

Defining French 'Romanesque': the Zodiaque series¹

Janet T. Marquardt

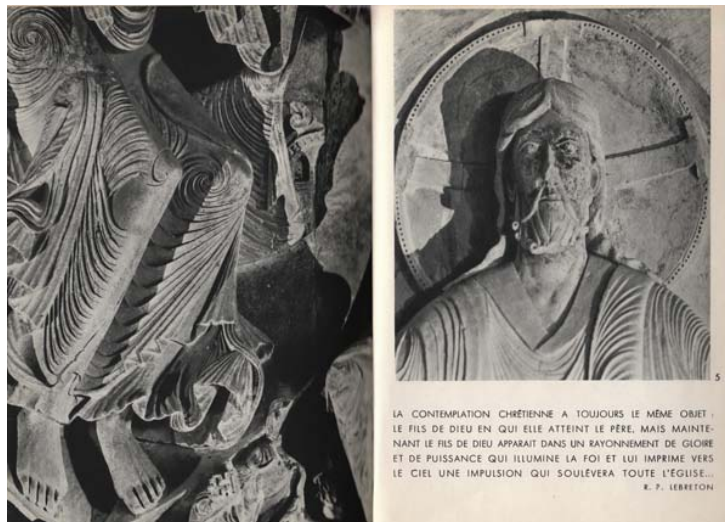


Figure 1 Example of early photogravures of Vézelay from *Zodiaque* 12-13 (January 1953), reused in *Bourgogne romane*, first edition (1954) [Les Nuits des temps 1], pages 212- 213, laid out by Angelico Surchamp, photographs by Pierre Kill, a professional from nearby Avallon. © Photothèque-Zodiaque

Between 1951 and 2001, la Pierre-qui-Vire monastery in Burgundy published an illustrated journal, appearing three times a year, as well as multiple series of

¹ This research would not be possible without the kind assistance of the monks from the abbey of la Pierre-qui-Vire: Abbot Luc Cornuau, Brothers Mathieu and Ambroise, as well as their generous permission to use figs. 1, 6 and 7 (Photothèque-Zodiaque, La Pierre-qui-Vire, 89630 Saint-Leger-Vauban, France). Equally helpful is Père Angelico Surchamp, who answers endless questions, both in person and via email, on a regular basis. Thanks are also due to two colleagues, Colum Hourihane and Alyce Jordan, who reviewed this essay and greatly improved it by their insightful suggestions, as well as the journal's efficient editor, Richard Woodfield. I am also grateful to the wonderful staff at l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), the nicest archive in France, where I am working through the prodigious amount of papers deposited by the abbey of la Pierre-qui-Vire, and to my medieval taxonomy session colleagues (Laura Morowitz, Donna Sadler, and Mary Shepard) as well as the hosts of the Western Society for French History conference where this paper was first presented at Boulder, Colorado in October 2009. Many other colleagues have been supportive of this project. I would like to particularly mention Kathryn Brush, Yves Chevrefils Desboilles, Andrea Gibbs, Jean-Marie Guillouët, Todd Gustavson, Christopher Hanlon, Ruth Hoberman, Dominique Iogna-Prat, Danielle Johnson, Terry Kinder, Gerd Koehler, Guy Lobrichon, Max Marmor, Christine Merllie-Young, Eric Palazzo, Anne Prache, Annie Pralong, Willibald Sauerländer, Mary Caroline Simpson and Otto-Karl Werckmeister.

lavishly illustrated books, nearly all focusing on Romanesque art.² The central and most popular book series, *La Nuit des Temps*, ran to eighty-eight volumes.³ Another dozen series were spun off the collected material, pushing the total number of books to over three hundred. A printing workshop was established at the monastery, similar to the medieval scriptorium, for the text pages and a few color photographs. The primary illustrations, consisting of rich black-and-white photogravures, were from photographs taken first by professional photographers and later by the monks themselves [Fig. 1]. The glass negatives from these were burned to copper plates, touched up, and printed on thick paper with rich ink. The results are subtle with warm grays, contrasting light reflections and deep black shadows. The graphic intensity was maintained by the use of matte paper cut to a small scale, placed inside cloth covers and completed with ribbon bookmarks, suggesting precious religious texts. During the same period, other publishers, such as the Louvre and Arthaud, were bringing out books on medieval monuments, many also with photogravures.⁴ However, Zodiaque imagery stands out because the selected monuments and wealth of decorative details are presented in a highly aestheticized light, demonstrating deliberate artistic compositional manipulation of the subjects through lighting, cropping, angles, and framing. In addition, many of the styles among Romanesque art forms suggest corresponding graphic and spare qualities. In this way, the black-and-white medium often served to highlight and reinforce the artistic presentation of Zodiaque's subjects. Finally, their simple clarity makes these photographs highly significant historical documents of monuments that have suffered erosion, restoration, or even demolition.

