bamberg, Conques, and the Hohenstaufen Dynasty," 67-69.

⁹⁷ Christine Strube, *Die "Toten Städte": Stadt und Land in Nordsyrien während der Spätantike*, Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1996), 61-67.

⁹⁸ Jean-Pierre Sodini and Jean-Luc Biscop, "Qal'at Sem'an et Deir Sem'an: naissance et développement d'un lieu de pèlerinage durant l'Antiquité tardive," in *Architecture paléochrétienne*, ed. Jean-Michel Spieser, Collection Grèce-Rome-Byzance. Études fribourgeoises d'Histoire, d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art (Gollion: Infolio, 2011), 50.

including the gable roof, the side columns, a similarly molded archivolt, and two doors. Even the position of the two doors relative to the portal house is similar. The portal house of Conques is accompanied by two tall blind arches which may refer to the two side portals of Qal'at Sim'an.

Many cornices of Conques are decorated with square billet moldings, different from most of the moldings of Qal'at Sim'an. Nevertheless, the Church of St. Simeon Stylites is one of very few places in the Eastern Mediterranean where at least a double-row precursor of the Romanesque three-row square billet moldings has been found (Figure 22). An Egyptian tomb stele from the 3rd or 4th centuries shows a nearly identical portal situation.⁹⁹ Another characteristic element of Qal'at Sim'an are the moldings of its cornices that consist of various sequences of coves, steps, and beads. Strikingly, a portal of the north basilica of Qal'at Sim'an (Figure 22) has a similar combination of moldings, including square billet moldings, as the current archivolt and eaves cornice of the portal house of Conques (Figure 23).¹⁰⁰

Finally, drawings of the 18th century show that the gables of the east and west basilica of Qal'at Sim'an had two arched windows with a large oculus above them (Figure 24), very much like the iconic grouped window of the west façade of Conques (Figure 25).¹⁰¹

To conclude, the iconic and distinctive east and west façades of Conques can best be understood as an adaptation of the east and south façades of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an. But there are even more parallels. The Church of St. Simeon Stylites also had an octagonal crossing tower. Its octagonal base has four corner rooms with apsidioles that can be considered precursors of squinches (Figure 27). The crossing tower of Conques will later be discussed in more detail.

HAGIA SOPHIA AS POTENTIAL MODEL FOR THE GALLERY WINDOWS AND SOME DECORATIONS

The famous Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is so differently structured from Conques that there was hardly any room for the adoption of its architecture. However, there were more opportunities when it came to its decorative elements. A few of them have nearly unique parallels with Conques.

One of the characteristic elements of the gallery and cloister windows of Conques are their coupled columns (Figure 28). There are no known direct precursors in the Latin West other than potentially the contemporary examples of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse and Moissac.¹⁰² According to an 18th century drawing, the gallery windows of Saint-Martial in Limoges still had singular columns.¹⁰³ The same applies to other early Romanesque churches with galleries, such as Mont-Saint-Michel, Jumièges or Saint-Étienne in Nevers. Early Christian coupled columns exist at the arcade of the rotunda of Santa Constanza in Rome. But it is not evident why these would have been adopted at the gallery windows of Conques. Free-standing coupled columns were also very rare in the Byzantine world. The only prominent example are the coupled columns of the west gallery of Hagia Sophia which was reserved for the empress and her entourage (Figure 29).¹⁰⁴ Strikingly, all known examples of free-standing coupled columns in Rome and Constantinople were associated with empresses, a fact which seems to provide them with special prestige.¹⁰⁵

In many Byzantine churches, angels are displayed in the pendentives of the crossing tower, be it as mosaics or frescoes. The Hagia Sophia was a very prominent example, although her angels are seraphim. At San Marco in Venice, regular angels are displayed. It is one of the most unusual elements of Conques that

⁹⁹ The stele is now kept at the Museum for Byzantine Art in Berlin, Inv. 4721. The third known occurrence of such double-row square billet moldings exists at the eaves cornice of the small S. Astvatsatsin (Mother of God) chapel of the cathedral of Talin in Armenia from the 7th century.

¹⁰⁰ The square billet moldings of the portal house of Conques are modern reconstructions. However, similar square billet moldings of Romanesque origin can be found at the radial chapels.

¹⁰¹ Sodini and Biscop, "Qal'at Sem'an et Deir Sem'an: naissance et développement d'un lieu de pèlerinage durant l'Antiquité tardive," 44 f.

¹⁰² Coupled columns were already known as engaged half-columns supporting blind arches or transverse arches, for example at Santa María del Naranco near Oviedo.

¹⁰³ Vergnolle, "Saint-Martial de Limoges," 9.

¹⁰⁴ Rowland J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 59–61.

¹⁰⁵ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 155 f.

sculptures of angels are positioned in the squinches of the crossing tower (Figure 30), in the same way as the mosaics or frescoes of many Byzantine churches.

Finally, the cloister portal of Conques has an oculus above the mullioned portal at a rather uncommon position (Figure 31). The existence of oculi above double or mullioned windows has early Christian precursors in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly in Syria. A prominent extant example exists above the apse of the church of St. Catherine's monastery in the Sinai desert. Another more refined example is known from the Asturian church San Miguel de Lillo near Oviedo. In general, oculi were a common element of Carolingian and Ottonian architecture, but not in conjunction with double windows. According to current building research, the earliest extant oculus in the spandrel of a mullioned window with discharging arch may exist at two gallery windows of Gernrode.¹⁰⁶ If their dating is correct, they did not have a lot of succession. In France, Conques seems to be the earliest extant example of an oculus in the spandrel of a mullioned window with discharging arch, precursor of later Gothic grouped windows. The parallel with distant Gernrode (see the discussion on the floor plan above) is another hint that this motif may have had Byzantine origins. In any case, the rather low position of the oculus of the cloister portal of Conques, between the arches of the mullioned portal, appears unusual and unbalanced when compared to later occurrences. Strikingly, the arcades of the nave of Hagia Sophia have black round-shaped inlays at the same position as the oculi of the cloister portal of Conques.¹⁰⁷ It was already noted that Hagia Sophia possesses some fine examples of basket capitals with interlace similar to those in the chevet of Conques, but also similar to those from the Holy Land.

The parallels with Hagia Sophia are weaker than the earlier cases discussed. But they also contribute to the overall picture of a significant number of unusual elements of Conques that can naturally be explained by Byzantine influences.

PANAGIA CHALKEON AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LATEST TRENDS IN BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURE

The decorations of all four façades of Conques have characteristic structures that correspond to the latest trends in Byzantine architecture, at the time when the design of the abbey church of Conques was developed. The 11th century saw a significant amount of innovation in Byzantine architecture. Leading churches which spearheaded these innovations include Hosios Loukas near Delphi, the Church of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki, the Daphni monastery near Athens, and Nea Moni on the island of Chios. In our analysis, Panagia Chalkeon is chosen as a representative since it is conveniently located on the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land described. It also is the most relevant of them for the understanding of Conques. The Church of Panagia Chalkeon (Figure 32) was completed in 1028, only a few years before work on the chevet of Conques commenced.¹⁰⁸ During the initial construction phase of Conques, Panagia Chalkeon was the most recent of the notable buildings discussed here representing the latest and greatest in Byzantine architecture.

Apart from the fact that Panagia Chalkeon was one of the earliest churches of the cross-in-square type, it is most notable for introducing expansive frames or blind arches with stepped profiles around the windows. With these frames, the façade acquired a more three-dimensional appearance than it was customary in earlier Byzantine architecture. Similar trends are visible at the other innovative churches of this period. However, the frames of Panagia Chalkeon are the most extensive of them. Later, window frames or blind arches with a stepped profile became a common element of Byzantine architecture.

One can find similar frames or stepped profiles at various places at the abbey church of Conques. Arguably, the most prominent of them is the shield-like frame around the double windows and the oculus at the west façade (Figure 25). This grouped window of

¹⁰⁶ Wolfgang Erdmann et al., "Neue Untersuchungen an der Stiftskirche Gernrode," in *Diethard von Winterfeld. Meisterwerke mittelalterlicher Architektur. Beiträge und Biographie eines Bauforschers: Festgabe für Diethard von Winterfeld zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ute Engel, Kai Kappel, and Claudia Annette Meier (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2003), 144–53.

¹⁰⁷ Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, 42, 192.

¹⁰⁸ Anna Tsitouridou, *The Church of the Panagia Chalkeon*, Guides of the Institute for Balkan Studies 7 (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985), 7–9.

Conques strongly resembles the transepts of Panagia Chalkeon (Figure 32) which are rather unique with that respect. Conques is also known for having introduced the first stepped portals in western architectural history, here referring to the west portals of its transepts. Also, the other windows of Conques have stepped profiles (Figure 33) that had no known precedence in western architecture and hardly any succession in French Romanesque architecture.¹⁰⁹

Panagia Chalkeon and Hosios Loukas also provide evidence that the dynamics along the investigated pilgrimage route must have been bidirectional. At Hosios Loukas, discharging arches above mullioned windows create a strong resemblance of earlier Carolingian and Ottonian mullioned windows. Even more striking is the silhouette of Panagia Chalkeon. It displays pronounced features of Romanesque architecture that have no notable precedence in Byzantine architecture. The domes above the western corner rooms and their elevated bases create the unusual impression of a Romanesque westwork with a two-towered façade. In contrast to most other cross-in-square churches, the cruciform floor plan is clearly visible from the outside. To emphasize this impression, the transepts and the east façade are accentuated by decorative gables that protrude from the low-slope roofs above the barrel vaults of the naos. The west façade of Conques has a rather similar configuration (Figure 25). Finally, the crossing tower of Panagia Chalkeon has two stories, resembling the elongated towers of Carolingian tradition rather than their Byzantine brethren. Possibly, such unusual western influences can be explained by the fact that the founder of Panagia Chalkeon was a military leader in southern Italy where he may have come into contact with Western architecture.¹¹⁰

Any potentially remaining doubts about the relevance of a relatively small church in Thessaloniki can be addressed by having a look at the apses of Santa Fosca in Torcello and San Marco in Venice.¹¹¹ Both were important churches in the lagoon of Venice and were presumably built during the extended construction

phase of Conques. They feature polygonal apses with blind arcades that have the same stepped profiles as Panagia Chalkeon. Santa Fosca even has a blind arcade with engaged columns. It is a particular characteristic of these apses that their blind arcades are positioned on top of a cornice below the sole benches of their windows. If any 11th century apse was a direct model for the 12th century polygonal apses of Auvergne having blind arcades above such cornices, Santa Fosca in Torcello would be the best fitting candidate. Arguably, the most prominent of these apses exists at the priory of Conques of Saint-Hilarian-Sainte-Foy in Perse (Espalion).

On a side note, Panagia Chalkeon possesses one of only three relevant Byzantine visualizations of the Last Judgment from the 11th century, together with the already mentioned monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople and with Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello.¹¹² The latter is adjacent to Santa Fosca. This point will be elaborated later.

POTENTIAL BYZANTINE OR ISLAMIC MODELS FOR THE CROSSING TOWER

The crossing tower of Conques has two characteristic features that were unusual in Romanesque architecture. It was one of the earliest octagonal crossing towers with squinches in the Latin West (Figure 30), albeit not the earliest. Likely, the original crossing tower was a single-story lantern tower instead of the current two-story tower (Figure 26). Being a lantern tower, it provides the interior of the church with unusually bright lighting, one of the key factors of the special charm of Conques. These elements also have their origins in the Eastern Mediterranean and were characteristic elements of Byzantine and Islamic architecture.

The earliest form of crossing tower was rectangular, as can be seen at the so-called mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna. The same holds for crossing towers in Visigothic Spain and in Carolingian France such as the oratory of Germigny-des-Prés. Later, rectangular crossing towers became a characteristic

¹⁰⁹ For example, the radial chapels of the cathedral of Magdeburg have similar stepped window profiles. The construction of Magdeburg was artistically linked to the slightly earlier cathedral of Bamberg. For the latter, Conques has been identified as an important model.

¹¹⁰ Tsitouridou, *The Church of the Panagia Chalkeon*, 10.

¹¹¹ Gianna Suitner-Nicolini, *Romanisches Venetien mit Südtirol* (Würzburg: Zodiaque-Echter, 1994), 54, 99.

¹¹² Another less relevant example originates from the Sinai desert.

feature of Norman architecture. In contrast, Byzantine architecture used round crossing towers with pendentives, following the precedence of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The creation of round crossing towers and pendentives was enabled by the brick masonry of conventional Byzantine architecture which facilitated the creation of fluid surfaces.

In contrast, the architecture of the Levante, from the Caucasus via Cilicia and Syria to the Holy Land, was rather based on ashlar masonry. Therefore, crossing towers of the Levante tended to be octagonal with squinches. Octagonal crossing towers with squinches can be found in Georgia, Armenia, and Syria. Precursors from the 5th and 6th centuries are known from the Church of St. Simeon Stylites and from Cappadocia and Cilicia.¹¹³ The church of St. Simeon Stylites had precursors of squinches not only on the ground floor, as described above, but also in the crossing tower itself.¹¹⁴ Arguably, the most influential octagonal crossing tower with squinches still exists at the Ummayyad mosque of Damascus, which replaced the earlier Basilica of St. John the Baptist (Figure 34). The Ummayyad mosque was built around 715, still based on Byzantine construction techniques. As the primary mosque of the Ummayyad dynasty, its architectural influence rapidly spread within the Islamic world, even reaching North Africa and al-Andalus in Spain. The Great Mosque of Córdoba from the 10th century has an octagonal crossing tower too. The same applies to the former mosque El Cristo de la Luz in Toledo from the same period. However, the latter two crossing towers are supported by interlaced arches rather than by squinches.

In the Latin West, octagonal crossing towers with squinches seem to have been introduced only in the last decades of the 11th century. Apparently, the earliest still extant example is the crossing tower of Sant Vicenç in Cardona in Catalonia. It dates from 1040 or a little later. Here, the transition from a rectangular to an octagonal tower is clearly visible. The irregular octagon of Sant Vicenç constitutes an intermediate state between a rectangle and a regular octagon. Some of the next octagonal towers with squinches presumably were built

at San Martín in Frómista and San Pedro in Loarre. Others that are earlier than or contemporary with Conques existed at San Nazaro in Brolo in Milan, Toulouse, Santiago de Compostela, Cluny III, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe, and Nevers, to name some of the most important ones. Their relative dating is uncertain. The geographic locations of Cardona in Catalonia, Frómista in Castile, and Loarre in Aragon suggest that the octagonal crossing tower may have been imported from Islamic Spain, potentially after the reconquest of Toledo in 1085. But the only extant octagonal tower of Toledo has interlaced arches instead of squinches. Be it as it may, octagonal crossing towers with squinches can be considered a reference to Eastern Mediterranean architecture if we count the Islamic architecture of Spain as Eastern Mediterranean in origin.

In contrast to other earlier crossing towers of Southern France, the crossing tower of Conques was a lantern tower that is flooding the interior of the church with light (Figure 30). The earliest rectangular crossing towers, as mentioned above, did not have windows. At least, the elongation of the crossing tower of the Carolingian oratory in Germigny-des-Prés was used to insert small windows on each side providing limited lighting. Later rectangular crossing towers from Normandy had better lighting, albeit only from windows at a high level above the nave due to the steep roofs of their nave and transepts.

In Byzantine architecture, windows were already inserted into the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. They were the starting point for the development of single-story lantern towers as a key concept of Byzantine architecture. The trend towards lantern towers became firmly established with the introduction of churches of the cross-in-square type. The Myrelaion in Constantinople from around 920 is a perfect example (Figure 35). Consistently, the octagonal crossing towers of the Ummayyad mosque in Damascus and many of their successors in North Africa or Spain as well as the crossing tower from Frómista were single-story lantern towers too. Hence, the imported concept

¹¹³ The churches from Cilicia and Cappadocia include the Red Church in Sivrihisar and the Alahan monastery. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 180 f., 237.

¹¹⁴ Sodini and Biscop, "Qal'at Sem'an et Deir Sem'an: naissance et développement d'un lieu de pèlerinage durant l'Antiquité tardive," 47 f.

of an octagonal crossing tower with squinches often went hand in hand with a single-story lantern tower.

In contrast, most Romanesque crossing towers south of the Loire developed into a different direction. In line with Carolingian traditions, these crossing towers could become quite tall. The late medieval crossing tower of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse provides an extraordinary example of that sort. In most cases, the crossing was covered by a dome or roof which was the basis of a multi-story crossing tower that often served as bell tower. The crossing towers of Cluny III, Paray-le-Monial, and Saint-Sernin in Toulouse are good examples with that respect. Even the additional barlongs between nave and crossing tower, a hallmark of Auvergnatic architecture, were not used to flood the church with light. Therefore, many southern Romanesque churches can be quite dark. Literally, Conques is a shining counterexample from that perspective.

But apart from being a lantern tower, the crossing tower of Conques is unusual since it appears that the original tower may have been a single-story tower. The current second story of the crossing tower was only built in the second half of the 15th century.¹¹⁵ There is no evidence that it replaced an earlier second story.¹¹⁶ In fact, the attached staircase tower, which ascends from the galleries to the second story of the crossing tower, does not exhibit the same consistency in the ashlar masonry as the first story of the tower. Some of the stones appear to be original, but most aren't. If an original second story had collapsed, why would it have destroyed the rather solid staircase tower while leaving the more fragile walls of the first story entirely intact? If the second story hadn't collapsed, why was it necessary to entirely rebuild it to add a new vaulting? Certainly, several questions remain. But at least in its current state, there is no reliable evidence for the existence of a regular second story in the 12th century.

The current physical evidence rather points towards the existence of an original crossing tower that

was both a lantern tower and a single-story tower, very much in line with Byzantine tradition.

On a side note, it was only possible to erect the crossing tower of Conques as a lantern tower with windows slightly above the crossing because the roofs above the barrel vaults have a low gradient. As consequence, the steep gable of the west façade of Conques only has a decorative function. This situation is very similar to Panagia Chalkeon, as discussed before.

EUPHRASIAN BASILICA IN POREČ AS POTENTIAL MODEL FOR A CHARMING DETAIL

Arguably, the most charming detail of the iconography of Conques are the small angels in the archivolt of the west portal. They hold a scroll using this opportunity to catch a glimpse of the scenery in the tympanum of the Last Judgment (Figure 36). In more abstract terms, they constitute personifications of curiosity. While there is an extended tradition in Romanesque art of depicting personifications of virtues and vices following the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, curiosity was not one of them. So far, only one earlier depiction of curiosity has been found at a building. At the apse mosaic of the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč, a secret observer peeks out from behind a veil to watch the scene of the Visitation (Figure 37). In early Christian and Byzantine tradition, veils were often attached between the columns of arcades or at doors. Prominent examples are displayed at the mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and San Vitale in Ravenna. The idea of depicting a secret observer behind a veil would provide a rather natural motivation for the unusual angels in Conques. We do not know how common the motif of a secret observer was in Byzantine art. At least, a Carolingian ivory from the end of the 8th century shows a similar scene, also including the Annunciation and Visitation.¹¹⁷ However, given the close relations of Charlemagne to Ravenna, it is quite possible that it was also created after the model of nearby Poreč.

¹¹⁵ Vergnolle, Pradalier, and Pousthomis-Dalle, "Conques, Sainte-Foy. L'abbatiale Romane," 77.

¹¹⁶ Personal communication by Lei Huang.

¹¹⁷ The ivory is associated with the Ada group. In 1926, it was kept by the Musée des Arts décoratifs et industriels in Brussels. Adolph

Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, VIII. - XI. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Cassirer, 1926), 9, Tafel II, doi:10.11588/diglit.23832.

ABSENCE OF PROMINENT WEST TOWERS AND OF A CRYPT

In contrast to Byzantine architecture, bell towers have a long tradition in the Latin West. The earliest documented example is the abbey church of Saint-Martin in Tours from the 6th century.¹¹⁸ Bell towers proliferated in Carolingian and Capetian times based on the prominent examples of the bell tower in the atrium of Old-St. Peter in Rome and the assumed two-towered façades of Saint-Denis and Cluny II.¹¹⁹ The tall westwork of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne in Aachen was a prominent precursor of later porch towers. In the 11th century, nearly every Romanesque church with serious ambition was embellished with one or two prominent bell towers. All competitors of Conques had at least a porch tower, if not a two-towered façade.¹²⁰ The robust substructures of the narthex of Conques suggest that such a prominent two-towered façade was originally planned.¹²¹ For whatever reason, only an unassuming turret at the northwestern corner of the nave was executed (Figure 38). The current double towers are a fictitious reconstruction of the 19th century (Figure 1). The prominence of the original turret relative to the gable is so low that it does not reward the name tower. Even the rather small southwestern tower of Saint-Philibert in Tournus has significantly more prominence. In the literature on Conques, it has been speculated that a second turret may have existed but was destroyed by the fire of 1586, caused by the Wars of Religion.¹²² But there is no proof substantiating such a speculation.

As mentioned earlier, Conques also does not have a westwork in the Carolingian sense, at least not the massive form of the second half of the 9th century that is still visible in many places such as in Corvey.¹²³ These

later westworks, with an era extending far into the Salian period, are compartmentalized at ground floor level with staircase access to the gallery above.¹²⁴ The gallery was liturgically connected with the ground floor due to its purpose of enabling the *laus perennis* for those buried or venerated at ground floor level.¹²⁵ Apparently, the earlier abbey church of Conques had such a westwork with a presumed porch tower.¹²⁶

In contrast, the current west section of Conques is organized in an entirely different way. The side aisles of Conques are accessible from the ‘westwork’, like in most early Christian or Byzantine churches. The narthex of the monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople provides a good example. In a very unusual way, the staircases to the galleries of Conques are inserted in the side aisles. Comparable Byzantine buildings, like the monastery of Stoudios, did not have any integrated staircases at all. The access to their galleries was achieved through wooden staircases attached to the building from outside. Hence, instead of a Carolingian westwork, Conques has a classic early Byzantine narthex with a gallery. For example, the disposition of the narthex of Conques is structurally identical to Panagia Chalkeon, including a central west portal followed by three portals from the narthex to the naos or nave.¹²⁷

To conclude, apart from its one or maybe two unassuming turrets, the steep decorative gable seems to be the only concession of Conques to the impressive west façades of other Romanesque churches. Hence, the absence of prominent bell towers and a Carolingian westwork is an unusual feature of Conques that is more in line with Byzantine than with Carolingian or Romanesque traditions.

Likewise, Conques does not have a crypt. Ever since the invention of the crypt at Old-St. Peter in Rome,

¹¹⁸ Lelong, *La basilique Saint-Martin*, 15 f.; Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 39 f.

¹¹⁹ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 29–35.

¹²⁰ This applies for the other so-called ‘pilgrimage churches’ in Tours, Limoges, and Santiago de Compostela. The westwork of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse was only completed in the 20th century. But also Mozac, a likely model for the sculpture of Conques, has a single west tower that is based on a Carolingian westwork. Aurillac and Figeac do no longer exist or have been substantially modified.

¹²¹ Huang, “Memory between Tradition and Modernity,” 68.

¹²² Vergnolle, Pradalier, and Pousthomis-Dalle, “Conques, Sainte-Foy. L’abbatiale Romane,” 79.

¹²³ Skalecki, “Turris Occidentalis. Das Phänomen Des Westbaues in Der Karolingischen Architektur. Teil 2.”

¹²⁴ Huang, “Memory between Tradition and Modernity,” 68–70.

¹²⁵ Skalecki, “Turris Occidentalis. Das Phänomen Des Westbaues in Der Karolingischen Architektur. Teil 2,” 9.

¹²⁶ Ivan Foletti, Lei Huang, and Martin F. Lešák, “In the Valley: Geographical Context and Origins of the Abbey,” in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th–21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 97.

¹²⁷ Tsitouridou, *The Church of the Panagia Chalkeon*, 10–14.

many prominent churches of the Latin West had crypts to venerate the tomb or the relics of a patron saint, in case such relics existed. Admittedly, Conques did not have the tomb of an important saint or martyr, but it established a significant veneration of the relics of Sainte-Foy. In western tradition, it would have been natural to position them in a crypt. In contrast, Byzantine tradition rarely uses the concept of a crypt. Shrines were often positioned on the ground floor, like the tomb of Jesus in the center of the Anastasis. At least, this was the case for the memorial churches of the Holy Sepulchre, St. Simeon Stylites, and the Holy Apostles. One may argue that the underground of Conques may have posed an impediment to building a crypt. But given the massive earthwork that was needed to make space for the church, a crypt should have been only a minor complication.¹²⁸

Hence, even the absence of two characteristic features of western churches may provide hints of a deliberate adherence to Byzantine traditions. Certainly, these traces are not as prominent as some of the explicit similarities discussed above. But they further add to the list of unusual features that can be most naturally explained by Byzantine influences.

THE MAJESTY OF SAINTE-FOY AS A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ICON

The absence of a crypt went hand in hand with the veneration of the Majesty of Sainte-Foy and her relics in the apse. This highly unusual body reliquary constituted a significant disruption of established religious practices, as was documented by Bernard of Angers about twenty years before the start of the construction of the current abbey church. The way how Bernard describes the theological dispute and its outcome, the ‘veneration’ of a three-dimensional icon in the sanctuary, very much resembles the disputes of

Byzantine iconoclasm and the later central role of icons in the Eastern Orthodox church, including the dominant use of gold on such icons. In both cases, the main theological justification for prominently demonstrating an icon was that the veneration was not directed to the icon itself but to the holy person displayed, the Virgin with the child or Sainte-Foy.

It was shown by Taralon and Taralon-Carlino that the head of the Majesty of Sainte-Foy was an ancient spolia portraying a Roman emperor of the late 3rd or early 4th century, such as Valentinian I or Honorius.¹²⁹ Busts of emperors of this period were found both in the western and the eastern part of the former Roman Empire. Hence, the provenience of this bust remains uncertain. However, its use demonstrates a deliberate allusion to the Roman Empire. At the assumed creation of the full-body figure of Sainte-Foy in the late 10th century, the cultural view of the Ottonian rulers of the empire was firmly directed towards their peers in Constantinople. The use of such an imperial bust is consistent with the overall representation of the Majesty of Sainte-Foy as a male ruler. Such masculinization of empresses or women, or rather the androgynization of men and women, was typical for the early Christian art of the 5th to 7th century.¹³⁰ Prominent examples are the mosaics of Justinian and Theodora of San Vitale in Ravenna. Apparently, such practice remained relevant in the Byzantine empire for much longer, as can be seen in the joint coronation images of emperor Otto II and empress Theophanu as well as of emperor Henry II and empress Cunigunde from the late 10th and early 11th centuries which were created under strong Byzantine influence.¹³¹ Earlier and later portraits of western kings or emperors most often did not even include their wives.

Despite her Carolingian crown, the full-body figure of the Majesty of Sainte-Foy and the unusual way of its veneration constitute a more natural fit to the Ottonian-Byzantine culture of the time of its creation than to

¹²⁸ Huang and Sparhubert, “Building the Abbey Church,” 153 f.

¹²⁹ Jean Taralon and Dominique Taralon-Carlino, “La Majesté d’or de Sainte Foy de Conques,” vol. 1, *Bulletin Monumental* 155 (Paris: Société française d’archéologie, 1997), 11–73.

¹³⁰ Ivan Foletti, “Sainte Foy as Sacred Focus,” in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th–21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, *Convivia* 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 119–22; See also Kris N. Racaniello, “A Translike Object?

Composing the Majesty of Sainte Foy and Staging Gender,” in *Entangled Histories at Conques. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Unique Site of Medieval Heritage*, *Convivium Supplementum* 15 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024), 102–26.

¹³¹ For example, these can be found at an ivory of the late 10th century (Paris, Musée de Cluny, Cl. 392) and in the Pericopes of Henry II of the early 11th century (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4452, fol. 2r).

earlier Carolingian traditions that were still prevalent in northern France.

TRACES OF THE TREASURY TO THE BYZANTINE WORLD

Finally, the rich treasury of Conques contains several objects of Byzantine or Far Eastern origin. Arguably, the most important of them is the 10th century Byzantine silk shroud in which the skull of Sainte-Foy was wrapped.¹³² Another piece of fabric is believed to come from Persia. Some of the enamels may be of Byzantine origin too, while others were local copies of Byzantine models.¹³³

There are multiple indications that the reconquest of Jerusalem in 1099 refocused the attention of Conques on Jerusalem. In 1100, abbot Bégon III received relics of the True Cross from Pope Paschal II. Bégon had pieces of them placed in several reliquaries that he commissioned from regional artisans or that he had received as a gift.¹³⁴ The so-called Reliquary of Pope Paschal II seems to include graphical representations of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the Basilica of Constantine and the Anastasis. Similarly, the shape of the so-called Lantern of Bégon, another reliquary, resembles the aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre. The treasury of Conques also includes a so-called Jerusalem cross, another True Cross reliquary, most likely from the third quarter of the 12th century.¹³⁵ It is believed to have been sent by the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem indicating direct relations of Conques with them.

Conques as a medieval Neo-Byzantine project

By applying a novel method of Analytical Humanities, as described in the appendix, it is shown that the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques features nearly 20

rather unusual architectural or decorative elements that have no or only very limited precedence in the architecture of the Latin West. Instead, it was demonstrated that each of them has natural precursors in the Byzantine culture. More specifically, it was shown that models for all analyzed elements could have been easily found along a natural pilgrimage route to the Holy Land. In return, each of the most prominent Byzantine buildings on this pilgrimage route seems to have left characteristic traces in Conques. This overall picture is astonishingly consistent. The significant number of investigated elements hardly leaves any statistical room for an independent invention in Conques.

This finding permits us to conclude that the builders of Conques deliberately tried to set them apart from their regional competitors by adding a distinct Byzantine flavor to an otherwise advanced but not groundbreaking Romanesque building. It is therefore justified to describe the construction of the abbey church of Conques as a medieval Neo-Byzantine project.

More strikingly, the observed relationships allow the speculation that the builders of Conques may have intended to create specific references to the most extraordinary buildings of the Eastern Mediterranean. It was already discussed that the chevet of Conques can be interpreted as deliberate reference to the outstanding chevets of Saint-Martin in Tours and Cluny II. Given the undoubted aspirations of the monks of Conques to establish themselves as a pre-eminent pilgrimage destination, what would have been a more apparent and more ambitious aspiration than to quote the three most important pilgrimage destinations of the Eastern Mediterranean with their new abbey church?

In this sense, the chevet, transepts, and nave of Conques can be read as an image of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The specifics of the cruciform floor plan would have been a reference to the Basilica of St. John the Apostle in Ephesus, most likely also to the Church of the Holy Apostles in

¹³² Cynthia J. Hahn, "The Treasury Reconsidered: Renewal and Incorporation," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 264 f.

¹³³ *Byzantine Echoes in "Romanesque" France: Textiles, Enamels & Modern Myths*, Slovanský Ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUpIZ1Q6dIQ>.

¹³⁴ Adrian Bremenkamp, "Conques, Rome, Jerusalem, and Barbastro: The True Cross and a Global Treasury Around 1100," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 303–13.

¹³⁵ Bremenkamp, 313–15.

Constantinople. The east and west façades of Conques would have been copies of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal‘at Sim‘ān. Potentially, also the octagonal crossing tower referred to the latter. Finally, some important decorative details would refer to Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. With this, the new abbey church would have referred not only to the two most important churches of their time in France but also to the five most important churches in the Byzantine empire. Some additional adoptions from Byzantine architecture would only underline the ambition of Conques to reach beyond the level of their peers in creating a groundbreaking church and a highly attractive pilgrimage destination.

