Our study of the ancient world—from ancient fertility statues, to the Egyptian *ka*, to the rise of Buddhism—shows how powerful religion can be in setting the course of culture, and the advent of Christianity in the Western world makes this abundantly clear. So powerful was the Christian story that in the West the common calendar changed. From the sixth century on, time was recorded in terms of years “BC” (before Christ) and years “AD” (anno Domini, the year of Our Lord, meaning the year of his birth). Today, usage has changed somewhat—the preferred terms, as we have used them in this text, are *BCE* (before the common era) and *CE* (the common era)—but the West’s calendar remains Christian.

In the East, Buddhism exerted the same power to stir the human imagination as Christianity did in the West. And as in the West images of Christ became a central feature of art, so too did images of Buddha in the East. In early Buddhist art, Buddha was never shown in figural form. It was believed to be impossible to represent Buddha, since he had already passed to *nirvana*. But by the fourth century, during the reign of the Gupta rulers in India, Buddha was commonly represented in human form (Fig. 585). Typically his head is oval, framed by a halo. Atop his head is a mound, symbolic of his spiritual wisdom. His demeanor is gentle, reposed, and meditative. His elongated ears refer to his royal origins. And his hands are set in one of several symbolic gestures, the mudra discussed in the section...
on iconology in Chapter 2. The seated Buddha illustrated here employs the Dhyana mudra, a gesture of meditation and balance. The lower hand represents the physical world of illusion, the upper nirvana and enlightenment. Together they symbolize the path to enlightenment. The bodhisattva—a person of very near total enlightenment who has vowed to help others achieve it (see Fig. 284)—standing next to him employs the Abhaya mudra, a gesture of reassurance, blessing, and protection.

Other long-standing religions continued to exert enormous influence throughout the first millennium CE and beyond—the Hindu faith in India and Shinto in Japan. Judaism, the oldest continuing religion in the West, continued to be practiced, despite the fact that ever since the Babylonians had destroyed the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and deported the Hebrew people to Babylon in the sixth century BCE, the Jewish people had been scattered across the Mediterranean and Europe, a people without a homeland. Even so, Judaism remained the philosophical and historical foundation of both Christianity and the new Islamic faith, based on the teachings of Muhammad, which arose on the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century CE and rapidly spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain at a rate far higher than the spread of either Christianity or Buddhism. The powerful influence of all these religions throughout the first millennium and well into the second gave rise to an age of faith, which is the subject of this chapter.

**EARLY CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE ART**

Christianity spread through the Roman world at a very rapid pace, in large part due to the missionary zeal of St. Paul. By 250 CE, fully 60 percent of Asia Minor had converted to the religion, and when the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, Christian art became imperial art. The classical art of Greece and Rome emphasized the humanity of its figures, their corporeal reality. But the Christian God was not mortal and could not even be comfortably represented in human terms. Though His Son, Jesus, was human enough, the mystery of both Jesus’s Virgin Birth and his rising from the dead most interested early Christian believers. The world that the Romans had celebrated on their walls in fresco—a world of still lifes and landscapes—was of little interest to Christians, who were more concerned with the spiritual and the heavenly than with their material surroundings.

Constantine chose to make early Christian places of worship as unlike classical temples as possible. The building type that he preferred was the rectangular basilica, which the Romans had used for public buildings, especially courthouses. The original St. Peter’s in Rome, constructed around 333–390 CE but destroyed in the sixteenth century to make way for the present building, was a basilica (see Fig. 477). Equally important for the future of Christian religious architecture was Santa Costanza (Fig. 586), the small mausoleum built around 354 CE for the
tomb of Constantine’s daughter, Constantia. Circular in shape and topped with a dome supported by a barrel vault, the building defines the points of the traditional Greek cross, which has four equal arms. Surrounding the circular space is a passageway known as an ambulatory that was used for ceremonial processions.

The circular form of Santa Costanza appears often in later Byzantine architecture. By the year 500, most of the western empire, traditionally Catholic, had been overrun by barbarian forces from the north. When the Emperor Justinian assumed the throne in Constantinople in 527, he dreamed of restoring the lost empire. His armies quickly recaptured the Mediterranean world, and he began a massive program of public works. At Ravenna, Italy, at one time the imperial capital, Justinian built San Vitale (Fig. 587), a new church modeled on the churches of Constantinople. Although the exterior is octagonal, the interior space is essentially circular, like Santa Costanza before it. Only in the altar and the apse, which lie to the right of the central domed area in the floor plan, is there any reference to the basilica structure that dominates western church architecture. Considering that Sant’ Apollinare was built at virtually the same time and in virtually the same place, there is some reason to believe that San Vitale was conceived as a political and religious statement, an attempt to persuade the people of the Italian peninsula to give up their Catholic ways and to adopt the Orthodox point of view—that is, to reject the leadership of the Church by the Pope.