The monastery of La-Pierre-qui-Vire had been founded in the middle of the nineteenth century on the medieval Benedictine model, including the emphasis on scholarship as *opus dei* or 'work of God'. These publications thus served founder Jean Baptiste Muard's original intention to renew sacred life in France through the monastic ideal. Producing a series of illustrated books on religious subjects in the twentieth century gave the monks at La-Pierre-qui-Vire a project comparable to the *opus dei* of medieval scriptoria. Searching out the sites of Romanesque monuments and visiting them to make photographs, literally initiated 'pilgrimages' by small



Figure 2 Frères Surchamp and Norberto photographing a church in Aragon September 23, 1986. (Photo: Jaime Corbreos, *Románico*)

² <http://www.abbaye-pierrequivire.asso.fr>

³ http://www.romanes.com/biblio/zodiaque_fr.html

⁴ For example: Marcel Aubert, *La Cathédrale de Chartres*, Paris: Arthaud, 1952; Maurice Gieure, *Les Églises romanes en France*. Series 'Pierres Sacrées' edited by Maurice Malingue, Paris: Editions du Louvre, 1953.

troupes of monks traveling across Europe to find Romanesque art from Spain to Scandinavia and from Ireland to the Holy Land [Fig. 2].⁵ There were few publications on Romanesque art when the Pierre-qui-Vire team began. By disseminating the scholarship of key art-historical authors, the monks not only brought to light many obscure monuments off the beaten path of the art-historical canon and rarely visible details of more famous sites, they also contributed to a growing literature debating the origins of the Romanesque style and its regional differences. One cannot deny the apparent nationalistic vision of such a project, especially in light of its appearance immediately succeeding two recent wars



Figure 3 Advertisement used in *Zodiaque* for subscriptions showing covers of various issues.

against Germany during which French medieval monuments had been gravely damaged. Certainly France had widely claimed medieval innovations from the nineteenth century onwards, for instance Pierre Francastel's vehement argument published 1945.⁶ This may not have been a conscious goal; nevertheless the thrust of the program seems reminiscent of the arguments over who invented Gothic architecture.⁷

The Zodiaque book series aided in the creation of a cultural history of Romanesque art along nationalistic lines. But it also helped define what is understood today by the very word 'Romanesque'. A somewhat fluid term from its inception in the mid nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, 'Romanesque' is sometimes defined in terms of date, sometimes style, architectural engineering or even

circumstances of production (monastic versus urban, et cetera). These books seemed to visually and comprehensively document the existence of a European Romanesque art even as the wide variety of examples destabilizes the term.

Zodiaque's approach was wildly successful, selling over 46,000 copies of the first edition of the initial *Nuit des Temps* volume on the region of Burgundy, published in 1954. This single book went through nine more editions and eventually sold 140,000 copies, representing the most successful art book ever published in

⁵ Janet T. Marquardt, 'La Pierre-qui-Vire and Zodiaque: A Monastic Pilgrimage of Medieval Dimensions', *Peregrinations* 2/3, Summer 2009 [http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu].

⁶ Pierre Francastel, *L'Histoire de l'art, instrument de la propagande germanique*, Paris: Librairie de Médecis, 1945.

⁷ This argument began in 1772 with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *On German Architecture* and grew in intensity over the next two centuries. See Conrad Rudolph, 'Introduction: A Sense of Loss: An Overview of the Historiography of Romanesque and Gothic Art', *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 16 ff.

France.⁸ As two volumes were produced annually, the activity generated a printing workshop in the abbey of a dozen monks and the income helped fund the enlargement of la Pierre-qui-Vire's physical layout.

The genesis of these Zodiaque books was in a little journal of the same title, which followed another, also from la Pierre-qui-Vire, entitled *Témoignages*. The latter appeared during World War II under the direction of Dom Jean-Nesmy, whose younger brother contributed articles on art. This younger brother, Angelico Surchamp, had trained with the Cubist painter Albert Gleizes and formed a painting atelier with two other young monks to create modernist wall paintings of religious subjects. Surchamp wrote an essay for *Témoignages* 21 (April 1949) defending abstract art after an exhibition, organized for tourists by this atelier at Vézelay that paired the medieval sculpture with contemporary Christian art, drew criticism.⁹ He added a second essay on the same subject to create his own journal, *Zodiaque*, first appearing in March 1951 [Fig. 3].¹⁰ In both these essays, Surchamp addressed the problematic term 'abstract art' as part of the contemporary French debate over what constituted 'sacred art' (*l'art sacré*). This latter was a longstanding 'quarrel' of major concern to modern artists who sought to bridge the huge gap between what they perceived, on the one hand, as saccharine and meaningless religious art of the nineteenth-century 'Saint-Sulpician' variety and, on the other, cutting edge 'abstract' or less realistic forms of their own day. Saint-Sulpician art referred to naturalistic, often Romantic imagery popular in the nineteenth century that drew upon a revival of Gothic and Byzantine art styles.¹¹ A typical example is the statue of the Virgin made by Joseph Fabisch in 1864 for the shrine at Lourdes.¹² The name came from an association with the taste of the Sulpician society of clergy based at church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Contemporary artists, on the other hand, such as Henri Matisse with his decoration program at the chapel of Vence (1949-1951) or Germaine Richier's intense sculpture of the suffering Christ in the modernist church of Notre-Dame-de-Tout-Grâce at Assy (1950),¹³ posed challenging questions on what truly represented nature, what generated spiritual contemplation, how aesthetic appearances could affect viewers, and which styles best conveyed religious content.

The argument over sacred art had raged in France since the late nineteenth century, reviving after World War I.¹⁴ The French Church felt strongly that there was a need for a renewal of faith; republican laicism, public education, the breakup

⁸ Dom Angelico Surchamp, 'L'Aventure de Zodiaque', *Annales de l'Académie de Mâcon* 13, series 4, 2001.

