

# CULTURE AND ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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UNIT 10



A medieval manuscript illustration featuring four figures in ornate, colorful robes. The figures are depicted in a traditional style with gold leaf backgrounds and intricate patterns. The central figure is a man in a blue robe, gesturing with his right hand. To his left is a man in a red robe, and to his right are two men in white robes. The background is a mix of gold leaf and blue and red decorative patterns.

# RELIGION

- **Medieval culture** was deeply **religious**. The literature, philosophy and arts of the period reflect a **theocentric mentality**, or in other words, God was at the centre of all things. All daily activities were also governed by religion. Therefore, representatives of the **Catholic Church** exercised strong ideological, economic and social control.
- The Bishop of Rome, the **Pope**, was **head** of the Church. His residence was in Rome. There were two large groups beneath him: the **secular clergy** and the **regular clergy**

# THE SECULAR CLERGY

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The secular clergy was made up of members of the Church who were integrated into society and performed **pastoral functions**: giving the sacrament, officiating at religious ceremonies and preaching. It was organised as follows:



The **basic management** was done by the **priests**, who were in contact with the faithful via the **parishes**.



Above them were the **high clergy**: the bishops managed the **diocese**, made up of a group of parishes; the **archbishops** governed a group of dioceses, the **archdioceses**.

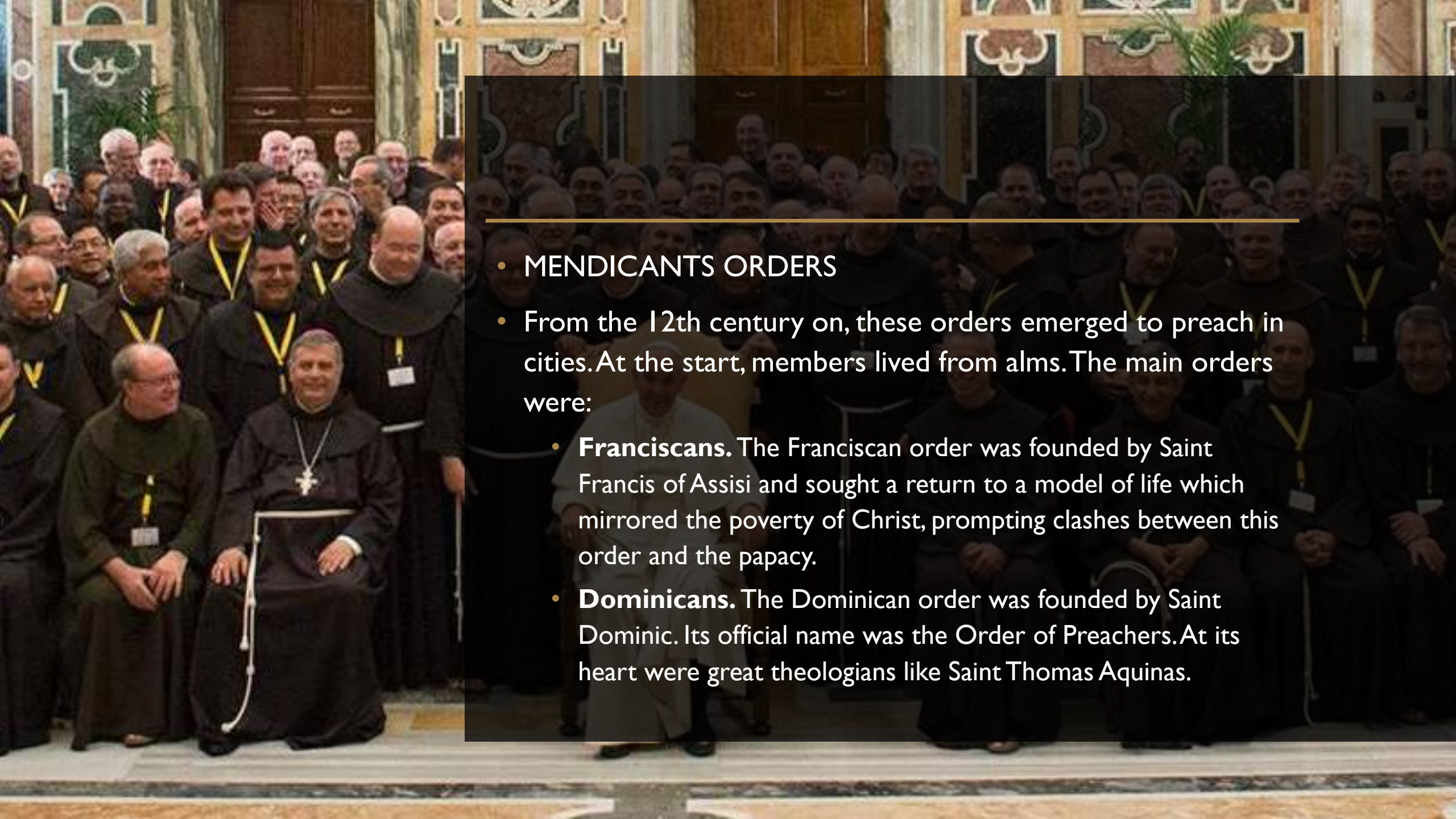




# THE REGULAR CLERGY

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- The **regular clergy** consisted of individuals living in a religious community. They followed **precepts**, which were sets of rules that imposed discipline and organised everyday life. The regular clergy congregated in orders. There were two types: **monastic orders** and **mendicant orders**.
  - **MONASTIC ORDERS**
  - They consisted of monks living in isolated monasteries in rural areas. Most followed the Rule of Saint Benedict, which instructed them to pray and work. The most important monastic orders were:
    - Order of Cluny. This order spread throughout Europe in the 11th century. Its monasteries were very powerful and many farmers worked in them.
    - Cistercian Order. This order was founded in the 12th century in reaction to the wealth that had been accumulated by Cluny. In contrast, it imposed a return to the simple life and manual labour.



- **MENDICANTS ORDERS**

- From the 12th century on, these orders emerged to preach in cities. At the start, members lived from alms. The main orders were:

- **Franciscans.** The Franciscan order was founded by Saint Francis of Assisi and sought a return to a model of life which mirrored the poverty of Christ, prompting clashes between this order and the papacy.