Sant’ Apollinare and San Vitale share one important feature: The facades of both are very plain, more or less unadorned, local brick. Inside, however, both churches are elaborately decorated with marble and glittering mosaics. At San Vitale, two elaborate mosaics—small pieces of stone, glass, or tile arranged in a pattern or image—face each other on the side walls of the apse, one depicting Theodora, the wife of Justinian (Fig. 588), and the other Justinian himself (Fig. 589). Theodora had at one time been a circus performer, but she became one of the emperor’s most trusted advisors, sharing with him a vision of a Christian Roman Empire. In the mosaic, she carries a golden cup of wine, and Justinian, on the opposite wall, carries a bowl containing bread. Together they are bringing to the Church an offering of bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist. The haloed Justinian is to be identified with Christ, surrounded as he is by 12 advisors, like the 12 Apostles. And the haloed Theodora, with the three Magi bearing gifts to the Virgin and newborn Christ embroidered on the hem of her skirt, is to be understood as a figure for Mary. In this image, Church and state become one and the same.

These mosaics bear no relation to the naturalism that dominated Greek and Roman culture. Here, the human figures are depicted wearing long robes that hide the musculature and cause a loss of individual identity. Although each face has unique features—some of Justinian’s attendants, for example, are bearded, while others are not, and the hairstyles vary—all have identical wide-open eyes, curved brows, and long noses. The feet of the figures turn outward, as if to flatten the space in which they stand. They are disproportionately long and

![San Vitale, Ravenna, 526–47 CE. Exterior view. Canali Photobank.](image-url)
thin, a fact that lends them a heavenly lightness. And they are motionless, standing before us without gesture, as if eternally still. The Greek ideal of sculpture in the round, with its sense of the body caught in an intensely personal, even private moment—Nike taking off her sandal, for instance, or Laocoön caught in the intensity of his torment—is gone. All sense of drama has been removed from the idea of representation.

Mosaics are made of small pieces of stone called tesserae, from the Greek word tesserēs, meaning “square.” In ancient Rome, they were a favorite decorative element, used because of their durability, especially to embellish villa floors. But the Romans rarely used mosaic on their walls, where they preferred the more refined and naturalistic effects that were possible with fresco. For no matter how skilled the mosaic artist, the naturalism of the original drawing would inevitably be lost when the small stones were set in cement.

The Byzantine mosaic artists, however, had little interest in naturalism. Their intention was to create a symbolic, mystical art, something for which the mosaic medium was perfectly suited. Gold tesserae were made by sandwiching gold leaf between two small squares of glass, and polished glass was also used. By setting the tesserae unevenly, at slight angles, a shimmering and transcendent effect was realized, which was heightened by the light from the church’s windows.
Justinian attached enormous importance to architecture, believing that nothing better served to underscore the power of the emperor. The church of Hagia Sophia, meaning “Holy Wisdom,” was his imperial place of worship in Constantinople (Figs. 590 and 591). The huge interior, crowned by a dome, is reminiscent of the circular, central plan of Ravenna’s San Vitale, but this dome is abutted at either end by half-domes that extend the central core of the church along a longitudinal axis reminiscent of the basilica, with the apse extending in another smaller half-dome out one end of the axis. These half-domes culminate in arches that are repeated on the two sides of the dome as well. The architectural scheme is, in fact, relatively simple—a dome supported by four pendentives, the curved, inverted triangular shapes that rise up to the rim of the dome between the four arches themselves. This dome-on-pendentive design was so enthusiastically received that it became the standard for Byzantine church design.

Many of the original mosaics that decorated Hagia Sofia were later destroyed or covered over. During the eighth and ninth centuries, iconoclasts, meaning “image-breakers,” who believed literally in the Bible’s commandment against the worship of “graven” images, destroyed much Byzantine art. Forced to migrate westward, Byzantine artists discovered Hellenistic naturalism and incorporated it into later Byzantine design. The mosaic of Christ from Hagia Sophia (Fig. 592) is representative of that later synthesis.