⁹ Dom Angelico Surchamp, 'Note sur l'art abstrait', *Témoignages* 21, April 1949, 174-181.

¹⁰ Dom Angelico Surchamp, 'Deux notes sur l'art abstrait', *Zodiaque* 1, March 1951, 1-23.

¹¹ Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing belief*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1992.

¹² Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*, New York: Viking, 1999, figs. 9, 13.

¹³ The piece was withdrawn by Church authorities in 1951. A photograph can be seen in the newsletter *Évangile et Liberté* 217 (March 2008) on line at: <http://www.evangelie-et-liberte.net/elements/numeros/217/article8.html>

¹⁴ Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz age Catholicism: mystic modernism in postwar Paris, 1919-1933*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.

of rural communities in the face of industrialism—all this contributed to the gestures of empty ritual. There had been a powerful counter movement to secularism by religious folk who were superstitious about France's continual bad luck beginning with their defeat by the Prussians in 1870, the horrors of the Commune in 1871, the corruption of the Dreyfus Affair, the shocks of World War I and, soon, World War II. Cults to the Sacred Heart, Joan of Arc, and pilgrimage sites grew in response.¹⁵ But these were popular movements that tended to cultivate the Saint-Sulpician style of Catholic imagery, an empty, user-friendly art that did not challenge the viewer and offered little profound complexity.

Angelico Surchamp's teacher, Albert Gleizes, wrote that Christian art between the sixth and twelfth centuries had the raw power of true artistic expression, the visible sign of the artist's inner being.¹⁶ He was not the first to make the aesthetic connection to modern abstraction; late nineteenth-century painters such as Paul Gauguin, the Symbolists, and the Nabis had begun the search for a 'mystical link between the visual and spiritual worlds'.¹⁷ Wassily Kandinsky's 1911 essay *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is one of the first articulations of modernist concerns about the fundamental truths lost in materialist philosophies and 'art for art's sake', which stimulated the search for the deeper internal purity of 'the primitive', a term from art-historical discourse about ancient and medieval arts that was being applied around this time to colonial artifacts from outside the western tradition, such as in exhibitions at the Musée d'ethnographie in Paris where Pablo Picasso famously first saw African art in 1907.¹⁸ This appreciation for less naturalistic and polished arts that privileged expression over realism carried into a growing revival of earlier medieval material. That ethno-anthropological artifacts and medieval artworks were conceptually related by curators is clear from the

¹⁵ Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

¹⁶ Although Gleizes began with a vague interest in late medieval cathedrals in the Romantic populist tendency, he soon turned against Renaissance and then even Gothic arts in favor of the arts produced prior to the twelfth century with his essay 'La Peinture et ses lois' originally appearing in the journal *La Vie des Lettres et des Arts* in March 1923 and reprinted as *La Peinture et ses lois: Ce qui devait sortir du cubisme*, Paris: Croutzet et Depost, 1924. See also: Peter Brooke, *Albert Gleizes: for and against the twentieth century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 87-88.

¹⁷ Albert Boime, *Revelation of Modernism: Responses to Cultural Crises in Fin-de-Siècle Painting*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008, 135. See also: 'Packaging the *Primitifs*: the medieval artist, the *Neo-Primitif* and the art market', in: Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, 37-60; Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000.

¹⁸ It would later be codified by important art historians such as Roger Fry in his work on African art during the 1910s and 1920s and continued by Frank Boas in *Primitive Art* (Oslo: Skrifter, 1927) or Georges-Henri Luquet in *L'art primitif* (Paris: G. Doin, 1930). For an excellent and comprehensive anthology of early texts utilizing the term 'primitive art', see Jack Flam, ed. *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. The arguments about the pejorative connotations of the term have been extensively discussed in recent scholarship. See: Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

proximity of the 1878 Musée d'ethnographie (later the Musée de l'homme) to the 1882 Musée du sculpture comparée (later to become the Musée des monuments français), which included prominent Romanesque examples, on the Trocadéro in Paris.¹⁹ Also around the turn of the twentieth century, Picasso and architect/art historian Josep Puig y Cadafalch, among others, sparked new awareness of Catalan medieval art.²⁰ In fact, though it took Émile Mâle until 1922 to publish a book on Romanesque iconography, remaining caught up in the nineteenth-century romance with the Gothic, already in the 1880s architects and artists had begun to look beyond Viollet-le-Duc's ideal Gothic style toward more powerful and expressive forms of art from the previous two centuries—witness the revival of the Romanesque architectural style in Germany, the popularity of H. H. Richardson in the United States, the nationalistic association of Celtic art in nineteenth-century Ireland, or Haseloff's references to Hildegard illuminations already in 1906.²¹

As Caviness states: 'Contorted and disproportionate limbs gave Catalan Romanesque art its spiritual intensity. In Picasso they serve political ends and identify with the Republican struggle against General Franco, and with the Catalan cause'.²² This political content was the direction that interested avant-garde art collectors such as Christian Zervos in Paris, whose *Cahiers d'art* gave modernism a powerful presence.²³ In Germany, the intensity of modernist abstraction was exaggerated for Christian works by artists such as Ernst Barlach, but again, the emotion was linked to socio-political concerns.²⁴ For avant-garde French Catholic artists, such as Gleizes, it was specifically that spiritual intensity alone which caught their attention and suggested a way to renew sacred art. They felt that if they could link the religious spaces and subject matter of the early medieval past with the growing interest in a non-realist aesthetic, they could offer a new generation fresh visual stimulation to Christian symbolism and thoughtful meditation.