- **Dominicans.** The Dominican order was founded by Saint Dominic. Its official name was the Order of Preachers. At its heart were great theologians like Saint Thomas Aquinas.

# EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGION

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## PILGRIMAGES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

- Pilgrimages were journeys that were undertaken to **venerate holy places**. In return for their efforts, pilgrims obtained **indulgences**; or in other words, their sins were forgiven.
- The most important pilgrimages were those that led to **Jerusalem** and the **Holy Land**, **Rome** and **Santiago de Compostela**.
- A lot of commercial activity revolved around the pilgrims to attend to their needs during their journeys. In addition, pilgrimages allowed the spread of artistic styles and cultural trends. All of these factors contributed to the growth of cities located on pilgrim routes.

# POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

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- Popular religiosity in the Middle Ages was inspired by ancient **Pagan customs** that the Church had christianised, such as funeral rites and festivities related to the seasons. **Saints** were also **worshipped** and processions were made in their honour, their relics were venerated and offerings were made to them. **Preachers incited** the masses to do public acts of penitence, and this sometimes caused violent reactions against the Jews or the rich.
- Finally, there were frequent **heresies**, which were interpretations of religion that deviated from the Church's doctrine. Some of these heresies, like the **Albigensian Heresy**, also known as Catharism, or the **Hussite Heresy**, had a significant social impact.





# THE CRUSADES

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- Christianity launched eight Crusades between 1095 and 1270: **military expeditions** to retake the **Holy Land**. This is the land where Jesus Christ preached and died, which was in the hands of Islam. The Crusades were inspired by the popes, and kings, nobles, knights and poor men took part. Through these initiatives, the popes sought to strengthen their authority and channel the warlike tendencies of the feudal nobility towards a cause that they considered to be just.
- The Crusades were also the origin of **military orders**, made up of knights who were both monks and soldiers. The most important were the **Templars**, who were custodians of the Holy Sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem, and the **Hospitallers**, who cared for pilgrims.

# ACTIVITIES!

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- Who was the European spiritual leader? Where did he live?
- What was the difference between the secular and regular clergy?
- What were the most important places medieval pilgrims traveled to?
- How did pilgrimages contribute to the growth of cities?
- What was the origin of the Crusades?