Though only a few of the original mosaics have been restored, and later mosaics were few, the light in the interior is still almost transcendental in feeling, and one can only imagine the heavenly aura when...
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Justinian's reign marked the apex of the early Christian and Byzantine era. By the seventh century, barbarian invaders had taken control of the western empire, and the new Muslim empire had begun to expand to the east. Reduced in area to the Balkans and Greece, the Byzantine empire nevertheless held on until 1453 when the Turks finally captured Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul, converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

THE RISE OF ISLAM

Born in Mecca on the Arabian peninsula in about 570 to a prominent family, Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith, was orphaned at age six and received little formal education. He worked in the caravan trade in the Arabian desert, first as a camel driver for his uncle, and then, after marrying a wealthy widow 15 years his senior at age 25, as head of his wife’s flourishing caravan firm. But at the age of 40, in 610, he heard a voice in Arabic—the Archangel Gabriel’s, as the story goes—urging him, “Recite!” He responded “What shall I recite?” And for the next 22 years, he claimed to receive messages, or “recitations,” from God through the agency of Gabriel. These he memorized and dictated to scribes, who collected them to form the scriptures of Islam, the Qur’an (or Koran), which means “recitations.” Muhammad also claimed that Gabriel commanded him to declare himself the “Seal of the Prophets,” that is, the messenger of the one and only Allah (the Arab word for God) and the final prophet in a series of God’s prophets on earth, extending from Abraham and Moses to Jesus.

At the core of Muhammad’s revelations is the concept of submission to God—the word Islam, in fact, means “submission” or “surrender.” God, or Allah, is all—all-powerful, all-seeing, all-merciful. Because the universe is his creation, it is necessarily good and beautiful, and the natural world reflects Allah’s own goodness and beauty. To immerse oneself in nature is thus to be at one with God. But the most beautiful creation of Allah is humankind, which God made in his own image. As in Christianity, Muslims believe that human beings possess immortal souls and that they can live eternally in heaven if they surrender to Allah and accept him as the one and only God.

Fig. 592 Christ, from Deësis mosaic, thirteenth century.
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Visigoths in Spain adopt Western Christianity
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St. Augustine in England

In 622, Muhammad was forced to flee Mecca when its polytheistic leadership became irritated at his insistence on the worship of only one God. In a journey known as the *hijra* (or *hegira*, “emigration”), he and his followers fled to the oasis of Yathrib, 200 miles north, which they renamed al-Medina, meaning “the city of the Prophet.” There, Muhammad created a community based not on kinship, the traditional basis of Arab society, but on common submission to the will of God.

At Medina, Muhammad also built a house that surrounded a large open courtyard, which served as a community gathering place, on the model of the Roman forum. There the men of the community would gather on Fridays to pray and listen to a sermon delivered by Muhammad. It thus became known as the *masjid*, the Arabic word for *mosque*, or “place of prostration.” On the north and south ends of the courtyard, covered porches were erected, supported by palm tree trunks and roofed by thatched palm fronds, which protected the community from the hot Arabian sun. This many-columned covered area, known as a *hypostyle space* (from the Greek *hupostulos*, “resting upon pillars”), would later become a required feature of all Muslim mosques. Another required feature was the *qibla*, a wall that indicated the direction of Mecca. On this wall were both the *minbar*, or stepped pulpit for the preacher, and the *mihrab*, a niche commemorating the spot at Medina where Muhammad planted his lance to indicate the direction in which people should pray.

The Prophet’s Mosque in Medina has been rebuilt so many times that its original character has long since been lost. But when, at Damascus in 705, the Muslim community had grown so large that radical steps had to be taken to accommodate it, a Byzantine church was torn down, leaving a large...
courtyard (Fig. 593), the compound walls of which were transformed into the walls of a new mosque. A large prayer hall was constructed against the qibla wall and decorated with an elaborate mosaic facade, some of which is visible in the illustration, facing into the courtyard, while the street side of the mosque was left relatively plain.

As we saw in Chapter 2, one of the most important characteristics of Islamic culture is its emphasis on calligraphy (see Fig. 28), and the art of calligraphy was incorporated into Islamic architecture from the beginning. By the mid-ninth century, the walls of palaces and mosques were covered by it, and throughout the following centuries, the decoration became more and more elaborate. The mosaic mihrab originally from a madrasa, or teaching college, in Iran contains three different inscriptions from the Qur’an (Fig. 594). The outer frame is a description of the duties of true believers and the heavenly rewards in store for those who build mosques. The next contains the Five Pillars of Islam, the duties every believer must perform, including, at least once in a lifetime, a pilgrimage to Mecca. And, finally, in the center of the inner wall, the reminder: “The mosque is the house of every pious person.” All of this is contained in a beautifully balanced and symmetrical design.