¹⁹ Risham Majeed, 'The 'Other' Primitive: Revisiting Romanesque in the Age of Colonialism', a paper given in the session 'Shaping the Reception of Medieval Sites' at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds University 2009, forming part of the research for her dissertation at Columbia University.

²⁰ Madeleine Caviness recently suggested that we still do not credit them enough. See: Madeleine Caviness, 'The Politics of Taste', in: Colum Hourihane, ed., *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 2008, 57-81.

²¹ Curran, Kathleen. *The Romanesque Revival: Religion, Politics, and Transnational Exchange*, Buildings, Landscapes, and Societies Series 2. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003; James. F. O'Gorman, *H.H. Richardson: Architectural Forms for an American Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Colum Hourihane, *Gothic Art in Ireland, 1169-1550: Enduring Vitality*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 19-34. Haseloff's essay appeared in A. Michel, *Histoire de l'art II: Formation expansion et evolution de l'art gothique* and is quoted in Caviness, 'Politics', 76. For background on the development of the distinction between 'Romanesque' and 'Gothic' styles of medieval art, see: Tina Waldeier Bizarro, *Romanesque Architectural Criticism: A Prehistory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, and Jean Nayrolles, *L'invention de l'art romane à l'époque moderne: XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005.

²² Caviness, 'Politics', 65.

²³ Christian Zervos, *Cahiers d'art*, Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'art, 1926-1960, 35 vols.

²⁴ Caviness, 'Politics', 73.

Gleizes was a committed Catholic who read the works of the neo-Thomists, Raïssa and Jacques Mauritian, and argued the finer points of their theories about the civilizing power of art and the artist's 'purity of intention'.²⁵ For Gleizes, the ultimate way to capture the spiritual energy of God's creation was in rhythmic form, which he developed as a series of rotating lines drawing the eye in and around the various figures and shapes of his paintings.²⁶ His influence on the young Frère Angelico Surchamp's ideas about religious art was enduring and nurtured a strong modernist aesthetic sense. Surchamp followed Gleizes into the fray over sacred art. The argument from their side concerned very powerful visual laws about good artistic composition; along with the importance of keeping imagery open to viewer's imaginations. Realism became mere copying of the outer appearance of Nature; whereas modern, non-representational art could address the inner, profound meanings of existence.

It was Surchamp's creation of Zodiaque that really gave him the chance to visually as well as textually develop the connection between Romanesque art and the modern, cubist aesthetic. For him, the Romanesque style was not determined wholly by technical developments in architecture, sculpture, painting, and other arts during the Middle Ages, changes that many have seen as mere interim points on the inevitable progress toward Gothic naturalism and light-filled mega-churches. Instead, the style grew from the intensity of a minimalist aesthetic form for powerful spiritual expression, rich with linear sharpness, powerfully simple iconographic references, multiple viewpoints, and rhythmic patterns. He saw the terms 'Romanesque' and 'Gothic' as denoting more than successive time periods. Rather, for Surchamp, and thus eventually for the Zodiaque books, Romanesque art came to designate medieval art that was conceived differently from Gothic art. For sculpture in particular, he distinguished Romanesque art as that by artists who worked outside Greco-Roman realism, or at least made creative responses in adapting it. He felt that artists who worked on the deliberate revival of classical naturalism, beginning in the thirteenth century, did so at the expense of creativity and by giving into the laziness of copying nature. Thus the name, Roman-*esque*, which for someone like Marvin Trachtenberg is still an apt expression of an architecture that took its basic elements from the Roman forms of engineering, or which Linda Seidel sees as the *raison d'être* for the historical visual references at S. Lazare in Autun, was quite the opposite to Surchamp.²⁷ He appreciated pre-Gothic architecture for the precision of its parts and for sculptural decoration that he saw as stripped down and clarified in its response to classical models. He wanted to define this art as a rejection of Roman traditions in order to look to its abstraction

²⁵ Schloesser, *Jazz age Catholicism*, 121-122.

²⁶ Examples of Gleizes's paintings can be seen on line at: <http://www.fondationgleizes.com/albert-gleizes-work.html>. Especially relevant are those from the sections entitled 'The Interwar Period' and 'The Last Years'.

²⁷ Marvin Trachtenberg, 'Suger's Miracles, Branner's Bourges: Reflections on 'Gothic Architecture' as Medieval Modernism', *Gesta* 39/2, 2000, 185-205; Linda Seidel, *Legends in Limestone: Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

and creativity for an explication and justification of its spiritual power. He thus entirely separated derivative architectural structural forms from innovative architectural decoration. For him, even the way medieval columns were fluted or arranged carried a different aesthetic sensibility to that of the Classical ideal, and his images emphasize such effects.

