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Comparative Essay: Early Christian, Early Islamic, and Early Buddhist architecture

# Introduction

The history of any religion is illustrated in the early architecture of these religions. These religions play a vital role in giviving recognition to the historical architectural in the modern world. The architectural forms were an expressive form of religion. There is no particular type of architectural style that is common to these religions since different kinds of religious practices and activities prompt these styles.

# Discussion

### Early Christian Architecture

The early architecture in Christianity did not differ much from domestic architecture. It was highly influenced by the Roman architecture which existed prior to the advent of Christianity. The basilica style included timber trussed roofs and large rectangular halls for mass congregations, two Isles on each side, a central nave and a principal entrance. The architecture was more centralized in nature. Many early structures of the church also included a dome on the roof with decorated shapes and pillars inspired from Greek architectural designs. The primary architectural designs included churches and tombs.

### Early Islamic Architecture

The early Islamic architecture was largely influenced by the Byzantine, Roman and Persian styles of architecture. The primary architectural types of Islamic architecture were the Mosques, Palaces, tombs, and forts. They were inspired by the Christian style of architecture prevalent at the time. The early Islamic architecture featured a dome, the horseshoe arches, tapered brick pillars, large arcades, and a minaret which resembles one high pillar. The structures are well decorated with Arabic motifs, calligraphy, and geometrical figures. Moreover, the obstruction of Mihrab in the mosques was also a significant feature shared by early Islamic architectural designs.

Early Buddhist Architecture

The early Buddhist architecture developed in India. The early Buddhist structures were the monasteries, shrines, prayer halls and relics (stupas). They are associated with the rock structures, and those carved out of the mountain cliffs and in caves. The stupas are more like sculpted structures rather than buildings. The early Buddhist architecture contained a large hemispherical dome, stands elevated and is circular in shape with decorative carvings all over them. It is surrounded by a square boundary. Another significant feature of the early Buddhist architecture is the monolithic stone pillars emerging from a lotus and carvings all over them hey also include congregation halls with rock-cut structures, with arch-shaped entrances.

How do they Differ?

The most common difference in the Christian, Islamic and Buddhist early architecture is that they existed in different times at different places standing tall to represent different beliefs and different religions. The Saint Peter’s Basilica is a Roman architectural design while the great mosque of Cordoba is a classic example of Moorish architecture in Spain however the structure for the Great Stupa takes inspiration from Hindu temples. The Great Stupa situated in Sanchi is one of the greatest stone structures in India. The architectural designs of structures significantly differ from their sizes to their decorative styles. The Saint Peters Basilica is decorated with paintings and baroque styled sculpting, while the elements of decoration in the Cordoba mosque are reflective of calligraphy and geometric styles in contrastive colors whereas the Great Stupa in Sanchi is a stone structure with animals and floral patterns carved on it. The inspiration for these three designs also differs significantly from each other.

How are they Similar?

There are many similarities when it comes to the structure and design of these architectural designs. The most common characteristics in these architectural designs were inspired by the architectural designs that existed prior to them. The early Christian architecture was inspired by Roman architecture, early Islamic architecture was inspired by Christian architecture that existed before them, and the early Buddhist architecture took inspiration from the Hindu temples. Moreover, certain physical features such as the presence of dome, congregation halls, Roman style columns, horseshoe arch, and pillars stay common to them.