The available data does not permit us to draw conclusions about individual models of Conques with statistical confidence. But the interpretation above would very much be in line with general preferences of the 10th and 11th centuries. Already around 825, the monks of Reichenau Abbey were in the possession of a pilgrimage report with a rather accurate floor plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at least as far as the Anastasis is concerned (Figure 5).¹³⁶ Later in the 9th century, a copy of the Anastasis was built at St. Michael in Fulda and a rotunda at Saint-Germain in Auxerre.¹³⁷ In the last three quarters of the 10th century and in the first quarter of the 11th century, rotundas or a copy of the Holy Sepulchre were built in Reichenau, Constance, St. Gall, and Dijon.¹³⁸ Historical sources and excavations suggest that even the earlier abbey church of Conques had a rotunda next to its apse.¹³⁹ The rotunda of Reichenau Abbey was initiated by the acquisition of a relic of the Holy Blood from the Byzantine empire. The bishop of Constance had personally undertaken a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Monks from Reichenau are known to have traveled to Jerusalem several times in the 11th century. There are indications that Conques was already connected with Reichenau Abbey and St. Gall in the 9th and 10th century. At least, such a

connection is very likely in the second half of the 11th century, as will be demonstrated later.

A particularly high propensity for the recreation of important buildings is proven for the years between 1025-50, at least as far as the empire is concerned. In this timeframe, the nearly only known copies of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne in Aachen were created in Nijmegen, Goslar, Ottmarsheim, Essen, Wimpfen, Groningen, and Bamberg.¹⁴⁰ In 1033, the bishop of Paderborn sent a monk to the Holy Land to measure the dimensions of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁴¹ Allegedly, the so-called *Jerusalemkirche* (later Busdorf church) in Paderborn was built according to these measurements. In the same year, the bishop of Elne in medieval Catalonia undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the documented consequence that he had the apse of his new cathedral decorated with a blind arcade emulating the Anastasis of the Holy Sepulchre. The second half of the 10th century and first half of the 11th centuries also were a period of intense adoption of Byzantine architectural elements in the empire. Prominent examples include Gernrode, St. Pantaleon in Cologne, the (former) cathedrals of Bamberg and Trier, St. Michael in Hildesheim, and the westwork of Reichenau Abbey. This trend lasted until the groundbreaking cathedral of Speyer narrowed the architectural focus of the empire down to the style of Ravenna, in its more recent variant of Ivrea or Pomposa.

Hence, the period, in which the blueprint for the construction of Conques was designed and its ground floor was built, was the apex of an era in which the most extraordinary churches were imitated and Byzantine decorative elements were adopted. The first half of the 11th century was a period of significant disruption in French Romanesque architecture too. However, the sources of its inspiration are less evident. Whether the monks of Conques really intended to copy specific buildings will remain subject to debate. However, little doubt seems to exist that their abbey church was highly influenced by Byzantine architecture.

¹³⁶ Untermann, "Ein Kloster, sieben Kirchen," 126.

¹³⁷ The current rotunda was built in the late 11th century. But the existence of a Carolingian rotunda above the extant crypt is described in historic sources. Notker Baumann et al., *Michaeliskirche Fulda*, Kunstführer 2973 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2023), 4–17.

¹³⁸ Untermann, "Ein Kloster, sieben Kirchen," 125.

¹³⁹ Foletti, Huang, and Lešák, "In the Valley," 97–99.

¹⁴⁰ Walter Burandt, *Die Baugeschichte der Alten Hofhaltung in Bamberg* (Bamberg: Bayerische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 183–87.

¹⁴¹ Günther Binding, *Die Michaeliskirche in Hildesheim und Bischof Bernward als "sapiens architectus"* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013), 245.

The Carolingian spirituality of the tympanum of the Last Judgment

The findings of the previous chapter suggest that the famous sculpted tympanum of the Last Judgment of Conques (Figure 39) may have had Byzantine origins too. According to recent research, the tympanum was the first of its kind, created around 1100.¹⁴² Nearly all known Byzantine visualizations of the Last Judgment of an earlier date existed on the same pilgrimage route from Venice to the Holy Land that was discussed in the previous chapter (Figure 53).¹⁴³ Hence, it is plausible that at least some of these representations, in particular the monumental wall mosaic of Torcello (Figure 50), were known to the builders of Conques. Indeed, the tympanum of Conques shows significant iconographic parallels with the classic Byzantine type of the Last Judgment from the second half of the 11th century. It exhibits more extensive parallels to the Byzantine type than any other tympanum of the Romanesque and early Gothic era. However, the iconographic ideas of the Byzantine type were not merely copied in Conques. It will be shown that they were further developed to reflect the specific Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife.

This conclusion is reached by combining art-historical and religious-historical approaches. The analysis of the relevant written sources shows how the concept of the Last Judgment evolved from the Bible to 13th century scholastic theology. With each development step, the concepts of Particular Judgment, purgatory, and intercession became more refined, thereby adding a new doctrine to the text of the Holy Scriptures. But this development was not homogeneous. By combining

the evolution of written sources and iconography, two archetypes can be identified. The Carolingian spirituality and iconography of the Last Judgment had its most prominent representative in Reichenau Abbey. In the 11th century, a differing Byzantine iconography and spirituality was developed. A similar evolution of spirituality is known from Cluny.

From the 780s to the middle of the 11th century, Reichenau Abbey was one of the most pre-eminent cultural, artistic, and scientific centers within the Germanic territories of the Frankish kingdom and the later empire, only comparable to Fulda abbey. Reichenau was the center of an informal monastic network that ranged from Jumièges in northern France to Benevento in southern Italy as well as from Saxony and Bavaria in the northeast to Conques in the southwest. Rich anecdotal evidence supports the assumption that Conques and Reichenau must have been connected, directly or indirectly, from the Carolingian era until the end of the 11th century.

The addition of religious-historical research to the well-established art-historical study of the Last Judgment leads to a more consistent result conforming with the iconography of the tympanum of Conques to an astonishing level of detail. The fact that Conques employed a spiritual model which already was outdated in Cluny justifies the notion of a Neo-Carolingian approach, significantly going beyond the inclusion of the figure of Charlemagne. This conclusion fully is in line with earlier observations regarding the tympanum

¹⁴² Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity," 74.

¹⁴³ Marcello Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier: entre Orient et Occident*, ed. Valentino Pace (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 34–36, 53–60.

and the treasury of Conques.¹⁴⁴ Based on them, the assumption of a Neo-Carolingian background was an important initial hypothesis of the recent “Conques in the Global World” project.¹⁴⁵

It is shown that the Carolingian iconography and spirituality of the Last Judgment were predominantly based on the texts of Matthew 24-25, Reichenau’s *Visio Wettini*, and Augustine’s *Enchiridion* 29:109-111. Surprisingly, these three texts provide a rather detailed blueprint of the iconography of the tympanum of the Last Judgment in Conques. Many of its peculiarities find a straightforward explanation in them.

Earlier illustrations of the Last Judgment from Reichenau’s workshop were predominantly based on Matthew 24-25, the most foundational text of the Gospels on the Last Judgment. Reichenau’s *Visio Wettini* from 824 undoubtedly was the most important and most widely distributed Carolingian vision of the afterlife. Correspondingly, Augustine’s *Enchiridion* 29:109-111 was one of the most often quoted texts of Carolingian authors in the context of memorial prayers. It also was used by the monks of Reichenau and St. Gall for their liturgy of the Office of the Dead.

These texts can be identified with specific registers of the tympanum of Conques. The upper register with its dominant presentation of the Cross reflects the text of Matthew 24. The Cross also was a central element of Reichenau’s iconography of the Last Judgment, as in their Bamberg Apocalypse (Figure 49). The middle register of the tympanum of Conques with its oversized figure of Christ and its prominent representation of Charlemagne is postulated to follow the *Visio Wettini* with references to Matthew 25 and Apocalypse 19-20. The *Visio Wettini* has a strong focus on proto-purgatory and intercession by saints, clerics, and relatives. The concern for the soul of Charlemagne is another characteristic element. Finally, the lower register of the tympanum can be read as a rather accurate reflection of Augustine’s *Enchiridion* 29:109-111.

As a result, the tympanum of Conques can be interpreted as a monumental and enduring act of

intercession for the soul of their legendary founder Charlemagne, thereby setting a moral example for its monks and pilgrims. But the tympanum also constitutes a very explicit promotion for the 11th century ‘business model’ of Conques which was based on generous donations by the wealthy to secure spiritual support for the souls of the deceased.

The Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife with its strong focus on the torments of Hell and intercessions at scale was already about to be superseded when the tympanum was created. Despite its innovative artistic character, the tympanum rather marked the end of a spiritual and cultural era than the beginning of a new.

The Last Judgment according to the sources

Any interpretation of an artwork as complex and cryptic as the tympanum of the Last Judgment of Conques will leave room for doubt and debate. Therefore, it is not sufficient to show that certain sources have parallels with the iconography of the tympanum. Instead, it is necessary to show that a proposed interpretation and its sources are the most likely combination in view of their potential alternatives. For this purpose, the relevant theological documents on the afterlife, from the Bible to the medieval visions, are briefly summarized below, focusing on those nuances that are relevant for the interpretation of the tympanum of Conques (Table 4).

MATTHEW 24-25 WITH 19:28 AND THE LAST JUDGMENT

Undoubtedly, the most important biblical source for the iconography of the Last Judgment is Matthew 24-25 in conjunction with Matthew 19:28.¹⁴⁶ The text describes the return of Christ and his consequential Last Judgment as a one-time event.¹⁴⁷ His return is heralded by the appearance of the sign of Christ in the sky, usually equated with the Cross. Angels with trumpets call the

¹⁴⁴ Ivan Foletti et al., “Romanesque’ Conques as a Neo-Carolingian Project,” *Convivium* 8, no. 2 (July 2021): 172 f.

¹⁴⁵ Foletti et al., “Romanesque’ Conques as a Neo-Carolingian Project.”

¹⁴⁶ Yves Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2001), 45 f., 53; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ A highly abbreviated version of Matthew 24-25 is also provided by Matthew 13:36-43.

elected from all four wind directions. Thereafter, Christ sits on a throne as judge with the twelve apostles as his jury separating the saved from the damned. He calls the saved on his right side to him rewarding them with eternal life. In contrast, he sends the damned on his left side away from him into the eternal fire. The eternal fire also is predestined for Satan and his angels. This narrative is complemented by various parables, including the separation of the sheep from the goat and the Ten Virgins. While Hell is characterized as a place of eternal fire, no description of Heaven is provided.

The elements described can be found in most visualizations of the Last Judgment. Often, they are complemented by a glory of angels above the Apostles and by the dead rising from their tombs. Both elements are not explicitly mentioned in Matthew 24-25. The twelve Apostles are only mentioned in Matthew 19:28. The presentation of the Cross plays an important role in western iconography. Only few illustrations include the four winds or an asymmetric gesture of Christ to welcome the saved and to reject the damned. Instead, the rejection often is displayed by angels pushing the damned into the fire. The illustration of the Last Judgment in the Bamberg Apocalypse is one of the best examples (Figure 49).

BOOK OF REVELATION OF JOHN OR BOOK OF THE APOCALYPSE

The other prominent biblical tale of the Last Judgment is provided by the Book of Revelation or Book of the Apocalypse, the final book of the New Testament. Its scope is much wider than the text of Matthew and it uses cryptic allegoric language. Due to its complexity, the narrative of the Apocalypse was rarely used as model for illustrations of the Last Judgment. However, some of its elements have found wider use in Christian iconography. For their interpretation, it is necessary to understand the narrative of the Book of the Apocalypse which can be divided into seven sections:¹⁴⁸

1. **Revelation of Christ (1-3):** Appearance of Christ as “one like a son of man” with seven candle sticks and seven stars, representing the seven original Christian communities and the seven angels. He sends messages to these communities. One of them introduces the concept of the Crown of martyrdom (Apocalypse 2:10).
2. **Paschal mystery of Christ (4-5):** Transfiguration of Christ as Lamb of God between the Throne of God, the twenty-four elder, and the four living creatures. The Lamb receives the Book with Seven Seals from God. This allegory summarizes the paschal mystery of Christ whose incarnation and passion will fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament.
3. **Contemporary pagan world of John (6-8:5):** The opening of the seven seals triggers the events following the passion of Christ, including the four Apocalyptic horsemen, the cry of the martyrs for vengeance, the rolling up of the scrolls of the sky, and the appearance of seven angels with seven trumpets. An eighth angel with a golden censer devastates the earth with fire. These events relate to the oppression or difficulties of early Christian communities in the pagan Roman empire.
4. **End of the contemporary world of John (8:6-18):** The sounding of the seven trumpets announces the end of the contemporary world of John (pagan Roman empire), including the expulsion of the dragon (Satan) and his angels from Heaven by archangel Michael, the final battle at Armageddon, and the destruction of New Babylon (pagan Rome). In contrast to widespread belief, the seven trumpets announce the imminent Parousia of Christ followed by his thousand-year reign, instead of the Last Judgment.

¹⁴⁸ François Brossier, “Verschlüsselte Botschaft. Die Symbolik im Buch der Offenbarung,” *Apokalypse. Die Offenbarung an Johannes*, Welt und Umwelt der Bibel, no. 52 (2009): 28–33.

5. **Parousia of Christ (19-20:6):** Marriage of the Lamb (Christ) with the woman (Christian church). Allegory of Christ as King of Kings who is to rule for thousand years together with the martyrs (first resurrection). The twenty-four elder assist Christ as judges. The thousand-year reign of Christ refers to the era of the Christian church. During the reign of Christ, ordinary sinners remain dead. Christ is also described as an angel with a heavy chain who imprisons the dragon (Satan) in the bottomless pit, while the Beast (pagan Roman empire and its imperial cult) and the False Prophet (presumably pagan Roman emperors) are sent to their final destinations in the Lake of Fire (Hell).
6. **Last Judgment (20:7-20:15):** The Last Judgment marks the end of the reign of Christ as King of Kings. The judges are only described by mention of their thrones. In early Christian and Byzantine iconography, an empty throne was shown as symbol of God as judge. The dead rise from the land and from the sea. They are judged according to their deeds in life recorded in various books. The damned who are not listed in the Book of Life (*Liber vitae*) are cast into the Lake of Fire (Hell), together with Satan, Death, and *Hades*, where they join the Beast and the False Prophet.
7. **Heavenly Jerusalem (21-22):** Allegory of Heavenly Jerusalem as the eternal Paradise, only admitting those who are listed in the Book of Life. God will reside amongst them.

This brief synopsis includes a sizable list of iconographic elements that were common in Christian art. However, most of them have no direct link to the Last Judgment. This includes the twenty-four elder, the four living creatures, the Lamb of God, the Book with Seven Seals, the seven angels with seven trumpets as well as the Crown of martyrdom. According to the Apocalypse, even the majesty of Christ does not refer to the Last

Judgment but to the preceding era of the Church, the contemporary period of the Middle Ages. Only the empty throne, the open *Liber vitae*, the Lake of Fire, potentially including Satan, Beast and False Prophet, or Heavenly Jerusalem are references of the Apocalypse to the Last Judgment and to the eternal rule of God.

Western illustrations of the Last Judgment often do not separate between the thousand-year reign of Christ and the act of the Last Judgment. They rather represent Christ as *Rex* and *Iudex*, in line with Matthew 24-25. In contrast, Byzantine iconography of the 11th century and later is more differentiated showing Christ as ruler and the empty throne of God as judge in separate iconographic elements. Both traditions have in common that fire is the most frequently used representation of Hell.

In Byzantine iconography of the 11th century and later, Christ sitting on a throne, the empty throne of the judge, and the Lake of Fire are connected by a Stream of Fire that emanates from the throne of Christ referring to Daniel 7 and 12 (Figure 50). In these passages of the Book of Daniel, many elements of the Apocalypse were already introduced, including the four creatures, the throne of God, a tribunal with open books, resurrected, saved and damned, eternal life or punishment, and the eternal reign of God. To complete the picture, Judith 16:15 adds serpents as additional torments of Hell. The idea of the *Liber vitae* can also be found in Luke 10:20.

LUKE 16:19-31 AND THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

The concept of the Last Judgment, as expressed by Matthew and the Apocalypse, is contrasted by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. In its narrative, Lazarus and the rich man face their ultimate destiny immediately after their deaths. Lazarus is carried by angels into the Bosom of Abraham while the rich man is tormented by flames in *Hades*. The allegory of the Bosom of Abraham later became an important element of the visualization of Paradise or Heaven. In the text of Luke, there is no further mention of a Last Judgment. Hence, the idea of the Last Judgment of Daniel, Matthew, and the Apocalypse is contrasted in Luke with the concept of the Particular Judgment occurring immediately after the death of a

person. This apparent contradiction is not resolved in the Bible leaving a lot of room for later theological interpretations.

GRECO-ROMAN AND EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGIES OF THE AFTERLIFE

The unresolved contradiction between Last and Particular Judgment reflects the heterogeneity of the world of early Christians. While Jewish belief favored the concept of the Last Judgment expressed in the Book of Daniel, Greco-Roman and Egyptian mythologies were based on the idea of the Particular Judgment.¹⁴⁹

In Greek mythology, as described by Homer among others, the dead are ferried to the Underworld (*Hades*).¹⁵⁰ *Hades* is assumed to be a bleak but not a frightful place. In *Hades*, the dead are immediately judged according to their deeds in life. Exceptional sinners are sent to a special place of punishment (*Tartaros*) in the remotest parts of *Hades*. Some of them are given the opportunity to return to the ordinary parts of *Hades* after a certain period of purgation. Serious sinners with incurable sins will stay in *Tartaros* forever. On the other hand, the righteous, who are chosen by the Gods, will enjoy a happy afterlife in the Elysian Fields (*Elysion*).¹⁵¹ The majority of ordinary people will stay in *Hades*. This three-partite concept of the afterlife, consisting of *Hades*, *Tartaros*, and *Elysion* with some form of probation, heavily influenced later Christian concepts of the afterlife.

The ideas of Greek mythology were further developed in the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹⁵² In Greek mythology, *Tartaros* and *Elysion* were reserved for exceptional individuals that were handpicked by the Gods, such as Sisyphus or Tantalus. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Tartarus* and *Elysium* became mainstream notions with relevance for ordinary people. In fact, every mortal is destined for one of them. However, *Elysium* is not a final destination. It rather is a resting stop in a cycle of

death and rebirth before a soul reaches its ultimate home, *Tartarus* or reunification with the divine. As consequence, every soul requires purification by wind, water or fire in preparation of its rebirth. *Tartarus* is described as a city with walls surrounded by a river of fire and reaching deep down into earth, a counter image to the Christian Heavenly Jerusalem.

While Homer and Virgil preempted many concepts of later Christian thinking on the afterlife, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (Dream of Scipio) was the prototype of an entire genre of later medieval visions of otherness.¹⁵³ The main intent of the *Somnium Scipionis* was to admonish the Roman elite to strive towards the highest standards of moral conduct.

Egyptian mythology was also based on the concept of the Particular Judgment. The judgment of the dead occurred by weighing of their hearts conducted by the god Anubis. Anubis was the equivalent of the winged god Hermes of the Greeks. Most likely, the concept of the Weighing of Souls by archangel Michael was influenced by this Egyptian model.

APOCRYPHAL APOCALYPSES, THE CHURCH FATHERS, AND ANGLO-IRISH VISIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

The ambiguity of the biblical texts with regards to Particular and Last Judgment and their very limited details about Heaven and Hell were addressed by the apocrypha, mainly the three apocryphal apocalypses of Peter, Paul, and Mary, and by the texts of the Church Fathers. The apocryphal apocalypses were written in the 2nd century in the Eastern Mediterranean and were transmitted to the west through the Homilies of Ephraim the Syrian among others.¹⁵⁴ They provided further details on the torments of Hell. According to them, the individual torments reflect the specific nature of the respective sins, often affecting the body parts that were involved in the sinful conduct. As a result, Hell is divided into various compartments for the different

¹⁴⁹ Susanna Braund and Emma Hilliard, "Just Deserts in the Ancient Pagan Afterlife," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9 f.

¹⁵⁰ Braund and Hilliard, 9–12.

¹⁵¹ The concept of the Elysian Fields was introduced by the cult of Demeter.

¹⁵² Braund and Hilliard, "Just Deserts in the Ancient Pagan Afterlife," 15–18.

¹⁵³ The *Somnium Scipionis* was part of Cicero's lost *De Re Publica*. It is preserved through a later commentary of Macrobius. Braund and Hilliard, 13 f.

¹⁵⁴ Christe, *Das jüngste Gericht*, 33 f.; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 16.

types of sins and their respective punishment. In addition, the repository of punishments was extended beyond fire and serpents to also include hanging and various kinds of torments performed by demons. At least, the Virgin and the saints acted as intercessors on behalf of the wicked. These elements were widely used in the medieval iconography of the Last Judgment.

While the apocryphal apocalypses were rejected by the Church Fathers as unauthentic, many ideas were adopted by them. The most notable contributions of the Church Fathers to medieval thinking about the afterlife were provided by Tertullian, Augustine, and Gregory the Great.¹⁵⁵ As a consequence, from the 3rd to the middle of the 8th centuries, the doctrine of Particular Judgment successively gained importance relative to the Last Judgment, complemented by the concepts of proto-purgatory and intercession. Increasingly, the Greco-Roman and Egyptian mythologies of the afterlife permeated the thinking of the Holy Scriptures which were based on Jewish traditions. Understandably, this rather fundamental paradigm shift was a slow process that lasted for about one thousand years. It only converged to a more balanced view in the 12th and 13th centuries, i.e., after the completion of the tympanum of Conques. It is this lack of convergence that often makes the interpretation of visualizations of the Last Judgment from the 11th and early 12th centuries difficult.

Around 200, Tertullian established in *De anima* 55 the notion that all ordinary people will spend the time between their death and the Last Judgment in *Hades*, a vast deep space in the interior of the earth. Before the Last Judgment, only the patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs are with Christ. He introduced in *De anima* 58 the additional idea that the souls in *Hades* do not sleep, in contrast to their dead bodies. This assumption made the exclusive idea of a Last Judgment untenable. Otherwise, the souls of sinners would mingle with those of their victims in *Hades* without any restraint. As a resolution, he postulated that *Hades* already is a place of consolation and punishment, thereby reconciling the

seemingly conflicting ideas of the Particular and the Last Judgment. The righteous will immediately be provided with refreshments (*refrigeria*) and the wicked be treated with torments in anticipation of glory and gloom at the Last Judgment. No further details were provided. Only in the second half of the 11th century, the idea of *refrigerium* was developed into the concept of an Earthly Paradise as the waiting area for the elected.

Augustine confirmed the existence of the Particular Judgment in *De natura et origine animae* 2:8. He described in his *Enchiridion* 18:69 and 29:109-111 the existence of separate waiting areas in the otherworld for the souls of the righteous and the wicked. However, he did not go as far as Tertullian who postulated that the righteous will be rewarded with refreshments before the Last Judgment. According to Augustine, the souls of the righteous will simply rest in peace until Judgment Day while the wicked will already be subject to their deserved punishment. From his perspective, refreshments for the elected are unnecessary since the reunification of the souls with their bodies – only the latter benefitting from such refreshments – will take place with the Last Judgment.¹⁵⁶ Augustine also posed the open question whether some of the wicked with marginal sins may be saved from Hell by a time-limited purgation. He nearly preempted the answer by conceding that relatives of the dead may in certain marginal cases be able to provide relief through masses and alms.¹⁵⁷ Finally, he assumed that after the Last Judgment, the righteous and the wicked will reside in separate cities or kingdoms that are ruled by God and Satan respectively. The idea of an eternal *civitas immortalis* ruled by God (Heaven) and a mirror-image *civitas mortalis* ruled by Satan (Hell), full of eternal torments for the wicked, was further explored in his *De civitate dei*. Such structural symmetry between Heaven and Hell was a unique concept of Augustine. In addition, by refraining from providing rewards to the good before Judgment Day, he preserved the relevance

¹⁵⁵ Sebastian Scholz, "Durch eure Fürbitten ist er Gefährte der Heiligen": Grabinschrift als Ausdruck des Totengedenkens im Mittelalter," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 153 f.

¹⁵⁶ This line of thought is expressed in *De natura et origine animae* 2:8 and not in the *Enchiridion*.

¹⁵⁷ The concept of prayers for the souls of the dead already was briefly introduced in 2 Maccabees 12:43-46.

of the Last Judgment and its priority over the Particular Judgment.

The ideas of Tertullian and Augustine were further developed and substantiated by pope Gregory the Great in the fourth book of his *Dialogues*, written in 593/94 after years of significant turbulence with an outbreak of the plague and Lombard threats to Rome.¹⁵⁸ Gregory's *Dialogues* were the model of numerous other medieval visions of the afterlife.¹⁵⁹ In contrast to Augustine, Gregory rather sided with Luke 16 and assigned priority to the Particular Judgment. According to Gregory, the souls of the righteous will immediately be accepted in Heaven while the souls of the wicked will immediately be sent to Hell.¹⁶⁰ During the Particular Judgment, forces of Heaven and Hell, later interpreted as angels and devils, dispute over sinners with an ambivalent life record. Gregory also foresaw that venial sinners with significant good deeds in their life will have to spend a certain time in proto-purgatory before receiving their admission to Heaven. Masses and prayers by relatives may help to shorten or alleviate the time in proto-purgatory. On the other hand, even the mighty of the world may end up in Hell. For Gregory, the only benefit of the Last Judgment for the righteous was to provide them with the additional joy of reunification of their souls with their bodies. While Augustine saw a horizontal relationship between Heavenly Jerusalem and its Satanic counterpart, both being separate areas in the same otherworld, Gregory assigned a rather vertical relationship to Heaven and Hell. He conjectured that Hell is located deep below the surface of Earth, in line with the description of Virgil. Heaven, as the name says, would obviously be above the surface of Earth.

Julian of Toledo solidified the idea of a purgatorial fire after the Particular Judgment in his *Prognosticum futuri saeculi* from 688/89 eradicating any remaining doubts whether the purgation of Gregory the Great was referring to the Particular or to the Last Judgment.¹⁶¹

From the 8th to the early 10th centuries, these ideas were the basis of several Anglo-Irish visions of otherness which are of no relevance for Conques.¹⁶² Only, the Vision of Drythelm, documented by Bede the Venerable in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, introduced the allegory of the Mouth of Hell. It first became popular in Anglo-Saxon art and is also visualized in the tympanum of Conques (Figure 47).¹⁶³

From the second quarter of the 8th century, it became Christian practice in the southwest of England to ask friends for prayers for deceased relatives.

CAROLINGIAN SPIRITUALITY OF THE AFTERLIFE

The visions and prayer practices described came to the Frankish kingdom with St. Boniface and other Anglo-Irish missionaries as well as through the texts of Bede the Venerable.¹⁶⁴ They fell on fertile ground leading to an evolved Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife that is characterized by significantly increased fear of Hell and by unprecedented efforts to save the souls of the dead through prayers, masses or alms.

The Anglo-Irish practice of joint prayer for the souls of the dead was adopted by the League of Attigny of 762 and by a similar confraternity of prayer, established in Dingolfing in 770.¹⁶⁵ The League of Attigny was initiated by archbishop Chrodegang of Metz, a successor of St. Boniface, during a synod. Its members, 44 bishops and abbots, individually agreed to celebrate 100 masses and to read 100 psalters for each

¹⁵⁸ Jesse Keskiaho, "Visions and the Afterlife in Gregory's *Dialogues*," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 226.

¹⁵⁹ Yitzhak Hen, "Visions of the Afterlife in the Early Medieval West," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 29.

¹⁶⁰ Keskiaho, "Visions and the Afterlife in Gregory's *Dialogues*," 239.

¹⁶¹ Helen Foxhall Forbes, "The Theology of Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages, c. 400 - c. 1100," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 156.

¹⁶² Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook*, Garland Medieval Bibliographies (New York: Garland, 1993).

¹⁶³ Gardiner, 95.

¹⁶⁴ Jean Dufour, "Totenroteln im deutschen Sprachraum (8.-18. Jahrhundert)," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 200.

¹⁶⁵ Gisela Muschiol, "Gedenken und Verbrüderung: Europäische Netzworke der Lebenden und der Toten," in *Welterbe des Mittelalters: 1300 Jahre Klosterinsel Reichenau*, ed. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 226.

deceased member of the League. Most of the members originated from the Carolingian heartlands in northern France, including the abbots of Saint-Denis, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Jumièges. The German members included the bishops of Mainz, Würzburg, and Eichstätt as well as the abbot of Reichenau and St. Gall and the abbot of Hornbach. The participants of the synod in Dingolfing, all coming from Bavaria, also agreed on 100 masses and 100 psalters for every deceased member, this time including the priests and monks of their communities. In addition, many bilateral confraternities of prayer were formed, such as the confraternity between the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall from 800.¹⁶⁶

Again, the 760s were a phase of significant uncertainty. The transition from Pepin the Short to Charlemagne caused a weakening of the Carolingian rule which enticed several attacks on Frankish territory by the dukes of Aquitaine. The shifted military focus of the Carolingian troops on Aquitaine left the Papal States exposed to feared attacks by the Lombards or the Byzantine empire. Such political instability may have been interpreted as a punishment from God or as a warning signal of the nearing end of the world.

In 783/84, bishop St. Virgil of Salzburg, another Irish missionary and a participant of the synod of Dingolfing, established the earliest extant confraternity book.¹⁶⁷ About 4,500 names are listed in this book. Such written *memoria* was supposed to help their souls in the afterlife. Some of the names mentioned relate to distant locations, such as Saint-Denis, York or Aquileia. But most were of local or regional origin. The confraternity book of Salzburg marked the beginning of a Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon memorial tradition of so-called *Libri vitae* that included not only the deceased of the

respective local community but also members from other communities in the same region or even from further away.¹⁶⁸ Many of these confraternity books include the names of Carolingian kings or regional rulers. The name *Liber vitae* was chosen to create an association with the Book of Life of the Apocalypse. It was hoped that the names in the local *Liber vitae* would be added to the *Liber vitae* of the Last Judgment. Nine *Libri vitae* from the 8th and 9th centuries or traces thereof have survived.¹⁶⁹ Nearly all of them had close connections to Reichenau Abbey.¹⁷⁰ Some of them were in use until the 12th century. Beyond these early books, an isolated group of three 11th century *Libri vitae* has survived in England.¹⁷¹

One of the earliest and by far the most comprehensive of these *Libri vitae* was initiated by Reichenau Abbey in 823/25.¹⁷² It contains nearly 40,000 names. More importantly, it is the only known *Liber vitae* with a universal ambition reflecting the exceptional political role of Reichenau Abbey in the Carolingian empire. Many of its entries relate to St. Gall and to other monasteries along the Rhine, ranging from Disentis at the Anterior Rhine to Lorsch at the Upper Rhine. However, in contrast to the other confraternity books, it also documents extensive connections to all major regions of the Frankish kingdom. The initial focus was on the important Carolingian abbeys of Leno near Brescia, Nonantola near Modena, and Fulda as well as on other places in Bavaria and northern France. The latter contacts went back to the League of Attigny. Later, many connections to places in Saxony and Burgundy were added. For the purposes of our discussion, it is relevant that the *Libri vitae* and other sources of Reichenau and St. Gall document close connections to northern Italy, including Verona, Brescia, Pavia,

¹⁶⁶ Dieter Geuenich, "Die Verbrüderungsverträge im St. Galler Kapitelfizibuch (Cod. Sang. 915)," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 40–46.

¹⁶⁷ Maximilian Diesenberger, "Das Salzburger Verbrüderungsbuch," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 31–35.

¹⁶⁸ Rosamond McKitterick, "Geschichte und Memoria im Frühmittelalter: History and Memory in the Early Middle Ages," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 19–24.