The central premise of Surchamp's 1951 essays on abstract art was that power was conveyed by the formal properties of art which distinguished copying from creativity and form from figure. He illustrated his argument with examples of archaic Greek art, suggesting that the abstraction of the folds into regular patterns on the Hera of Samos, an Erechthion caryatid and the Charioteer of Delphi carried the same aesthetic balance as the forms carved onto the prehistoric stones from Gavrinis in the Morbihan. These served as precursors to the ultimate pairing of aesthetic and spiritual visualization in Romanesque architecture, sculpture and painting. He did not yet name a key work, but rather cited a wide range of French examples.²⁸ It thus seems that Surchamp's appreciation of Romanesque art grew directly from his desire to champion contemporary abstract art and to find a fresh Christian imagery to offer the post World War II world in the pages of his Zodiaque periodical and books. In this way, he particularly sought other forms from art history that related to the expressive and harmonious compositional treatment of the stone in Romanesque European sculpture in order to set up an opposition between naturalism and abstraction that served to justify his presentation of Romanesque in a new light.

With this in mind, we can see a number of taxonomic complications arising: 1) If all aspects of this art are not, in fact, Roman-like, how can one link the various manifestations under a single term? This is not, in fact, a rogue question: It wasn't until the publications of Henri Focillon during the 1930s that connections were made. Jean Nayrolles, in his 2005 study *L'Invention de l'art roman*, tells us 'Romanesque art' in the sense that one uses this term today, designating a universal consistency of forms, for a style inclusive from the architectural monument to the illuminated book, did not exist for the contemporaries of Viollet-le-Duc. 'The expression itself was not employed: one spoke of *Romanesque architecture*, very rarely of *Romanesque sculpture*, never of *Romanesque art*'.²⁹ Many scholars today hold firmly that the evidence of Romanesque's indebtedness to Roman is indisputable.³⁰ It would seem that one must allow for a variety of responses to the classical inheritance. Contextual studies of meaning attributed to Classical models have moved Surchamp's close reading of artistic compositional techniques and religious iconography to broader questions of social reception.

²⁸ Surchamp also wrote a response to critics of these two statements, after their appearance in *Zodiaque*, in *Témoignages* 33, April 1951, 227-235.

²⁹ 'L'expression même n'est pas employée : on parle d'*architecture romane*, très rarement de *sculpture romane*, jamais d'*art roman*'. Jean Nayrolles, *L'invention de l'art roman*, 365.

³⁰ Manuel Castiñeiras and J. Camps (eds.). *El Románico y el Mediterráneo: Cataluña, Toulouse y Pisa. 1120-1180* [exhibition catalogue], Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya: Barcelona, 2008.

2) If there are no unifying Roman elements, is there at least a shared style among the arts generally contemporary with the period 1000-1200 across medieval France, across medieval Europe? The Zodiaque illustrations also serve to elucidate the clear lack of a unifying artistic style during these years in medieval Europe and the same can be said for any other arbitrary art-historical style designation when applied too broadly. The more one looks at the beautiful photogravures that illustrate the Zodiaque volumes, the more one realizes there are few defining shared elements, even among examples of the same media, of what the series consistently terms 'Romanesque' [Fig. 4]. Leaving aside *Zodiaque's* venture into early medieval art with the Irish and Scandinavian volumes and the post-1995 series on Gothic monuments, even the bulk of the material drawn from around the years 1000-1200 represents workshops of great cultural variety.³¹

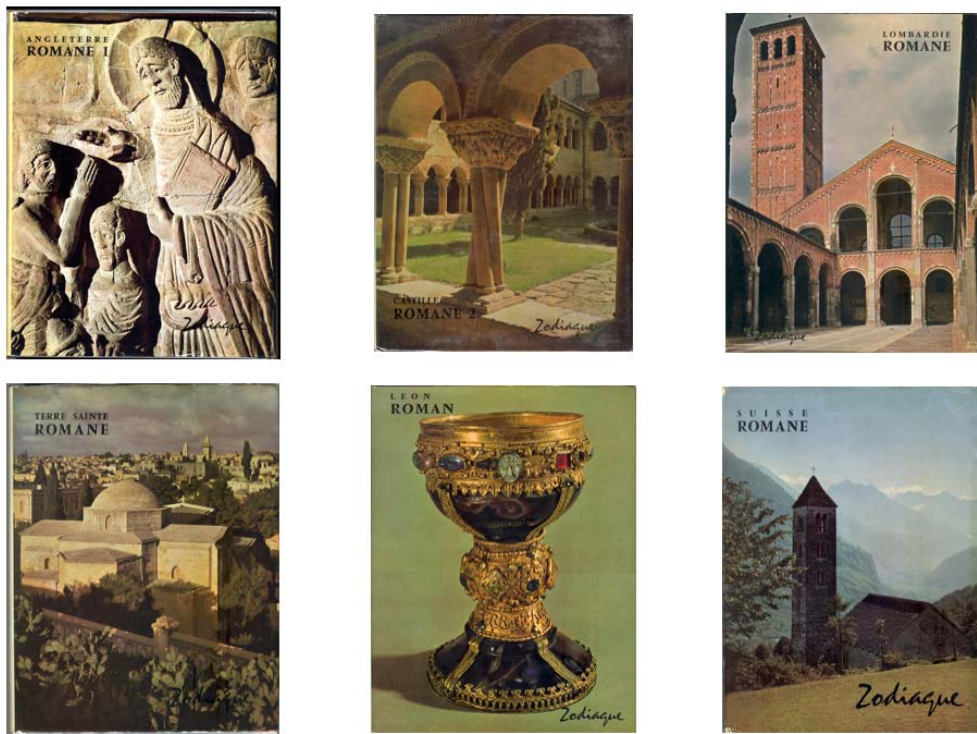


Figure 4 *La Nuit des temps* series, covers showing range of locations.