# ROMANESQUE ART AND CULTURE

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- The Romanesque artistic style developed in feudal Europe between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The most important Romanesque buildings were churches and monasteries, filled with paintings and sculptures that depicted passages from the Bible to a largely illiterate population.
- The expansion of the Benedictine monastic order, which had its origin in the monastery of Cluny (France), was instrumental in the establishment and expansion of the Romanesque style.



# ACTIVITIES!

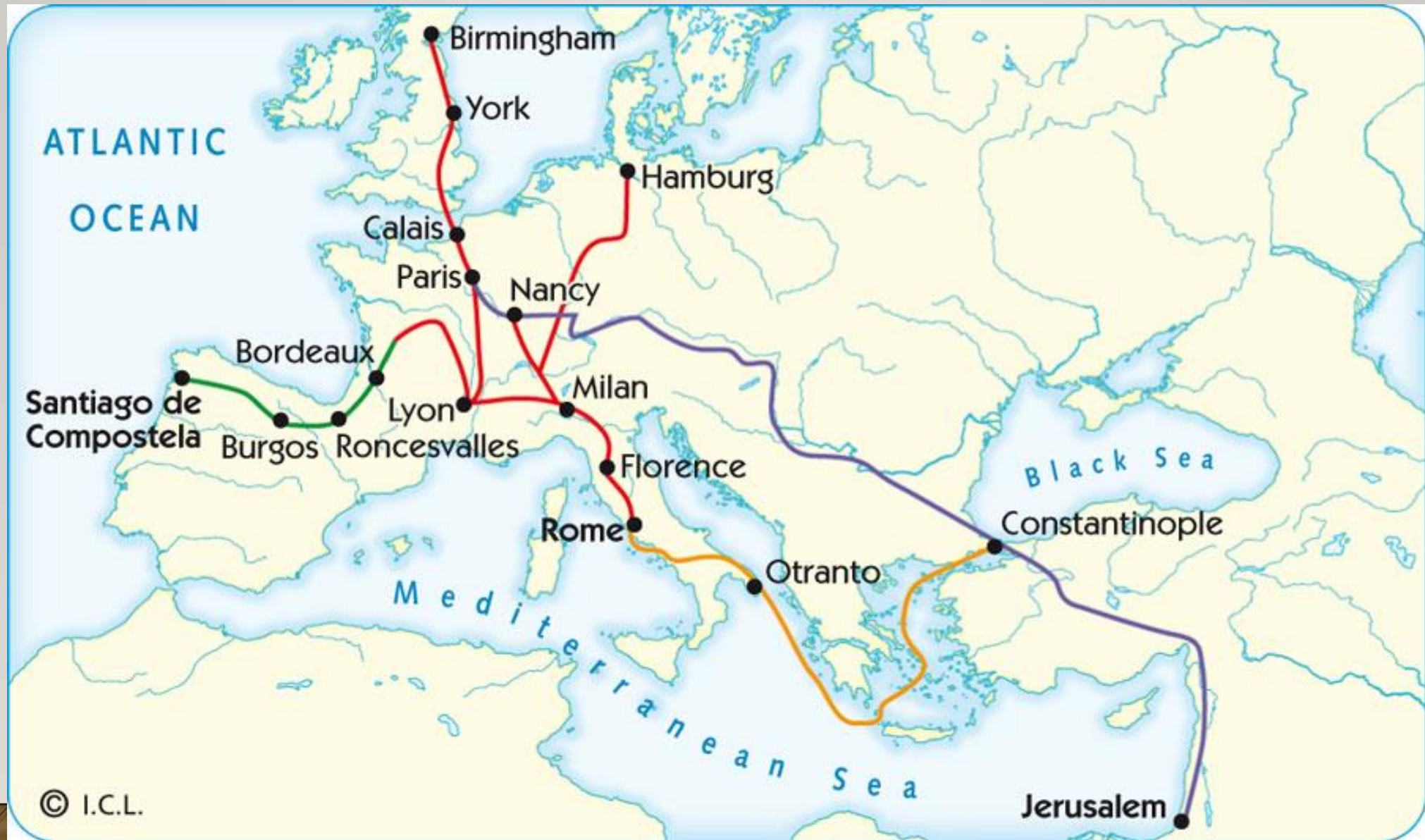
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- Do you think there is a relationship between the Romanesque and Roman artistic styles?
- Where do you think the name Romanesque comes from?
- What is a monastery? Who lives there and what sort of lives do they lead?

