

# Early Christian, Byzantine & Islamic Art

The Middle Ages

# Question

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all known as:

1. (a) religions of peace
2. (b) religions of iconography
3. (c) religions of the book
4. (d) religions of the rock
5. (e) religions of the catacombs

# Question

Answer: (c). All three religions are monotheistic, and Christianity and Islam are based on the traditions of the previous. Each religion has its own written records of God's will. They are the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Bible, and the Koran.

# Early Christian Art - An Activity

The class will divide into two groups. 1 group will look at Sant' Apollinare in Classe page 289 figures 13.4 and 13.5. The 2nd group will look at the Pantheon Figures 9.22 and 9.23 on pages 202 & 203. Have each group prepare a detailed description of the exterior and interior of the structure assigned to them. Then have groups share their descriptions, noting similarities and differences.

Website: [http://www.turismo.ra.it/ita/Scopri-il-territorio/Arte-e-cultura/Chiese\\_-battisteri/Basilica-di-Sant%27Apollinare-in-Classe](http://www.turismo.ra.it/ita/Scopri-il-territorio/Arte-e-cultura/Chiese_-battisteri/Basilica-di-Sant%27Apollinare-in-Classe)

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a11G3XVT1xl>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qd3KSW2st-c>

# Early Christian Art - A Project

The dictionary of symbols in art (see links below) is an important art history research tool. Divide into table groups. Use markers, crayons or colored pencils (or create a google doc) to create a drawing/document that incorporates at least three symbols listed in the dictionary. You choose your medium. Display each drawing and ask the rest of the class to interpret the pictures. Take a picture or screenshot of your drawing and upload to canvas. This project should take 1 class period

## Links:

<http://symboldictionary.net/?p=1333>

<https://books.google.com/books?id=vGc8CgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

<http://www.boston-catholic-journal.com/a-primer-to-catholic-symbolism.pdf>

# Art of the Middle Ages

Throughout the Middle Ages, in a succession of three styles, art was concerned with religion. The main forms of art and architecture associated with each style were:



	<b>Byzantine</b>	<b>Romanesque</b>	<b>Gothic</b>
<b>Art</b>	Mosaics, icons	Frescoes, stylized sculpture	Stained glass, more natural sculpture
<b>Architecture</b>	Central-dome church	Barrel-vaulted church	Pointed-arch Cathedral
<b>Example</b>	Hagia Sophia	St. Sernin	Chartres
<b>Date</b>	532-37	Begun 1080	1194-1260
<b>Place</b>	Constantinople, Turkey	Toulouse, France	Chartres, France

# Mosaics

Although drawing on the Roman tradition of setting colored cubes, or tesserae, in plaster to form a picture, Byzantine mosaics were distinct from Roman. Here are the principal variations:

<b>Roman Mosaics</b>	<b>VS.</b>	<b>Byzantine Mosaics</b>
Used opaque marble cubes		Used reflective glass cubes
Pieces had smooth, flat finish		Surfaces left uneven so work sparkled
Colors limited due to use of natural stones		Glowing glass in wide range of colors
Typically found on floor of private homes		Found on walls and ceilings - especially church dome and apse
Subjects were secular, like battles, games		Subjects were religious, like Christ as shepherd
Used minute pieces for realistic detail		Large cubes in stylized designs
Background represented landscape		Background was abstract: sky-blue, then gold

# Elements of Architecture

**Atrium:** An open aired, forecourt.

**Narthex:** A porch which spans one of the buildings short ends.

**Portal:** Doors

**Nave:** Long Central area.

**Apse:** Semicircular projection (like a bay window) opposite the narthex. This is where the altar is located.

**Dome:** Half a sphere rising above the ceiling.

**Aisle:** low-ceilinged sides of the church, separated from the nave by columns.

**Clerestory:** Upper story with windows.

**Transept:** Another wing of the church that crosses the nave to make the building T-shaped.

**Basilica Plan:** A church with an atrium, narthex, LONG nave and apse.

**Central Plan:** The building looks like a + sign.



# Early Christian Art - An Overview

It's helpful to know that Byzantine art is generally divided up into three distinct periods:

1. Early Byzantine (c. 330–750)
2. Middle Byzantine (c. 850–1204)
3. Late Byzantine (c. 1261–1453)

Check out: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/byzantine1>



# question

Old Saint Peter's Church is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_ plan Church.