¹⁶⁹ These originate from Salzburg, Reichenau, St. Gall, Pfäfers, Murbach (lost), Remiremont, Corvey, Brescia, and Lindisfarne. Pfäfers is located

close to Chur. Murbach was a foundation closely linked to Reichenau. McKitterick, 21 f.

¹⁷⁰ The connection to Remiremont is established via the *Liber vitae* of Murbach, a former foundation of the founder of Reichenau. No connections of Reichenau to Lindisfarne are known.

¹⁷¹ The *Liber vitae* of Lindisfarne was the basis of the *Liber vitae* of Durham. Two further books are known from Thorney and Winchester.

¹⁷² Régine Le Jan, "Beziehungen und Politik: Das europäische Netzwerk des Klosters Reichenau nach seinem Liber Confraternitatum (Verbrüderungsbuch)," in *Die Klosterinsel Reichenau im Mittelalter: Geschichte - Kunst - Architektur*, ed. Wolfgang Zimmermann, Olaf Siart, and Marvin Gedigk (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 59–71; Muschiol, "Gedenken und Verbrüderung."

Bobbio, and Como (Figure 53).¹⁷³ Reichenau's connections reached even further to the south of Italy, as far as Benevento. Even the names of the patriarchs of Jerusalem and Alexandria were added. Only, the coverage of medieval Aquitaine was very sparse. At least, half a dozen monastic connections in Lyon constitute a step in this geographic direction. The few entries of Reichenau's *Liber vitae* from Aquitaine are limited to Conques in Rouergue as well as presumably Manglieu and Charroux in Auvergne. It is remarkable that the entry identified with Conques (*Colticas*) was already included in the initial *Liber vitae* from 823/25.¹⁷⁴ It will be shown later that connections from Conques to Reichenau and St. Gall seem to have existed until the end of the 11th century.

Like Gregory's Dialogues of the 590s and the confraternities of prayer of the 760s, the *Liber vitae* of Reichenau Abbey was created in response to unstable external conditions. According to the annals of the empire, the year 823 was an *annus horribilis* with adverse weather conditions that led to a bad harvest, famine and a deadly outbreak of the plague.¹⁷⁵ The *ordinatio imperii* or rather *divisio imperii* of 817, which was supposed to secure an orderly succession from Louis the Pious to his three sons, had shaken the empire only a few years ago. The planned succession was unsettled again in 823 by the unforeseen birth of Louis' fourth son Charles the Bald. Hence, the uncertain political situation of 823/825 was somewhat comparable to the 760s in which the first confraternities of prayer were established.

The exceptional *Liber vitae* of Reichenau Abbey provides a first indication that the abbey may have played an important role in the development of the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife. This impression is supported by other theological and liturgical documents. Undoubtedly, the most important literary

product of Reichenau Abbey was its *Visio Wettini*. Reichenau's schoolmaster Wetti had this vision in 824, few days before his death.¹⁷⁶ It was documented in 824/825 by Reichenau's abbot Heito, the builder of the abbey church mentioned above, and as a poem by Walahfrid Strabo. Both authors count amongst the most important leaders of Reichenau Abbey.

In his vision, Wetti is led by an angel to several places of otherworld where he can see various deceased acquaintances and deceased leaders of Reichenau Abbey or leaders of the empire, all being subject to torments. The most prominent and by far most extensively described example is Charlemagne.¹⁷⁷ Despite his significant and widely recognized good deeds for the Catholic faith and for the church, his genitals are being gnawed at by an animal. This punishment is attributed to various extramarital affairs in the later years of his life. At least, Wetti receives the consolation that Charlemagne eventually is destined for Heaven. In other words, Charlemagne is in a state of proto-purgatory.

Wetti himself is accused of sexual misconduct relating to his pupils. In three consecutive attempts, he asks the saints, the martyrs, and the Holy Virgins for their intercession with Christ.¹⁷⁸ It is described in much detail how each group rushes to Christ as the King of Kings to ask for mercy on behalf of Wetti. Each time, Christ reconfirms his verdict emphasizing the severity of the sins. But after the third attempt, he also offers the possibility of forgiveness if Wetti will lead those that he had misled back to the path of virtue. Eventually, Wetti wakes up with a clear path to salvation but with little time left to pursue it. He uses the last days of his life having Heito document and disseminate his vision as a warning for others. He also sends ten letters to friends asking for their support in prayer referring to the 100

¹⁷³ For the connections of St. Gall, see the included map of: Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli, eds., *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher* (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010).

¹⁷⁴ Le Jan, "Beziehungen und Politik," 60; Some researchers believe that the entry *Colticas* refers to Couches in Burgundy instead of Conques. However, most researchers interpret the entry as a reference to Conques. For an alternative view, see Katrinette Bodarwé and Moritz Rother, "Die Gründung(en) des Klosters Conques: Die Urkunden Ludwigs des Frommen (BM2 688) und Pippins I. von Aquitanien (D 32)," *Archiv für Diplomatik* 57 (2011): 7.

¹⁷⁵ Alfons Zettler, "'Visio Wettini' und Reichenauer Verbrüderungsbuch," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 65 f.

¹⁷⁶ Walahfrid Strabo and Heito, *Visio Wettini: Einführung. Lateinisch-Deutsche Ausgabe und Erläuterungen*, ed. Walter Berschin, 3rd ed., Reichenauer Texte und Bilder 12 (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2009).

¹⁷⁷ Strabo and Heito, 49–51.

¹⁷⁸ Strabo and Heito, 53–55.

masses and 100 psalters required by the League of Attigny.¹⁷⁹

The *Visio Wettini* was the most influential and most widely distributed vision of the afterlife of the entire Carolingian era, in particular with respect to proto-purgatory and intercession.¹⁸⁰ Its strong influence lasted at least until the end of the 11th century. In total, 58 medieval copies are known, of which 25 were created in the 9th to 11th centuries.¹⁸¹ Trans-regional copies of the 9th century are known from Nonantola, Milan, Saint-Amand, northern France, and England. In the 10th and 11th centuries, copies were created among others for Tours, Lombardy, Murano (Venice), and Montecassino. Other visions of the afterlife inspired by the *Visio Wettini* were written in Reims and Montecassino.¹⁸²

The passages from Augustine's *Enchiridion* discussed above were among the most popular texts cited by Carolingian authors in the context of prayer for the dead.¹⁸³ Hence, they have a particular importance for the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife. Apparently, the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall were the first to even introduce excerpts of them in the responsories of their Office of the Dead. Only a handful of nearly 1,800 analyzed responsory sequences from different places used passages of the *Enchiridion*.¹⁸⁴ In the course of the 11th century, the passages from *Enchiridion* were replaced in St. Gall by passages from Job and from the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. The latter emphasized the importance of the Last Judgment.¹⁸⁵ Such prominence of the text of Augustine, in general and particularly at the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall, as well as the later prominence of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians support the assumption of a Carolingian renaissance of the Last Judgment relative

to the Particular Judgment favored by Gregory the Great.

The first half of the 9th century saw the emergence of further innovations in memorial practices. Martyrologies were extended to become necrologies. An early example again is preserved from St. Gall.¹⁸⁶ Text passages from funeral liturgies were added to epitaphs asking readers to pray for the deceased person.¹⁸⁷ These anecdotal observations add further evidence to the claim that the spirituality of the afterlife saw a significant surge in the Carolingian era.

Due to its detailed account and its wide influence, the *Visio Wettini* teaches several important lessons on Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife. First, the narrative of the temporary torments of Charlemagne further solidifies earlier assumptions of proto-purgatory by Augustine and Gregory the Great. In fact, the *Visio* mentions that the Dialogues of Gregory the Great were its most important source of inspiration. Wetti also had access to the visions of Julian of Toledo, Fursey, and Barontus as well as to other visions from the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Bede the Venerable.¹⁸⁸ However, in contrast to Gregory the Great, the *Visio Wettini* leaves the relationship between Particular and Last Judgment open. In fact, the use of Augustine's *Enchiridion* in the liturgy of the Office of the Dead of Reichenau Abbey and the important illustrations of the Last Judgment based on Matthew 24-25 created in its cultural space provide a clear indication that the Last Judgment had a significantly higher relevance for the monks of Reichenau than can be expected from the Dialogues of Gregory the Great.

A second important lesson from the *Visio Wettini* and other Carolingian visions as well as from several

¹⁷⁹ Zettler, "Geschichte und Memoria im Frühmittelalter," 61.

¹⁸⁰ Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*; Richard Matthew Pollard, "Nonantola and Reichenau. A New Manuscript of Heito's *Visio Wettini* and the Foundations for a New Critical Edition," *Revue Bénédictine* 120, no. 2 (2010): 3 f., <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.RB.5.100547>; Strabo and Heito, *Visio Wettini*, 13.

¹⁸¹ Pollard, "Nonantola and Reichenau. A New Manuscript of Heito's *Visio Wettini* and the Foundations for a New Critical Edition," 30–38.

¹⁸² Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*, 31, 45.

¹⁸³ Julian Hendrix, "Das Totenoffizium auf der Reichenau und in St. Gallen: The Office of the Dead at Reichenau and St. Gall," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 70 f.

¹⁸⁴ Hendrix, 77 f.; Knud Ottosen, *The Responsories and Versicles of the Latin Office of the Dead*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Books on Demand, 2007).

¹⁸⁵ Hendrix, "Das Totenoffizium auf der Reichenau und in St. Gallen," 78 f.

¹⁸⁶ Bernhard Zeller, "Die frühmittelalterlichen Necrologien des Klosters St. Gallen," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 183–89.

¹⁸⁷ Scholz, "Durch eure Fürbitten ist er Gefährte der Heiligen," 154 f.

¹⁸⁸ Strabo and Heito, *Visio Wettini*, 12; Pollard, "Nonantola and Reichenau. A New Manuscript of Heito's *Visio Wettini* and the Foundations for a New Critical Edition," 21.

Libri Vitae of the 9th century is the concern for the souls of important leaders of the Carolingian empire, most notably for Charlemagne. This concern also must be read as a moral critique or admonishment of the contemporary elite in the wake of the religious reforms of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious.¹⁸⁹ Visions with mention of leaders of the Frankish kingdom include the Visions of Charles the Fat, Bernold, Fulrad, a Poor Woman, Rotcharius, and the *Visio Wettini*. The latter three focus on Charlemagne.

The idea of intercession by saints and by prayers of the living proliferated in the Carolingian era to unprecedented levels, aptly described by the notion of ‘the more, the better.’ While the earlier texts of Augustine and Gregory the Great acknowledged the potential support of masses, prayers or alms in very limited cases and while the apocryphal apocalypses introduced the intercessions by the Virgin and by saints, the exhaustive intercessions by saints, martyrs, and Holy Virgins as well as by the living described in the *Visio Wettini* elevate the concept of intercession to an entirely new level. Augustine and Gregory the Great still were very careful, if not cautious, in identifying situations in which masses, prayers or alms may be of any help. In contrast to the considerate attitude of the latter, the *Libri Vitae* and the *Visio Wettini* promote a coordinated approach to intercession at scale. However, such excessive use of prayers can also be read as a sign of significant doubt about the effectiveness of individual intercessions.¹⁹⁰ After unsuccessful attempts with the saints and martyrs, Wetti requires the support of the Holy Virgins to achieve at least some progress with Christ. But even then, he is required to correct his past misconduct after returning to ‘this-world’ to be considered for salvation. Hence, the Carolingian theologians did not question the feeble power of an individual prayer, as expressed by Augustine and Gregory the Great. Rather, they tried to overcome this weakness by adopting an orchestrated volume approach to intercessions.

Lastly, Carolingian visions or related texts are characterized by an increased focus on the spiritual role of women, in particular in the context of intercession.¹⁹¹ In the Carolingian texts of the *Visio Wettini*, a revised Apocalypse of Paul, and the Vision of the Poor Woman among others, women have a more prominent role than in earlier comparable visions. The reference of the *Visio Wettini* to intercession by the Holy Virgins is a notable new element that was by no means standard practice. Apparently, such increased role of women in the spiritual texts was in contradiction with their diminished role in Carolingian religious practices.

To conclude, the Carolingian era was characterized by a significantly increased focus on the afterlife and on the Last Judgment. The non-biblical ideas of proto-purgatory and intercession matured to a level that allowed them to have significant impact on memorial practices. The themes of intercession by masses and prayers, moralizing political agendas with focus on the soul of Charlemagne, and the concern for women are very specific aspects of Carolingian spirituality.¹⁹²

CLUNY AND THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE 10TH TO 13TH CENTURIES

In the 10th and 11th centuries, further visions of otherness were created, some based on the *Visio Wettini*.¹⁹³ But none of them seem to have relevance for the tympanum of Conques. More importantly, the 10th and 11th centuries saw the rise of the Cluniac movement. The foundation of Cluny Abbey in 910 was the consequence of the Carolingian paradigm of intercession by extensive masses and prayers. Cluny was funded by wealthy donors for the benefit of their souls. The excessive memorial practices of Cluny that were required to provide the promised memorial services for its numerous donors, resulting among others in the introduction of the feast of All Souls’ Day, underline that Cluny Abbey maintained, if not

¹⁸⁹ Richard Matthew Pollard, “A Morbid Efflorescence: Envisaging the Afterlife in the Carolingian Period,” in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 41–43.

¹⁹⁰ Pollard, 50 f.

¹⁹¹ Pollard, 51–55.

¹⁹² Pollard, 42.

¹⁹³ Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*.

intensified, the practices of the Carolingian era described above.¹⁹⁴

However, the many charters that were created in the context of such donations exhibit an important shift of Cluny in the 11th century relative to the earlier Carolingian view exemplified by Reichenau Abbey.¹⁹⁵ Instead of emphasizing the horrors of proto-purgatory and Hell, as was the case in the *Visio Wettini*, the monks of Cluny rather emphasized the positive effects that a donation would have for the souls of the donors in the afterlife. In this context, Tertullian's notion of *refrigerium* was revived. In the second half of the 11th century, the use of *refrigerium* in the charters of Cluny evolved from describing an abstract benefit to a paradise-like location in otherness. The notion of an Earthly Paradise as a resting place after purgation, often allegorized by the Bosom of Abraham from Luke 16, became more and more concrete in visions of the 12th century such as the Cistercian *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* from around 1180.¹⁹⁶

Both Reichenau, as representative of the Carolingian spirituality, and Cluny, as pre-eminent representative of the 11th and early 12th centuries, agreed on the importance of the Last Judgment and the effectiveness of intercession by masses and prayers. However, different perspectives existed with respect to how the righteous are treated before the Last Judgment.

Formal convergence between these incongruent views only occurred in the 13th century, siding more with the Carolingian perspective.¹⁹⁷ In 1245 and 1274, the councils of Lyon affirmed that the afterlife mainly consists of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. The new formal concept of Purgatory (*purgatorium*) as an enduring waiting area reconciled the seemingly divergent ideas of Particular and Last Judgment. *Tartaros* and eternal

Hell denote the same place. The 11th century idea of an Earthly Paradise as a separate waiting area for the righteous and purified was abandoned. Instead, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas introduced two categories of Limbo (*limbus*) as waiting area for the patriarchs and as final resting place for children that died before their baptism.¹⁹⁸ With the two Limbos, the Underworld now was believed to consist of four layers, contrasted by Heaven as an undifferentiated location. This new doctrine reconciled the divergent positions of Tertullian, Augustine and Gregory the Great, as well as of Matthew and Luke. However, this evolution happened too late to be relevant for the iconography of the tympanum of Conques.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE AFTERLIFE AROUND 1100

With the Church Fathers, the Greco-Roman concepts of *Hades* and *Tartaros* had permeated the traditions of the Jewish-Christian Scriptures. Foxhall Forbes calls the new doctrine, developed until the early 8th century, the 'fourfold judgment.'¹⁹⁹ According to it, the Particular Judgment is a kind of triage system. Saints and martyrs are immediately sent to Heaven to sit with Christ as judges. The most wicked sinners are immediately cast into hell and will not be summoned before Christ as judge. For ordinary sinners with a more ambiguous record in life, Christ will make the final call during the Last Judgment in which the righteous will be elected to Heaven and the wicked will be cast into Hell.

However, there was still some uncertainty as to how ordinary people spend their waiting time in *Hades*. In Carolingian times, the concepts of proto-purgatory and intercession by saints or by masses and prayers became a mainstream notion that was applied at scale.

¹⁹⁴ Franz Neiske, "Pro defunctis exorare ut a peccatis solvantur": Theologie und Praxis der Memoria in Cluny," in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 190–94.

¹⁹⁵ Neiske, 194–96.

¹⁹⁶ Carl Watkins, "Otherworld Journeys of the Central Middle Ages," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 105, 110.

¹⁹⁷ Watkins, 111; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 188, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511483332>; Isabel Moreira,

"Purgatory's Intercessors: Bishops, Ghosts, and Angry Wives," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 134.

¹⁹⁸ Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Afterdeath Locations and Return Appearances, from Scripture to Shakespeare," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 177–79.

¹⁹⁹ Foxhall Forbes, "The Theology of Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages," 155; Helen Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in Quattuor: The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series* 61, no. 2 (October 2010): 659–84.

Hence, most souls would have to spend time in proto-purgatory and therefore would benefit from intercessions. These ideas maintained their validity until 1100.

Different perspectives are recognizable between the Carolingian spirituality and the spirituality of the late 11th century. In Carolingian spirituality, the good will not receive early rewards in *Hades*, in accordance with Augustine. Carolingian texts also had a strong moralizing note, focusing on the souls of Charlemagne and other leaders of the Frankish kingdom. They particularly emphasized the important roles of intercession by prayer and intercession by women. A particularly influential role in this development was played by Reichenau Abbey.

These beliefs were gradually superseded by the thinking of the second half of the 11th century, for example promoted by Cluny and Constantinople. The concepts of Tertullian and Gregory the Great evolved towards the assumption of an Earthly Paradise in *Hades* for the souls of the good, providing a more desirable alternative to the sober perspective of idle resting, as promoted by Augustine. Thereby, the focus of the narrative of the afterlife had begun to shift from the torments of proto-purgatory and Hell to the rewards of Earthly Paradise and Heaven.

A short history of the iconography of the Last Judgment

The previous section summarized the development of the spirituality of the afterlife according to literary sources. Here, this view will be complemented by a concise summary of the evolution of the iconography of the Last Judgment (Table 5). The combination of both views will eventually provide a renewed perspective on the tympanum of Conques. The following synopsis is largely based on the comprehensive monographs of Voss, Christe, Pace with Angheben, and Loerke.²⁰⁰

Precursors of the iconography of the Last Judgment were created in the 3rd to 6th centuries in

Rome and Ravenna. While further precursors from the Eastern Mediterranean are likely, their existence has never been proven. The iconographic ideas of Rome and Ravenna were adopted at the Anterior Rhine in the second half of the 8th century. From there, the idea of visualizing the Last Judgment developed and continuously matured while moving down the Rhine from Disentis via Chur/Müstair and St. Gall to Reichenau. The iconography of these illustrations was based on the text of Matthew 24-25. Only selected iconographic ideas were adopted from the Apocalypse or from later texts. Due to the leading artistic role and vast network of Reichenau Abbey, the latter became the most influential center of dissemination for the iconography of the Last Judgment. In the 10th and 11th centuries, illustrations of the Last Judgment also appeared in a handful of Byzantine locations along the pilgrimage route from Venice to the Holy Land. It therefore remains open to what extent their iconography was imported from the west or constitutes an echo of pre-iconoclastic iconography. The most important innovation of 11th century Byzantine iconography, known from visualizations in Constantinople and Torcello, was the joint representation of the Particular and the Last Judgment following the texts of Tertullian and Gregory the Great. The tympanum of Conques is believed to constitute the earliest monumental visualization of the Last Judgment of the Romanesque period.

According to this history, the wall painting of Müstair may have been the decisive moment in which the mature iconography of the Last Judgment was developed. Evidently, such a significant development required spiritual and artistic precursors, most likely from Reichenau Abbey and from Italy. The surprisingly similar wall painting of Sant'Angelo in Formis near Naples raises the open question whether Müstair and Formis may have had a common ancestor, potentially in Rome. In the following, more details will be provided on the development steps outlined above.

²⁰⁰ Georg Voss, *Das jüngste Gericht in der bildenden Kunst des frühen Mittelalters* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1884); Christe, *Das jüngste Gericht*; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*; Marc-Oliver Loerke, "Höllenfahrt

Christi und Anastasis: Ein Bildmotiv im Abendland und im christlichen Osten" (Universität Regensburg, 2007), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:355-opus-7544>.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE PAROUSIA OF CHRIST IN ROME AND RAVENNA

From the 3rd to the early 6th centuries, until the end of the Ostrogothic rule, selected iconographic motifs were developed that heralded later visual representations of the Last Judgment. These include the Good Shepherd and his separation of the Sheep and Goat as well as early visualizations of the Parousia of Christ. Such depictions are known from Rome and Ravenna. There is no evidence for the existence of comparable motifs in the Byzantine empire.

The earlier of them is the representation of Christ as the Good Shepherd and his separation of the Sheep and the Goats according to Matthew 25:31-46. The earliest extant visualization of the separation of the Sheep and the Goats exists at a 4th century sarcophagus from Rome, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The left hand of Christ shows a rejecting gesture towards the goats in line with the text of Matthew 25.²⁰¹ Further representations of this scene are known from the apse of a lost church in Fondi from about 400, located between Rome and Naples, as well as from a mosaic of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna from about 500.²⁰² The shepherd of Ravenna also shows an asymmetrical hand gesture to indicate his rejection of the goat.

In the same period, several mosaics were created in Rome with the Parousia of Christ, showing him sitting on a throne or on a large sphere. In these mosaics, Christ is often arranged with selected iconographic elements from the Book of Apocalypse. These include clouds symbolizing divine power, the twenty-four elder, the four living creatures, the Lamb of God, twelve lambs as representations of the twelve apostles or depictions of Heavenly Jerusalem. These elements were shown in different combinations at Old-St. Peter, Santa Constanza, Santa Pudenziana, San Paolo fuori le mura, and Santi Cosma e Damiano. An early representation of the triumphal cross exists at Santa Pudenziana. Later representations followed at San Michele in Affricisco and Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna. But apart from Heavenly Jerusalem and the triumphal cross,

these iconographic elements have no relevance for the Last Judgment.

In this first phase, the idea of the Last Judgment was introduced through the allegory of the Sheep and the Goat. But its iconography has no resemblance with later representations, except for the rejecting gesture of the left hand of Christ.

FIRST ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE ERA

In the next phase from the second quarter of the 6th century to the first quarter of the 9th century, starting with the rule of Justinian, several visualizations were created under Byzantine influence that in the past were interpreted as early representations of the Last Judgment. However, later analysis rejected or at least questioned these claims. These visualizations have iconographic parallels with later representations of the Last Judgment. Therefore, it remains an open question whether pre-iconoclastic representations of the Last Judgment existed in the Byzantine empire.

An important development step was the often-overlooked apse mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco in Ravenna from around 545 (Figure 48), now in the Museum of Byzantine Art in Berlin. It contains the earliest extant representation of the seven angels with seven trumpets of the Apocalypse as well as one of the potentially earliest representations of the Arma Christi. The mosaic shows seven angels with trumpets surrounding the Majesty of Christ and the two adjacent archangels with the Arma Christi.

According to the text of the Apocalypse, the seven angels with seven trumpets announce the Parousia of Christ rather than the Last Judgment. However, they create a parallel with the text of Matthew 25 and later representations of the Last Judgment. In addition, they convey the sense of a one-time event rather than a continuous state. Most likely, the mosaic was an early, not yet fully developed representation of trinity. Christ is displayed three times, as a young person with the triumphal cross (the Son), as an older person sitting on a throne with the symbols of his Parousia (an

²⁰¹ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, Abb. 2.

²⁰² Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 21 f.

approximation to the Father), and as the Lamb of God surrounded by twelve doves (an early representation of the Holy Spirit). Such a representation of trinity would be well motivated in the anti-Arian climate of Justinian Ravenna.

Apart from the seven angels with seven trumpets and the representation of Christ with the triumphal cross, the two angels with the Arma Christi deserve further discussion. Today, the mosaic is displayed in heavily restored condition. Due to the poorly documented restoration of the 19th century and due to conflicting earlier drawings, it is not beyond doubt that the angels next to Christ held the Arma Christi in their hands rather than plain ceremonial sticks. Three of five drawings from the time before the restoration show the Arma Christi.²⁰³ The watercolor of Ravenna (Figure 48) is one of them. The earliest of the two drawings that only show ceremonial sticks, dating from 1699, is rather inaccurate leaving only one rather accurate drawing that would speak against the originality of the Arma Christi. Unfortunately, it is the latter drawing that was used for the restoration work giving some credibility to potential doubts about the originality of the Arma Christi. On the other hand, the restored mosaic clearly shows the Arma Christi. In light of the interpretation of the mosaic as representation of trinity, the Arma Christi would indeed be important to indicate that the Majesty with the beard is identical with Christ and not an image of God as a separate person.²⁰⁴ A 6th century pilgrim ampulla from the Holy Land, found in Bobbio, also contains a representation of the Arma Christi.²⁰⁵ Therefore, it is quite likely that the mosaic from San Michele in Affricisco constitutes one of the earliest representations of the Arma Christi indeed. Interestingly, also the lost apse of Fondi with the separation of the Sheep and the Goat contained a representation of trinity.²⁰⁶ Apparently, the concept of trinity was seen as closely linked to the Parousia of Christ and eventually to the Last Judgment. In any case,

the angels with trumpets, the triumphal cross of Christ, and the angels with the Arma Christi of San Michele in Affricisco have considerable iconographic parallels with the tympanum of Conques, even though the overall themes of both images are not identical. Before Conques, the Arma Christi were already included in the Last Judgments of St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell and Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello (Figure 50), both dating from the 11th century.²⁰⁷

Generally, Justinian Ravenna was under strong influence from the Eastern Mediterranean. In particular, the anti-Arian theme of the mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco and its patron saints Cosmas and Damian point towards a creation under strong Byzantine influence.

A handful of artistic artifacts created between the 6th and 9th centuries preempt iconographic elements of later representations of the Last Judgment. But none of them was validated as an early representation of the Last Judgment. In most cases, even their dating leaves significant room for doubt. These new elements include courtroom scenes, dead rising from their tombs or damned in the fire. Such elements can be found in copies of a manuscript of the Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes, a terracotta from the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, now in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, a sarcophagus from Jouarre, and a manuscript that may be attributed to Johannes Damascenus.²⁰⁸ At least the text of Johannes Damascenus indicates the potential existence of a Byzantine iconography of the Last Judgment before the iconoclasm.²⁰⁹ In addition, it is assumed that the Trier Apocalypse from the early 9th century may have been based on a 6th century manuscript.²¹⁰ It contains an illustration of the Last Judgment closely following the text of Apocalypse 20. But it has not found any notable succession in Carolingian art.²¹¹

Between the end of the 7th century and around 820, representations of the Lamb of God with the Book with

²⁰³ Arne Effenberger, *Das Mosaik aus der Kirche San Michele in Affricisco zu Ravenna: Ein Kunstwerk in der Frühchristlich-byzantinischen Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 65.

²⁰⁴ Effenberger, 73–75, 78.

²⁰⁵ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 94.

²⁰⁶ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 22.

²⁰⁷ Angheben, 65.

²⁰⁸ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 16 f., 25–27, 33 f.

²⁰⁹ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 25.

²¹⁰ Peter K. Klein, "L'Apocalypse de Trèves," in *Le Jugement dernier: entre Orient et Occident*, by Marcello Angheben, ed. Valentino Pace (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 37 f.

²¹¹ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 109.

Seven Seals and the Seven Candlesticks were added to the iconographic toolbox at Santi Cosma e Damiano and Santa Prassede in Rome. Pope Sergius I who mandated the mosaic on the triumphal arch of Santi Cosma e Damiano was of Syrian origin further pointing towards Byzantine influences.

ICONOGRAPHY OF THE HARROWING OF HELL

Another indication in the direction of early Byzantine influences is provided by the iconography of the Harrowing of Hell or *Descensus ad inferos*, the descent of Christ into *Hades* between the crucifixion and the resurrection.²¹² The Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople of 680/81 emphasized the importance of the feast of Easter and promoted the representation of Christ as a person rather than by its transfiguration as the Lamb of God. In this context, the narrative of the Harrowing of Hell became an important element of orthodox Easter liturgy although it is hardly mentioned in the Bible.²¹³ It is rather based on Jewish traditions and on the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell was already accepted by the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople from 359/60. Its main theological intent is the redemption of those who lived before the death of Christ and therefore were unable to adopt the Christian faith. From an iconographic perspective, such redemption was directed to Adam and Eve or to the Patriarchs of the Old Testament.

For the purposes of our discussion, it is relevant that the motif of the Harrowing of Hell motivated the first Christian illustrations of Hell predating the earliest representations of the Last Judgment. It contributed to the introduction of the Greek concept of *Hades* to the Christian faith, beyond the vague allusions of the Apocalypse. Both points were instrumental for later representations of the Last Judgment.

Most likely, the iconography of the Harrowing of Hell was developed in the last quarter of the 7th century, as a consequence of the Sixth Ecumenical Council from

680/81.²¹⁴ Due to the iconoclasm, no early Byzantine representations are known. Instead, the earliest extant illustrations exist in the chapel of pope John VII at Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome. John VII mandated the wall painting around 705-07.²¹⁵ There and in later Byzantine depictions, Christ grabs Adam by the hand to pull him out of Hell while *Hades* tries to hold him back by the foot. The earliest extant Byzantine depiction is known from Kiliçlar Kilise near Göreme in Cappadocia.²¹⁶

In the 9th century, a handful of wall paintings with this motif were created in some churches of Rome, including the chapel of Zeno of Santa Prassede, the crypt and nave of San Clemente, San Giovanni e Paolo, and Old-St. Peter.²¹⁷ Outside Rome, early wall paintings are only known from Müstair and Cimitile near Naples. Also, a few miniatures from the 9th and the early 11th centuries exist, most notably in the Utrecht Psalter. In the period of 1080-1110, a few more depictions were created in the Papal States, such as in Sant'Angelo in Formis, Salerno, Farfa, and Montecassino.²¹⁸ The slightly earlier doors of San Paolo fuori le Mura with the same motif were created in Constantinople. The scene of the Harrowing of Hell is also included in the wall mosaic of the Last Judgment at Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello from about 1080.

To conclude, nearly all western representations of the Harrowing of Hell from the time before 1100 were created in Rome or in the Papal States. The only notable exceptions are Müstair and Torcello. These were key locations for the development of the iconography of the Last Judgment. Coincidences with the iconography of the Last Judgment also exist in Göreme and Formis. Apparently, the evolution of the iconography of the Last Judgment was closely related to the Harrowing of Hell. In the Catholic Church, the crucifixion of Christ increasingly gained priority over his resurrection, by the latest since Anselm of Canterbury in the late 11th century.²¹⁹ As a consequence, the tympanum of Conques

²¹² Loerke, "Höllenfahrt Christi und Anastasis."

²¹³ A short allusion to the Harrowing of Hell is included in 1 Peter 3:19. Loerke, 4-7.

²¹⁴ Loerke, 23-25.

²¹⁵ Loerke, 22.

²¹⁶ Loerke, 26, 29.

²¹⁷ Loerke, 37 f.

²¹⁸ Loerke, 64.

²¹⁹ Loerke, 15.

displays the Cross where the wall mosaic of the Last Judgment of Torcello shows the Harrowing of Hell.