Since the Prophet Muhammad fled Mecca for Medina in 622, the Muslim empire had expanded rapidly (see the map showing the expansion of Islam, above). By 640, Muhammad’s successors, the Caliphs, had conquered Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Two years later, they defeated the army of Byzantium at Alexandria, and, by 710, they had captured all of northern Africa and had moved into Spain. They advanced north until 732, when Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, defeated them at Poitiers, France. But the Caliphs’ foothold in Europe remained strong, and they did not leave Spain until 1492. Even the Crusades failed to reduce their power. During the First Crusade, 50,000 men were sent to the Middle East, where they managed to hold Jerusalem and much of Palestine for a short while. The Second Crusade, in 1146, failed to regain control, and in
1187, the Muslim warrior Saladin reconquered Jerusalem. Finally, in 1192, Saladin defeated King Richard the Lion-Hearted of England in the Third Crusade.

The Muslim impact on the culture of North Africa cannot be overstated. Beginning in about 750, not long after Muslim armies had conquered most of North Africa, Muslim traders, following the trade routes created by the Saharan Berber peoples, began trading for salt, copper, dates, and especially gold with the sub-Saharan peoples of the Niger River drainage. Gradually they came to dominate the trans-Saharan trade routes, and Islam became the dominant faith of West Africa.

In 1312, a devout Muslim named Mansa Moussa came to the throne of Mali. He built magnificent mosques throughout his empire, including the Djingareyber Mosque in Timbuktu (Fig. 595). Still standing today and made of burnt brick and mud, it dominates the city. Under Moussa’s patronage, the city of Timbuktu grew in wealth and prestige and became a cultural focal point for the finest poets, scholars, and artists of Africa and the Middle East. To draw further attention to Timbuktu, and to attract more scholars and poets to it, Mansa Moussa embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1334. He arrived in Cairo at the head of a huge caravan of 60,000 people, including 12,000 servants, with 80 camels carrying more than two tons of gold to be distributed among the poor. In fact, Moussa distributed so much gold in Egypt that the value of the precious metal fell dramatically and did not recover for a number of years.

In Spain, the center of Muslim culture was originally Córdoba. For its mosque, Islamic rulers converted an existing Visigoth Church. The Visigoths,
who were a Christianized Germanic tribe who had invaded Spain three centuries earlier, had built their church with relatively short, stubby columns. To create the loftier space required by the mosque, the architects superimposed another set of columns on top, creating two tiers of arches, one over the other, using a distinctive alternation of stone and red brick voussoirs (Fig. 596). The use of two different materials is not only decorative but also functional, combining the flexibility of brick with the strength of stone. Finally, the hypostyle plan of the mosque was, in essence, infinitely expandable, and subsequent caliphs enlarged the mosque in 852, 950, 961–76, and 987, until it was over four times the size of the original and incorporated 1,200 columns. As in all Muslim design, where a visual rhythm is realized through symmetry and repetition of certain patterns and motifs, the rhythm of arches and columns unifies the interior of the Córdoba mosque.

**CHRISTIAN ART IN NORTHERN EUROPE**

Until the year 1000, the center of Western civilization was located in the Middle East, at Constantinople. In Europe, tribal groups with localized power held sway: the Lombards in what is now Italy, the Franks and the Burgundians in regions of France, and the Angles and Saxons in England. Though it possessed no real political power, the Papacy in Rome had begun to work

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**Fig. 596** Interior of the sanctuary of the Mosque at Córdoba, Spain, 786–987.
Photo © Achim Bednorz, Koln.
hard to convert the pagan tribes and to reassert the authority of the Church. As early as 496, the leader of the Franks, Clovis, was baptized into the Church. Even earlier (c. 430), St. Patrick had undertaken an evangelical mission to Ireland, establishing monasteries and quickly converting the native Celts. These new monasteries were designed to serve missionary as well as educational functions. At a time when only priests and monks could read and write, the sacred texts they produced came to reflect native Celtic designs. These designs are elaborately decorative, highly abstract, and contain no naturalistic representation. Thus, Christian art fused with the native traditions, which employed the so-called animal style.

Some of the best examples of this animal style, such as this hinged clasp (Fig. 597), have been found at Sutton Hoo, north of present-day London, in the grave of an unknown seventh-century East Anglian king. At the round end of each side of the hinge are animal forms, and the entire clasp is covered with intricate traceries of lines and bands.