1. (a) "house"
2. (b) central
3. (c) Greek cross
4. (d) basilica
5. (e) classical

# question

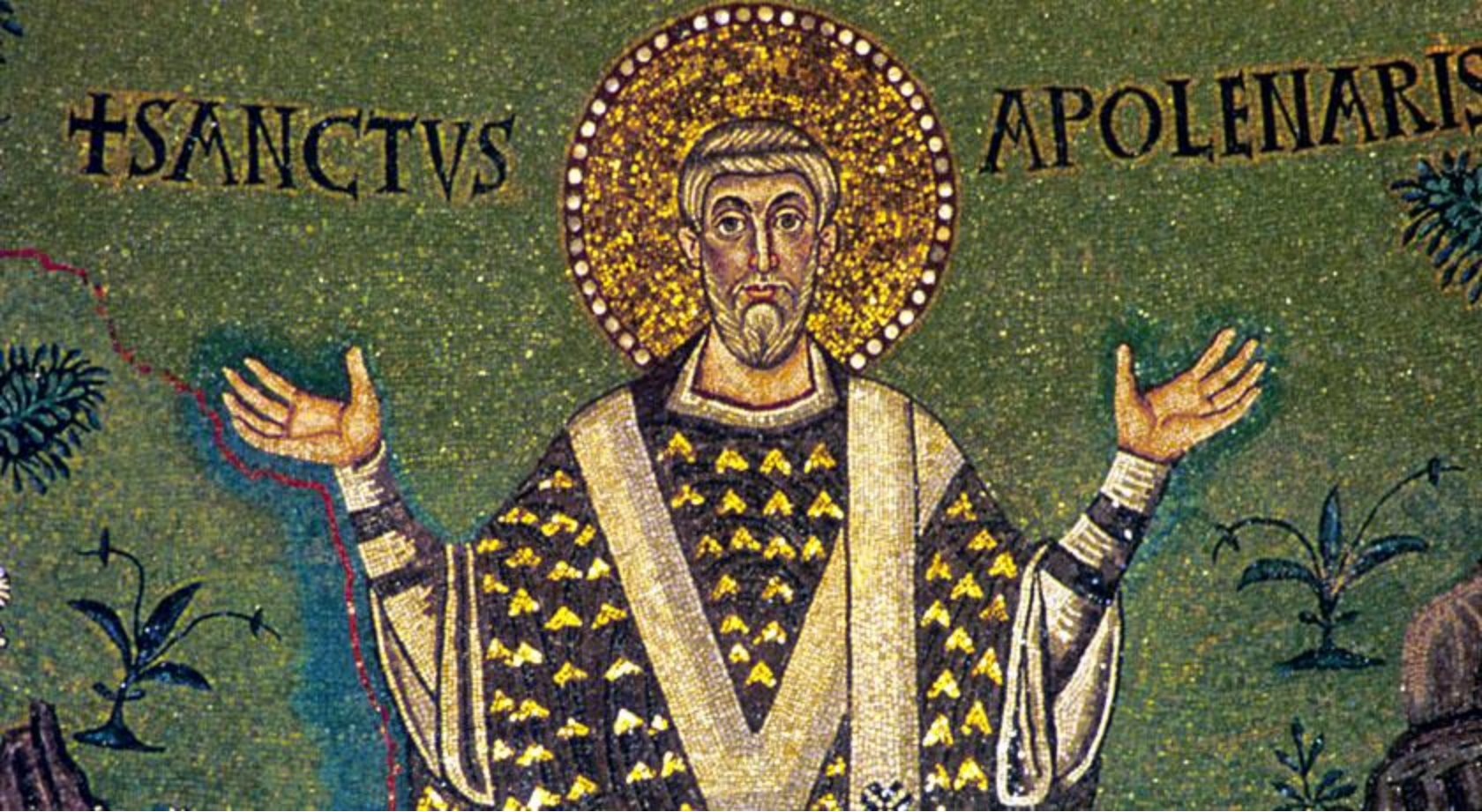
Answer: (d). Old Saint Peter's Church became the standard for the basilica plan church. It includes a large center area known as a nave with aisles on both sides and a transept that intersects the nave in front of the apse. A basilica plan church often resembles the Christian cross.