FULL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAST JUDGMENT IN THE CULTURAL SPACE OF REICHENAU ABBEY

The iconography of the Last Judgment matured in the Latin West. Possibly, it was even invented there since the early medieval spirituality of the afterlife described in the previous section was developed during the Byzantine iconoclasm. In line with this evolution, a text of Bede the Venerable from the early 8th century reports on an image of the Last Judgment on the northern wall of a church in Wearmouth.²²⁰ However, the maturation of the iconography of the Last Judgment seems to have taken place in the period from the late 8th to the mid-11th centuries in the eastern Frankish kingdom and later empire, along the Alpine sections of the Rhine ranging from the Anterior Rhine to Lake Constance.

Recent excavations at the abbey of St. Martin in Disentis at the Anterior Rhine provided evidence that a precursor church from around 750 contained a monumental painted relief with seven angels with trumpets, a dozen or more saints holding scrolls in their hands, more than 45 angels, and the potentially earliest representation of the Dormition of the Virgin (*Koimesis*).²²¹ As discussed in the context of the mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco, the angels with trumpets alone do not suffice to interpret the relief as a representation of the Last Judgment. The large number of angels and saints or apostles would at least be consistent with Matthew 25 and 19. Given the spiritual developments of the period around 760 exemplified by the first confraternities of prayer, a reference of the relief of Disentis to the Last Judgment is not unlikely. At least, it represented a further step in the development of iconography going beyond San Michele in Affricisco.

According to current knowledge, the most significant development step of the iconography of the Last Judgment consisted in the extensive wall painting

at the interior west wall of the church of St. John the Baptist in Müstair presumably dating from the first half of the 9th century.²²² Müstair was an important Carolingian monastery at the former border to Lombard Italy. It also was a residence of the bishop of Chur, the latter being located at the Alpine Rhine between Disentis and Lake Constance. The iconography of Müstair is almost entirely based on Matthew 24-25 with 19.²²³ The scene of the Judgment is arranged in several registers. As outlined in the previous section, the iconographic elements derived from Matthew include the announcement of the Judgment by angels with trumpets and presumably by the Cross, a glory of angels, an oversized Christ as judge sitting on a throne in a mandorla, the twelve Apostles as his jury, the dead rising from their tombs as well as the saved on the right side of Christ and presumably the damned on his left side. The assumed representations of the Cross and the damned are no longer extant. The most unique element of the Last Judgment of Müstair consists in the asymmetrical gestures of Christ. He raises his right arm which is directed towards the saved while lowering his left arm pointing to the assumed representation of the damned. In addition, his left palm is turned away from the observer in a somewhat unnatural way. The gesture of Christ's left arm refers to the rejection of the damned, as described in Matthew 25. The only iconographic elements based on the Apocalypse are an angel rolling up the scrolls of the sky and the arches above the Apostles representing Heavenly Jerusalem. The Last Judgment of Müstair is part of an extensive series of scenes from the Book of David and from the New Testament filling the entire nave.²²⁴ The arrangement of these scenes closely resembles what is known about the lost wall paintings of important basilicas of Rome, such as the Lateran Basilica, Old-St. Peter or San Paolo fuori le mura, manifesting strong Italian influences.²²⁵

A document from Reichenau Abbey dating from the second half of the 9th century comments on a planned painting of the Last Judgment at the west wall of the

²²⁰ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 18; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 27.

²²¹ Studer, *Byzanz in Disentis*, 11–13, 50–65, 202–33.

²²² Alexis Dind and Jürg Goll, *Kloster St. Johann. Müstair*, 32nd ed., Kunstführer 10601 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2017), 18.

²²³ Peter K. Klein, "Les peintures Carolingiennes de Saint Jean à Müstair," in *Le Jugement dernier: entre Orient et Occident*, by Marcello Angheben, ed. Valentino Pace (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 43 f.

²²⁴ Dind and Goll, *Kloster St. Johann. Müstair*, 26–28.

²²⁵ Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen in Rom*, 23–26, 102, 130 f.

new abbey church of St. Gall near Lake Constance. Christ as judge was to be surrounded by trumpet angels and by several saints as a jury, conforming with the archaeological findings from Disentis. This painting was to be executed by monks from Reichenau Abbey.²²⁶

The manuscripts of the Bamberg Apocalypse, the Pericopes of Henry II of Bamberg, and the Bernulphus Codex in Utrecht, produced by monks of Reichenau Abbey around 1000-50, contain rather similar miniatures of the Last Judgment. They constitute a somewhat condensed version of Müstair. The most representative of them is the miniature from the Bamberg Apocalypse (Figure 49). Despite being an illustration for a Book of the Apocalypse, its iconography is derived from Matthew 24-25 as well. In a slight variation of the text of Matthew, Christ presents a large triumphal cross with his right hand. The only iconographic additions from the Apocalypse are the representation of Hell with Satan in chains as well as the representations of kings and bishops among the saved and damned (Apocalypse 20:12). Further characteristic elements are two angels with scrolls containing passages from Matthew 25. Angels with illegible scrolls already existed in Müstair. The Brescia Casket would provide a natural model for them.²²⁷

In the middle of the 11th century, another wall painting of the Last Judgment was created at the eastern wall of the narthex of St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell.²²⁸ Generally, it is similarly structured as the wall painting from Müstair. However, it no longer is presented in the nave as the end of the sequence of scenes addressing those leaving the church. Instead, it is positioned above the entrance to the nave. Its position preempts later tympana of the Last Judgment in

Romanesque and Gothic art. The wall painting of Reichenau-Oberzell introduced three novel elements regarding the iconography of Christ.²²⁹ The mandorla is decorated with stars and clouds to more explicitly indicate its representation of Heaven. In addition, the passion of Christ is emphasized by a depiction of the Arma and Stigmata Christi. Like the Arma Christi, the Cross is presented by an angel. Another angel presents the open *Liber vitae*. The stars and the Arma Christi may have been derived from early Christian models such as the mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco. In addition, the Virgin is introduced as intercessor. Intercession with Christ by the Virgin and by St. John the Baptist, the deesis, was an element of Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment. However, this analogy does not necessarily imply Byzantine influences. The Virgin was the patron saint of the abbey church of Reichenau. A prayer for the dead of Reichenau Abbey from the 9th century already refers to intercession by the Virgin.²³⁰ To provide space for these new elements, the glory of angels was dropped which had no basis in the text of Matthew 24-25 anyway. Finally, the representation of the Last Judgment was combined with a depiction of the crucifixion.

The related representation of the Last Judgment of St. Michael in Burgfelden dating from the second half of the 11th century is stylistically linked to St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell. It is located about 75 km north of Reichenau. Here, the Cross is presented by two angels, like in Conques. An additional angel with a lance pushes the damned into Hell.²³¹ In addition, they are pulled by two devils.

From the second half of the 11th to the early 12th centuries, a few additional wall paintings related to the

²²⁶ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 105; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 27 f.; Cornel Dora, "Fischfang trifft Morchelzucht: Die Reichenau und das Kloster St. Gallen," in *Welterbe des Mittelalters: 1300 Jahre Klosterinsel Reichenau*, ed. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 192.

²²⁷ Brescia and Verona were the nearest important settlements in northern Italy. Christ teaching with a scroll in a synagogue is the central motif of the impressive 4th century Brescia Casket. The latter was kept by the monastery of San Salvatore in Brescia which was very closely connected to Reichenau Abbey according to their *Liber vitae*. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the artists of Müstair or Reichenau Abbey were aware of the Brescia Casket. The motif of Christ teaching in a synagogue from the Holy Scriptures would provide a natural motivation for the introduction of scrolls with texts in iconography.

²²⁸ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 64; Caroline Raiter-Schärli, "Wunderbilder im Großformat: Die frühmittelalterlichen Wandmalereien von St. Georg in Oberzell," in *Welterbe des Mittelalters: 1300 Jahre Klosterinsel Reichenau*, ed. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 322.

²²⁹ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 65; Peter K. Klein, "Le développement du Jugement Dernier dans le Haut Moyen Âge à Reichenau," in *Le Jugement dernier: entre Orient et Occident*, by Marcello Angheben, ed. Valentino Pace (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 46.

²³⁰ Hendrix, "Das Totenoffizium auf der Reichenau und in St. Gallen," 73.

²³¹ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 65 f.

Last Judgment were created at the northern edge of Italy, such as at San Michele in Oleggio, San Vincenzo in Castro near Novara, San Carlo in Prugiasco (today Negrentino), and San Pietro al Monte in Civate near Como or in Acquanegra sul chiese near Nonantola.²³² Their iconography shows selected Byzantine influences that will be discussed in the next section.

To summarize, from the middle of the 8th to the middle of the 11th century, a specific iconography of the Last Judgment was developed in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. This iconography was mostly based on Matthew 24-25 with few additions from the Apocalypse. The presentation of the Arma and Stigmata Christi, the intercession by the Virgin as well as angels with scrolls containing explanatory texts appear to be specific elements of Reichenau Abbey.

When taking the institutional connection between Münstair and Chur into account, one can follow the early development of this iconography step by step as it progressed down the Rhine, from Disentis via Chur/Münstair and St. Gall to Reichenau. San Michele in Affricisco of Ravenna would provide a natural model for Disentis.

Also, the vast majority of all western illustrations of the Last Judgment from the period before 1100 were created in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey, in or near a geographic triangle defined by Reichenau, Milan, and Verona (Figure 53), including the major Alpine passes between the Germanic and Italian territories of the Frankish kingdom and the empire. The few other realizations do not show any regional clustering nor did they have any noticeable influence on later manifestations of the motif. The exceptional case of Sant'Angelo in Formis will be discussed later. Given that this finding is based on various sources, including excavations, extant wall paintings, mentions in text documents, and illuminated manuscripts, it is very unlikely that another region of such influence has existed elsewhere in Latin Europe without leaving any trace in history.

Given the leading role of Reichenau Abbey in the manifestation of Carolingian thinking on the afterlife, it is plausible that the earliest extant visualization of the Last Judgment of monumental size may have been created in Münstair indeed. As a residence of the bishop of Chur, it had close connections to St. Gall and Reichenau. On the other hand, Chur and Münstair belonged to the diocese of Milan until 843.²³³ Most of the bishops and monks of Chur and Münstair came from Italy. Thereby, it had a unique pivotal position between early influences of Carolingian spirituality from Reichenau and artistic influences from northern Italy.

For the sake of completeness, it shall be mentioned that the 9th and 10th centuries saw a limited development of the iconography of the Last Judgment under Anglo-Irish influence. A Carolingian ivory from about 800 of unknown origin, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, includes the presumably earliest extant joint representation of Heaven and Hell. It features allegorical representations of Heaven's Gate and of the Mouth of Hell, the latter being based on Bede's vision of Drythelm.²³⁴ In addition, few differently structured representations of the Last Judgment from the 10th century exist in Ireland.²³⁵ Muiredach's cross in Monasterboice from 923 contains the earliest extant depiction of the Weighing of Souls. It is unclear whether there were any connections with contemporary representations in Cappadocia.²³⁶

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHY IN THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Only very few Byzantine visualizations of the Last Judgment are known from the time before 1100. The presumably earliest of them was created in Kastoria in the early 10th century.²³⁷ Further wall paintings are known from Cappadocia, near Aksaray and Göreme, and from Thessaloniki. A relevant illustrated manuscript is preserved from Constantinople. Others are known from Armenia and the Sinai. It is still subject

²³² Angheben, 62.

²³³ Walter Kettemann, "Ein Namen-Text: Die Churer Bischofsreihe und die politische Botschaft des ältesten Eintrags im 'Liber vivendum Fabariensis,'" in *Bücher des Lebens - Lebendige Bücher*, ed. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gallen: Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, 2010), 90 f.

²³⁴ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 26, 30 f.

²³⁵ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 110.

²³⁶ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 32-34.

²³⁷ Angheben, 34 f.

to debate whether pre-iconoclastic illustrations of the subject existed in the Byzantine empire. Given the findings above, there is a certain likeliness that precursors may already have existed. But most likely, the fully developed representation of the Last Judgment was a Carolingian invention developed in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that nearly all known Byzantine visualizations of the Last Judgment from this period were located on or near the pilgrimage route from Venice to the Holy Land that was discussed in the chapter on the architecture of Conques (Figure 53). Moreover, the earliest of them is located furthest to the west in western Greece. The wall painting of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki was created for a church that shows significant western influences in its architecture, as was discussed above. Connections to the west certainly existed in Constantinople too. In the case of a Last Judgment from Armenia, created around 930, it is even documented that the artist came from the west.²³⁸ These observations indicate with high likeliness that the Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment were not created in isolation.

Therefore, it is not surprising that some representations of the Last Judgment in remote Cappadocia exhibit striking similarities with their western precursors, including representations of the twenty-four elder, the presentation of the Cross or angels with scrolls.²³⁹ The following discussion of the Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment will be limited to the novel iconographic elements that they contributed.

In the first half of the 10th century, the earliest extant Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment were created in Kastoria and in four churches of Cappadocia near Aksaray and Göreme, the most prominent being the so-called Church of Serpents.²⁴⁰ They added several new iconographic elements that were later adopted in the Latin West. One of their most important innovations is the representation of the

deesis with the Virgin and St. John the Baptist as intercessors. Another is archangel Michael with the Weighing of Souls and a devil trying to influence the balance in his favor. The novel representation of the three Patriarchs later evolved to the Bosom of Abraham. Particularly relevant for Conques are the extensive representations of Hell separated into numerous compartments. The torments of Hell are represented by devils and serpents. Devils may ride on monsters. Less relevant for the western adoption are the addition of the Stream of Fire emanating from the throne of Christ as well as the images of cherubim and seraphim. Sometimes, there is a link to the representation of the scene of Pentecost. Most of these new elements relate to Greek and Egyptian mythologies or to other biblical texts, such as the Books of Daniel and Judith.

In contrast to the Latin West, later Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment followed a clearly defined standard that was developed in the 11th century.²⁴¹ The earliest representations are a wall painting in the narthex of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki from around 1028 and two miniatures from a *tetraevangelion* of the monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. grec. 74) produced in the middle or second half of the 11th century.²⁴² Additional 11th century realizations exist in Ateni in Georgia and on the Sinai. The miniatures from Constantinople are prototypical for the later classic Byzantine type.²⁴³ By the end of the 11th and early 12th centuries, the new Byzantine type was adopted in Italy by a monumental mosaic at the west wall of Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello (Figure 50) and by an ivory, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.²⁴⁴

The representation of the Last Judgment of Constantinople includes even more elements from the text of the Apocalypse than its Carolingian precursors. However, its most significant innovation is the joint representation of the Particular and the Last

²³⁸ Angheben, 36.

²³⁹ Angheben, 36.

²⁴⁰ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 21–24; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, "Premières images du Jugement Dernier en Cappadoce Byzantine (X^e siècle)," in *Le Jugement dernier: entre Orient et Occident*, by Marcello

Angheben, ed. Valentino Pace (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 47–51.

²⁴¹ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 53.

²⁴² Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 27, Abb. 8.

²⁴³ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 53.

²⁴⁴ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, Abb. 10.

Judgment.²⁴⁵ This co-representation is even more visible in Torcello (Figure 51).²⁴⁶ In both representations, the process of the Judgment is separated into three registers. The Last Judgment is displayed in the middle register with the saved on the right side of Christ and the damned on his left side. The saved are turned towards Christ while the damned are pushed away by two angels, following the text of Matthew 25. The damned reside in a Lake of Fire together with representations of Satan and the False Prophet or Antichrist, both sitting on the Beast. These elements closely follow the text of Apocalypse 20. Accordingly, the judge of the Last Judgment is represented by an empty throne. The upper register shows the resurrection of the dead bodies, in Torcello from sea and from land as described in Apocalypse 20. The register below can be read as a representation of the Particular Judgment.²⁴⁷ In Constantinople, the latter judgment act is indicated by archangel Michael with the Weighing of Souls.²⁴⁸ The righteous are sent to an Earthly Paradise with Lazarus in the Bosom of Abraham and the Virgin as inhabitants. The wicked are sitting in various compartments of *Hades*. In contrast to the Lake of Fire of the Last Judgment (middle register), most of these compartments do not show any signs of fire. None of these compartments contain explicit visualizations of torments. Christ thrones on top of this three-register scene of the Judgment together with the twelve Apostles and a glory of angels (Figure 50). According to the text of the Apocalypse, this visualization of Christ refers to his thousand-year reign as King of Kings rather than to the Last Judgment. In order to indicate that Christ is also involved in the Last Judgment, a Stream of Fire emanates from his throne connecting the latter with the empty throne of the Last Judgment and with the Lake of Fire representing Hell.

For the first time, this comprehensive illustration of the Last Judgment integrates the ideas of Matthew 24-25, Apocalypse 20, and Luke 16 in a balanced way. The tension, if not conflict, between the descriptions of

the Particular and the Last Judgment in these texts is resolved based on Tertullian and Gregory the Great. Tertullian's concept of *refrigerium* is re-interpreted as a location, an Earthly Paradise hosting Abraham and Lazarus from Luke 16. The act of the Last Judgment is represented by the reunification of the previously judged souls (lower register) with their dead bodies (upper register) following the Dialogues of Gregory the Great. The Weighing of Souls is introduced as counter-image to the empty throne of God to differentiate between Particular and Last Judgment.

As mentioned before, such re-interpretation of the *refrigerium* of Tertullian as location in the otherworld rather than an abstract concept can also be observed in the charters of Cluny of the same period, the middle or second half of the 11th century.²⁴⁹ Similarly, the link between Pentecost and the Last Judgment that exists in some representations of the Last Judgment in Cappadocia had parallels with Cluny. In the liturgy of Cluny, the text of Matthew 24-25 was read on the Sunday after Pentecost.²⁵⁰ Similarly, the tympanum of the lost west portal of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine in Vézelay, which was linked to Cluny, showed the Last Judgment while the central portal of the narthex addresses the event of Pentecost. The nature of potential links from Cluny to Constantinople is unknown. At least, Cluny demonstrated a strong interest in the Crusades. It possessed five priories in the Holy Land and near Constantinople around 1100.²⁵¹ The establishment of its priory in Civitot, near Nicaea and Constantinople, may even predate the First Crusade.²⁵²

The very visible adoption of the new Byzantine type of the Last Judgment in Torcello near Venice certainly played an important role in the dissemination of its iconography to the Latin West. Nevertheless, the mosaic of Torcello (Figure 50) did not fully follow the Byzantine model. Among others, the strict arrangement of the scenes in registers, the presentation of the Cross, and the Arma Christi are typical elements of western iconography. In addition, it complemented the

²⁴⁵ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 55 f.

²⁴⁶ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, Abb. 11.

²⁴⁷ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 56–60.

²⁴⁸ In Torcello, the link of the Weighing of Souls to the Particular Judgment is less obvious. It could also be linked to the Last Judgment.

²⁴⁹ Neiske, "Pro defunctis exorare ut a peccatis solvantur," 195.

²⁵⁰ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 8.

²⁵¹ Marcellin Babey, "Le pouvoir de Cluny: 1100 ans d'une abbaye d'exception," *Histoire et images médiévales* 31 (2010): 59.

²⁵² Jules Gay, "L'abbaye de Cluny et Byzance au début du XII^e siècle," *Échos d'Orient* 30, no. 161 (1931): 84–86, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rebyz.1931.2667>.

Byzantine type consisting of the Parousia of Christ as well as the Particular and Last Judgment with representations of the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell.

To conclude, there is credible evidence that the motifs of the deesis, the Bosom of Abraham, and archangel Michael with the Weighing of Souls had their origin in Byzantine art. The same applies to detailed representations of Hell with several compartments and explicit representations of torments executed by demons or serpents. However, the most significant innovation of the Byzantine Last Judgment was its integration of the concepts of Particular and Last Judgment following the texts of Tertullian and Gregory the Great. Nevertheless, there are no hints that the Last Judgment had particular importance in Byzantine art. For example, the many Byzantine wall paintings in the Balkans do not provide the slightest indication that even associated motifs of the Last Judgment were common.²⁵³ From the 11th century, selected Byzantine elements enriched western representations of the Last Judgment. But the primary iconographic development must have happened in the Latin West, most likely in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey.

ADOPTION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT IN ROMANESQUE ART

For the longest part of the 11th century, the motif of the Last Judgment did not find further adoption in the west, other than at some smaller churches in Northern Italy. Only at the end of the 11th century, two realizations of the Last Judgment were created that may have had greater influence. The wall mosaic of Torcello introduced the new Byzantine type of the Last Judgment to the Latin West. The monumental wall painting at Sant'Angelo in Formis introduced the Carolingian tradition to the south of Italy. This situation changed significantly in the first third of the 12th century. In this period, first sculpted visualizations of the Last Judgment were created in Conques, Autun, and Mâcon. In contrast to their Carolingian and Byzantine

precursors, their iconography was rather individual. The most important innovation was the shifted position of the Last Judgment from the west wall of the nave to the façade of the church.²⁵⁴ This shift was preempted by the Last Judgments of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki and St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell which were positioned in the narthex, above the entrance to the nave.

The tympanum of Saint-Denis from around 1140 paved the way for the Gothic type of the Last Judgment. Therefore, Conques, Autun, Mâcon, Vézelay (lost), Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, and Santa María la Real in Sangüesa represent the only known Romanesque tympana of the Last Judgment.²⁵⁵ The tympanum of Moissac rather addresses the Parousia of Christ.²⁵⁶ Apart from Conques and Sangüesa, the mentioned Romanesque locations were either institutionally or geographically linked to the abbey of Cluny. Hence, Cluny may have played a major role in the dissemination of the motif of the Last Judgment in Romanesque France.

THE FORMIS CHALLENGE: DID A COMMON ANCESTOR EXIST IN ROME?

In the previous sections, it was argued that the iconography of the Last Judgment had its most relevant origins in the Carolingian era, in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. It reached its maturity in the 11th century through cultural exchanges with the Byzantine empire, along the pilgrimage route from Venice to the Holy Land.

However, this surprisingly concise picture has one potential crack that has not been addressed yet. The church of Sant'Angelo in Formis near Naples has a monumental painting of the Last Judgment at its west wall that dates from the last two decades of the 11th century. This wall painting has many unique similarities with the painting of Müstair. Apart from the position at the west wall of the nave, Christ also turns his left palm away from the observer. Further unique commonalities consist in the position of the angels with trumpets and

²⁵³ Vojislav J. Đurić, *Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien* (München: Hirmer, 1976).

²⁵⁴ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 60–62.

²⁵⁵ Angheben, 69.

²⁵⁶ Angheben, 71.

of the dead rising from their tombs above Christ as well as in the existence of angels with scrolls.²⁵⁷

By the time of the creation of the painting of Formis, Müstair had become a quiet, politically no longer important place in a remote side valley of the main traffic routes across the Alps. At first glance, it is difficult to imagine that Müstair may have been a model for distant Formis. However, it is known from the confraternity book of Reichenau Abbey that their monks had connections to nearby Benevento. An 11th century copy of the *Visio Wettini* is known to have existed in the Benedictine abbey of Montecassino, the owner and builder of Sant'Angelo in Formis. Hence, indirect links between Müstair and Formis did exist.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether Müstair and Formis may have had a common ancestor that now is lost. This question is kept relevant by another rare coincidence. The rich and comprehensive depictions of the scenes of the Old and New Testament in Müstair must have had models in Italy. In fact, the grid-like arrangement of the scenes is well known from major basilicas of Rome, such as Old-St. Peter, San Paolo fuori le mura or Santa Maria Maggiore. It is an open debate whether such extensive depictions only existed in very few prominent places, like the major basilicas of Rome, or whether they were more widespread. So far, the scientific opinion tends towards looking for artistic models of Müstair in Lombardy, such as in Pavia, Brescia or Verona. However, there is one detail that would rather speak for a direct link to Rome.

The rich scenes of the life of Christ in Müstair include a representation of the Harrowing of Hell. As discussed before, the notion of the Harrowing of Hell is of Byzantine origin. Nearly all known western wall paintings from before 1080 existed in Rome, with the sole exceptions of Müstair and Cimitile.²⁵⁸ Cimitile is less than 40 km from Formis. The motif of Christ turning his left palm away from the damned, realized in Müstair and Formis, goes back to the text of Matthew 25. This gesture already was displayed on the 4th century

sarcophagus from Rome showing the Sheep and the Goat. Apart from the mosaic of Ravenna, the only other known representation of the Sheep and the Goat existed in Fondi, halfway between Rome and Naples. Hence, nearly all potentially relevant iconographic precursors of Müstair, featuring the Sheep and the Goat or the Harrowing of Hell, were located in a region ranging from Rome to Naples, including the abbey of Montecassino. A joint representation of the Last Judgment and the Harrowing of Hell is only known from Müstair, Cimitile/Formis, and Torcello. The fact that the iconography of the Harrowing of Hell had its known origin in Rome naturally raises the question whether the Last Judgments of Müstair and Formis may have had a common ancestor in Rome too.

One more indication is pointing in the direction of Rome. The gesture of Christ turning his left palm away from the observer is consistently shown on the mentioned early 12th century Italo-Byzantine ivory of the Last Judgment, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as on nearly all Italian wall paintings or mosaics of the Last Judgment from 1270 to the middle of the 14th century. Such wall paintings or mosaics were created at the baptistery of Florence, Santa Maria ad Cryptas in Fossa, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere in Rome, Santa Maria in Vescovio, the Scrovegni chapel in Padua executed by the Florentine painter Giotto, Santa Maria Novella in Florence, Sant'Andrea in Sommacampagna near Verona, and Santa Maria in Pomposa.²⁵⁹ All wall paintings described were created in Rome or in a location that was geographically or politically closely connected to the Papal States. Apart from the mosaics in the dome of the baptistery of Florence, all are positioned at the west wall of the nave, like in Müstair and Formis.

While it is a valid possibility that Müstair may have influenced Formis which then influenced the images of the 13th and 14th centuries around Rome, one should consider the possibility that the ancestor of all western representations of the Last Judgment existed in Rome rather than in Müstair. The earliest representation of

²⁵⁷ Angels with scrolls are also displayed in other representations of the Last Judgment from Reichenau Abbey. Klein, "Les peintures Carolingiennes de Saint Jean à Müstair," 44; Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 63.

²⁵⁸ Loerke, "Höllenfahrt Christi und Anastasis," 37 f.

²⁵⁹ The left hand of Christ of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere is no longer visible. As an exception, the Christ of Santa Maria ad Cryptas in Fossa turns the palm of the left hand towards the observer.

the Harrowing of Hell in Rome is known from Santa Maria Antiqua, a church with Greek background. Therefore, the most likely candidates would be the handful of secondary churches of Rome that were built in the late 8th or early 9th centuries. Most of them do not show any traces of earlier wall paintings or were so substantially altered that their original state can no longer be judged. Strikingly, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere from about 820 is the earliest of the churches in Italy with a painting of the Last Judgment from the 13th or 14th centuries at its west wall, dating from about 1290. Only the mosaics of the baptistery of Florence are about twenty years older. Most likely, the wall paintings of Müstair were created shortly after the completion of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere.

These rare coincidences pose the open question: Is it conceivable that the Gothic painting of the Last Judgment of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere replaced the true Carolingian ancestor of the iconography of the Last Judgment?

Unless there are new insights from future building research, such a hypothesis will remain speculative. For the time being, we need to assume that the western iconography of the Last Judgment was invented in Carolingian times in Müstair or in a nearby location in Lombard Italy with close cultural connections to the abbeys of Reichenau or St. Gall.

The tympanum of Conques as a Neo-Carolingian project

The studies on the spirituality and iconography of the Last Judgment have shown that two archetypes of the iconography existed when the tympanum of Conques was created. The earlier Carolingian archetype, developed in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey, focused on the Last Judgment, mainly based on the text of Matthew 24-25 with limited additions from Apocalypse 20. The more recent Byzantine archetype, for the first time appearing in Constantinople, reached a much higher level of sophistication. It combined the

Parousia of Christ with the Particular and Last Judgment in one image. For this purpose, it leveraged the biblical texts of Matthew 24-25, Apocalypse 20, and Luke 16 with additional inspirations from Tertullian and Gregory the Great. Reasonably good examples of these two archetypes are provided by the visualizations of the Bamberg Apocalypse (Figure 49) and Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello (Figure 50).²⁶⁰

Given the findings in the previous chapter on the likely origins of the architecture of the abbey church of Conques in the Byzantine world, it would be an obvious hypothesis to look for models of its tympanum of the Last Judgment in the Byzantine archetype too. Indeed, the tympanum of Conques (Figure 39) exhibits several elements that were identified as Byzantine. These include archangel Michael disputing with a devil over the Weighing of Souls and the Bosom of Abraham in the lower register. Whether the Virgin on the right side of Christ goes back to models of Reichenau or whether it constitutes a truncated deesis of Byzantine origin is not evident. Certainly, the most apparent parallel with earlier Byzantine representations consists in the extensive representation of Hell which extends over the middle and lower register of Conques showing various torments by demons and serpents.

However, many Byzantine elements, such as the empty throne of God, the Stream of Fire, the cherubim and seraphim, a complete deesis, the prominent representation of the dead rising from their tombs, the Earthly Paradise featuring Abraham, the Virgin, and lush vegetation or the representation of Satan with the False Prophet (Antichrist) and the Beast, did not find their way to Conques. The few adopted Byzantine elements are insufficient to call the tympanum of Conques a Neo-Byzantine project.

Instead, the arrangement of the scenes in registers, the prominent presentation of the Cross, the Arma Christi, and an oversized representation of Christ are typical elements of the Carolingian archetype. However, they are also included in the hybrid mosaic of Torcello. Hence, the simplest explanation of the tympanum of Conques would be that it was created after the hybrid

²⁶⁰ The mosaic from Torcello is not a pure reflection of the Byzantine archetype. It also exhibits selected western influences. However, these are not material for the discussion below.

model of Torcello which conveniently is located on the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land that apparently was of great importance for Conques.

However, a close inspection of the iconography of the tympanum of Conques shows that this assumption is oversimplified. While influences of Torcello certainly are highly likely, for example the anagrams in the nimbus of Christ, the following analysis will show that significant influences from Reichenau must have existed too. The two angels holding the Cross, the asymmetric gesture of Christ, the intercession by the Virgin rather than by the deesis, Heavenly Jerusalem instead of the Earthly Paradise, and the angels with scrolls containing explanatory texts are distinctive features from the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. Also, the combination of Heaven's Gate and the Mouth of Hell followed a Carolingian model, as did the general sculpture of Auvergne and Rouergue from a stylistic perspective.²⁶¹

In fact, it will be shown that the tympanum of Conques is an innovative Neo-Carolingian visualization that only leveraged some of the recent iconographic elements of the Byzantine archetype, albeit with an entirely new composition and interpretation. The following iconographic analysis follows the structure of the tympanum of Conques along its three registers. It will first focus on the upper and the lower registers before conclusions on the more enigmatic middle register are drawn.

UPPER REGISTER: PRESENTATION OF THE CROSS

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 24

The upper register is an obvious allusion to Matthew 24. The angels with trumpets signal the imminent beginning of the Last Judgment, and the sign of Christ appears in the sky (Figure 40). In Conques, the sign of Christ is a large cross in the clouds held by two angels. Two additional angels present the Arma Christi. This

combination of angels with trumpets, the Cross, and the Arma Christi was already a distinctive feature of the mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco of Ravenna. The same elements are also included in the wall painting of the Last Judgment of St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell and in Torcello, albeit less prominently. The size and dimensions of the Cross of Conques as well as the fact that it is being held by two angels point towards models from the Reichenau school, most notably from Reichenau-Oberzell or Burgfelden.

On the other hand, it was recently pointed out that the True Cross received particular attention in Conques in the time when the tympanum was created.²⁶² Around 1100, Jerusalem was just reconquered by the First Crusade. Several contemporary items of the treasury of Conques refer to Jerusalem and to the True Cross.²⁶³ Eventually, both factors may have influenced the dominant representation of the Cross in the tympanum.