3) Is there a geographic source for Romanesque, from which other regions received the impetus for its development? The Zodiaque books are all titled in French, and the most famous series, *La Nuit des temps*, lists every country or geographic subdivision under the name plus 'roman/romane' (i.e., 'Romanesque' in French, very easily confused with 'romain' which means 'Roman'), giving the general impression that all forms of the art thus titled are, at their heart, French—

³¹ Françoise Henry, *L'Art Irlandais* 1-3, La Pierre-qui-Vire, Saint-Léger-Vauban: Zodiaque, 1963-64; Peter Anker and Aron Andersson, *L'Art Scandinave* 1-2, La Pierre-qui-Vire, Saint-Léger-Vauban: Zodiaque, 1969.

yet that was neither Surchamp's avowed goal nor a position that has ever been justified.³² He simply began by documenting Romanesque art in each region he visited and the title was descriptive of the photographic content. Perhaps the Zodiaque publications unintentionally reinforced a tendency towards Franco-centrism that began as far back as Wilhelm Vöge, who went from Germany to France in order to study architectural sculpture in the 1890s.³³

However, by beginning in Burgundy, drawing examples from that region throughout all early publications for visual evidence in theoretical arguments, the Zodiaque team implicitly privileged the Burgundian sites as a center from which their own understanding of Romanesque art grew, creating a sort of 'ur-Romanesque' or essential form from which to define the characteristics that would be emphasized in their search for Romanesque among other regions.³⁴ Raymond Oursel began to work closely with Zodiaque in the 1970s. He was a trained art-historian, archive director, and professor at the Catholic Institute in Lyon whose professional ideas about Romanesque art were an important model for Surchamp. He was also the son of Charles Oursel, a close colleague of Kenneth Conant who excavated the ruined abbey of Cluny from 1927-1950.³⁵ Raymond adhered to the arguments of this earlier generation that made the construction of the third church at Cluny (begun 1088) into a center of a renaissance of foreign influences that then spread across the region and could be seen in other Romanesque churches, which were subsequently all dated after it. Conant, in particular, wanted to see Cluny as the model for all innovation in medieval architecture after its appearance. Although alternative theories have been presented since, this underlying orientation towards Burgundy by Zodiaque was easily absorbed into contemporary art-historical discourse.³⁶

There are a number of different series within the Zodiaque books. Besides the geographic orientation by region of the *La Nuit des temps (The Dark Ages)* series which began with *Bourgogne romane*, others were organized on varied themes, such as the earliest *Travaux des mois (The Labors of the Months)* series which began with *Autun* and continued with other specific sites as well as some regional itineraries; Romanesque images of figures like angels, demons, Christ, and the Virgin; Christmas scenes; Romanesque cloisters; images of the Apocalypse, and so on. Another, *Les Points cardinaux (The Cardinal Directions)*, focused upon images from

³² Angelico Surchamp, interview with author June 2009.

³³ Kathryn Brush, *The Shaping of Art History: Wilhelm Vöge, Adolph Goldschmidt, and the Study of Medieval Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1996, 61-76. Dorothy Glass reminds us that Italy was the starting point in "Quo vadis": The Study of Italian Romanesque Sculpture at the Beginning of the Third Millennium' *Studies in Iconography* 28, 2007, 1-22.

³⁴ Jean Baudry, Georges Barbier, Abbés André Gaudillière, Denis Grivot, et. al., *Bourgogne romane*, La Pierre-qui-Vire, Saint-Léger-Vauban: Zodiaque, 1954.

³⁵ Janet T. Marquardt, *From Martyr to Monument: The Abbey of Cluny as Cultural Patrimony*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 150-252.

³⁶ C. Edson Armi. *Masons and Sculptors in Romanesque Burgundy: The New Aesthetic of Cluny III*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

individual monuments as illustrations to evocative literary, historical, or scriptural texts. A pocket-size series, *La Carte du ciel* (*The Map of Heaven*) seems to have been directed at travelers to key Romanesque shrines. The later *La Voie lactée* (*The Milky Way*), *Les Formes de la nuit* (*Shapes in the Night*), and *Visages du Moyen Âge* (*Faces of the Middle Ages*) revisited some topics and added new ones, including Gothic sites. The atelier was thus able to reuse photographs, combining and recombining disparate examples as necessary for each arrangement, that made any categorization fluid at best.

Art from widely divergent periods and areas was subsumed into the series without any apparent dissonance, easily and simply extending the parameters of non-realist styles in medieval workshops. Although not all series included the French term for 'Romanesque' in the books' titles, Zodiaque had already become intrinsically linked with that stylistic designation due to the popularity of the *Nuit des temps* series. It is