# THE RISE OF A NEW STYLE: ROMANESQUE

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- In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the end of the great invasions allowed the economy to develop, the population to grow and churches to be constructed. New villages appeared in which churches were built and parishes established for the faithful.
- From the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Romanesque-style churches were built throughout Christian Europe. It was the first great artistic style to unify all of Christianity.
- The importance of religion during the Middle Ages had a strong influence on art. Therefore, architecture, painting and sculpture strongly depicted the glory of God.

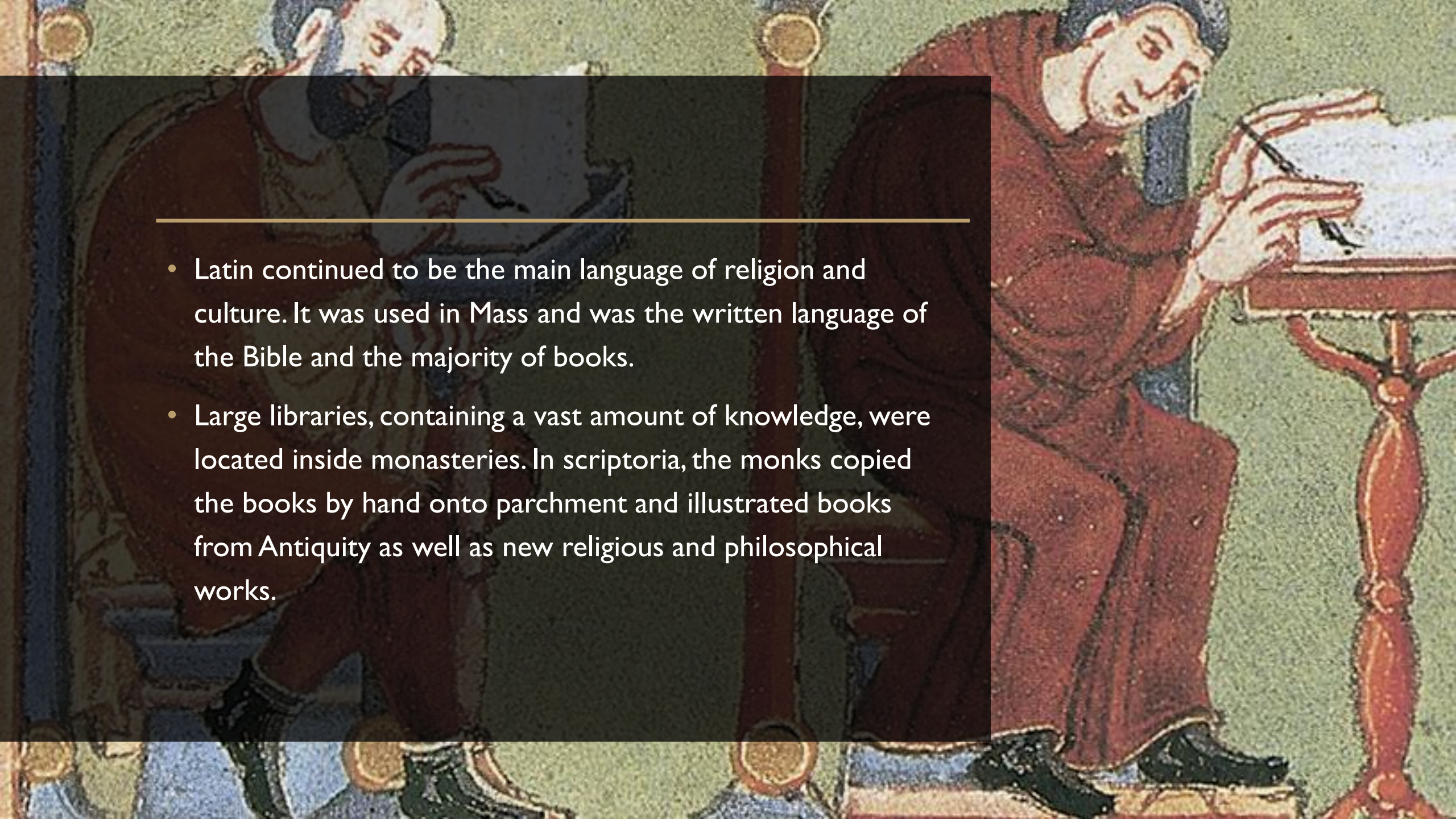


## CULTURE IN THE HANDS OF THE CHURCH

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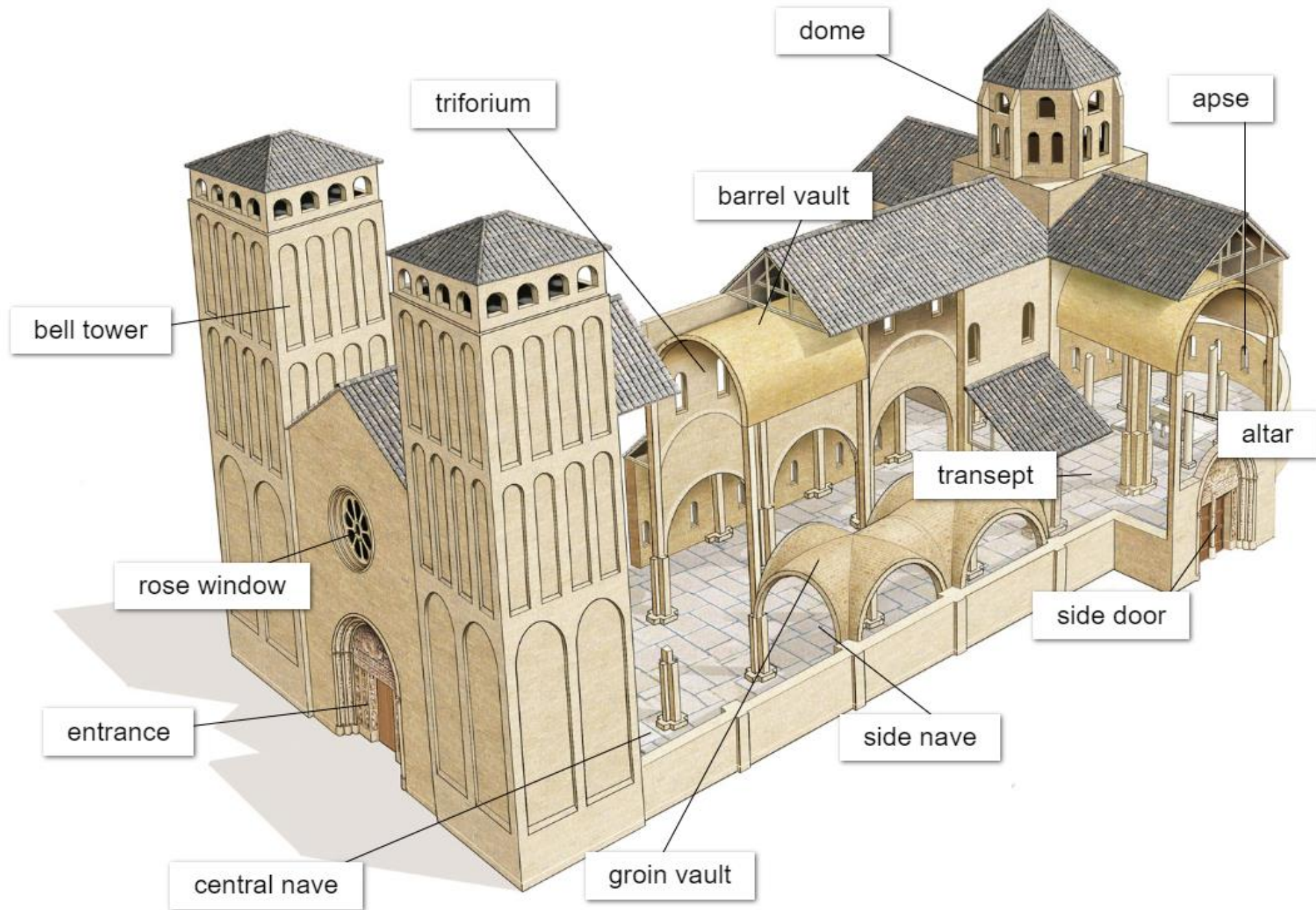
- Society in the Middle Ages was essentially rural and most of the faithful were illiterate.
- Only some members of the clergy and nobility could read and write. It was in church where the faithful could learn about religion and how to be good Christians.
- The clergy were the main repository of culture in the Middle Ages and the monasteries were the most important learning institutions until the creation of universities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In monasteries, people learnt to read and write and studied science and general knowledge.