LOWER REGISTER: PARTICULAR AND LAST JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO AUGUSTINE'S ENCHIRIDION

The distribution of the extensive representation of 'Hell' over the middle and lower register as well as the representation of the Weighing of Souls and the Bosom of Abraham in the lower register are so analogous to the Byzantine archetype from Constantinople and Torcello that one is tempted to assume that Conques merely copied them. In this spirit, earlier research interpreted the middle register of Conques as a representation of the Last Judgment with the saved and the damned. The lower register was suggested to be a representation of the Particular Judgment.²⁶⁴

However, a second look shows that it cannot be that simple. The text of Apocalypse 20 characterizes the Hell of the Last Judgment as a Lake of Fire into which Satan is cast. More generally, fire is the most consistent element of Hell in the Scriptures. In the representations of Constantinople and Torcello, the Lake of Fire with

²⁶¹ Le Deschault De Monredon, "The Influence of Carolingian Art on Some Great Romanesque Sculpture Masters in Auvergne and Rouergue."

²⁶² Vincent Debais and Cécile Voyer, "The Times of the Cross on the Conques Tympanum," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino,

Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 173–207.

²⁶³ Bremenkamp, "Conques, Rome, Jerusalem, and Barbastro."

²⁶⁴ Marcel Angheben, "L'iconographie du portail de l'ancienne cathédrale de Mâcon: Une vision synchronique du jugement individuel et du jugement dernier," *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 32 (2001): 79.

Satan, the False Prophet, and the Beast is shown in the middle of the three registers, the one associated with the Last Judgment. In contrast, the *Hades* of the lower register hardly shows any traces of fire. In Conques, it is the other way around. The Hell of the lower register is full of fire and prominently hosts Satan (Figure 45). However, there is hardly any fire shown in the middle register (Figure 43). According to Apocalypse 21, the elected will reside in Heavenly Jerusalem after the Last Judgment. The house-like structure with an arcade surrounding Abraham and the saints in the lower register of Conques is a clear reference to Heavenly Jerusalem of Apocalypse 21 (Figure 44). It is not the Earthly Paradise of the Byzantine archetype in the tradition of Tertullian, full of lush vegetation and including the Virgin.

These observations strongly suggest that the lower register of Conques needs to be read as a representation of the Last Judgment, other than in Constantinople or Torcello. As a consequence, the act of the Last Judgment is represented in Conques by the Weighing of Souls instead of by Christ or an empty throne.

Furthermore, the lower register has a substructure. It consists of two half-registers. The lower half-register contains the representations of Heaven and Hell in their conditions after the Last Judgment. The upper half-register shows dynamical flows from both sides towards the Weighing of Souls in the center and from there into Heaven and Hell (Figure 46). Apparently, it shows the process of the Last Judgment as a dynamic movement.

On the right side of Christ, dead rise from their tombs with the help of angels looking towards the Weighing of Souls. Below the Weighing of Souls, they enter Heavenly Jerusalem through a gate, ushered in by a female saint. On the left side of Christ, wicked are brought to the Weighing of Souls by demons, already tortured and in fire. After the judgment they are pushed into the Mouth of Hell by another demon. This dynamic bipartite representation suggests that an earlier Particular Judgment preceded the Last Judgment. The to be judged do not come to the Last Judgment on equal terms. But the Particular Judgment itself is not shown in the lower register.

The assumption that serious sinners are already in torments before the Last Judgment is a common theme,

from Greek mythology to the *Visio Wettini*. More interestingly, the elected of Conques seem to rise from their tombs only immediately before the Last Judgment. This rather sober representation of the waiting area for the elected, without any refreshments, is in stark contrast to the doctrines of Luke 16, Tertullian, and Gregory the Great. However, it is fully in line with the description of Augustine's *Enchiridion* 29:109-111. The scroll above the dead rising from their tombs explicitly states that happiness and the glory of their past life will be given to the elected to Heaven (*electis ad c(o)eli*). They will rest in eternal peace until Judgment Day. It does not talk about any refreshments (*refrigeria*) or any social mingling with the other elected. The opposite scroll states that unjust sinners (*iniusti*) will face eternal torments by fire and demons.

The text of Augustine also naturally explains the two nearly identical housing structures of the tympanum representing Heaven and Hell, with Abraham and Satan at their centers. Such symmetrical equivalence of Heaven and Hell has no precedence in Christian art. However, it matches the co-existence of a city of God (*civitas immortalis*, Heaven) and a city of Satan (*civitas mortalis*, Hell) of Augustine's *Enchiridion* and *De civitate dei*. After the completion of the tympanum of Conques, the monks of Conques created another sculpted portal (Figure 52) at their priory church of Sainte-Hilarian-Sainte-Foy in Perse (Espalion). Its oversized lintel contains another representation of the Last Judgment that is reduced to the Weighing of Souls with symmetrical representations of Hell and Heaven. In Perse, Christ takes the place of Abraham. The lintel of Perse provides further evidence that the lower register of the tympanum of Conques refers to the Last Judgment in the spirit of Augustine rather than to the Particular Judgment.

Finally, the lower register of the tympanum of Conques shows how one of the elected, who is about to enter the gate of Heavenly Jerusalem, and the demon pushing the damned into the Mouth of Hell have eye contact over their backs (Figure 46). The two figures suggest that this elected only narrowly escaped Hell. Possibly, the elected and the demon had met before. In that case, the elected must have successfully passed proto-purgatory. The scene of Conques remains vague

with that respect. But it is the same vagueness with which the possibility of proto-purgatory is described in the *Enchiridion*.

Therefore, it is concluded that the lower register of the tympanum of Conques has to be read as the earliest and perhaps only accurate visualization of Augustine's *Enchiridion* 29:109-111, featuring the Last Judgment with symmetrical representations of Heaven and Hell as the cities of God and Satan, the implicit assumption of an earlier Particular Judgment without further details about it, the sober treatment of the elected before the Last Judgment, and the vague possibility of proto-purgatory. The lack of an Earthly Paradise with refreshments and the lack of a reunification of bodies and souls at the time of the Last Judgment speak against Tertullian and Gregory the Great as direct models. The latter elements are clearly visible in the Last Judgments of the Byzantine archetype from Constantinople and Torcello.

For the sake of completeness, it is mentioned that Heaven's Gate as entrance to Heavenly Jerusalem and the Mouth of Hell as entrance to the city of Satan have no model in the text of Augustine. The notion of the Mouth of Hell was introduced by the 8th century Vision of Drythelm captured by Bede the Venerable. The Carolingian ivory from around 800 mentioned above, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, contains very similar representations of Heaven's Gate and the Mouth of Hell as the tympanum of Conques (Figure 47).²⁶⁵ The scrolls with texts of this ivory may point towards connections with Reichenau Abbey. At least, the Mouth of Hell of Conques is a Carolingian iconographic element too.

MIDDLE REGISTER: PROTO-PURGATORY AND INTERCESSION ACCORDING TO THE VISIO WETTINI

Given that the process of the Last Judgment is described in much detail in the lower register and given that the otherworld of the middle register hardly shows any fire,

which was a very consistent symbol of eternal Hell, it is unlikely that the middle register of Conques addresses the Last Judgment again. The allusion of the lower register to an earlier Particular Judgment indicates that the middle register may be linked to the Particular Judgment. In the following, it will be argued that the middle register shows the era of the Parousia of Christ in which the Particular Judgment occurs. However, the scene is not a depiction of the Particular Judgment itself.

The nimbus of Christ in the mandorla contains anagrams denoting Christ both as King (*rex*) and Judge (*iudex*) (Figure 41).²⁶⁶ In the figure of Christ, the allegories of Apocalypse 19-20 regarding the King of Kings (Parousia of Christ) and the throne of the Judge (Last Judgment) converge. Similar anagrams already existed in the nimbus of Christ of Torcello. They constitute a unique reference from Conques to Torcello. In Torcello, the dual role of Christ is made even more explicit by the Stream of Fire emanating from his throne and flowing under the empty throne of the judging God to the Lake of Fire of Hell (Figure 51). The Stream of Fire connects the Parousia of Christ with the Last Judgment. However, it does not touch the scenery of the Particular Judgment. Also, none of the sources assign a personal role in the Particular Judgment to Christ. In Conques, the function of the Stream of Fire is assumed by the asymmetrical judging arm gestures of Christ. These are based on Matthew 25 connecting the announcement of the Last Judgment of Matthew 24 in the upper register with its execution in the lower register.²⁶⁷ Therefore, the middle register cannot be a mere representation of the Particular Judgment.

The interpretation of the middle register as a broader reference to the period of the Parousia of Christ is supported by further iconographic elements. The scrolls above the middle register refer with their texts to the community of saints (*sancti*) happily convening with Christ as judge and to the mortal sinners (*homines perversi*) who already are in *Tartaros*. In the spirit of

²⁶⁵ Angheben, *Le Jugement dernier*, 26, 30.

²⁶⁶ Debais and Voyer, "The Times of the Cross on the Conques Tympanum," 193-95.

²⁶⁷ The tympanum of Conques does not show the twelve Apostles, as most of the earlier representations did. The twelve Apostles have no

precedence in Matthew 24-25. They are derived from Matthew 19:28 instead. Apparently, the tympanum of Conques only refers to the core text of Matthew 24-25.

the ‘fourfold judgment’ of Foxhall Forbes and in line with the text of Apocalypse 20, these references correspond to the period of the Parousia of Christ that precedes the Last Judgment.

This interpretation is also supported by the angel to the left of Christ holding the open Book of Life. The text on the book states “*Signatur liber (vi)t(a)e*” or “The Book of Life is in the process of being signed.” If the intention had been to state that the Book of Life already is signed or sealed, the Latin text would have to read as “*Signatus est liber vitae*.”²⁶⁸ The temporal form *signatur* instead of *signatus* clearly expresses that the process of signing the book has not yet been finished. This epigraph leaves room for intercession. If Christ would already read from the signed Book of Life, any intercession effort would be in vain from the outset.

Another proof point is provided by the angel with censer below the angel with the open Book of Life. According to Apocalypse 8:3-5 the eighth angel with a golden censer devastates the earth before the seven angels sound their trumpets. Together, the eight angels announce the imminent Parousia of Christ and not the Last Judgment. The two angels with candle sticks below Christ may refer to Apocalypse 1 but are of no relevance for our purposes.

The same applies to the stars in the mandorla of Christ which are also mentioned in Apocalypse 1.²⁶⁹ For the sake of completeness, it is pointed out that these stars have known models at the representations of the Last Judgment of St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell and of Constantinople while the asymmetric arm gesture of Christ has its only known precursor in Müstair. With this layer of stars and five layers of clouds, Christ is displayed to reside in the seventh heaven.²⁷⁰ Potentially, this representation may be a reference to the 8th century Reichenau Seven Heaven Homily which was a precursor of later Irish texts about souls having to pass seven

heavens before reaching Christ for their final judgment.²⁷¹

The interpretation of the middle register as a reference to the era of the Parousia of Christ provides a natural explanation for the procession of saints on the right side of Christ and for the outer part of otherness on his left side. The otherworld to the left of Christ is visibly divided into two compartments (Figure 43). The outer part shows identifiable mortal sinners, a counterfeiter, a sexually engaged couple, and a person who potentially is a fraudster, a liar, or a thief.²⁷² They already are subject to harsh treatment, for example by hanging. Only the counterfeiter is exposed to fire.

However, the explicit reference of the scrolls to saints and mortal sinners does not include the figures around Charlemagne on the right side of Christ and the inner part of the otherworld on his left side. The latter shows various figures, including kings and clerics, that are molested by demons but not tortured. Also, these figures are not associated with typical symbols of sin.

In line with the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife, these two groups of figures, not addressed by the scrolls of the middle register, are interpreted as depictions of proto-purgatory and intercession.

The compartmentalized structure of otherworld on the left side of Christ conforms with the Greek concept of *Hades* and *Tartaros* (Figure 43). The scenery is bleak but lacks the emblematic fire of Hell. In line with the Church Fathers, it can be read as an image of the afterlife of sinners in the time before the Last Judgment. The inner compartment of proto-purgatory is reserved for venial sinners who still may be elected for Heaven. The outer part is for mortal sinners who cannot be saved. The scroll above this representation of otherworld states that mortal sinners (*homines perversi*) are submerged in *Tartaros* (*tartara*). *Tartaros* was the special place of punishment in *Hades* for serious sinners. The text does not use the generic

²⁶⁸ The potential intention of describing the Book of Life as still being sealed would be in obvious contradiction with its representation as an open book.

²⁶⁹ The text of the Apocalypse mentions seven stars instead of the six stars of the mandorla of Conques. However, it also mentions at a later point that part of the stars are being kicked down from the sky.

²⁷⁰ The idea of the seven heavens that need to be passed was introduced by the apocryphal Ascensio Isaiae. Hen, “Visions of the Afterlife in the Early Medieval West,” 27.

²⁷¹ Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, Cod. Aug. perg. 254. Elizabeth Boyle, “The Afterlife in the Medieval Celtic-Speaking World,” in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 69 f.

²⁷² Kirk Ambrose, “The Counterfeit and the Authentic in the Conques Tympanum,” in *Contextualizing Conques. Imaginaries, Narratives & Geographies*, ed. Ivan Foletti et al., Convivium Supplementum 13, 2023, 82–97.

term sinners (*peccatores*) that is used on the lintel above the left door of the portal. Thereby, it leaves the fate of venial sinners ambiguously open.

This interpretation of the left side of Christ raises the consequential question why Charlemagne and other non-canonized figures are shown on his right side. Apocalypse 20 and the texts of the Church Fathers clearly state that ordinary people will not yet be with Christ at this stage. It will be argued in the following that the scene on the right side of Christ needs to be read as an act of intercession by the saints for Charlemagne. The saints already have their natural place with Christ.

It was concluded above that the visualization of the Last Judgment in the lower register is based on Augustine's *Enchiridion*. The Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife, as matured by the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall, was uniquely based on a combination of Augustine's *Enchiridion* and Reichenau's *Visio Wettini*. The cultural space of Reichenau Abbey played a crucial role in the development of the iconography of the Last Judgment. The prominent representation of the Cross in the upper register of Conques has its closest artistic parallels in the art of Reichenau Abbey too.

Therefore, it is proposed that the iconography of the middle register of the tympanum of Conques was inspired by Reichenau's *Visio Wettini*. While the depiction of proto-purgatory and *Tartaros* on the left side of Christ would also reasonably be in line with the thinking of the Church Fathers, the scene on the right side of Christ shows characteristic elements that have no other potential model than the *Visio Wettini*.

The *Visio Wettini* describes in much detail how saints, martyrs, and Holy Virgins rush to Christ to intercede for Wetti. It also emphasizes the relevance of the spiritual support of clerics or relatives by masses, prayers or alms. No other written source prior to the creation of the tympanum of Conques contains such an explicit and extensive description of intercession. Also, no other relevant source explicitly mentions the Holy Virgins in the context of the Last Judgment. Both elements can be found in the middle register. The Holy

Virgins also populate Heavenly Jerusalem of the lower register, another rather unique feature of Conques.

In the Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment from Constantinople and Torcello, the elected are also oriented towards Christ, grouped according to their social order. But these groups form a static picture. In contrast, the procession of Conques is quite dynamic, suggesting that the holy intercessors rush to Christ (Figure 42). Furthermore, the procession of the tympanum is nearly positioned at the level of Christ enabling the interaction with him.²⁷³

The procession on the right side of Christ is led by the foundational patron saints of Conques, the Virgin and St. Peter.²⁷⁴ Intercession by Sainte-Foy is prominently shown in the upper left corner of the lower register. The Virgin and St. Peter are followed by a hermit and an abbot. The hermit often is identified as Dadon, the founder of the monastic cell of Conques.²⁷⁵ Dadon and the abbot are usually seen as references to the abbey of Conques. The presumed abbot of Conques leads a king by the hand to Christ, commonly identified as Charlemagne. This element provides the entire procession with a dynamic character. Charlemagne is followed by a group of laymen carrying a treasury and a precious garment or holding a hand in prayer. After this group comes another couple of saints. An angel holds a crown above their heads. This crown is to be read as the martyr's crown of Apocalypse 2:10. It labels the saintly couple as martyrs. The crown is also mentioned in the *Visio Wettini*, albeit in conjunction with the saints.²⁷⁶ More importantly, the procession is ended by a couple of saintly women, obviously the Holy Virgins of the *Visio Wettini*. The angel with the martyr's crown also hovers above them.

With the background of the *Visio Wettini*, the entire procession can be read as a massive act of intercession for Charlemagne. The intercessors include the three patron saints of Conques, martyrs and Holy Virgins, the clerics of Conques, and a group of relatives carrying alms and being engaged in prayer.

²⁷³ In the late 12th and early 13th centuries such arrangements of the saved and damned were also created in Sangüesa and Bamberg.

²⁷⁴ Alternatively, the Virgin and St. Peter can be read as an allegory of the universal Church.

²⁷⁵ Huang, "Memory between Tradition and Modernity," 71, 75.

²⁷⁶ Strabo and Heito, *Visio Wettini*, 53.

The tympanum remains ambiguous whether the group of laymen behind Charlemagne really represents intercessors or whether they are subject of intercession themselves. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the proto-purgatory to the left of Christ shows the small figure of a king who points with his finger towards Charlemagne (Figure 43). Could this be the alter ego of Charlemagne in proto-purgatory, as described in the *Visio Wettini*? Both questions remain open. But they do not materially alter the interpretation of the tympanum.

This unusual procession of saints, martyrs, Holy Virgins, clerics, and presumably relatives interceding for Charlemagne is an excellent visualization of Reichenau's intercession principle of 'the more, the better,' as expressed in the *Visio Wettini* or in its extensive *Liber Vitae*. In Conques, the exhaustive procession of intercessors replaces the more modest deesis of Byzantine art.

The recognition, based on the *Visio Wettini*, that the procession of saints does not only include Charlemagne but may entirely be devoted to him, constitutes a significant finding. It would fully be in line with the prominent focus of the *Visio Wettini* and of other Carolingian visions on the souls of Charlemagne and other leaders of the empire.

To conclude, the somewhat enigmatic middle register of the tympanum of Conques finds a natural explanation, down to nearly all levels of detail, if it is read as a reference to Reichenau's *Visio Wettini*, both the most important text on the afterlife of the Carolingian era and the most extensive testimony of the importance of proto-purgatory and intercession.

The few remaining ambiguities of the proposed interpretation may still leave room for debate. However, the alternative interpretations suffer from significant contradictions. There is clear evidence that the middle register was neither intended to show the Particular nor the Last Judgment. While its representation of *Hades* and *Tartaros* would conform with the writings of the Church Fathers, the potential interpretation of the procession on the right side of Christ as a convention of the elected would be in contradiction with Augustine's *Enchiridion* which apparently was the basis for the lower register. It would also be in contradiction with Apocalypse 20 and Tertullian. It may better conform

with Gregory the Great, which was an important model for the *Visio Wettini*. The dialogues of Gregory emphasize the immediate reception of the souls of the good in Heaven. But this view, more oriented towards Luke 16, is in contradiction with the representation and epigraph of the lower register of the tympanum.

On the other hand, the interpretation of the tympanum of Conques as a representation of the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife as developed by Reichenau Abbey, based on Matthew 24-25, the *Visio Wettini*, and Augustine's *Enchiridion*, provides a very clear and consistent picture that is free of such contradictions.

THE TEMPORAL AND HIERARCHICAL ORDERS OF THE TYMPANUM

Based on these considerations, the narrative of the tympanum of Conques follows a rather strict temporal sequence that needs to be read from top to bottom. The upper register announces the imminent Parousia of Christ according to Matthew 24. The middle register describes the current state of the otherworld, between the event of the Parousia and the Last Judgment. The iconography drew its inspirations from Reichenau's *Visio Wettini*. The lower register contains the Last Judgment with an implicit allusion to the preceding Particular Judgment, in accordance with the *Enchiridion* of Augustine. In fact, this temporal sequence of the tympanum is more precise than in most of the earlier representations of the Last Judgment of comparable complexity. In some of the Carolingian representations, the Cross does not precede Christ in the sky. Also, the dead rising from their tombs may be represented between or below the saved and damned. In the Byzantine archetype from Constantinople and Torcello, the Last Judgment is shown above the Particular Judgment, in reverse temporal order.

In addition, the texts of the scrolls of the tympanum define a hierarchical order that should be read from bottom to top. One can call it a climax. The lintel above the left door of the portal contains a text relating to Bede the Venerable that addresses all worldly sinners (*peccatores*) whose eschatological fate is not yet

determined.²⁷⁷ They are reminded that a harsh judgment will await them if they do not change their moral way of life. The scrolls above the lower register address the deceased ordinary sinners which are subject to the Last Judgment. They are either called just sinners that will be admitted to Heaven (*electi*) or unjust sinners (*iniusti*) that will be sent to Hell. The middle register follows the same logic but addresses extraordinary people whose fate is already determined with the Particular Judgment, the saints (*sancti*) and the mortal sinners (*homines perversi*). These four groups correspond to the idea of the ‘fourfold judgment’ introduced by the Church Fathers.²⁷⁸ Finally, the upper register is devoted to Christ. This explicit elaboration of a hierarchical order following the idea of the ‘fourfold judgment’ is another unique quality of the tympanum of Conques.²⁷⁹

The historical connections of Conques to Reichenau Abbey

The previous analysis, that was primarily based on an exclusion principle, indicates that the iconography of the tympanum of Conques can best be understood as a reflection of the Carolingian spirituality and iconography of the afterlife, matured in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. Given the significant distance from Conques to Lake Constance, it would be reassuring if Conques had historic connections to Reichenau in the late 11th century. The likeliness of such connections will be demonstrated below. Even without further analysis, Reichenau Abbey needs to be considered a natural reference point, only comparable to the most important Carolingian abbeys from northern France, such as Saint-Denis, Tours or Fleury. From the early 9th to the middle of the 11th centuries, Reichenau Abbey was one of the most influential

political, artistic, and scientific centers of the Frankish kingdom and the Ottonian empire.

It was already pointed out that one of the earliest entries in the famous confraternity book of Reichenau from 823-25 refers to Conques. Such an early connection is plausible since both abbeys played important roles under king Louis the Pious with close connections to his court. As one of very few contacts in Aquitaine, Conques fills an important gap in the otherwise comprehensive regional coverage of the Frankish kingdom of the *Liber vitae*. In addition, the detailed history of the foundation of Conques was recorded by Ermoldus Nigellus in his *Carmina in honorem Hludowici*, written in Strasbourg around 826-28.²⁸⁰ In this time, Reichenau Abbey had close connections to Murbach abbey and other monasteries of Alsace.

Beyond the explicit mention of Conques in Reichenau’s *Liber vitae*, there is circumstantial evidence from the 9th to the early 12th centuries pointing towards continued connections between Conques and the Upper Rhine in conjunction with the pilgrimage of St. James. The legend of the evangelization of Spain by St. James was already known to the monks of St. Gall and Reichenau in the second half of the 9th century. One of the earliest reports of the veneration of St. James in Compostela is documented in a martyrology of St. Gall from 896.²⁸¹ The relevant passage can be traced back to Vienne and Lyon where Reichenau had multiple connections. The church of St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell, mentioned because of its wall painting of the Last Judgment, already had St. James as secondary patron saint in 896.²⁸²

More direct anecdotal evidence comes from the second half of the 11th century in which the pilgrimage of St. James replaced the pilgrimage to the Holy Land that had become untenable. An important turning point for the latter must have been the widely publicized pilgrimage of 1064/65, led by bishop Gunther of

²⁷⁷ Christe, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, 49.

²⁷⁸ Foxhall Forbes, “The Theology of Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages,” 155.

²⁷⁹ Many of the representations of the Last Judgment produced in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey also contain scrolls with texts. But they are typically limited to repeating the verdict of Matthew 25 for the saved and the damned.

²⁸⁰ Bodarwé and Rother, “Die Gründung(en) des Klosters Conques,” 13 f.

²⁸¹ Klaus Herbers, “Frühe Spuren des Jakobuskultes im alemannischen Raum (9.-11. Jahrhundert): Von Nordspanien zum Bodensee,” in *Der Jakobuskult in Süddeutschland. Kultgeschichte in regionaler und europäischer Perspektive*, ed. Klaus Herbers, Jakobus-Studien (Tübingen: Narr, 1995), 8–15.

²⁸² Herbers, 7.

Bamberg and by archbishop Siegfried I of Mainz.²⁸³ Despite its extraordinarily large number of participants, it took a dramatic turn and nearly failed due to a massive raid by Bedouins. The conquest of Jerusalem by Turkish Seljuks in 1071 interrupted the pilgrimage to the Holy Land until the reconquest of Jerusalem by the First Crusade in 1099.

While there are no explicit sources that describe the rise of the pilgrimage of St. James in the empire, several historical facts can be pieced together. From them, a prominent network emerges that was closely connected to the pilgrimage of St. James, if not even driving it. In the empire, important nodes of this network must have been the courts of the Salian king Henry IV and his Hohenstaufen successors as well as the imperial abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall. Cluny and Conques appear as their French counterparts.

The rapid shift in pilgrimage from the Holy Land to Santiago de Compostela can best be seen in the leaders of the nearly failed pilgrimage from 1064/65. In 1071, the successor of bishop Gunther, also a close confidant of Henry IV, founded the collegiate of St. James in Bamberg. Under his successor Otto I, again a close confidant of Henry IV, all subsequent churches or chapels of Bamberg were named after saints from the various Ways of St. James. Eventually, all five major Ways of St. James in France and Spain were represented by a patron saint in Bamberg.²⁸⁴ In 1124, Otto I founded the priory of St. Getreu, a reference to Sainte-Foy in Conques.²⁸⁵ In 1072, archbishop Siegfried I of Mainz, the other leader of the pilgrimage of 1064/65 and another close confidant of Henry IV, embarked on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela that prematurely ended in Cluny. Henry IV had close connections to France and to Cluny. His mother, Agnes of Poitou, came from southern France. Abbot Hugh of Cluny was his

godfather. Close connections to Cluny via the reform movement of Hirsau are also visible in Bamberg under bishop Otto I.²⁸⁶

Already in 1070, count Eberhard VI of Nellenburg, whose family was closely connected to Reichenau Abbey, had undertaken a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.²⁸⁷ In fact, he is one of the earliest German pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela who is known by name. In the following year, his son became abbot of Reichenau Abbey succeeding a former abbot of Bamberg's mother abbey of St. Getreu.²⁸⁸ Allegedly in 1085, the abbot of St. Gall personally translated relics of Sainte-Foy from Conques to St. Gall where he founded the church of St. Fiden.²⁸⁹ In 1093, the only priory of Cluny on the right side of the Rhine, located in Bollschweil in the Black Forest (later moved to Sölden), founded a priory for women named after Sainte-Foy. In the following year, Hildegard of Egisheim-Dagsburg, a close parent of Eberhard VI of Nellenburg and the founding mother of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, donated the priory of Sainte-Foy in Sélestat with rich possessions to Conques.²⁹⁰ This donation was the consequence of a penitential pilgrimage of her three sons to Conques, presumably in 1090 or 1091. Her son Frederick, Duke of Swabia, was a son-in-law of king Henry IV. Her grandson Conrad III became the first Hohenstaufen king of the empire. Therefore, Sainte-Foy is considered the family saint of the Hohenstaufen dynasty. In 1095, the abbey of Allerheiligen in Schaffhausen, a memorial foundation of Eberhard VI of Nellenburg, founded a priory named after Sainte-Foy in Grafenhausen which is also located in the Black Forest. The abbey of Allerheiligen had close links to Cluny and Hirsau. No other churches in the Germanic territories of the empire are known to have had Sainte-Foy as patron saint. However, further altars may have existed.

²⁸³ Jacoby, "Bishop Gunther of Bamberg," 274–76.

²⁸⁴ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 55 f.

²⁸⁵ Nathalie Kruppa, "Die Priorate Des Klosters Michaelsberg: St. Jakob in Stettin Und St. Getreu in Bamberg," in *1000 Jahre Kloster Michaelsberg Bamberg. 1015-2015. Im Schutz Des Engels*, ed. Norbert Jung, Horst Gehring, and Holger Kempkens (Petersberg: Imhof, 2015), 150.

²⁸⁶ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*, 154.

²⁸⁷ Herbers, "Frühe Spuren des Jakobuskultes im alemannischen Raum," 22 f.

²⁸⁸ Harald Derschka, *Geschichte des Klosters Reichenau* (Lindenberg im Allgäu: Kunstverlag Josef Fink, 2024), 130 f.

²⁸⁹ Ernst Tremp, "Ulrich I.," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 26 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016), 581–82.

²⁹⁰ Philippe Cordez, "Charlemagne in Conques: Objects and Narratives," in *Conques Across Time: Inventions and Reinventions (9th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino, Convivia 6 (Rome, Brno: Viella, Masaryk University Press, 2025), 217.

The close connections of the Hohenstaufen dynasty to Conques seem to have endured during the largest part of the 12th century. Former monks of Conques are assumed to have played a major role in glorifying Charlemagne as the legendary founder of the pilgrimage of St. James via the Chanson of Roland.²⁹¹ On the other hand, the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick I Barbarossa and one of his relatives, a later bishop of Bamberg, drove the canonization of Charlemagne in 1165.²⁹² It is generally assumed that this canonization was linked to a propensity of Frederick I for the pilgrimage of St. James with the intent of strengthening the apostolic role of Santiago de Compostela relative to the apostolic see of Rome.²⁹³ Two of the most prominent penitential pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela of the High Middle Ages were conducted by Frederick's divorced wife Adela and by his adversary Henry the Lion.²⁹⁴

Around the same time, Frederick I Barbarossa donated precious glass windows for the new priory church of Conques in Sélestat.²⁹⁵ No other church endowments are known of him. Recent art-historical analysis has shown that buildings erected in association with Frederick I Barbarossa drew artistic inspirations from the *Via Podiensis* and from Conques.²⁹⁶ The priory church of Conques in Sélestat must have played a pivotal role in this artistic transfer.²⁹⁷ The impact of this transfer can most prominently be seen in the eastern parts of Bamberg cathedral commissioned by bishop Otto II, the relative of Frederick I who drove the canonization of Charlemagne. Presumably around 1173,

an altar of Sainte-Foy and a secondary assignment of another altar to Saint-Léonard were added to the abbey church of Reichenau under an abbot with close connections to the Hohenstaufen dynasty.²⁹⁸

On the other hand, Conques also had close links to Rome in this period. In 1076, Abbot Étienne II participated in the Lenten synod in Rome upon request of pope Gregory VII to assist in judging king Henry IV resulting in his deposition and excommunication. In 1077, relations between king and pope were temporarily restored following Henry's Road to Canossa. The translation of relics from Conques to St. Gall allegedly occurred in the year after Henry IV finally deposed pope Gregory VII and installed Clemens III. In the Investiture Controversy lasting until 1122, St. Gall supported the king while Reichenau sided with the papacy resulting in a significant conflict between them.²⁹⁹ In light of this background, one can assume that the translation of relics from Conques to St. Gall may have had a political background. Presumably, Conques tried to hedge its bets on both sides.

Given their prominent presence in Aquitaine and their deep involvement in the Reconquista of Spain, it can be assumed that Conques and Cluny had tight connections too. At least, the unusual link between the feast of Pentecost and the Last Judgment, that was mentioned for Cluny and its abbey in Vézelay, is also visible in Conques. The tympanum of its priory church of Saint-Hilarian-Sainte-Foy in Perse (Espalion) includes one of the very few representations of Pentecost on a sculpted portal (Figure 52). The lintel

²⁹¹ Frédéric de Gournay, "Les origines méridionales de la Chanson de Roland," *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 32 (2001): 103–8.