In 597, Gregory the Great, the first monk to become Pope, sent an emissary, later known as Saint Augustine of Canterbury, on a mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons. This mission brought Roman religious and artistic traditions into direct contact with Celtic art, and, slowly but surely, Roman culture began to dominate the Celtic-Germanic world.

When Charlemagne (Charles, or Carolus, the Great) assumed leadership of the Franks in 771, this process of Romanization was assured. At the request of the Pope, Charlemagne conquered the Lombards, becoming their king, and on Christmas Day 800, he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The fusion of Germanic and Mediterranean styles that reflected this new alliance between Church and state is known as
Carolingian art, a term referring to the art produced during the reign of Charlemagne and his immediate successors.

The transformation in style that Charlemagne effected is evident if we compare the work of an artist trained in the linear Celtic tradition to one created during Charlemagne’s era. In the former (Fig. 598), copied from an earlier Italian original, the image is flat, the figure has not been modeled, and the perspective is completely askew. It is pattern—and the animal style—that really interests the artist, not accurate representation. But Charlemagne was intent on restoring the glories of Roman civilization. He actively collected and had copied the oldest surviving texts of the classical Latin authors. He created schools in monasteries and cathedrals across Europe in which classical Latin was the accepted language. A new script, with Roman capitals and new lowercase letters, the basis of modern type, was introduced. A second depiction of St. Matthew (Fig. 599), executed 100 years after the one on the left, demonstrates the impact of Roman realism on northern art. Found in Charlemagne’s tomb, this illustration looks as if it could have been painted in classical Rome.

ROMANESQUE ART

After the dissolution of the Carolingian state in the ninth and tenth centuries, Europe disintegrated into a large number of small feudal territories. The emperors were replaced by an array of rulers of varying power and prestige who controlled smaller or larger fiefdoms (areas of land worked by persons under obligation to the ruler) and whose authority was generally embodied in a chateau or castle surrounded by walls and moats. Despite this atomization of political life, a recognizable style that we have come to call Romanesque developed throughout Europe begin-
ing in about 1050. Although details varied from place to place, certain features remained constant for nearly 200 years.

Romanesque architecture is characterized by its easily recognizable geometric masses—rectangles, cubes, cylinders, and half-cylinders. The wooden roof that St. Peter’s Basilica had used was abandoned in favor of fireproof stone and masonry construction, apparently out of bitter experience with the invading nomadic tribes, who burned many of the churches of Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries. Flat roofs were replaced by vaulted ceilings. By structural necessity, these were supported by massive walls that often lacked windows sufficient to provide adequate lighting. The churches were often built along the roads leading to pilgrimage centers, usually monasteries that housed Christian relics, and they had to be large enough to accommodate large crowds of the faithful. For instance, St. Sernin, in Toulouse, France (see Figs. 468 and 469), was on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, in Spain, where the body of St. James was believed to rest.

Thanks in large part to Charlemagne’s emphasis on monastic learning, monasteries had flourished since the Carolingian period, many of them acting as feudal landlords as well. The largest and most powerful was Cluny, near Maçon, France. Until the building of the new St. Peter’s in Rome, the church at Cluny was the largest in the Christian world. It was 521 feet in length, and its nave vaults rose to a height of 100 feet. The height of the nave was made possible by the use of pointed arches. The church was destroyed in the French Revolution, and only part of one transept survives.

With the decline of the Roman Empire, the art of sculpture had largely declined in the West, but in the Romanesque period it began to reemerge. It is certain that the idea of educating the masses in the Christian message through architectural sculpture on the facades of the pilgrimage churches contributed to the art’s rebirth. The most important sculptural work was usually located on the tympanum of the church, the semicircular arch above the lintel on the main door. It often showed Christ with His Twelve Apostles. Another favorite theme was the Last Judgment, full of depictions of sinners suffering the horrors of hellfire and damnation. To the left of Gislebertus’s Last Judgment at Autun, France (Fig. 600), the blessed arrive in heaven, while on the right, the damned are seized by devils. Combining all manner of animal forms, the monstrosity of these creatures recalls the animal style of the Germanic tribes.