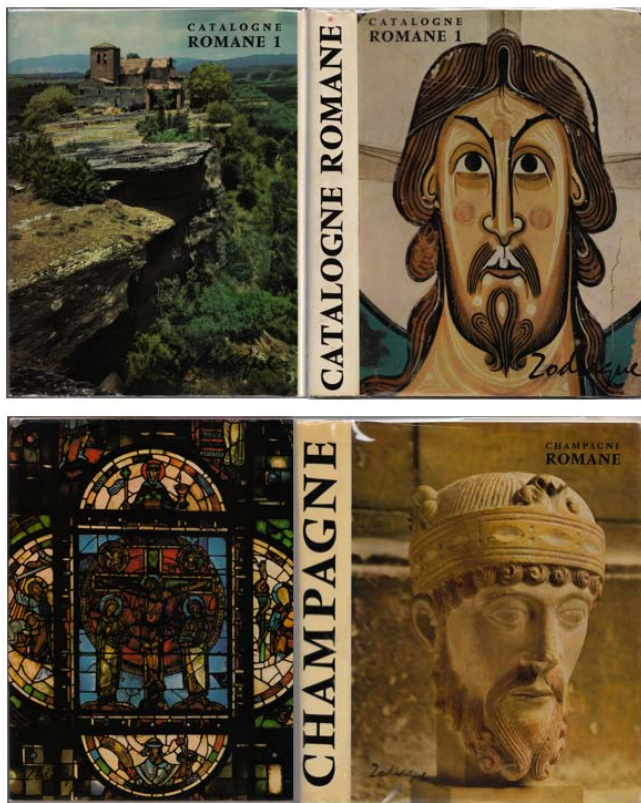


Figure 5 *La Nuit des temps* series, covers showing variety of media and styles.

interesting that the strong association of the Zodiaque books with Romanesque art caused most readers/collectors, from the very beginning, to consider the books which did *not* have that qualifier, such as *L'Art Gaulois*, *L'Art Irlandais* or *L'Art Scandinave*, as extensions of the same artistic group simply by association. How could this be? How could early Irish jewelry be so easily linked to twelfth-century Italian sculpture? For that matter, how could eleventh-century Catalan architecture live in the same world as twelfth-century stained glass from Champagne [Fig. 5]? Quite simply: The world of Zodiaque Romanesque art was not entirely coherent;

each volume follows its own logic. Some record the way medieval art manifested itself within a country or region, others contrast variations of a single subject. One can often detect differences in the authority of individual authors, for example Françoise Henry's presentation of Irish art over the course of three volumes. The

overriding principle at play in the choice of topics was Surchamp's attraction to contemporary artistic sensibilities in the second half of the twentieth century and the desire to find medieval art that 'spoke' to modernist criteria. These publications were never designed to follow iconographic or technical or structural developments in a logical sequence as Focillon might have done.³⁷ Yet, Focillon might nonetheless have looked back on the overall results with great interest. For the vision behind the Zodiaque photographs, the 'Romanesque' that Zodiaque produced, was quixotic and personal, decontextualized and powerful, unlike the contemporary art-historical focus of others, such as Meyer Schapiro, who took a broader view.³⁸ The photographs came first and in many cases were the true subject of the publication, with the text serving as illustrative to their message. Zodiaque presented a three-dimensional world seen through the lens of the camera; it was perceived by the eye of the photographer; it came from the vision of a Cubist-trained painter whose sense of space is two-dimensional. Details predominate, whether of architectural viewpoints or pieces of sculpted figures, margins of painted miniatures or color blocks of glass and tesserae [Figs. 1 and 6].



Variation and richness reign. The strongest images are always the black-and-white photogravures, often demonstrating a new way of seeing highly colored originals [Fig. 7]. The Zodiaque essence, its élan, is the powerful pull of a fresh aesthetic, a modern reevaluation of an art that had been ignored in the first medieval revival of the nineteenth century. It is like that initial art class in high school when the instructor has everyone cut a tiny square hole in a piece of paper and use it as a boundary lens with which to search out shapes, to abstract the world into incoherent forms, to rediscover the converging lines of our volumetric dimension, even as these paper 'finders'

Figure 6 Detail from abbey church at Paray-le-Monial from *Bourgogne romane*, sixth edition (1974) [Les Nuit des temps 1], plate 50. Photograph by the abbey atelier. © Photothèque-Zodiaque

³⁷ For an overall introduction to Focillon's approach see Jean Bony's preface to volume one of Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West in the Middle Ages*, London: Phaidon, 1963, 2 vols., ix-xxii.

³⁸ For examples see Meyer Schapiro, *Selected Papers: Romanesque Art*, New York: Georges Braziller, 1977, especially 28-101.

flatten the view into two dimensions. It is what Focillon saw in the adaptation of figural narrative sculpture to the rigor of medieval architecture's structural conformity, when the artists had to 'replace the harmony and proportions of life by the harmony and proportions of an abstract system', or how Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger characterized the role of modernist painting in 1912 when they wrote the '...the joy of confining unlimited art within the limits of the picture is worth the effort it requires'.³⁹ That is Romanesque à la Zodiaque. Yes, there are maps and ground plans, iconographic identifications and dates, histories and descriptions. But these merely nod to the requirements of the travel guide, the art book, identifying where to find the subjects. These elements were not the guiding thought underlying either the choices of monuments or the selection of photographs. The glue that held the enterprise together was the powerful belief in a fresh and edgy presentation of sacred art from the past.