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- Latin continued to be the main language of religion and culture. It was used in Mass and was the written language of the Bible and the majority of books.
  - Large libraries, containing a vast amount of knowledge, were located inside monasteries. In scriptoria, the monks copied the books by hand onto parchment and illustrated books from Antiquity as well as new religious and philosophical works.



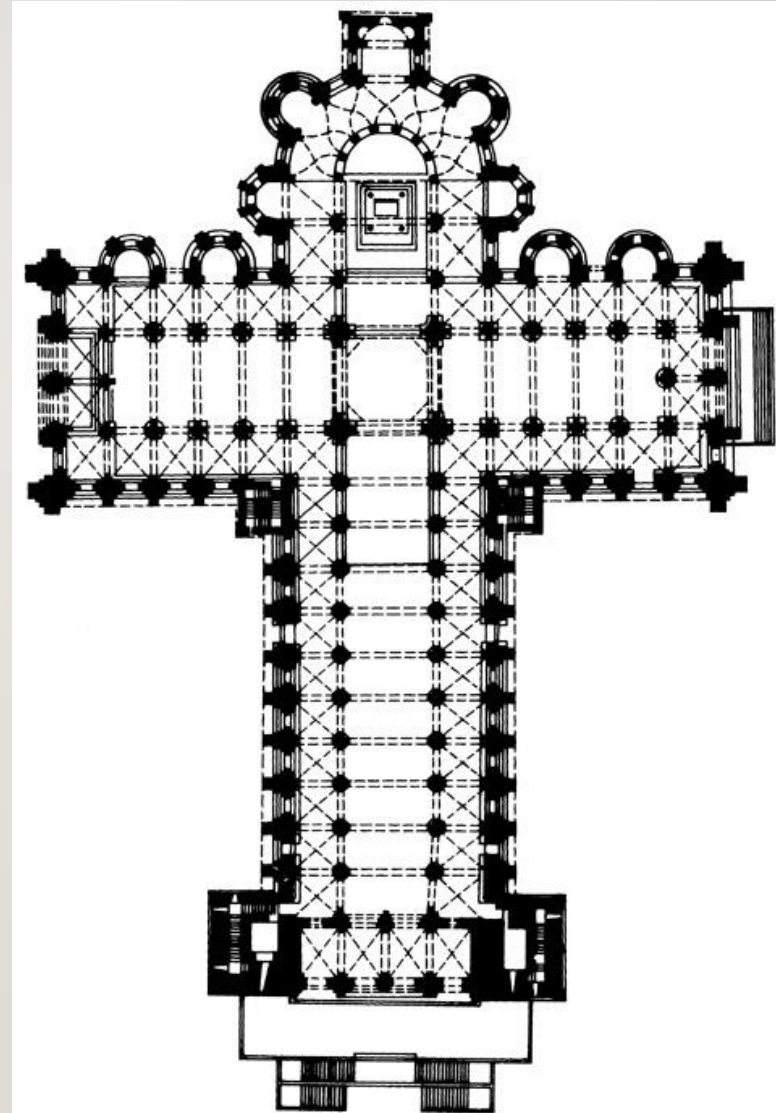




## THE FLOOR PLAN

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- Romanesque churches replaced the basilica-shaped floor design of Byzantine churches with the shape of a Latin cross to symbolise the place where Jesus died. The church floor consisted of a long section that housed the naves and shorter section (transept). The place where they met was called the crossing and normally had a tower or dome above it.
- The top part of the cross contained a central semi-circular apse, where the altar was found. Pilgrimage churches also had an ambulatory so pilgrims could move around. It was also common to build a bell tower next to the main entrance. It was used to announce the time for prayer or as a watchtower



# VAULTS, WALLS AND ARCHES

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- Large stone vaults replaced the old wooden roofs, which were very damp and flammable. First, they used semi-circular barrel vaults that were divided into sections by arches. Later, the intersection of two barrel vaults resulted in the groin vault.
- Because the vaults were heavy, the supporting walls had to be very thick with only a few small spaces for windows. They were reinforced with huge pillars or columns inside and solid buttresses outside. A semi-circular arch was used to attach the pillars to the walls and was also used in doors and windows, where they supported capitals.