Fig. 600 Gislebertus, Last Judgment, tympanum and lintel, west portal, Cathedral, Autun, France, c. 1125–35. Stone, approximately 12 ft. 6 in. × 22 ft. Photo © Achim Bednorz, Koln.
GOTHIC ART
The great era of Gothic art begins in 1137 with the rebuilding of the choir of the abbey church of St. Denis, located just outside Paris. Abbot Suger of St. Denis saw his new church as both the political and the spiritual center of a new France, united under King Louis VI. Although he was familiar with Romanesque architecture, which was then at its height, Suger chose to abandon it in principle. The Romanesque church was difficult to light, because the structural need to support the nave walls from without meant that windows had to be eliminated. Suger envisioned something different. He wanted his church flooded with light as if by the light of Heaven itself. After careful planning, he began work in 1137, painting the old walls of the original abbey, which were nearly 300 years old, with gold and precious colors. Then he added a new facade with twin towers and a triple portal. Around the back of the ambulatory he added a circular string of chapels, all lit with large stained-glass windows, “by virtue of which,” Suger wrote, “the whole would shine with the miraculous and uninterrupted light.”

It was this light that proclaimed the new Gothic style. Light, he believed, was the physical and material manifestation of Divine Spirit. Suger wrote: “Marvel not at the gold and the expense but at the craftsmanship of the work. Bright is the noble work; but being nobly bright, the work should brighten the minds, so that they may travel, through the true lights, to the True Light where Christ is the true door.” As beautiful as the church might be, it was designed to elevate the soul to the realm of God.

As the Gothic style developed, French craftsmen became increasingly accomplished in working with stained-glass, creating windows such as Chartres Cathedral’s famous Rose Window (see Fig. 189). Important architectural innovations also contributed to this goal (Fig. 601). The massive stonework of the Romanesque style was replaced by a light, almost lacy, play of thin columns and patterns of ribs and windows all pointing upward in a rising crescendo that seems to defy gravity, even as it carries the viewer’s gaze toward the heavens.
Compare, for instance, the Romanesque south tower of Chartres Cathedral to the fully Gothic north tower, which rises high above its starkly symmetrical neighbor. Extremely high naves—the nave at Chartres is 120 feet high, Reims 125, and highest of all is Beauvais at 157 (the equivalent of a 15-story building)—made possible by flying buttresses (see Figs. 472 and 473) add to this emphasis on verticality. They contribute a sense of elevation that is at once physical and spiritual, as does the preponderance of pointed rather than rounded arches. In Germany’s Cologne Cathedral (Fig. 602), the width of the nave has been narrowed to such a degree that the vaults seem to rise higher than they actually do. The cathedral was not finished until the nineteenth century, though built strictly in accordance with thirteenth-century plans. The stonework is so slender, incorporating so much glass into its walls, that the effect is one of almost total weightlessness.

The Gothic style in Italy is unique. For instance, the exterior of Florence Cathedral (Fig. 603) is hardly Gothic at all. It was, in fact, designed to match the dogmatically Romanesque octagonal Baptistery that stands in front of it. But the interior space is completely Gothic in character. Each side of the nave is flanked by an arcade that opens almost completely into the nave by virtue of four wide pointed arches. Thus nave and arcade become one, and the interior of the cathedral feels more spacious than any other. Nevertheless, rather than the mysterious and
transcendental feelings evoked by most Gothic churches, Florence Cathedral produces a sense of tranquility and of measured, controlled calm.

The Gothic style in architecture inspired an outpouring of sculptural decoration. There was, for one thing, much more room for sculpture on the facade of the Gothic church than had been available on the facade of the Romanesque church. There were now three doors where there had been only one before, and doors were added to the transepts as well. The portal at Reims (Fig. 604), which notably substitutes a stained-glass rose window for the Romanesque tympanum and a pointed for a round arch, is sculpturally much lighter than, for instance, the tympanum at Autun, France (see Fig. 600). The elongated bodies of the Romanesque figures are distributed in a very shallow space. In contrast, the sculpture of the Gothic cathedral is more naturalistic. The proportions of the figures are more natural, and the figures assume more natural poses as well. The space they occupy is deeper—so much so that they appear to be fully realized sculpture in-the-round, freed of the wall behind them. Most important of all, many of the figures seem to assert their own individuality, as if they were actual persons. The generalized “types” of Romanesque sculpture are beginning to disappear. The detail of figures at the bottom of the Reims portal (Fig. 605) suggests that each is engaged in a narrative scene. The angel on the left smiles at the more somber Virgin. The two at the right seem about to step off their pedestals. What is most remarkable is that the space between the figures is bridged by shared emotion, as if feeling can unite them in a common space.
DEVELOPMENTS IN ASIA

As early as 1500 BCE, Aryan tribesmen from northern Europe invaded India, bringing a religion that would have as great an impact on the art of India as Islam had on the art of the Middle East. The Vedic traditions of the light-skinned Aryans, written in religious texts called the Vedas, allowed for the development of a class system based on racial distinctions. Status in one of the four classes—the priests (Brahmans), the warriors and rulers (kshatriyas), the farmers and merchants (vaishyas), and the serfs (shudras)—was determined by birth, and one could escape one’s caste only through reincarnation. Buddhism, which began about 563 BCE, was in many ways a reaction against the Vedic caste system, allowing for salvation by means of individual self-denial and meditation, and it gained many followers.