²⁹² Caroline Gödel, "Otto von Andechs, Stiftspropst von Aachen, Bischof von Bamberg, Und Das Tafelgüterverzeichnis.," in *Die Andechs-Meranier in Franken. Europäisches Fürstentum Im Mittelalter* (Mainz, 1998), 75.

²⁹³ Niels von Holst, *Der Deutsche Ritterorden und seine Bauten: von Jerusalem bis Sevilla, von Thorn bis Narwa* (Berlin: Mann, 1981), 20; Bernhard Graf, *Oberdeutsche Jakobsliteratur: eine Studie über den Jakobuskult in Bayern, Österreich und Südtirol*, Kulturgeschichtliche Forschungen 14 (München: Tuduv, 1991), 112 f.

²⁹⁴ Odilo Engels, "Weingarten, das Hauskloster der Welfen, und die politische Bedeutung der Pilgerfahrt Heinrichs des Löwen nach Compostela," in *Der Jakobuskult in Süddeutschland. Kultgeschichte in regionaler und europäischer Perspektive*, ed. Klaus Herbers, Jakobus-Studien (Tübingen: Narr, 1995), 288.

²⁹⁵ Caroline Vienne, "Sélestat, église Sainte-Foy," in *Congrès archéologique de France. 162e session, 2004, Strasbourg et Basse-Alsace* (Paris: Société française d'archéologie, 2006), 144.

²⁹⁶ Naraschewski, "Bamberg, Conques, and the Hohenstaufen Dynasty"; Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*.

²⁹⁷ Naraschewski, "Bamberg, Conques, and the Hohenstaufen Dynasty."

²⁹⁸ The altars of Sainte-Foy and Saint-Léonard are only documented since 1477. Most likely, they were added after 1173 when the side aisles of the church were widened to provide additional space for secondary altars. Kleiner, "Keine Gründung auf der grünen Wiese?," 147–49; Andreas Odenthal, "In monasterio nostro fiat processio cum crucibus ad sepulchrum sancti Marti: Überlegungen zur Sakraltopographie und Stationsliturgie des Reichenauer Münsters St. Maria und Markus," in *Die Klosterinsel Reichenau im Mittelalter: Geschichte - Kunst - Architektur*, ed. Wolfgang Zimmermann, Olaf Siart, and Marvin Gedigk (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2024), 155–63.

²⁹⁹ Derschka, *Geschichte des Klosters Reichenau*, 130 f.

contains a highly condensed version of the Last Judgment.

This anecdotal picture shows how tightly Conques must have been interwoven in the close connections between Cluny, the pilgrimage of St. James, and the Salian and Hohenstaufen dynasties of the empire. The evidence presented is even more noteworthy since only few other historic sources of this period exist that describe personal connections between the empire and the pilgrimage of St. James.

For the purposes of this study, it can be concluded that Conques must have had some form of connection to the abbeys of Reichenau and St. Gall in the time when the tympanum of Conques was created, if only indirectly. The alleged pilgrimage of abbot Ulrich III of St. Gall to Conques and his translation of relics in 1085 even constitutes a direct link. In any case, the area around the Upper Rhine and Lake Constance was one of two hotspots of German pilgrimage of St. James in the 11th century, together with the Middle Rhine around Mainz.³⁰⁰

Focus on proto-purgatory and intercession

The analysis of this study has shown that the tympanum of Conques can be regarded as one of the most detailed and most explicit visualizations of the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife, shaped in the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. The underlying sources from Matthew, Reichenau, and Augustine give priority to the presentation of the Cross as well as to the concepts of proto-purgatory and intercession at scale. On the other hand, they do not include the assumption of an Earthly Paradise as a waiting area for the elected. This profile of Carolingian spirituality is clearly visible in the tympanum of Conques. The visible concern for Charlemagne and the many women interceding for him, the Virgin, Sainte-Foy, and the Holy Virgins, further sharpen this profile.

The procession of saints interceding for Charlemagne attracts significant attention, even today. Together with the extensive and differentiated representation of Hell, it is the most unique element of the tympanum. In view of the *Visio Wettini*, one can argue that the tympanum of Conques was created by its monks as a monumental act of intercession for their legendary founder Charlemagne. Linking themselves so visibly to Charlemagne likely served to re-emphasize the important role of Conques in the Frankish kingdom relative to their rivals of Aurillac and Figeac.

On the other hand, the tympanum also constitutes a less than subtle advertisement for the 11th century 'business model' of Conques: intercession through the miraculous support of Sainte-Foy or through masses and prayers against generous donations. Many other clerical institutions benefitted from such a 'business model' too, most prominently Cluny and other pilgrimage sites along the Ways of St. James. The Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife, manifested in the *Visio Wettini*, the confraternities of prayer, and the extensive *Libri vitae*, certainly was a critical prerequisite. The Romanesque architecture of southern France and northern Spain would not exist without this medieval form of fund raising.

For abbeys like Conques, the pervasive Carolingian focus on proto-purgatory had the convenient side effect that intercession became relevant for nearly everyone. Even apparent role models like Charlemagne were not able to evade proto-purgatory. On the other hand, the example of Wetti, who was accused of significant sexual misconduct, indicated that the proper form of intercession could make a difference even in severe cases. Such comprehensive impact of intercession contrasted with the views of Augustine and Gregory the Great who only saw value in it for marginal sinners with positive overall record and only venial sins.

The message of the tympanum on proto-purgatory and intercession primarily addressed the pilgrims who visited Conques. It is known from the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* that a large part of them must have come from the Germanic part of the empire, in particular from the

³⁰⁰ Herbers, "Frühe Spuren des Jakobuskultes im alemannischen Raum," 4 f.

Upper Rhine and Lake Constance, the cultural space of Reichenau Abbey. The tympanum of Conques conveniently provided them with a spiritual perspective that was familiar to them. This fact may have helped them to relate to its message.

However, the beneficial effects of such spirituality were not to last. Already around 1100, the era of Carolingian spirituality was about to come to an end. In Cluny and other places, the volume of promised masses and prayers was no longer sustainable, and it no longer was socially acceptable.³⁰¹ The rise of the Cistercians under the protection of the ruling dynasties of the 12th century as well as the rise of the Mendicant Orders in the fabrics of the emerging cities of the 13th century ended the viability of this ‘business model’. Certainly, the faithful continued to make donations to clerical institutions, but apparently at much reduced level. The Cistercians had to earn their wealth themselves through economic activities. They re-invested or distributed it

rather than spending it on spiritual luxury items. The Mendicant Orders even refrained from amassing wealth. In addition, the costly participation in one of the Crusades provided a novel preferred path to salvation. In this climate, it was impossible for traditional Benedictine abbeys like Conques or Cluny to maintain their financially attractive position.

From this perspective, the Neo-Carolingian tympanum of Conques not only is a romantic echo of the Carolingian era of its foundation but also of the era of its highest prosperity. When the construction of the abbey church of Conques was completed around 1125, the abbey had already passed its apex. Cluny would follow a few decades later. Eventually, this rapid decline may have saved Conques. Due to beneficial circumstances, it managed to transfer its historical appeal for pilgrims, now called tourists, into the 21st century. The tympanum has no small share in it.

³⁰¹ Neiske, “Pro defunctis exorare ut a peccatis solvantur.”

Building the perfect pilgrimage church

The findings of this study allow us to create a rather consistent picture of the potential intentions of the builders of Conques, complementing earlier findings of other researchers. Obviously, the monks of Conques aspired to establish themselves as a pre-eminent pilgrimage destination with trans-regional appeal. In earlier tradition, such a destination would have required the tomb of an important saint and ideally a *genius loci*.³⁰² Tourists visiting Conques today can attest that its charming location in a pristine valley undoubtedly possesses such a *genius loci*. But even the theft of the relics of Sainte-Foy from Agen did not suffice to compensate for the lack of a pre-eminent saint.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, the monks of Conques closed this gap by creating a novel spiritual attraction, the Majesty of Sainte-Foy and its surrounding tales of miracles. The monumental figure became ground-breaking since it merged several artistic traditions in an innovative way. The Massif Central was one of the last regions in the west where Roman traditions and Roman sculpture were preserved until the early Middle Ages. The Carolingian era paved the way for the re-introduction of monumental sculpture in the sacred space, initially limited to the crucifix. The post-iconoclastic Byzantine era introduced the veneration of two-dimensional icons. These separate developments converged in the Majesty of Sainte-Foy, thereby taking western art to a new level and creating an outstanding attraction for pilgrims.

It only is natural to assume that the monks of Conques aspired to repeat this success story by making their new abbey church an extraordinary attraction in its own right. For this purpose, it had to surpass the relatively sober architecture of the Carolingian era and

of earlier competing churches in its vicinity. What would have been more ambitious but also more adequate than copying the most pre-eminent pilgrimage churches of Christianity, located in the Holy Land and in other parts of the Byzantine empire? The second half of the 10th and first half of the 11th centuries were a period in which the emulation of extraordinary churches, such as the Anastasis in Jerusalem or the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne in Aachen, was fashionable anyway. In the time from about 1065 to 1099, in which significant parts of the abbey church of Conques were built, an emulation of the important pilgrimage sites of the Holy Land even served as a substitute for them since the pilgrimage to the Holy Land had become untenable.

The most unique and innovative attraction of the abbey church of Conques undoubtedly is its sculpted tympanum of the Last Judgment. Leveraging the Carolingian text of the *Visio Wettini* as a model, as suggested by the findings of this study, would be consistent with the Carolingian past of the abbey. The *Visio Wettini* would have conveniently served to 'kill three birds with one stone,' as the saying goes. The very visible reference to Charlemagne recalled the glorious Carolingian past of the abbey allowing Conques to differentiate itself from its regional competitors in Aurillac and Figeac. The focus of the *Visio Wettini* on intercession provided undisguised promotion for their 'business model.' Lastly, the spirituality of the *Visio Wettini* was familiar to their many pilgrims from the southwestern area of the empire.

Be it as it may, the potential models of Conques with differentiating influence were identified on the pilgrimage route from Conques to the Holy Land or on

³⁰² Thunø, "Localism and Sainte Foy at Conques."

the Way of St. James from the southwestern region of the empire to Conques (Figure 54). Thereby, the most relevant influences must have come from the east. Tours and Limoges, the most important models for the Romanesque elements of Conques, were rather located to the northwest. However, many of their elements were traced back to the Holy Land too.

The early 12th century was a period of extraordinary prosperity for Conques, given the simultaneous

completion of the abbey church, the creation of its extraordinary tympanum, the construction of its cloister, and the acquisition of many precious objects for its treasury. Such wealth attests how successful Conques was in attracting pilgrims and their donations. At least temporarily, a possible ambition of building the ‘perfect’ pilgrimage church was achieved. Its extraordinary echo can still be felt today.

APPENDIX

Analytical Humanities: Towards a new research approach

Digital technologies profoundly affect nearly every aspect of our daily lives. Responding to this development, the field of Digital Humanities aims to employ state-of-the-art digital technologies to advance scientific knowledge or to make scientific knowledge more accessible to broader audiences, for example via virtual reconstructions of historical buildings.

Introduction to basic concepts of Digital Humanities

A particular subfield of Digital Humanities leverages advanced algorithms of Data Science or Machine Learning to gain new scientific insight that cannot be obtained with traditional scientific approaches.³⁰³ Most of these advanced algorithms are of a statistical rather than an algorithmic nature. In this context, complex situations are being abstracted into high-dimensional mathematical models. These models are filled with large amounts of real-life data, thereby justifying the somewhat colloquial term *Big Data*. Instead of deriving causal relationships between the dimensions studied in a systematic and structured manner, as would have been done in the past, statistical methods are being employed. Such statistically identified relationships are called correlations. For example, AI-based translation algorithms are no longer instructed about the rules of syntax and grammar. Instead, they autonomously learn about these rules by identifying statistical correlations

between the words of large numbers of real-life texts and their translations produced by humans. In the same spirit, forecasting algorithms predict future outcomes through the identification of statistical correlations between potentially relevant influencing factors and their impact on the predicted outcome, based on historical data of influencing factors and actual outcomes. Such analysis typically is performed without quantitative human insight into how these factors impact the predicted outcomes.

However, statistical identification of correlations only is a necessary but not a sufficient indicator of causal relationships. There are various ways how the existence of correlations can be misinterpreted. In the best case, a causal relationship between two factors exists, but the causal pathway is so complex that the assumption of direct causality is misleading. More often, correlations can be the reflection of independent influences from a common cause. In this case, causality exists between the common cause and both investigated factors. But no causality exists amongst them. In the worst case, the size of the data set was not large enough allowing random fluctuations, called statistical noise, to pretend the existence of meaningful correlations. It is therefore important to validate the plausibility of any findings from such correlation analysis with other historical context information, be it art-historical, political-historical or cultural-historical.

A particular challenge of the approach of Digital Humanities described lies in the large volume of data

³⁰³ See for example Amanda Wasielewski, *Computational Formalism: Art History and Machine Learning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023).

that may need to be processed. Often, a mathematically precise correlation analysis is not feasible, and special heuristics need to be applied. Neural networks and their more recent variants of Deep Learning provide such heuristics. However, parametrizing neural networks in an effective way often is more an art than a science. Therefore, the use of methods of Digital Humanities requires tight collaboration between scholars of the humanities and data scientists. The need for such collaboration poses a significant impediment for widespread application of such new methods.

Analytical Humanities: Semi-statistical approach to Digital Humanities

In many situations, the ideas of Digital Humanities can be applied in a more traditional and more qualitative approximation abolishing the need for collaboration with data scientists. Here, it is proposed to refer to such semi-statistical use of methods of Digital Humanities as *Analytical Humanities*. A semi-statistical approach may be feasible if the underlying problem is highly complex requiring a significant number of dimensions, but the supporting data set is sparse enough to be handled manually. Such situations often occur in art history when a novel artwork constitutes a step change in innovation drawing in an obscure way from multiple precursors. The analysis of such a use case of Analytical Humanities may involve the following steps:

1. **Model definition:** To avoid duplicate work in data collection, it is paramount to define all dimensions of the model investigated upfront. Typically, such dimensions are architectural, decorative or iconographic elements of a complex artwork, e.g., a Romanesque church, with the aim of identifying the likely models or successors of the latter. From a methodological perspective, it is important that the chosen dimensions are clearly defined. A valid dimension may be a standardized class of decoration elements, like Lombard bands, or a standardized iconographic motif, like the Adoration of the Magi. In contrast, stylistic

similarities often are debatable and do not lend themselves well to such an analysis.

2. **Data collection:** Usually, the biggest challenge of this approach is posed by the collection of the data set to be analyzed. In the above example, it would mean collecting comprehensive and detailed information about all earlier or later churches that possess the same decorative or iconographic elements. For example, with more than 2,000 Romanesque churches being known in Europe, comprehensive data collection may not always be viable. In this case, a heuristic grid search needs to be employed. In an iterative process, the search grid needs to be narrowed down in those regional areas where potential findings turn out to be most promising. Like every heuristic, such an iterative approach will have a certain error rate. Relevant buildings may be overlooked. Therefore, the search grid needs to be gradually refined, until sufficient convergence of the overall results has been reached.
3. **Data analysis and data representation:** An often effective, yet relatively simple way of analyzing high dimensional data is to consolidate them in various tables, organized by different leading dimensions. Thereby, potential relations can be tested and displayed. One of the most effective ways of analyzing geo-spatial correlations is to put data on a map. Ideally, these include relevant context information, such as important cities or churches, major traffic routes or borders of territorial rulership. The scientific value of representing data in tables or on maps should not be underestimated. The laborious act of creating such representations in a complete and accurate way often provides relevant insight that would have been overlooked by a less meticulous approach. The aim of such data representations is to identify nontrivial spatial or temporal patterns that may provide insight into the artistic dynamics investigated.
4. **Result verification:** In a last procedural step, the plausibility of identified patterns or

correlations needs to be verified. First, the statistical relevance of the correlations needs to be assessed. In contrast to the quantitative methods of Digital Humanities, such an assessment will necessarily be of a qualitative nature. It will require rather pronounced correlations for them to be credible. The simultaneous occurrence of several elements in two investigated sites only is of statistical significance if these elements are so rare that no other clustered occurrence can be identified that could have served as a common model. In particular, one needs to exclude the potential existence of solitary but prominent common models in remote locations such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or of common models of different materiality such as illustrated manuscripts. Also, any verification of potential causalities should include the identification of potential political or cultural relationships between the identified sites.

5. **Data interpretation:** Nevertheless, such a statistical approach will only allow drawing aggregated conclusions. The identification of validated correlations may prove the existence of a causal relationship between a model region and the successor building investigated. But the existence of such semi-statistical correlations does not necessarily infer that each element of the successor had its model in the investigated model region. Some elements may have been invented independently or may have been derived from other relevant models elsewhere. The existence of correlations also does not permit conclusions to be drawn on the way how influence has spread. The artist of the successor may have visited the model region himself. But just as well, he may have leveraged sketch books from other artists who have visited the region on various earlier occasions. Alternatively, artistic influences may have spread in a diffusive way via several intermediate artworks.
6. **Publication of results:** The publication of insights gained through methods of Analytical Humanities often faces practical challenges in

finding a suitable publication medium. Often, the comprehensive data of studies of Analytical Humanities, in the form of tables, images or other contextual information, may exceed the limits imposed by established art-historical journals. On the other hand, many studies may not be suitable for publication as monographs by traditional publishing houses either. To overcome these limitations, the author has established the new e-publication series *Athenanea* (www.athenanea.net). It provides the necessary flexibility in terms of publication length and formats. In addition, it allows published studies to be updated through successive editions to include post-publication data that further sharpen the initial findings.

The relevance of Analytical Humanities for the study of Romanesque art

Romanesque art exhibits a vast variety of architectural, decorative, and iconographic elements. Already in the 19th and 20th centuries, researchers like Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in France or the contributors to the RDK Labor in Germany have systematically described and classified various architectural and decorative elements of Romanesque architecture including a cataloging of their occurrences.

Using a vague analogy with Egyptology, we know the various types of Romanesque ‘hieroglyphs’ and their general occurrence in various ‘documents’ reasonably well. But often, we have yet to discover our ‘Rosetta stone’ to understand their meaning in a broader context. In the world of Romanesque art, this means that we have yet to better understand why artists chose certain decorative elements. Was it a mere matter of artistic convenience or did they intend to demonstrate allegiance to a regional ruler, to a monastic network, to a spiritual idea or to a place of particular importance, such as Old-St. Peter in Rome or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem? Did specific decorative elements have a spiritual meaning beyond their aesthetic appeal, and was there a spiritual meaning when some elements were used in conjunction? Did

artistic dynamics occur along certain traffic routes more often than along others? Who determined the artistic program of a new church? Was it the politically well-connected bishop or abbot or rather an intellectual local cleric or maybe the artist himself? The amount of progress that Romanesque art history has made in this direction is surprisingly limited due to the lack of explicit historical sources. For example, the work of Reuterswärd on the various early Christian and Romanesque symbols of God as well as the work of Blanc and Blanc on the symbolism of Romanesque sculpture was an important step in this direction.³⁰⁴ But there may be more to be learned if we would better understand transregional dynamics and their drivers. The methods of Analytical Humanities described here may help to achieve this goal.

It may be objected that several generations of highly acclaimed researchers have already attempted to identify such relationships. Why should the prospects be more promising now? Such skepticism underestimates that the proposed semi-statistical approach, when applied in a rigorous and meticulous manner, constitutes a significant conceptual

innovation. By looking conjointly at large numbers of decorative elements, one may be able to derive collective conclusions with confidence where the study of individual elements was inconclusive. Furthermore, recent advances in building research, the publication of many detailed regional monographs as well as the pervasive availability of intelligently searchable images on the internet, in particular via Wikimedia Commons, fundamentally changed the perspective of successfully applying such a research approach.

As a pioneering step, such a method of Analytical Humanities was successfully applied by the author in an earlier study to identify the likely models of the late Romanesque parts of Bamberg cathedral.³⁰⁵ By analyzing about 40 architectural, decorative, and iconographic elements, it could be shown that an extension of the *Via Podiensis* ranging from Cluny to Moissac must have been the core model region for the builders of Bamberg cathedral. Similar results were obtained in the study on the abbey church of Conques presented here. In this case, the pilgrimage route from Conques to the Holy Land played the most crucial role.

³⁰⁴ Patrik Reuterswärd, *The Forgotten Symbols of God: 5 Essays* Reprinted from *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, Stockholm Studies in History of Art 35 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986); Anne Blanc and Robert Blanc, *Les Symboles de l'art roman* (Monaco: DU ROCHER, 1999); Anne Blanc and Robert Blanc, *Monstres, sirènes et centaures: Symboles de l'art roman* (Monaco: DU ROCHER, 2006).

³⁰⁵ Naraschewski, *Der Bamberger Dom aus kunst- und kulturhistorischer Sicht*; Naraschewski, "Bamberg, Conques, and the Hohenstaufen Dynasty"; Martin Naraschewski, *Les origines de la cathédrale de Bamberg sur la Via Podiensis: Résumé partiel de Athenanea*, n° 1, 2nd ed., Athenanea 2 (Berlin: Martin Naraschewski, 2025).

Tables

LOCATION	CHURCH	PRECURSOR ELEMENTS	OTHER OCCURRENCES BEFORE CONQUES
Jerusalem	Holy Sepulchre	Anastasis (model for ambulatory/radial chapels)	Tours, Limoges, others; Rotunda: Fulda, Auxerre, Reichenau, Constance, Dijon
		Anastasis (model for blind arcade of the apse)	Georgia, Contemporary: Speyer, Pisa, Saintes
		Alternating supports	Other Byzantine churches, Dome of the Rock, Reichenau, Ottonian architecture, Jumièges, Poitiers (Saint-Hilaire)
		Galleries of the nave	Other Byzantine churches, Gernrode, Jumièges, Dijon, Tours, Limoges, others
Damascus	Ummayyad mosque, ex-St. John the Baptist	Octagonal crossing tower with squinches	Armenia, Georgia, few Byzantine churches, Islamic buildings of North Africa and Spain
Qal'at Sim'an	Church of St. Simeon Stylites	Stacked columns of the apse	Flavian Amphitheater, Theater of Marcellus
		Eye-brow shaped cornices	Syria, Armenia, Georgia
		Portal house (gable roof)	Armenia, Georgia
		Double windows with oculus	Syria, Holy Land, San Miguel de Lillo
		Octagonal crossing tower	See above
Ephesus	St. John the Apostle	Floor plan (wide transepts)	Holy Apostles, Tours, Limoges, Orléans
		Alternating supports	See above
Constantinople	Hagia Sophia	Angels in pendentives	Other Byzantine churches
		Coupled columns of gallery	Rome (Santa Constanza, arcade)
		Oculi in spandrels	Gernrode
		Alternating supports	See above
	Myrelaion	Single-story lantern tower	Other Byzantine churches
	Monastery of Stoudios	Painting of Last Judgment	Müstair, St. Gall, Reichenau, Torcello, others
		Galleries of the nave	See above
		Absence of westwork	Other Byzantine churches
Thessaloniki	Panagia Chalkeon	Painting of Last Judgment	See above
		Stepped profile of windows	Hosios Loukas (less pronounced)
		Framed group of windows	-
	Hagios Demetrios	Alternating supports	See above
		Galleries of the nave	See above
Poreč	Euphrasian Basilica	Personification of curiosity	-
Torcello/ Venice	Santa Maria Assunta	Mosaic of Last Judgment	See above
	Santa Fosca	Stepped profile of windows	See above; dating of Santa Fosca uncertain
	San Marco	Angels in pendentives	See above

Table 1: Potential models for Conques along the identified pilgrimage route to the Holy Land.

ELEMENTS OF CONQUES	BYZANTINE PRECURSORS	OTHER OCCURRENCES	COMMENTS
Byzantine elements with occurrences in Romanesque architecture before Conques (approx. 950-1050)			
Floor plan (wide transepts)	Ephesus/Holy Apostles	Tours, Limoges, Orléans	Static necessity of vaulting
Ambulatory with radial chapels	Holy Sepulchre (Anastasis)	Tours, Limoges, Clermont, Orléans, Beaulieu-lès-Loches	Rotunda: Fulda, Auxerre, Reichenau, Constance, Dijon
Galleries of the nave	Holy Sepulchre (Basilica), Ephesus/Holy Apostles, many Byzantine churches	Gernrode, Jumièges, Dijon, Tours, Limoges, Mont-Saint-Michel, some others	Potentially, combined reference to Holy Sepulchre in conjunction with ambulatory
Alternating supports	Holy Sepulchre (Anastasis), Ephesus, Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, many Byzantine churches	Reichenau, Gernrode, Ottonian architecture, Jumièges, Poitiers (Saint-Hilaire)	Reichenau is the only known Carolingian example; possibly reference to Holy Apostles, together with Gernrode
Byzantine elements without relevant occurrences in Romanesque architecture before Conques			
Blind arcade of the apse	Holy Sepulchre (Anastasis)	Georgia; Contemporary: Speyer, Pisa, Saintes	Appearance in Europe around 1100; precursor in Elne
Octagonal crossing tower with squinches	Syria, Armenia, Georgia, few Byzantine churches, Islamic architecture of North Africa and Spain	Cardona, Frómista	Frómista presumably before Conques, some contemporary buildings (e.g., Anzy-le-Duc), potential models in Toledo
Single-story lantern tower	Church of St. Simeon Stylites, Myrelaion, many Byzantine churches	Germigny-des-Prés, Caen (Saint-Étienne), Normandy, Fulda, Frómista	Germigny-des-Prés and Caen have tall rectangular lantern towers with limited lighting
Coupled columns of galleries or of cloister	Hagia Sophia, very few other Byzantine churches	Rome (Santa Constanza, arcade)	Contemporary occurrences in Toulouse and Compostela
Stacked half columns of radial chapels	Church of St. Simeon Stylites, Qalb Loze	Flavian Amphitheater, Theater of Marcellus	Toulouse and Frómista dependent on Conques
Eyebrow shaped cornices	Church of St. Simeon, Syria, Armenia, Georgia	Contemp.: Saint-André-de-Sorède, Arles-sur-Tech	Some shortly after Conques, e.g., Frómista
Square billet moldings	Church of St. Simeon	Loire, Burgundy, Auvergne	Byzantine origin uncertain
Angels in squinches (elsewhere in pendentives)	Hagia Sophia, San Marco, many Byzantine churches	-	Unusual realization as sculptures in Conques
Framed group of windows	Panagia Chalkeon	-	Result of 11 th century trends in Byzantine architecture
Window frames/blind arches with stepped profile	Panagia Chalkeon, Torcello (dating uncertain)	Contemporary: Selles-sur-Cher (limited similarity)	San Marco in Venice shortly after Conques
Oculi in spandrels of mullioned or double windows/portals	Hagia Sophia (inlays), Church of St. Simeon, Syria, St. Catherine (Sinai)	Gernrode, Medallions in spandrels: Santa María del Naranco, Pisa	Unusual position of oculus at cloister portal of Conques, similar to Hagia Sophia
Tympanum of Last Judgment	Kastoria, Cappadocia, Monastery of Studios, Panagia Chalkeon, Torcello	Wall paintings: Müstair, St. Gall, Reichenau Mosaic: Torcello	Complex origination with Carolingian and Byzantine models
Personification of curiosity	Poreč (Euphrasian Basilica)	-	Unique element of Conques
General Byzantine characteristics: Absence of westwork/prominent west tower(s), absence of a crypt			

Table 2: Potential Byzantine elements of Conques and their potential models.

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS	PRECURSORS (EARLY EXAMPLES)	COMMENTS
Architectural elements of Conques with early Christian, Visigothic, Merovingian or Lombard precursors		
Cruciform floor plan with crossing tower	Early Christian: Ravenna (Santa Croce), San Nazaro in Brolo (Milan), Trier, Sofia Visigothic: Braga, Santa Comba de Bande, San Pedro de la Nave, others Merovingian: Paris (Sainte-Croix-et-Saint-Vincent)	Widespread adoption in France only in Carolingian era (after Saint-Denis) and in the Empire only in Ottonian era (after Gernrode); in the Empire often without crossing tower
Figured or historiated capitals	Early Christian: Rome (San Lorenzo fuori le mura, ancient spolia), Egypt Visigothic: San Pedro de la Nave	Only very few early examples, slightly more widespread use of eagle capitals in Roman art
Decorated impostos	Early Christian: Ravenna, Byzantine Visigothic: San Pedro de la Nave	San Pedro de la Nave is early example of historiated capital with decorated impost
Three-stranded interlace	Early Christian: Italy (reliefs); use at capitals: Constantinople, Holy Land Lombard: Verona, several others	Characteristic for Conques, often two-stranded in French Romanesque, basket capitals in Constantinople, Holy Land
Architectural elements of Conques with Asturian or Carolingian precursors		
Cruciform floor plan	Carolingian: Saint-Denis, Germigny-des-Prés, Reichenau	Re-introduction in the empire through Gernrode, St. Pantaleon, Bamberg
Barrel vaults with transverse arches	Asturian: Santa María del Naranco, Santa Cristina de Lena	Earlier examples of transverse arches in Syria, Islamic architecture, e.g., Ukhaidir
Double windows with oculus	Asturian: San Miguel de Lillo	Earlier examples in Syria and the Holy Land (e.g., Monastery of St. Catherine)
Mullioned windows with external engaged columns	Syrian: Resafa (external columns) Asturian: Santa María del Naranco	Widespread use in French Romanesque architecture, not in Empire or Italy
Mullioned windows with discharging arch	Carolingian: Corvey Early Ottonian: Gernrode	Earliest known example in Byzantine architecture at Hosios Loukas monastery
Round staircase towers	Carolingian: Aachen (Palatine Chapel)	Wide-spread use in Ottonian architecture
Architectural elements of Conques with Romanesque precursors (mainly Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne)		
Compound piers with engaged columns and pilaster strips	Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Châtillon-sur-Seine, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, Auxerre (Saint-Étienne), Cardona, Bernay, Poitiers (Saint-Hilaire)	Significant innovation of French Romanesque architecture, absent in Roman or early Byzantine architecture
Figured or historiated capitals	Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire (porch tower)	Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire was the most important model for Romanesque art
Square billet moldings	Syria, Armenia, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, Dijon (Saint-Bénigne), env. of Tours	Widespread use at Loire, in Burgundy, and in Auvergne, potentially Byzantine
Corbels with masks at the cornice	Armenia, Contemporary: Epeigné-sur-Dême, Azay-le-Rideau, Poitiers (Saint-Hilaire), Saint-Sever	Widespread use at Loire, in Burgundy, and in Auvergne; contemporary with Conques, potentially Byzantine
Shaving corbels	Dijon (Saint-Bénigne)	Widespread use at Loire, in Burgundy, and in Auvergne; few precursors in Córdoba and in Mozarabic architecture

Table 3: Architectural elements of Conques with potential models from the Latin West.

