

# MEDIEVAL ART

## Part 1: Early Christian, Byzantine, Migratory

### Early Christian Context:

1. Constantine legitimizes Christianity - Edict of Milan in 313 CE. He makes Byzantium the capital of the eastern Roman Empire and changes the name to Constantinople. In 600 CE Pope Gregory (in Rome) establishes the papacy as a political power.
2. The fall of Rome/Roman Empire. In 410 CE the Visigoths sack Rome. Ravenna becomes the capital of the Western Roman Empire under Honorius. The Western Roman Empire falls in 476 CE, Odoacer conquers Italy and Ravenna becomes the capital of the Ostrogothic kingdom.
3. The early Christian church appropriates Greek and Roman forms for architecture, sculpture, painting, and mosaics for purposes of illustrating the characteristics of Christianity (below). By 392 CE Christianity is the official religion of the Empire.
4. Distinctive characteristics of Christianity:
  - a. proselytizing (converting from one religion or belief to another) making didactic art work (art that teaches/ulterior motive) in sacred spaces
  - b. congregational with shared prayer, sermons, sacrament, confession making large assembly halls necessary for worship
  - c. burial requirements makes catacombs and sarcophagi necessary
  - d. mysticism and miracles are cornerstones of the faith = didactic art work requires images and storytelling



What is the FUNCTION of this art work?

Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Concise Global History

STOKSTAD, 5th Edition, Chapters 7, 8, and 15

## CONTEXT

### Byzantine Context:

Constantinople: Founded in 330 CE by Constantine as the center of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Byzantine Empire ended with Constantinople falling to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Theocracy: The belief that the ruler as head of state is also the religious leader (the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church). Justinian claimed to be "Vicar of Christ on Earth". The Eastern Orthodox Church splits with the western church in 1054.

Justinian: Was the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire in 550 CE. He invades Ravenna and eastern Italy comes under his control. Justinian declares Christianity to be the only lawful religion of his empire.

Mosaics: The main decorative element in church interiors - they were best preserved in Ravenna. Mosaics were iconic representations of complex theological ideas.

### Migratory + Early Northern Medieval Context:

Fall of the Roman Empire: Roman traditions diminish in importance and influence as northern European ethnic groups and indigenous art traditions assert themselves.

Impermanence/mobility: Nomadic traditions of northern European peoples and Viking marauders threaten stability of northern Europe therefore, no significant architecture or large scale sculpture.

Craft traditions/portable art objects: The creation of ornamental art with zoomorphic "animal style" serpentine and interlacing designs as portable art objects that had value and "currency", especially jewelry and gold, leather goods, and wood carving.

Rise of Monasticism and the Benedictine Order: The order was founded in 529 CE with emphasis on work - manual labor and religious study. Irish monks (missionaries to the "barbarian" north) are known for copying the gospels and Bible by hand in scriptoria in monasteries on the islands of Lindisfarne and Iona from 600 - 800 CE. This was the "Golden Age" of Irish art .

## ARTWORKS

### Early Christian Art/Medieval Art

**48. Catacomb of Priscilla (Greek Chapel, Orant, Good Shepherd frescos)**

**49. Santa Sabina**

\* Old St. Peter's

\* Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus

### Byzantine

**52. Hagia Sophia**

**51. San Vitale (including Justinian and Theodora panels)**

**54. Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George**

**50. Vienna Genesis (Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well and Jacob)**

### Migratory Art + Early Northern Medieval Art

**53. Merovingian looped fibulae**

**55. Lindisfarne Gospels, St. Matthew, cross-carpet page; St. Luke incipit page**

### Migratory Art

#### Ornament Art (decorative)

Interlacing pattern and complex design

Visual experience of the work of art

Complex pattern composed of a single line which overlaps and intertwines organic and animal forms simplified and abstracted into geometric patterns

Decorative elements can dominate geometric organization with extreme complexity in design and elements Miniaturist sensibility = extremely fine work

### Byzantine Art (and Early Christian)

#### Iconic Art (symbolic)

Icon: Image symbolic of an idea Conceptual experience of the work of art

Simplification of an image into something easily recognizable Move toward realism but not exactly representation of visual reality

Clarity of purpose means unambiguous image and decorative elements are secondary to central image or icon

Simplification and stylization

## VOCABULARY:

iconoclast/iconoclasts

aniconic

orthodox

orant figures

catacomb

spoila

atrium

crossing

narthex

arcade

nave

blind arcade

colonnade

transept

clerestory

theocracy

tesserae

encaustic

dome

curtain wall

squinch

conches

pendentive

lunette

buttress

zoomorphic

serpentine

interlacing

filigree

cloisonne