The Hindu religion, which evolved from the Vedic tradition, has myriad gods, headed by the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma is the creator of the cosmos, and contains all things. Pictured here is Shiva Nataraja, or the Dancing Shiva (Fig. 606), whose dance, on the body of a dwarf who symbolizes “becoming,” signifies the endlessly cyclic nature of the universe. The fire in the Shiva’s left hand represents the destruction of both the physical universe and the ego. The drum in the right hand beats out the rhythms of birth and death. The Hindu Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Fig. 607) is dedicated to Shiva and symbolically captures the rhythms of Brahma, the cosmos. Completed only a few years before the great Romanesque cathedrals of Europe, the main tower is like a mountain peak, showing the paths one must follow to attain salvation. The entirety is covered by intricate reliefs representing the gods and stories from Hindu tradition.

Beginning in 618, at about the same time that Islam arose in the Middle East, the Tang dynasty reestablished a period of peace and prosperity in China that, except for a brief period of turmoil in the tenth century, would last 660 years. During this period, the pagoda became a favored architectural form in China. A pagoda is a multistoried structure of successively smaller, repeated stories, with projecting roofs at each story. The design derives

Fig. 606 Shiva Nataraja (King of Dance). Chola period, Dravidian style, eleventh century. From Veilalagaram, Southern India. Bronze. Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris.

Fig. 607 Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho, India, tenth–eleventh century. George Holton / Photo Researchers, Inc.
from Indian stupas that had grown increasingly tower-like by the sixth century CE as well as Han watchtowers. In fact, the pagoda was understood to offer the temple a certain protection. The Great Wild Goose Pagoda (Fig. 608) was built in 645 for the monk Xuanzang, who taught and translated the materials he brought back with him from a 16-year pilgrimage to India. In its simplicity and symmetry, it represents the essence of Tang architecture.

Since the time of the Song dynasty, which ruled the empire from 960 until it was overrun by Kublai Khan in 1279, the Taoists in China had emphasized the importance of self-expression, especially through the arts. Poets, calligraphers, and painters were appointed to the most important positions of state. After calligraphy, the Chinese valued landscape painting as the highest form of artistic endeavor. For them, the activity of painting was a search for the absolute truth embodied in nature, a search that was not so much intellectual as intuitive. They sought to understand the *li*, or “principle,” upon which the universe is founded, and thus to understand the symbolic meaning and feeling that underlies every natural form. The symbolic meanings of Guo Xi’s *Early Spring* (Fig. 609), for instance, have been recorded in a book authored by his son, Guo Si, titled *The Lofty Message of the Forests and Streams*. According to this book, the central peak here symbolizes the Emperor, and its tall pines the gentlemanly ideals of the court. Around the Emperor, the masses assume their natural place, just as around the mountain, the trees and hills fall, like the water itself, in the order and rhythms of nature.

![Great Wild Goose Pagoda at Ci’en Temple, Xi’an, Shanxi, Tang dynasty, first erected 645 CE.](image)

![Guo Xi, Early Spring, 1072 (Northern Song dynasty). Hanging scroll, ink, and slight color on silk, length 60 in. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.](image)
Until the sixth century CE, Japan was a largely agricultural society that practiced Shinto, an indigenous system of belief involving the worship of kami, or deities believed to inhabit many different aspects of nature, from trees and rocks to deer and other animals. But during the Asuka period (552–646 CE), the philosophy, medicine, music, food, and art and architecture of China and Korea were introduced to the culture. Finally, in the Heian period (794–1185 CE), the influence of China was fully absorbed and transformed. An imperial government severed relations with China and, with the support of aristocratic families, established a new capital in Kyoto.

It was a period of enormous splendor and refinement, highlighted by the growing popularity of Pure Land Buddhism, which held that by merely chanting a mantra to Buddha, paradise, or the Pure Land, could be obtained. One of the most beautiful Pure Land temples is Byodo-in (Fig. 610) in the Uji mountains not far from Kyoto. It is often called the Phoenix Hall, not only for the pair of phoenix sculptures on its roof but also for the lightness and airiness of its columns and roofs, which seem to ascend to the Pure Land.