TIME PERIOD	SOURCE	NEW CONCEPTUAL OR ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS
New Kingdom	Egyptian mythology	Weighing of hearts (souls), Particular Judgment
5 th century BC or earlier	Greek mythology	Particular Judgment, Otherworld: Hades, Elysion, Tartaros (special place of punishment with possibility of purgatory)
2 nd to 1 st centuries BC	Daniel 7:10 Judith 16:15	Stream of fire from the throne of God/Christ to the damned Torments of damned by fire and serpents
80/90	Matthew 24-25, 19:8	Angels with trumpets, Last Judgment heralded by sign of Christ (Cross), Christ as judge, saved rewarded with eternal life, damned facing perpetual torments, 12 apostles as jury
70/90	Luke 16:19-31	Parable of poor Lazarus and rich man, Particular Judgment, Bosom of Abraham, torments for wicked
90/95	Book of the Apocalypse	Paschal mystery of Christ: 24 elder, four living creatures, Lamb of God, seven candle sticks, book with seven seals Parousia of Christ: Seven angels with seven trumpets and eighth angel, rolling up the scrolls of sky, Christ as King of Kings with thousand-year reign, First resurrection of martyrs, crowning of martyrs, others remain dead Last Judgment: empty throne of God, <i>liber vitae</i> , resurrection, damned, Satan, Beast, and False Prophet cast in Lake of Fire, Heavenly Jerusalem with God residing between saved
2 nd to 4 th centuries	Apocryphal apocalypses (Peter, Paul, Mary)	Detailed description of Hell and its torments, Hell compartmentalized by type of torment, torments reflecting the respective sin and involved body part, hanging and demons as punishment, intercession by Virgin and saints
180-220	Tertullian (De anima 58)	Particular Judgment, refreshments or torments in otherworld
First third of 5 th century	Augustine (Enchiridion 18:69, 29:109-111, De civitate dei)	Elected resting (no Paradise) and damned in torment until Last Judgment, possibility of proto-purgatory, prayers and alms may help venial sinners, co-existence of eternal civitas immortalis (Heaven, God) and civitas mortalis (Hell, Satan) with differentiated levels of benefits or torments
593/94	Gregory the Great (Dialogues, 4 th book)	Priority of Particular Judgment, immediate ascension to Heaven, perpetual torments in Hell, time-limited proto-purgatory in dedicated places of Hell, prayers and masses may help sinners in purgatory, dispute of angels and devils over souls, re-unification of body and soul at Last Judgment
8 th to early 10 th centuries	Anglo-Irish visions (Boniface, Bede)	Mouth of Hell, largely following Gregory the Great, link to confraternities of prayer in the Frankish kingdom
8 th to 9 th centuries 824/25: Visio Wettini	Carolingian visions (mainly Visio Wettini; also woman, Barontus, poor woman, St. Ansgar, Rotcharius, Bernoldus)	Intercession by saints, martyrs, and virgins as well as by clerics and relatives through masses, prayers, and alms, concern for the souls of worldly or clerical leaders of the Frankish kingdom, Charlemagne in proto-purgatory, women as intercessors, confraternity books (libri vitae)
First third of 12 th century	Hildebert of Lavardin	Purgatory as formal concept within framework of Limbo

Table 4: Evolution of concepts and iconography of the Last Judgment according to written sources.

TIME PERIOD	REGIONS, SITES	CHURCHES, SITES	NEW ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS
3 rd to mid-6 th century	Rome, Fondi, Ravenna	Old-St. Peter, Santa Constanza, San Paolo fuori le mura, Santa Pudenziana, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo	Parousia of Christ with Christ on throne, sphere or walking on clouds, 24 elder, 12 apostles (sheep), Lamb of God, 4 living creatures, Heavenly Jerusalem; Good Shepherd with separation of Sheep and Goats, asymmetric hand gestures
4 th or mid-6 th to early 9 th century	Ravenna, Rome, Jouarre, potential Byzantine influences	San Michele in Affricisco, Santa Prassede, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Notre-Dame (Jouarre)	Angels with trumpets, resurrected, to be judged, stigmata of Christ, damned with stream of fire, book with seven seals, seven candle sticks, angels with Arma Christi, presentation of Cross
Early 8 th to early 10 th century	Rome, Müstair, Cimitile/Naples	Santa Maria Antiqua, St. John (Müstair), Santa Prassede, San Clemente, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Old-St. Peter, Cimitile/Naples	Harrowing of Hell (independent from Last Judgment)
<i>Early 9th century</i>	<i>Rome</i>	<i>Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (820)</i>	<i>Potential common model for Müstair and Formis (hypothesis)</i>
8 th to early 11 th century	Wearmouth, Rhine valley/ Lake Constance	Disentis, Chur/Müstair, St. Gall, Reichenau, (Utrecht)	Saved and damned, devils in hell, bishops and kings amongst saved and damned, asymmetric hand gestures of Christ, stars in Mandorla, angels with scrolls, Virgin, angel rolling up the scroll of the sky, arrangement in registers
10 th to late 11 th century	Byzantine: Kastoria, Cappadocia, Thessaloniki, Constantinople, Torcello	Kastoria, Cappadocia, Panagia Chalkeon, monast. of Stoudios, Santa Maria Assunta, Victoria and Albert Museum (from Italy)	Deesis (Virgin with St. John the Baptist), stream of fire, cherubim, seraphim, Satan, Archangel Michael with weighing of souls, Hades/Tartaros, Bosom of Abraham and St. Peter in Paradise, Particular Judgment; Torcello: Harrowing of Hell, Arma Christi
2 nd half of 11 th century to early 12 th century	Burgfelden, Novara, Civate, Acquanegra sul chiese, etc.	St. Michael, San Michele in Oleggio, San Pietro al Monte	Archangel Michael fighting the dragon, Bosom of Abraham (three patriarchs) in western iconography
1080	Formis/Naples	Sant'Angelo	Iconography similar to Müstair
Early 12 th century	Conques, Mâcon, Autun	Sainte-Foy, Saint-Vincent, Saint-Lazare	Conques: Christ with exposed right side, prominent representation of torments of hell, Charlemagne (founder), intercession at scale, Holy Virgins

Table 5: Evolution of the iconography of the Last Judgment.

Figures



Figure 1: South façade of the abbey church of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The prominent west towers are fictitious reconstructions of the 19th century. The second story of the crossing tower was added in the 16th century. The apse with its blind arcade is hidden by the scaffolding.



Figure 2: Chevet of Notre-Dame-du-Port in Clermont-Ferrand with typical decorative elements of the Romanesque architecture of Loire, Burgundy, and Auvergne. These include square billet moldings and shaving corbels at the eaves cornices as well as single-row round billet moldings at the eyebrow shaped cornices around the windows. The black inlay patterns are a typical feature of Auvergne.



Figure 3: Ambulatory and radial chapels of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The eaves cornice of the ambulatory is decorated with the characteristic multi-row round billet moldings of Conques with separating lines between the rows of billets. The round billet moldings of the later transept window do no longer have these separating lines. Most of the corbels of the ambulatory have animal masks. The earlier shaving type can be seen in the upper left corner.



Figure 4: Map of a prototypical 11th century pilgrimage route from Conques to the Holy Land. Ephesus could have been omitted since the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople would have provided a rather similar model. Alternative land routes to Constantinople would have passed through Italy via Brindisi or from Venice through the Balkans.

Source: User Nzeemin, [Wikimedia Commons](#), pilgrimage route and locations added by the author.

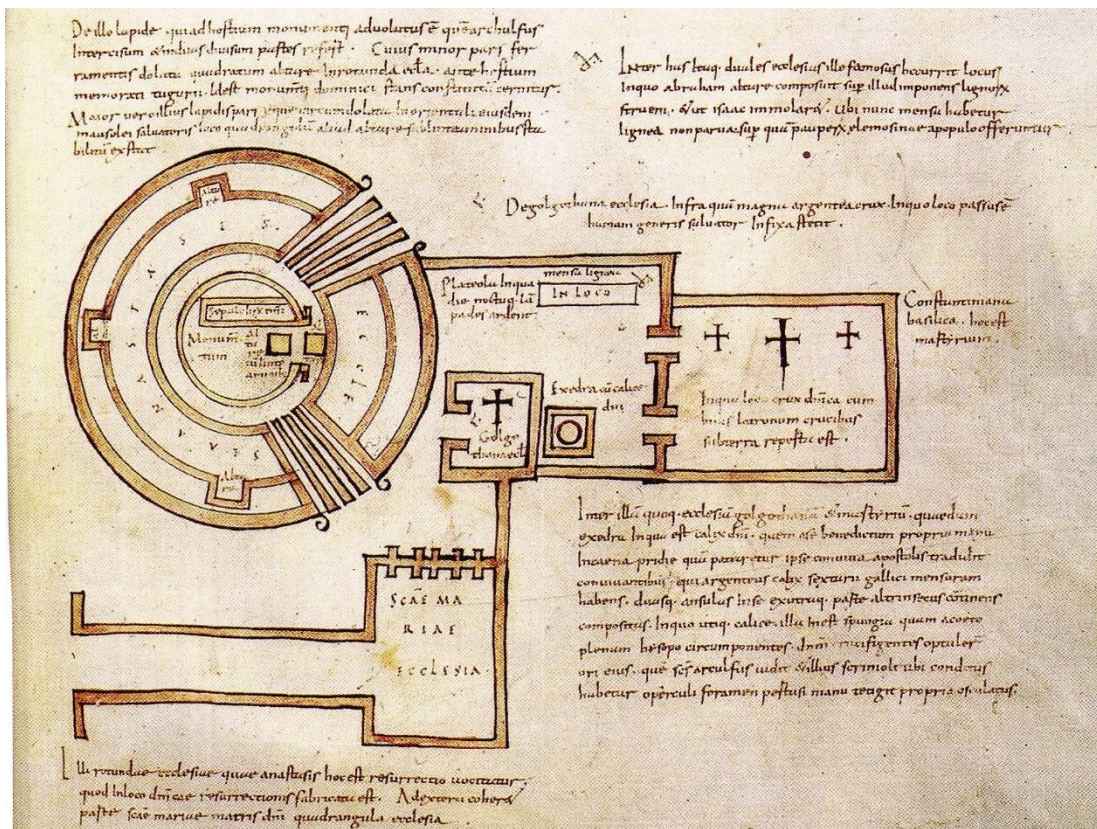


Figure 5: Floor plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem according to the pilgrimage report of Arculf from the 7th century. The image shows a copy from the first half of the 9th century created in Reichenau Abbey.

Source: Adamnanus, De Locis Sanctis, Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 73, fol. 5r, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

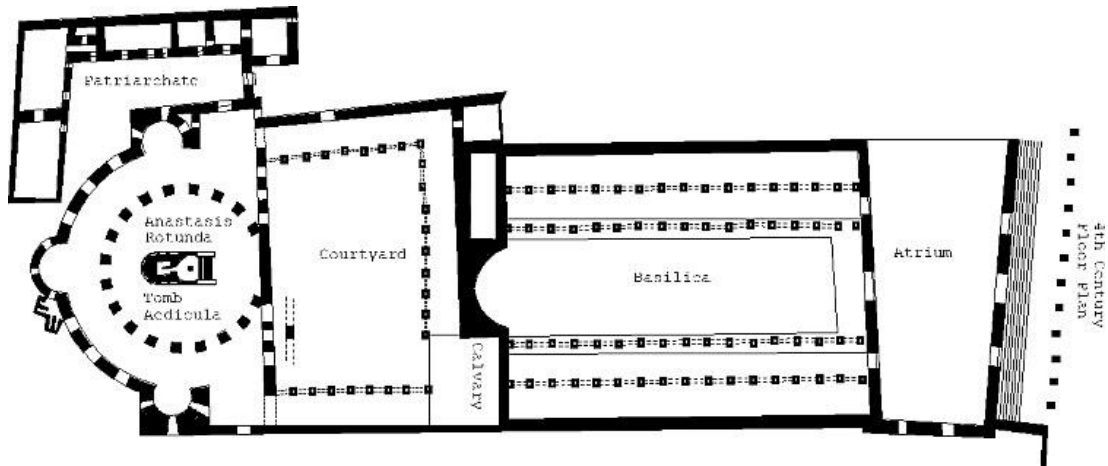


Figure 6: Sketch of the reconstructed floor plan of the Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulchre with Anastasis, atrium, and basilica with galleries.

Source: Yair Talmor (User Talmoryair), [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 7: Two basket capitals with interlace in an apsidiole of the northern transept of Sainte-Foy in Conques. Similar basket capitals are known from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and from other early Christian churches of the Holy Land as well as from Constantinople and Egypt.

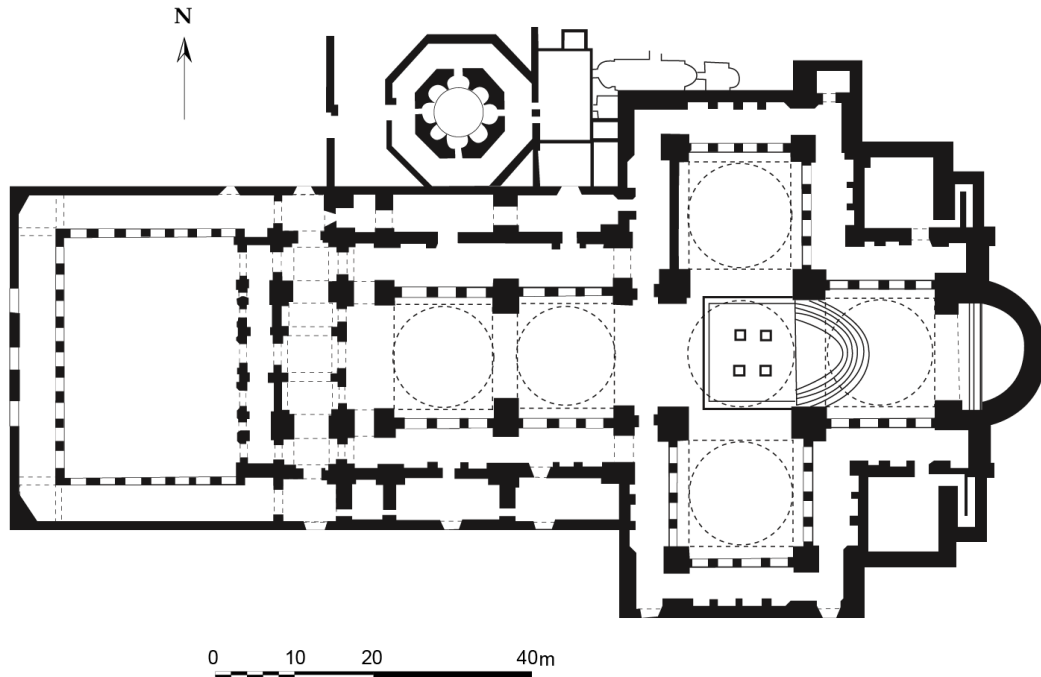


Figure 8: Floor plan of the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus. The chevet possesses side aisles but no ambulatory. The arcades of the naves have alternating supports. The western arcade of the northern transept also had three columns, in contrast to the wall shown in this plan. The side aisles of the nave are accessible from the narthex. The central entrance to the nave is split into three doors, while the central portal of the façade only has one door.

Source: User Marsyas, redrawn after Clive Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, Cambridge 1979, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

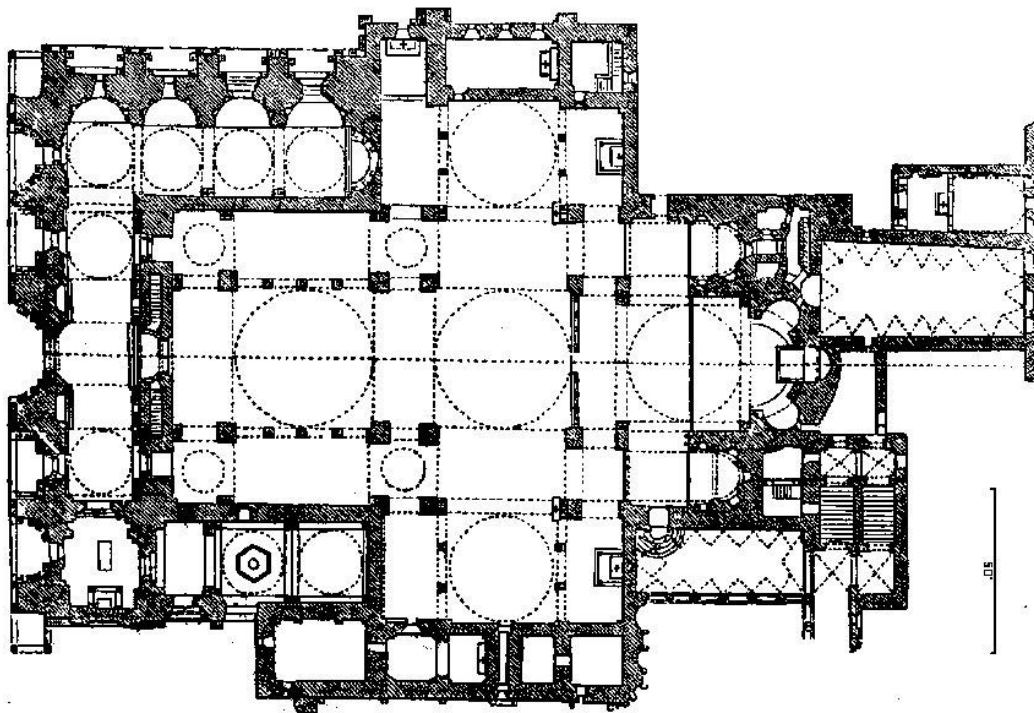


Figure 9: Floor plan of San Marco in Venice. The northern portico is an addition from the 13th century. Further alterations were made in the 14th century.

Source: James Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, London 1855, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

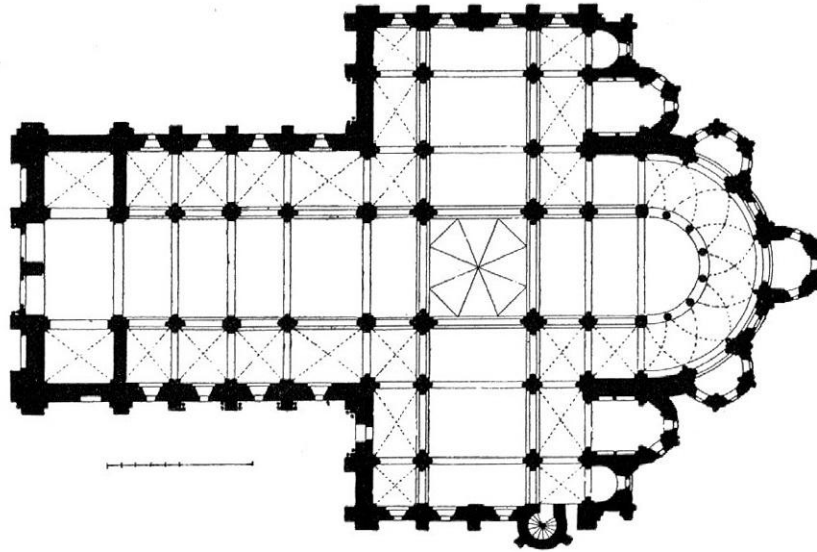


Figure 10: Floor plan of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The staggered chevet followed the models of Saint-Martin in Tours and Cluny II. The alternating supports of the arcades of the nave are hardly visible on this plan. In contrast to this plan, the side aisles of the nave are accessible from the narthex. The main portal is split by a trumeau.

Source: Georg Dehio/Gustav von Bezold, *Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*, Stuttgart 1887, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

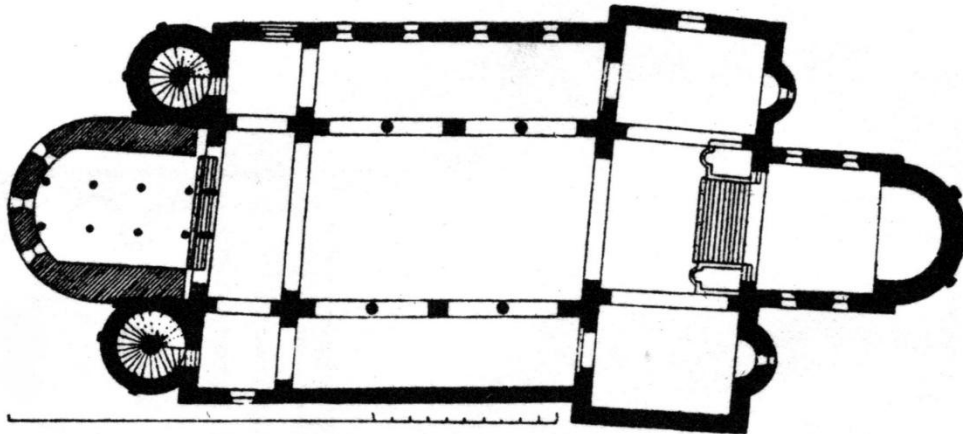


Figure 11: Floor plan of St. Cyriac in Gernrode from the second half of the 10th century. The western crypt (on the left) is an addition of the 12th century. The arcades of the nave have alternating supports. The nave has galleries (not shown).

The reconstructed floor plan of the *Heito Münster* of Reichenau Abbey from the second quarter of the 9th century is structurally very similar to the 10th century state of Gernrode, albeit with more accurate proportions and orientations. In Reichenau, the dimensions of the transepts and sanctuary correspond to the dimensions of the crossing. They are repeated twice in the nave. The *Heito Münster* had different apses and no galleries of the nave. A westwork and a rotunda were added in the 10th century.

Source: Georg Dehio/Gustav von Bezold, *Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*, Stuttgart 1887, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 12: Northern arcade of the nave of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The image shows the four western bays of the nave, not including the fifth bay next to the crossing. The alternating supports at arcade level correspond to a pseudo-sequence of pier – column – pier – column – pier. At gallery level, the alternation has been suspended in favor of consistent half columns supporting the transverse arches of the vaulting.



Figure 13: Galleries of the nave (left) and the northern transept (right) of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The first narrow bay of the nave has a parallel in St. John of Ephesus. Like in Ephesus, the sequence of alternating supports starts with its first pier only after the compound pier of the crossing, as is visible from the pilaster strip at arcade level. This disposition may have mimicked the massive quadrupedal piers of the crossing of Ephesus.

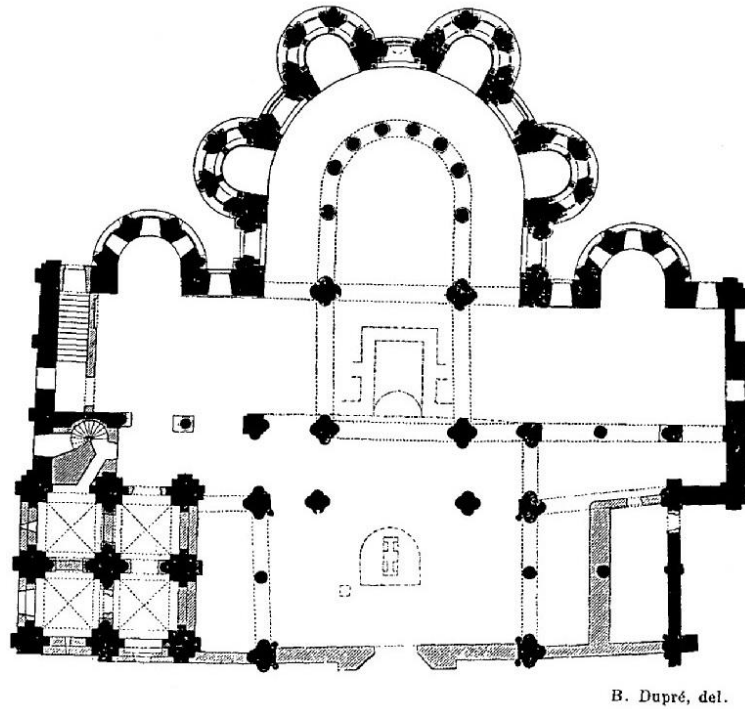


Figure 14: Floor plan of the chevet, transept, and first bay of the nave of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand in Poitiers, showing the condition in 1854 before the reconstruction of the nave. The parts in black supposedly go back to the condition in 1080.

Source: Eugène Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand, étude archéologique*, in *Société française d'archéologie*, LXXe session, Paris 1904, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 15: First bay of the nave and northern transept of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand in Poitiers in its current condition. The domes of the nave, of which only one squinch is visible (upper left corner), are reconstructions of the 19th century.

Source: Gerd Eichmann, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

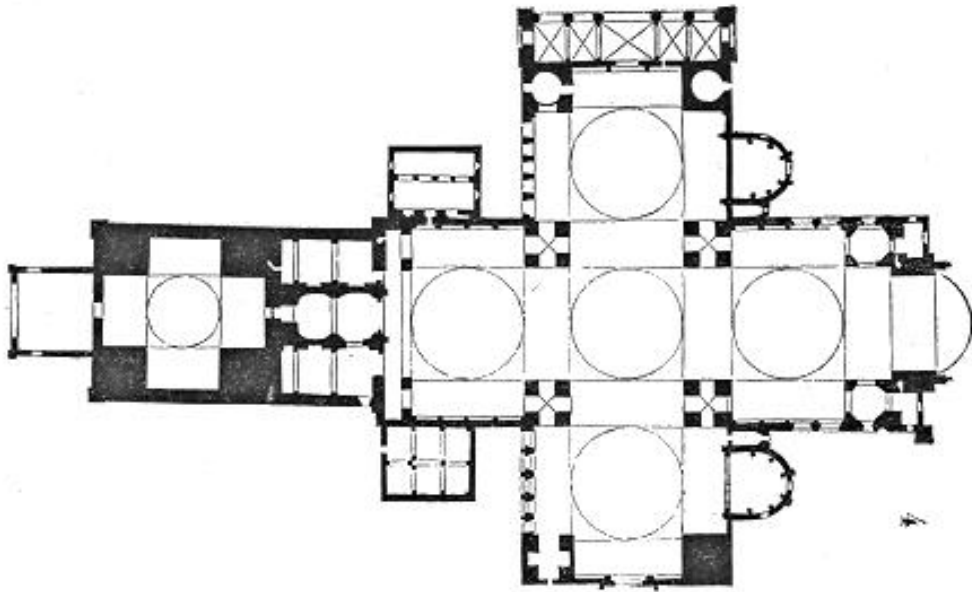


Figure 16: Floor plan of the cathedral of Saint-Front in Périgueux from about 1170.

Source: Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, Paris 1856, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

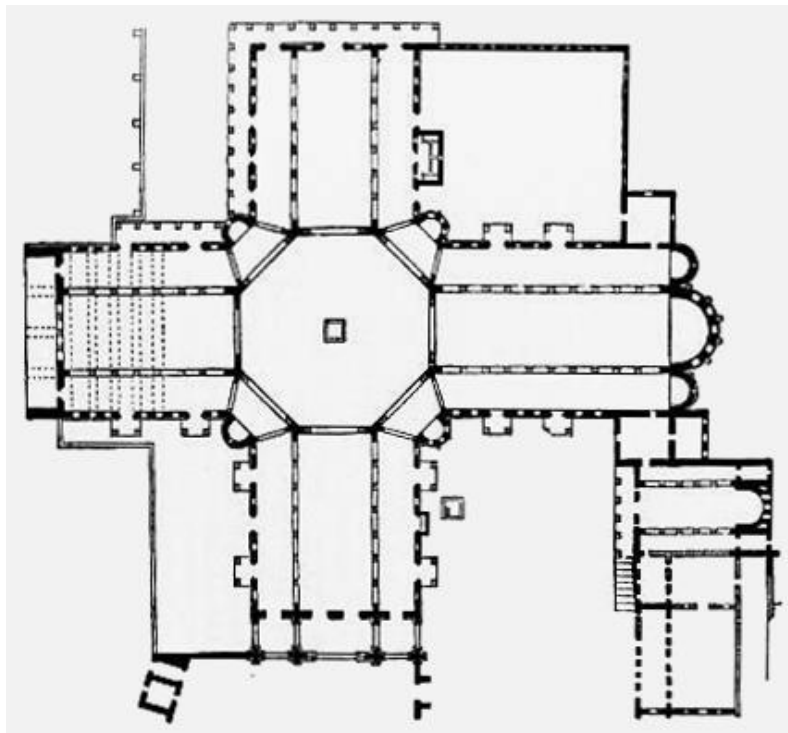


Figure 17: Floor plan of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'ān. Four basilicas with side aisles are connected to an octagon. The main entrance with a porch opens into the south basilica. The three apses are located in the east.

Source: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition, 1911, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 18: Central apse of the east basilica of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'ān. The apse had stacked columns on pedestals, separated by an entablature-like cornice. The windows have eyebrow shaped cornices.

Source: Bernard Gagnon, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 19: Radial chapel of Sainte-Foy in Conques looking like a height-compressed version of the central apse of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites. The size-reduced upper half-columns sit on the eyebrow shaped cornices of the windows rather than on a separate entablature above the windows.



Figure 20: Main entrance (south basilica) of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'ān. The narthex had the form of an open porch with three connected portal houses. It is opened to the nave through four doors (in the background).

Source: User Aotearoa, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 21: West portal of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The overall disposition with portal house, two widely separated entrance doors and blind portals to the left and to the right has no precedence in Romanesque architecture. It appears like a simplified version of the main entrance to the Church of St. Simeon Stylites in Qal 'at Sim 'ān.



Figure 22: Portal of the north basilica of St. Simeon Stylites. The cornice above the door has double-row square billet moldings. The outer moldings of the cornice around the upper window have parallels with the portals of Conques.

Source: Dick Osseman (User Dosseman), [Wikimedia Commons](#), image is cropped and brightened.



Figure 23: Archivolt of the west portal of Conques. The moldings have significant structural similarity with corresponding moldings of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites. The reconstructed eaves cornice of the portal house (upper left side) shows typical square billet moldings.

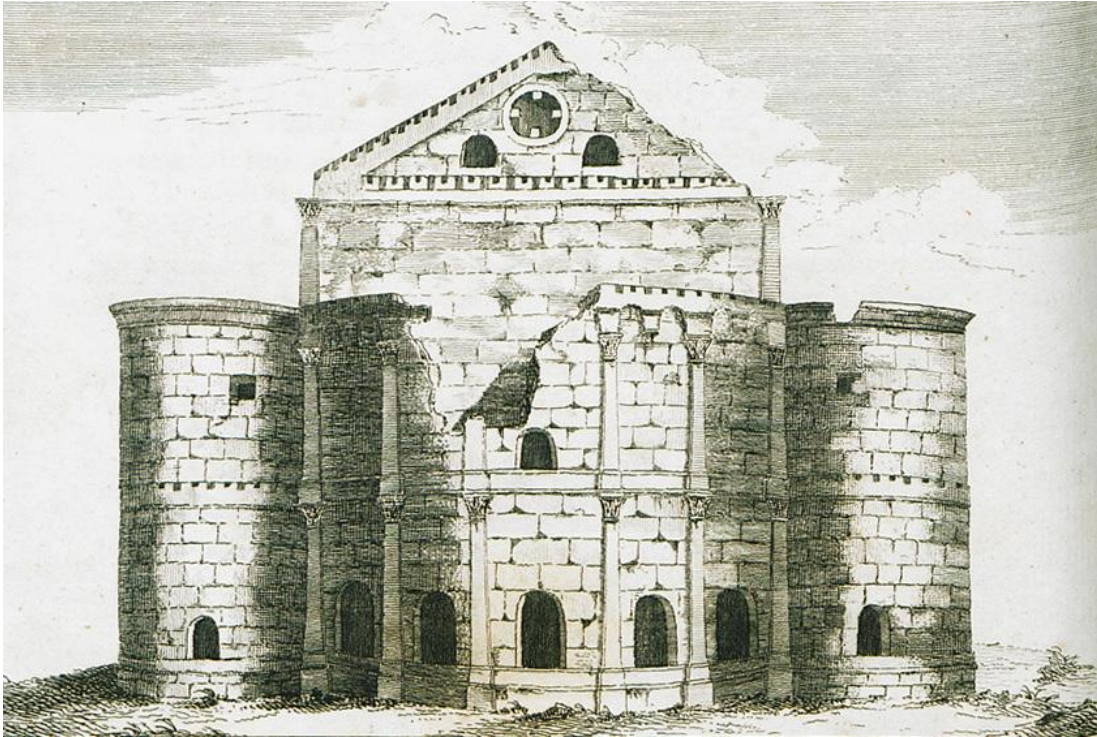


Figure 24: Drawing of the façade of the east basilica of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites with its three apses. The gable featured two arched windows with a large oculus above them. Fragments of this oculus have been preserved.