# Saint Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna, Italy 550









Saint Apollinaire in Classe

# Saint Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna, Italy 550

- Stark unadorned exterior brickwork echoes the crudeness of the outside world
- Interior richly decorated symbolizes the soul
- 12 sheep represent the 12 apostles
- 3 sheep are the apostles who witnessed Jesus's Transfiguration
- Moses and Elijah flank the cross
- Hand of God comes down and blesses the scene
- Increasing flatness of forms, moving away from classical naturalistic depictions





# HAGIA SOPHIA in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) Turkey 530





HAGIA SOPHIA in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) Turkey



# Muslim Art

What is the highest form of art in the Muslim world?

1. (a) calligraphy
2. (b) iconography
3. (c) sculpture
4. (d) painting
5. (e) architecture

# Muslim Art

Answer: 1. (a). Reverence for the word of God/Allah extends by the association to the act of writing. Since early Islamic art prohibited any depiction of living things, artists developed a rich vocabulary of non-figural ornaments such as geometric patterns, arabesques, and beautiful calligraphy.



# San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy AD 526-47

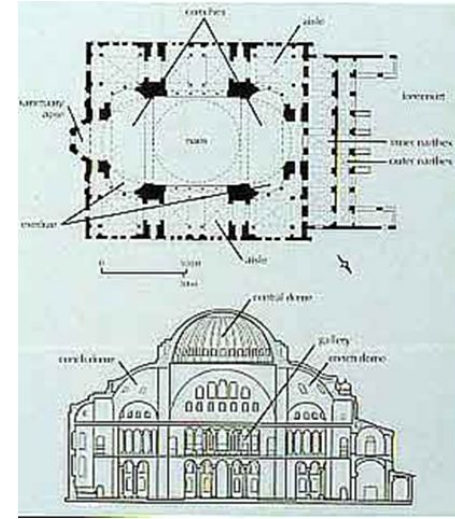


# Early Byzantine Art in the Age of Justinian

## Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), Turkey

- Combination of central plan and axial planned church
- Exterior: plain and massive, little decoration
- Altar at far end, but emphasis placed over the area covered by the dome
- Dome supported by pendentives
- Powerful central dome, with forty windows at base
- Cornice unifies space
- Arcade decoration: wall and capitals are flat and thin but richly ornamented
- Great fields for mosaic decoration
- At one time had four acres of gold mosaics on walls

Many windows punctuate wall space







San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy AD 526-47

## **San Vitale, Ravenna (c.547)**

- Byzantine forces capture Ravenna in 540
- 8 sided structure
- Plain exterior except porch added later in Renaissance
- Large windows for illuminating interior designs
- Interior has thin columns and open arched spaces, complex spatial system
- Sense of mystery in the space

## Emperor Justinian and Attendants, Saint Vitale, Ravenna

In the late Fifth and early Sixth Centuries, the Western half of The Roman Empire fell into a shambles. Even Italy was under the control of feuding barbarians.



The Emperor Justinian rallied his forces and recovered Ravenna. For a short time Ravenna became the Byzantine capital in the West and a number of important early Byzantine monuments are preserved there today. The Church of San Vitale in Ravenna is one of these monuments. San Vitale's humble exterior protects a glistening interior full of glass mosaics and sumptuous decorative marble.