Late in the Heian period, the emperors began to see their authority challenged by regional clans of warriors from outside Heian known as samurai (literally, “those who serve”). The absence of tax revenues from the valuable properties and temples controlled by these nobles contributed to a general state of unrest. While the samurai paid lip service to the sovereign, they increasingly exercised complete authority over all aspects of Japanese society.

In 1192, Minamoto no Yoritomo, the greatest samurai of the day, gave himself the title of shogun, general-in-chief of the samurai, inaugurating the first shogunate at Kamakura and what is known as the Kamakura period (1192–1392). In a famous portrait of Yoritomo (Fig. 611), the sword that is the hallmark of his class protrudes from his robe. The painting is a masterful blend of the realism that comes to define the artistic production of the Kamakura period and a powerful compositional abstraction. His face, with its determined eyes, is absolutely realistic, while his robe is a flat geometry of black angles without detail. Almost pyramidal in form, the figure of Yoritomo is above all a symbol of the authority and self-assuredness that defined Japanese culture for years to come.
THE CULTURES OF AFRICA

Just as in Europe and Asia, powerful kingdoms arose across Africa in the early centuries of the second millennium. As we have seen, the influence of Islam helped to establish a powerful culture in the kingdom of Mali (see Fig. 595). Further south, along the western coast of central Africa, the Yoruba state of Ife developed along the Niger River. On the eastern side of Africa, the Zagwe dynasty maintained a long Christian heritage introduced in the first millennium from the Middle East. Further south, near the southeastern tip of Africa, the Shona civilization produced urban centers represented today by the ruins of “Great Zimbabwe.”

By the middle of the twelfth century, Ife culture was producing highly naturalistic brass sculptures depicting its rulers. An example is the Head of a King (or Oni) (Fig. 612). The parallel lines that run down the face represent decorative effects made by scarification. The hole in the lower neck suggests that the head may have been attached to a wooden mannequin, and in memorial services the mannequin may well have worn the royal robes of the Ife court. Small holes along the scalp line suggest that hair, or perhaps a veil of some sort, also adorned the head. But the head itself was, for the Ife, of supreme importance. It was the home of the spirit, the symbol of the king’s capacity to organize the world and to prosper. Ife culture depended on its kings’ heads for its own welfare. Since the Ife did not leave a written record of their cultural beliefs, we can best understand their ancient culture by looking at their contemporaries.

One of the dynasties of greatest cultural importance in medieval East Africa was that of the Zagwe, who reigned for approximately 150 years, from the early twelfth century to 1270. They carved massive rock churches into the soft rock of the region (Fig. 613). The most famous of these was commissioned by...
the emperor Lalibela. In the town now known by his name, he ordered the construction of a series of these sunken churches. Engineers had to conceive of the completed building in advance, including decorative details, because subtractive techniques such as carving do not allow for repair of mistakes. Once the shell of the building was carved, the interior was hollowed out into rooms for use in Christian worship and study.

Inland from the southwestern coast of Africa, the Shona people built an entirely indigenous African civilization in the region of today’s Zimbabwe beginning in about 1100. As trade developed along the African coast, the Shona positioned themselves as an inland hub where coastal traders could travel to procure goods for export. From surrounding regions they mined or imported copper and gold, and received in return exotic goods such as porcelain and glass from Asia and the Middle East.

Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Shona erected the massive stone buildings and walls of a city known today as Great Zimbabwe. The origin of the Shona word zimbabwe is debated, but a composite of various meanings suggests that it referred to the “palaces of stone” in this city. A huge city for its time, the ruins cover one square mile and are believed to have housed a population of somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000. Great Zimbabwe has several distinct areas. The Great Enclosure is a group of structures encircled by a tall stone wall (Fig. 614). constructed in approximately 1350, here Shona craftsmen constructed a double wall with a space between the two walls only wide enough to allow single-file passage. They tapered the walls inward from a seventeen-foot-thick base for greater strength and stability, and topped the exterior wall with an alternating diagonal pattern of dark- and light-colored rocks. This decoration may have been meant to represent lightning, or perhaps the zebra, an animal frequently depicted in Shona art. Two conical structures that interrupt passage around the perimeter wall are likely to have been ancient granaries, for the Shona people today still use similar structures. Despite the turrets and lookout spots, the walls of Great Zimbabwe do not appear to have been meant for defense, and from this scholars have surmised that the walls may have existed primarily to serve as a buffer between royalty and the common people, a constant reminder of their power and status.