Willibald Sauerländer recently raised the question of whether the term 'Romanesque' is 'A Worn Out Notion'.⁴⁰ He briefly surveyed the usage of various terms for art and architecture that appeared in Europe between the Carolingian and Gothic periods.⁴¹ Although there is general agreement that the 'full flowering' of Romanesque art came in the twelfth century, where this happened and from whence it came continues to be contested, along the lines of Arthur Kingsley Porter, Puig y Cadafalch and others at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴² Sauerländer's overview suggests that perhaps the blanket term 'Romanesque' has replaced these national associations, in spite of Zodiaque's French domination but aided by its ubiquitous use of the term.⁴³ Sauerländer also



Figure 7 Detail from the Escorial Beatus from *Images de l'apocalypse*, [Les Travaux des mois 15] (1977), plate 32. Photograph by the abbey atelier. © Photothèque-Zodiaque

³⁹ Focillon, *Art of the West*, 104; Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Cubism*, first English edition, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913, 5.

⁴⁰ Willibald Sauerländer, 'Romanesque Art 2000: A Worn Out Notion?' in Colum Hourihane, ed., *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 2008, 40-56.

⁴¹ Sauerländer lists the Ottonian style in Germany, the Capetian flowering in France, the 'First Romanesque' of Catalonia, the pre-Norman Saxon forms in England, Lombard decoration in Italy, and so on, Sauerländer, 'Romanesque Art 2000', 41-42ff.

⁴² Arthur Kingsley Porter, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads*, Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1923; Josep Puig i Cadafalch, *Le Premier art roman, l'architecture en catalogne et dans l'occident méditerranéen aux Xe et XIe siècles*, Paris: H. Laurens, 1928.

⁴³ For a review of the historiography of medieval art and the development of the term 'Romanesque', again see Conrad Rudolph, 'Introduction: A Sense of Loss'. The 2005 Louvre exhibition on

tried to address the apparent lack of interest in this art among contemporary students, concluding that study of the Middle Ages has changed overall because '...they [the Middle Ages] have become dead letters. We need new comprehensive studies on the function and life of monuments that have come down to us as empty stone shells and that as images have become isolated as objects of either aesthetic or iconographic interest'.⁴⁴

Did Zodiaque contribute to this isolation? Perhaps—but we must remember that, as influential as they might have been, these volumes were not conceived as art history books. Sometimes art historians wrote accompanying texts that have become canonical studies, and in later years the abbey tried to contract with the very best scholars they could find, but often at the beginning, it was only the local cleric or Surchamp himself who provided their understanding of a site or the photographs accompanied religious texts. Certainly, for Zodiaque, the term 'Romanesque' never 'wore out' because it was a wholly different proposition. No one was asking the reader to judge whether or not something fit the standard taxonomy of art-historical styles or take sides about nationalistic origins or regional forms. There was no whiff of the rising interest, during the same period, of 'social art history'. Zodiaque simply presented its own version of the art, which was so compelling and so attractive, with a bit of dark mystery and lot of graphic contrast, that most people simply forgot the questions when perusing the stunning images. In the end, we are left with an overwhelming catalogue of disconnected details evidencing the myriad manifestations of art in Europe between the seventh and fourteenth centuries, with a strong emphasis on the period 1000-1200.

Surchamp had an artistic eye and he wanted artistic compositions to 'work' as structural forms that captured viewers' attention and made them look more deeply, connect with an expressive content, and open up to intense new explorations of existence, away from rote Catholic formulae.⁴⁵ He had inherited a legacy of the Neo-Benedictine culture in which he took his vows that can be identified with a certain nostalgia, previously couched in more or less kitschy neo-medieval manifestations, such as the products of the art school at the Benedictine monastery of Beuron, founded thirteen years after la Pierre-qui-Vire, in 1863, in Germany.⁴⁶ He did not identify with that notion of medieval art and wanted to use his personal aesthetic insights, based upon modernist painting and his awareness of contemporary theories about sacred art, to rehabilitate the messages of medieval Christian imagery. Perhaps we should credit the Zodiaque enterprise with playing a

Romanesque art raised concerns about nationalism and use of the term 'Romanesque', see: Kathleen Nolan and Susan Leibacher Ward, 'La France romane au temps des premiers Capétiens (987-1152): Musée du Louvre, 10 March-6 June 2005', *Gesta* 44/2 2005, 149-156.

⁴⁴ Willibald Sauerländer, 'Romanesque Art 2000', 52.

⁴⁵ Although the Zodiaque volumes were accepted, the journal *L'Art sacré* faced censure and one of the original monks from the painting atelier in which Surchamp began his work, Frère Yves, found his missals for children, illustrated with brightly colored, naively styled images strongly influenced by Romanesque, condemned and withdrawn from publication by the Church.

⁴⁶ Thanks to Willibald Sauerländer for bringing this to my attention in his letter of July 2009.

key role in the change of our perceptions and critical awareness about medieval art versus those of the Romantics, as enumerated by Conrad Rudolph in his introduction to *A Companion to Medieval Art* of 2006.⁴⁷

The surprises and the harmonies, the balance of opposing irregularities, the liberty confined within an architectonic frame, the honesty and the subtleties—Surchamp thought he'd found both the most profound manifestation of Christian ideals as well as the model for modern artistic standards. He valued the creativity and clarity of early twelfth-century Burgundian non-mimetic representation, then took that interest on the road looking for proto, early, classic, late—the full spectrum—of 'Romanesque'. And ultimately, for the Zodiaque project he had helped initiate, the term 'Romanesque' became a handy catch-all to designate what it presented as the purest visual expression from the western European Christian past.

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⁴⁷ Conrad Rudolph, 'Introduction: A Sense of Loss', 39.