Credit: bassmanb

Add slides <http://www.slideshare.net/bassmanb/etruscan-to-early-christian>



# Emperor Justinian and Attendants, Saint Vitale, Ravenna 550



Add slides <http://www.slideshare.net/bassmanb/etruscan-to-early-christian>

# Emperor Justinian and Attendants, Saint Vitale, Ravenna 550

- Left is clergy, right is military
- Symmetry, frontality
- Figures have no volume, seem to float, and overlap each other's feet
- Minimal background, golden background indicates timelessness
- Halo indicates saintliness, a semi divinity as head of church and state





# Question

This mosaic from San Vitale in Ravenna, is an example of the Byzantine method of illustrating the world by placing an emphasis on:

1. (a) a hieratic style that conveys a sense of timelessness.
2. (b) a supernatural world filled with two dimensional patterns.
3. (c) reverse-perspective and connection between the viewer and the image.
4. (d) none of the above
5. (e) all of the above



# Answer

Answer: 5. (e). The mosaic artists were capable but deliberately avoided using elements that would imply realistic space. Religious art of this era was meant to teach and inspire. The Byzantine artists were interested in illustrating a world “other than” the world that people had to live in everyday.



# Theodora and Attendants, Saint Vitale, Ravenna 550

- Slight displacement of absolute symmetry with Theodora, she plays a secondary role to her husband
- Richly robed empress and ladies at court
- Figures are flattened and weightless, barely a hint of a body can be detected beneath the drapery





# Later Byzantine Art - Church of San Marco 1050



# St. Mark's Cathedral Venice, Italy 1050

- Five domes placed in a cross pattern
- Windows at base of dome illuminate brilliant mosaics that cover every wall space above the first floor
- Figures are weightless in a field of gold mosaics
- Prominent iconostasis separates apse from nave
- Compartmentalized space of middle Byzantine architecture



# Early Christian Art - Catacombs

## Catacombs, Rome

- Four million buried under Rome alone
- Galleries are 1 meter wide and 2-3 meters high
- Loculi, cubiculum
- Burial underground cheaper than surface burials
- Christian belief in burial because Christ was buried

<http://www.catacombe.roma.it>



2. Which statement is NOT True about mosques?

1. (a) You typically enter a mosque via a courtyard
2. (b) They have a large covered space to accommodate Friday prayers.
3. (c) All mosques house relics of Muhammad.
4. (d) They are oriented to the direction of Mecca with a qibla wall and mirahab.
5. (e) It is typical to find minarets to call the faithful to prayer outside.

Answer: 3. (c). Mosques are not depositories for relics. Christians and Buddhists often place relics in their places of worship.

# Icons

As gloomy as these images of tortured martyrs were, no discussion of Byzantine art is complete without a look at icons. Icons were small wood-panel paintings, believed to possess supernatural powers. The images of saints or holy persons were typically rigid, frontal poses, often with halos and staring, wide eyes. Icons supposedly had magical properties. According to legend, one wept, another emitted the odor of incense. Ardent believers carried them into battle or wore away their faces by kissing them. So powerful did the cult of icons become that they were banned from 726-843 as a violation of the commandment against idolatry.

Source: The Annotated Mona Lisa pg. 24

# Icons

The term \_\_\_\_\_ describes the short-lived reaction to the veneration of images of religious figures.

1. (a) cloisonné
2. (b) iconography
3. (c) iconoclasm
4. (d) mandorla
5. (e) catacombs

# Icons

Answer: 3. (c). Eastern Christians used to pray to images of Christ, Mary, and the saints. Worship including these icons was not considered idolatry because they became a visual aid to promote prayer and meditation.

# Vocabulary

Alcazar

Campanile

Catacombs

Koran

Mihrab

Minaret

Mosaic

Mosque-

Muezzin-

Piers

Manuscript

Illumination

Flying Buttress

Constantinople

Triptych

Pendentive

Iconostasis

Icons

# Video Resources

Videos to watch:

Ravenna:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/byzantine1/venice-ravenna/v/sant-apollinare-in-classe>

Smart History - San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/byzantine1/venice-ravenna/v/justinian-and-his-attendants-6th-century-ravenna>

DCMP (use your password)

<https://dcmp.org/media/8419-the-time-compass-the-byzantine-empire/stream?digest=39473> pay attention at 6:50 - 8:17