Source: Alexander Drummond, 1754, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 25: West façade of Sainte-Foy in Conques with its iconic framed grouped window. The transparent window at the top indicates that the steep gable has a purely decorative function. The roof of the nave has a significantly lower position than this gable. The two towers are fictitious reconstructions of the 19th century.



Figure 26: Chevet and crossing tower of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The apse has a large blind arcade. The masonry of the staircase tower attached to the crossing tower is not consistent with the first story of the tower.

Source: User Flaurentine, [Wikimedia Commons](#), image is cropped.



Figure 27: View from the central octagon of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites to one of the corner rooms containing an apsidiole. The corner rooms with apsidiole are equivalents of the squinches of other octagonal crossing towers.

Source: Effi Schweizer, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 28: Southern gallery of the nave of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The mullioned windows have coupled columns at the center and additional external half columns. The external half columns are a frequent feature of French Romanesque architecture. They have no earlier correspondence in Roman architecture.

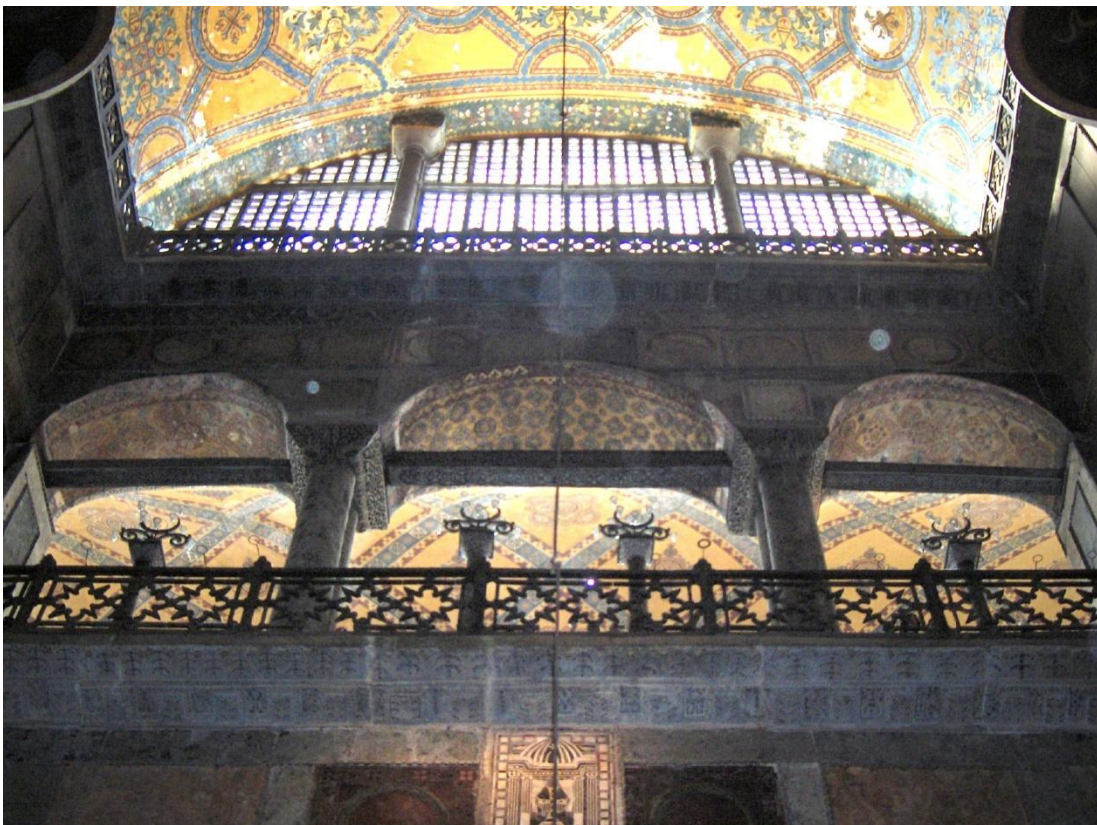


Figure 29: Windows of the western or empress gallery of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople with two coupled columns.

Source: Georges Jansoone (User JoJan), [Wikimedia Commons](#), image is cropped and brightened.



Figure 30: Two angels in the squinches of the crossing tower of Sainte-Foy in Conques. Mosaics or paintings of angels in pendentives are a common motif in Byzantine art. Most Byzantine crossing towers or domes are round and have pendentives instead of the squinches of Conques.



Figure 31: Portal and windows of the cloister of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The mullioned portal and mullioned windows have coupled columns. The mullioned portal has an oculus between its two arches. The arcades of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople feature black circular inlays at the same position. The low position of the oculus in Conques is unique in Romanesque architecture. Later, the oculus was typically positioned in the center between discharging arch and the arches of the mullioned window.



Figure 32: South façade of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki. Characteristic innovative features are the stepped frames around the windows. The frame around the five windows of the transept has high similarity to the framed grouped window of the west façade of Conques. The decorative gable of the transept is unusual in Byzantine architecture.

Source: Konstantinos Stampoulis (User Geraki), [Wikimedia Commons](#).

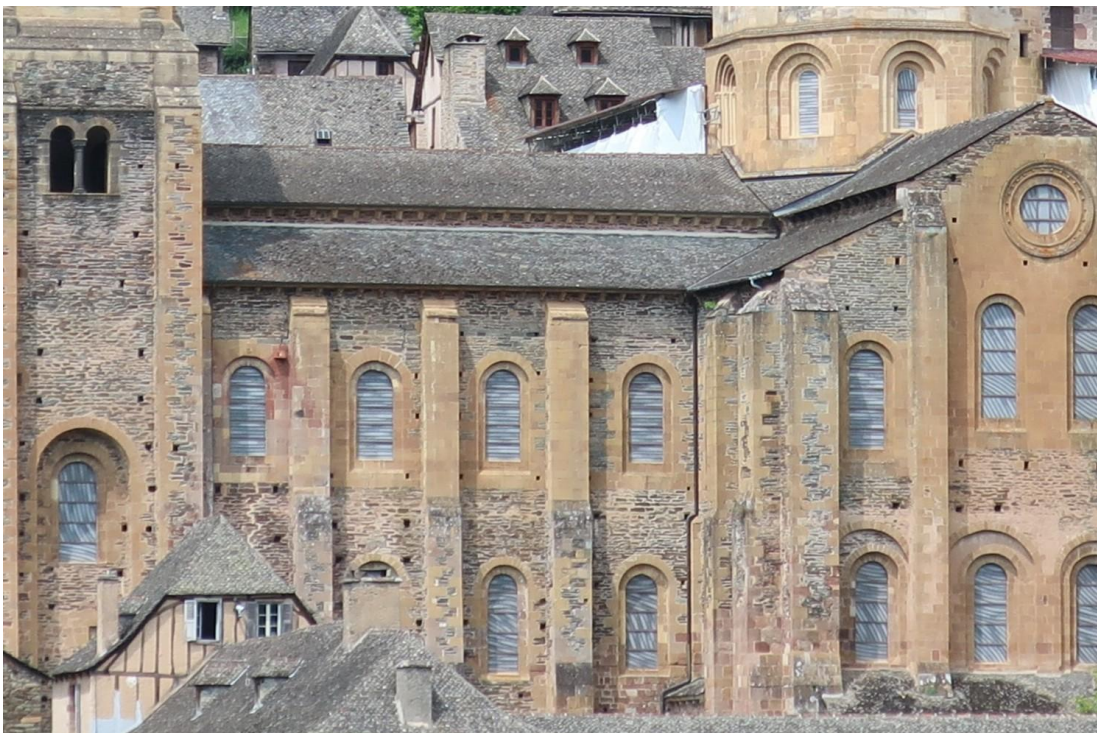


Figure 33: South façade of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The many stepped frames around the windows are clearly visible.



Figure 34: Umayyad Mosque in Damascus with octagonal lantern tower echoing Byzantine precursors.

Source: Francis Bedford (1862), Royal Collection, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 35: Myrelaion in Constantinople, one of the first cross-in-square churches with single-story crossing tower.

Source: Nina Aldin Thune (User Nina-no), [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 36: Angel from the archivolte of the tympanum of the Last Judgment of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The angel is holding a scroll using this opportunity to catch a glimpse of the scenery in the tympanum. The angel can be interpreted as a personification of curiosity.



Figure 37: Mosaic in the apse of the Euphrasian basilica in Poreč. The secret observer behind the veil looks at the scene of the Visitation, constituting another personification of curiosity.



Figure 38: West façade of Sainte-Foy in Conques in its condition before the restauration (1877). Today's massive double towers do not yet exist. The northwestern corner has a turret that hardly breaks through the silhouette of the gable. It has been speculated that a second turret may have existed at the southwestern corner but may have been destroyed in 1586, during the Wars of Religion. However, there is no proof for the former existence of a second turret. Like today, the gable has a decorative function and does not support the roof.

Source: Séraphin-Médéric Mieusement (1840-1905), [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 39: Tympanum of the Last Judgment of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The scene is arranged in three registers with a temporal sequence from top to bottom and a hierarchical order from bottom to top.

The temporal sequence describes the sequence of events of the Last Judgment. In the upper register, various angels announce the Parousia of Christ and the imminent Last Judgment following Matthew 24. The middle register reflects the Carolingian spirituality of the afterlife according to the *Visio Wettini*. It shows a procession of saints, martyrs, Holy Virgins, clerics, and relatives interceding for Charlemagne with Christ on his right side. On his other side, sinners are denied direct access to him by two angels. These sinners await the Last Judgment in *Hades*. Venial sinners are subject to proto-purgatory in the inner part of *Hades*. Mortal sinners (*homines perversi*) already are subject to permanent punishment in its outer part, called *Tartaros* (*tartara*). The lower register describes the process of the Last Judgment according to Augustine's *Enchiridion*. Elected and sinners move from their individual waiting areas in the otherworld, which are determined by the Particular Judgment, towards the judgment act and from there to their final destinations in Heaven or Hell.

The spiritual hierarchy, as described by the scrolls, should be read from door level. An epigraph on the lintel of the left door addresses the worldly sinners (*peccatores*) who still may influence their fate by moral conversion. The lower register of the tympanum deals with the fate of ordinary sinners who will be saved (*electi*) or damned (*iniusti*). The middle register describes the fate of exceptional individuals, saints (*sancti*) and mortal sinners (*homines perversi*). The upper register addresses the fate of Christ.

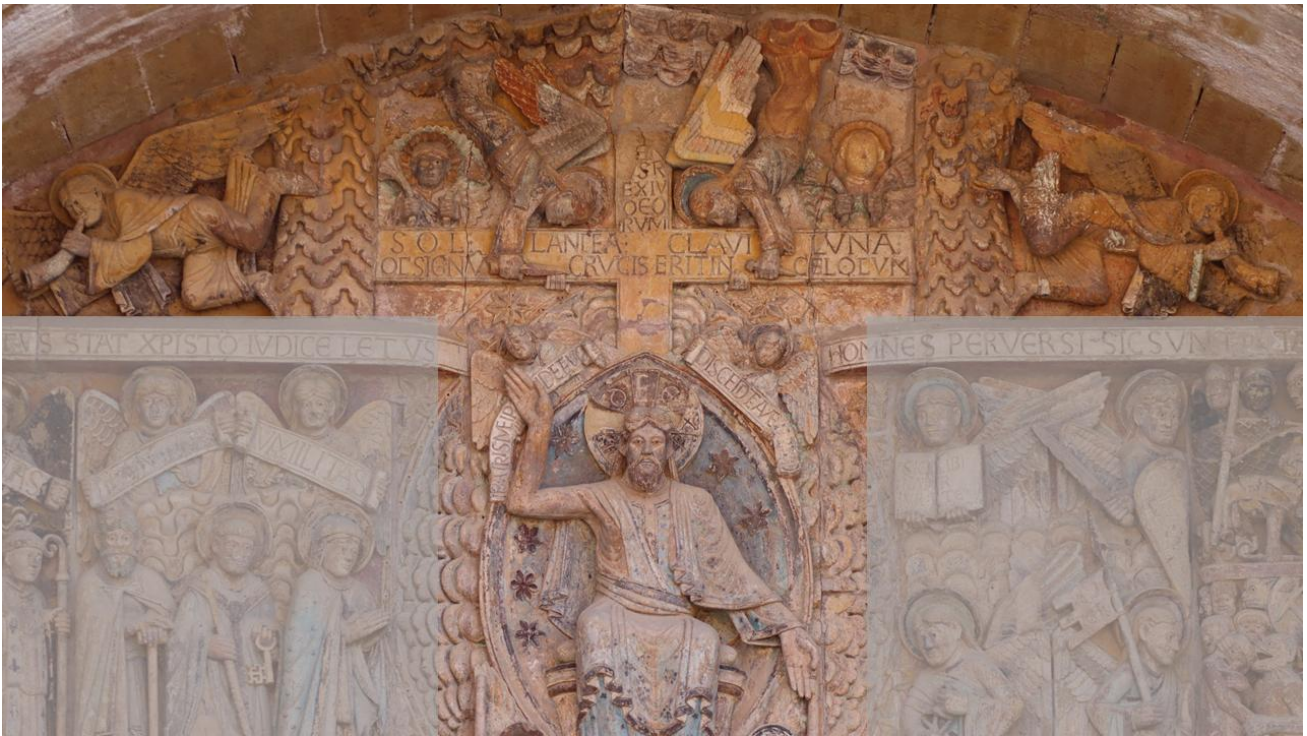


Figure 40: Announcement of the Parousia of Christ and his imminent Last Judgment, heralded by the Cross and the Arma Christi (Matthew 24). The ambivalent anagrams of *rex* and *iudex* in the halo of Christ indicate that the angels with trumpets announce both the thousand-year kingdom of Christ (Apocalypse 8-11) and the following Last Judgment.



Figure 41: Christ as king and judge in the mandorla. His asymmetric gesture underlines his active role as judge. The two angels underneath Christ are an allusion to the seven candle sticks of the Apocalypse. The upper angel on the left side of Christ holds the open *Liber Vitae*. The lower angel with a censer complements the seven angels with trumpets of the Apocalypse. Christ resides in the seventh layer of heaven, potentially alluding to the Reichenau Seven Heaven Homily.

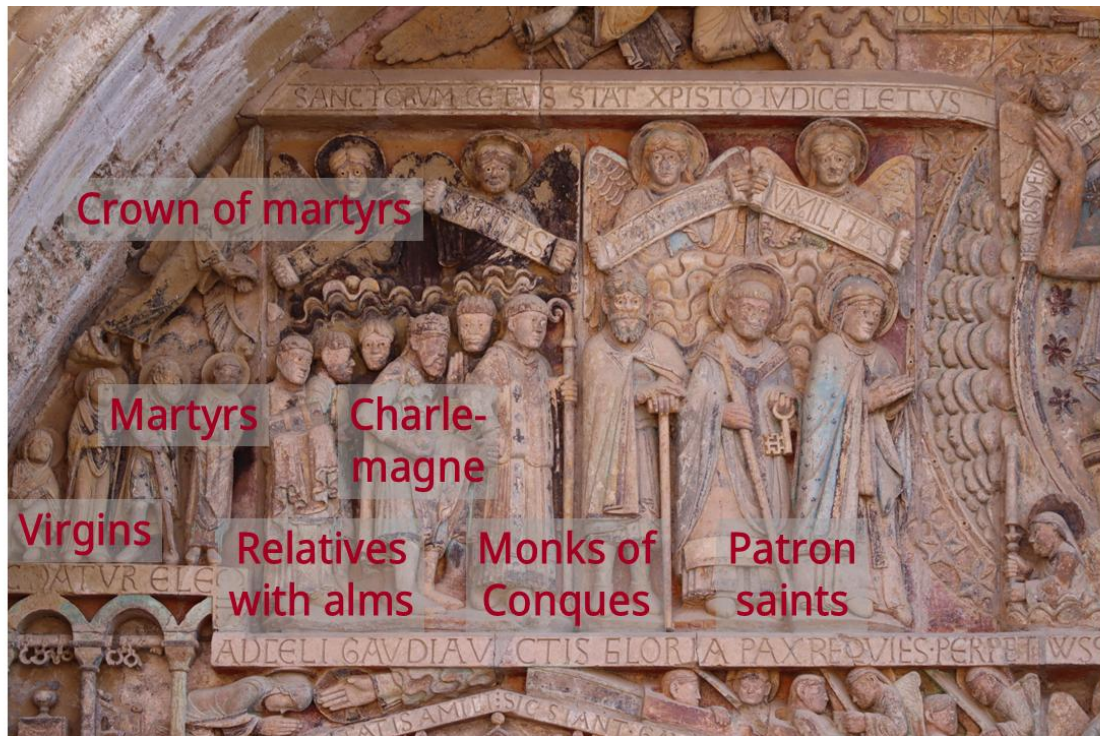


Figure 42: Procession of saints, martyrs, Holy Virgins, monks of Conques, and relatives interceding with Christ for Charlemagne, in line with the *Visio Wettini*. The angel on the left holds the crown of life that will be given to martyrs or saints. The procession is led by the Virgin and St. Peter, the patron saints of Conques, followed by the hermit Dadon and an abbot leading Charlemagne by the hand to Christ. His companions seem to support him with alms and prayers.

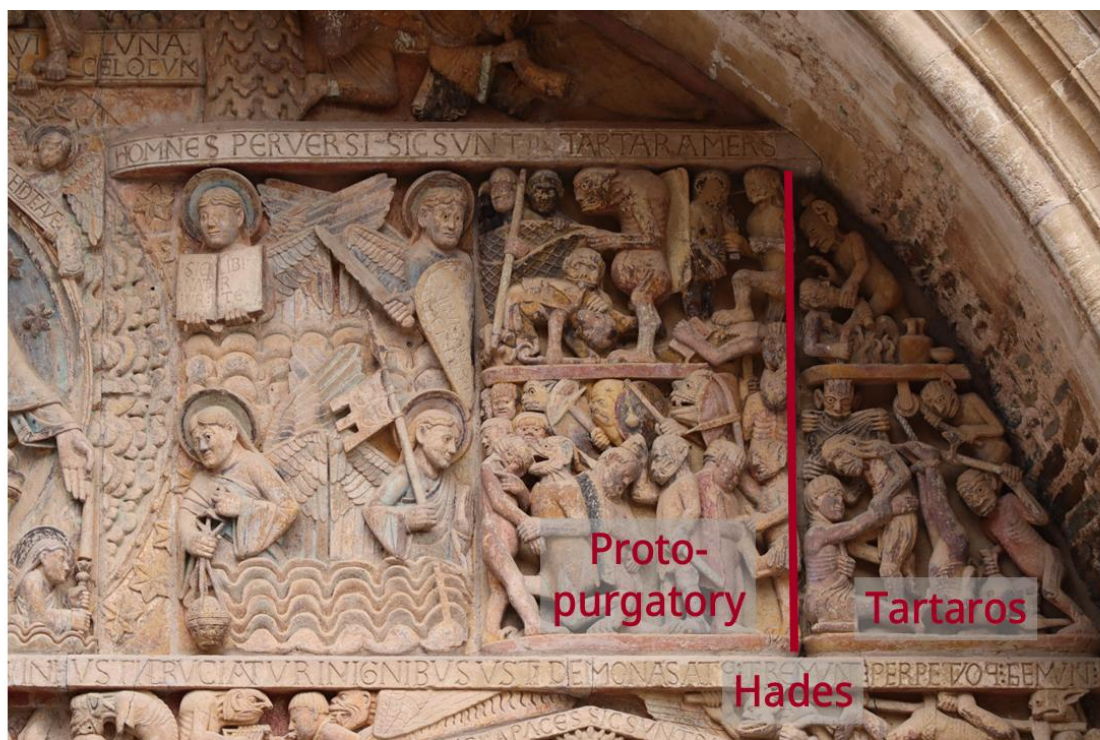


Figure 43: Sinners, including kings and clerics, are waiting in the otherworld (*Hades*) for their judgment without direct access to Christ, in line with the text of the Apocalypse. *Hades* is compartmentalized. The inner part is for ordinary sinners while the outer part is *Tartaros*, the special place of punishment (*tartara*) for mortal sinners (*homines perversi*).



Figure 44: Representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem (*civitas immortalis*) with Bosom of Abraham and various saints. The small register above the roof shows on the left side Sainte-Foy interceding with God for those under her protection. On the right side, the elected for Heaven (*electi*) rise from their tombs where they rested in peace until Judgment Day. The elected for Heaven are described by the banner on the roof as chaste, peaceful, gentle, and pious.



Figure 45: Representation of Hell as counterimage to the Heavenly Jerusalem (*civitas mortalis*) with Satan taking the place of Abraham. The small register above the roof shows that unjust sinners (*iniusti*) are subject to perpetual torture by demons and fire while moving towards the Last Judgment. The damned are described by the banner on the roof as thieves, liars, counterfeiters, greedy, voluptuous, and looters.



Figure 46: Process of the Last Judgment according to Augustine's *Enchiridion* 29:109-111 and *De civitate dei*. After the Particular Judgment (not shown), the elected rest in peace until Judgment Day (left), while the unjust sinners spend their waiting time in torments (right). The Last Judgment, indicated by the Weighing of Souls (center), determines whether the to be judged will be sent to Heaven (*civitas immortalis*) or Hell (*civitas mortalis*). The carefully balanced judgment act and the eye contact between one of the elected and the devil sending damned to Hell (center bottom) indicate that just sinners may successfully pass proto-purgatory to enter Heaven.

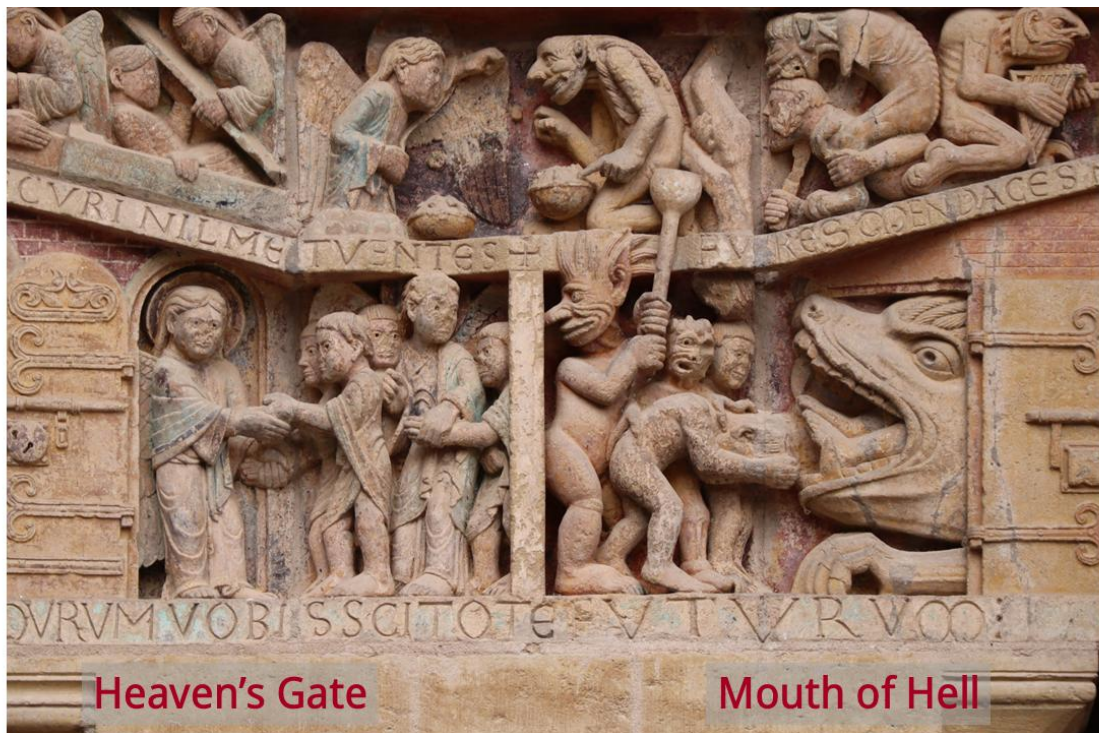


Figure 47: Representation of Heaven's Gate and of the Mouth of Hell following the example of a 9th century Carolingian Ivory, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The ivory shows similarities with the art of Reichenau.

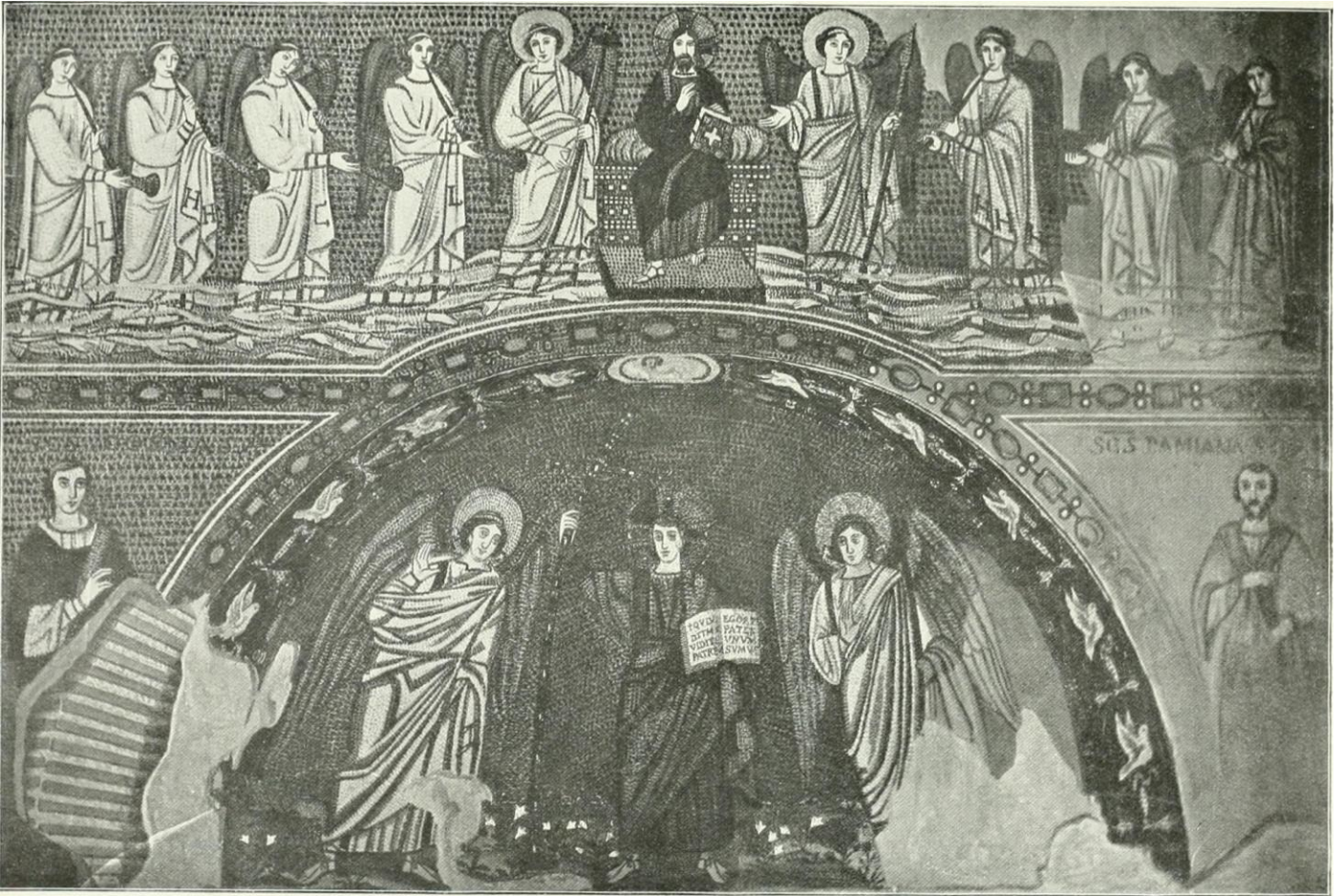


Figure 48: Watercolor of the 6th century mosaic of San Michele in Affricisco of Ravenna before its restoration in 1844 and its later relocation to Berlin. This often-overlooked mosaic is the earliest representation of the seven angels with seven trumpets indicating the imminent Parousia of Christ. The angels next to Christ show the Arma Christi. Their original existence is not beyond doubt. The Arma Christi emphasize that the person on the throne is Christ. Christ is also represented as a younger person with the Cross in the apse and as the Lamb with doves in the archivolt. Thereby, the mosaic may have been a representation of trinity. The originally twelve doves in the archivolt stand for the twelve apostles. The figure of Christ in the apse is flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Source: Julius Kurth, *Die Wandmosaiken von Ravenna*, Tab. XXIX, Munich 1912, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 49: Miniature of the Last Judgment of the Bamberg Apocalypse, produced by the scriptorium of Reichenau Abbey between 1000-20. It is one of the most evolved representations of the Last Judgment of the Reichenau school, mainly following Matthew 24-25. The ostentation of the Cross is very prominent. Other examples in Müstair, St. Gall or St. George of Reichenau-Oberzell present the scenes in registers while Christ is positioned in a mandorla with judging hand gestures. Some of these other examples also include stars and clouds in the mandorla, the Arma Christi, an angel scrolling up the sky, the *Liber Vitae* or a representation of Heavenly Jerusalem.

Source: Bamberg Apocalypse, [Staatsbibliothek Bamberg](https://www.staatsbibliothek-bamberg.de/), Msc.Bibl.140. Photo: Gerald Raab, image is cropped.



Figure 50: Mosaic of the Last Judgment at the western wall of Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello from about 1080. This mosaic is the most evolved example of the Byzantine tradition from the second half of the 11th century, complemented by some western elements, such as the arrangement of the scenes in registers, the representation of the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell, the presentation of the Cross as well as the Stigma and Arma Christi. The mosaic has a near-temporal sequence from top to bottom, including the Crucifixion of Christ, his Harrowing of Hell, his Parousia and thousand-year reign, and the Last Judgment represented by the empty throne of God. The lower three tiers describe the Last Judgment as re-unification of the resurrected bodies (above) with their souls (below).

Source: User Gsimonov, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 51: The three registers of the wall mosaic of Santa Maria Assunta focusing on the Last Judgment. The Last Judgment itself is shown in the middle register. The upper register shows the throne of God and the resurrection of the dead bodies. The lower register shows the Particular Judgment with the souls in Earthly Paradise and *Hades*. In the model from Constantinople, the Weighing of Souls is more directly associated with the lower register.

Source: User Gsimonov, [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 52: Tympanum of Saint-Hilari-Sainte-Foy in Perse (Espalion), a former priory of Conques. It is one of very few tympana with the scene of Pentecost. The oversized lintel contains a compressed representation of the Last Judgment.



Figure 53: Map of locations with relevance for the iconography of the Last Judgment of Conques (marked in red). The Way of St. James from Reichenau to Conques and a prototypical travel route from Conques to the Holy Land are shown as black lines. The locations in black as well as some in red had special links to Reichenau Abbey.

Source: User Nzeemin, [Wikimedia Commons](#), image is cropped, travel routes and locations added by the author.



Figure 54: Map of the identified locations of influence with the pilgrimage routes of St. James and to the Holy Land.

Source: User Nzeemin, [Wikimedia Commons](#), image is cropped, travel routes and locations added by the author.

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