Early Medieval Art and Architecture in the West

Lecture by Ivy C. Dally
South Suburban College
South Holland, IL
What are the Middle Ages?

► The term “Middle Ages” dubbed in the Renaissance.

► Considered the time between the great Roman Empire and the “great” Italian Renaissance.

► The Middle Ages are divided into:
  - The Early Middle Ages ca. 475-1000
  - Romanesque ca 1000-1200
  - Gothic ca 1200-1400

► Medieval art encompasses:
  - Vikings/Normans
  - Christianized Irish/Britons/Saxons
  - Mozarabic (Islamic) Spain
  - Franks /Carolingians
  - Byzantines
  - Ottonians (Holy Roman Empire)

Map of Europe ca. 814
Influences on Early Medieval Art

► The Migration Period in Europe begins after the fall of Rome. People on the move led to smaller, portable objects.

► “Status items”

► Germanic tribes were not Christian, so subject matters represent their beliefs.

► Most early medieval finds come from grave sites.

Above: *Drinking horn* from the Sutton Hoo burial.

Below: *Animal-head post* from the Viking Ship Burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 825

Cloisonné: a decorative metalwork technique made from small soldered strips of metal filled with stones or glass.

Interlace: linear decoration in which ribbon-like bands are shown as is woven together.
The early Medieval period sees the conversion of the Germanic tribes to Christianity.

Achieved in part through the production of Christian manuscripts.

The use of images and symbols is especially important in spreading the faith in an illiterate world.

Man (symbol of St. Matthew), from the Book of Durrow, Scotland?
Cross and Carpet Page, from the Lindisfarne Gospels, Hiberno-Saxon, ca. 698-721.

Manuscript: a handwritten book or document.

Illumination: a painting on paper used to decorate manuscripts.

Vellum/Parchment: paper made from treated animal skins.
Early Medieval Art: The Carolingian Empire

► The first Empire to arise in the west after Rome.

► Charlemagne “restored” the Roman Empire, revived the arts and literacy, and strengthened the Church through forced conversions.

► Art and architecture inspired by ancient Roman and Byzantine solidity and monumentality; combined with linear forms and patterns of the North.

► The Carolingian style is sometimes referred to as the “Pre-Romanesque”.

Equestrian portrait of Charlemagne (?), bronze, ca. 800.
St. Matthew, from the Coronation Gospels of Charlemagne, 800-810.
What church was the influence for this chapel?
Westwork of the Abbey Church at Corvey, Germany, 873-885.
Early Medieval Art: Otto I and the Holy Roman Empire

Following the breakup of the Carolingian Empire, the areas of modern day Germany and Austria came under the rule of Saxon rulers named Otto, who were given Charlemagne’s Holy Roman crown.

Otto I is the first ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.

In addition to continuing Charlemagne’s artistic reforms, they strengthened the Church through the arts, and created a new medieval tradition of large sculpture in wood and bronze.

Some scholars include Ottonian art and architecture in the era of the Romanesque.

*Otto III Enthroned*, Holy Roman Empire, ca. 1000.
Interior view towards the apse, Abbey Church of St. Michael, and detail of the Ceiling, 1001-1033.
Bronze Doors of Bishop Bernward, Hildesheim. 1015. Detail showing the accusation and judgment of Adam and Eve.
A theological understanding of the themes presented in the Doors.
Gero Crucifix in the Cologne Cathedral, Holy Roman Empire, ca. 970.
After this lecture you should be able to...

► Identify the formal and iconographic characteristics of early Medieval art.

► Discuss the influence of Germanic, Classical, and Early Christian art on Medieval art/architecture.

► Describe the materials and techniques employed in early Medieval art and architecture.

► Define key terms presented in lecture.