## THE MAIN ENTRANCE

- The main entrance was usually on the west façade and symbolised the door to Heavenly Jerusalem. Some churches had one door flanked by an arch, which connected directly with the central nave. In others, there are two more doors that aligned with the side naves.
- All the doors were lavishly decorated with reliefs and sculptures.



# MONASTIC ORDERS

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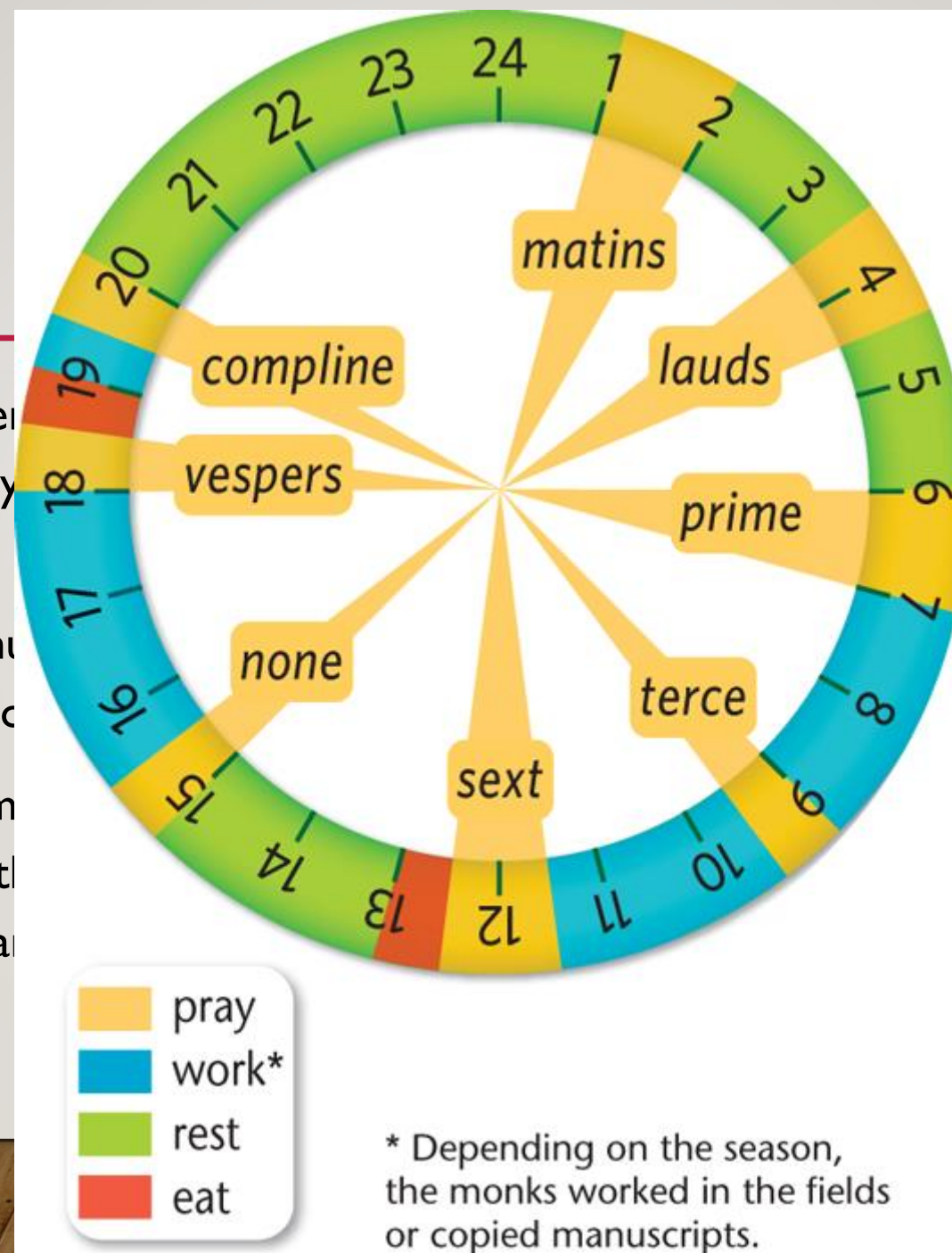
- Monasteries were inhabited by monastic orders, which could be either male or female. They were governed by an abbot or abbess, who had overall authority. However, they had to consult the rest of the community on the most important issues.
- The orders were subject to monastic rules that explained how the monastery should be organised and how the monks or nuns should live.



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- The Benedictine Order was the most important. They founded St. Benedict of Nursia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Italy and the movement spread throughout Europe. The Rule of St. Benedict consisted of 73 chapters that regulated monastic activities.
  - The Cistercian Order was a reform of the Benedictine Order and spread alongside the Gothic style from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

# DAILY LIFE

- Prior Pedro's activities were *ora et labora*. The habits they followed were dictated by monastic rule.
- Not all the monks and nuns worked in the fields. Some worked in the *scriptorium* (library), copying manuscripts in the afternoon.
- Monks and nuns spent most of their day in the dining hall while one of them went to walk, meditate and pray.



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# ACTIVITIES

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- What was a monastic rule?
- How did monks and nuns spend their days?
- Correct the sentences.
  - Monasteries were governed by a feudal lord.
  - To be ordained, novice monks and nuns had to make four vows.
  - Monks and nuns could live together in the same monastery.
  - They ate together in silence.
  - Monks met the abbot in the cloister.

# ROMANESQUE PAINTING

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- The functions of Romanesque painting were educational (to teach the faithful), moralising (helping people to distinguish right from wrong) and decorative (to cover the cold, stone walls).

# A VERY EXPRESSIVE STYLE

- Romanesque painting in general had certain common characteristics:
  - It was technically very simple and had no depth, volume or perspective.
  - Figures were usually uniform in colour, predominantly blue and red, with thick outlines.
  - People were always forward-facing and stylised and were strongly anti-naturalistic and hieratic. However, they managed to express abstract ideas through symbolism.
  - Scenes were adapted to the architectural framework. Characters were arranged hierarchically so that the more important ones were larger. There was little or no empty space (horror vacui).
  - The most common motifs were scenes from the Bible and the lives of saints. There were also representations of everyday life, but always with a moral content.



## FRESCOS, PANEL PAINTINGS AND MINIATURES

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- The walls and the apses of the churches were covered with frescos. For colours, they used earth, mixed with egg or other natural glues.
- Paintings on wooden boards covered with a fine layer of plaster (panel paintings) were also made, to cover the front of the altar or the apse. They all had very geometrical designs, framing the different scenes.
- Miniatures were also very important for decorating and illustrating religious books. These paintings were small but detailed and full of colour.



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# FRESCO PAINTING

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- The creation of frescos was a complex task, requiring a precise technique.
- The wall was prepared with layers of mortar and a thin layer of lime-based plaster on top.
- The artist drew an outline on parchment.
- Holes were made in the parchment along the outline of the drawing. The parchment was placed in the corresponding position on the wall and the artist blew soot through the holes, onto the plaster on the wall.
- Finally, pigments diluted in water were applied to the plaster. The plaster was sprinkled with water from time to time as it was not possible to use this technique on a dry wall.



# ACTIVITIES

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- What were the main subjects of Romanesque art?
- Where were panel paintings used?
- Choose five adjectives that you think best describe Romanesque art.

# ROMANESQUE SCULPTURE

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- Although Romanesque churches were intended to be a perfect fusion between architecture, painting and sculpture, architecture was clearly dominant. Sculptures had to conform to the shape and dimensions of the surface on which they were made.
- The sculptures were rigid, lacked perspective, had relief themes and featured hieratic figures. Sculptural groups were organised hierarchically and geometrically according to their importance.
- Although most sculptures were attached to buildings, religious carvings made of wood and brightly-coloured polychrome were also found on church altars. The major themes were the crucifixion of Christ and the Virgin and Child.





- The capitals that appeared on columns in cloisters were another important decorative feature.
- Most of the imagery was religious with Biblical characters and scenes. Some were historiated capitals that narrated entire stories scene by scene.
- Scenes from everyday life were also shown. The clothes, tools and tasks performed by the figures in the sculptures tell us about feudal society.
- Real or fantastical animals, which had a symbolic value, and plant motifs, such as volutes, acanthus leaves, stems and flowers, were also used.



## ENTRANCES: A STONE BIBLE

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- Sculptures and reliefs followed an order and distribution, which was repeated with minor variations in all Romanesque churches.
- Sculptures and reliefs were mainly located at the entrance to inspire terror among the faithful as they entered the church.

