Unit 3 Discussion

Kaitlyn Roark

[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

Author Note

Gothic Architecture of Cathedrals

Cathedrals based on Gothic architecture focused on height to enhance the sense of power of God and to reinforce influence of the Church. The great size of the Churches left people in awe of the magnificence of the structures which swayed people even further into the ambit of religion. This was especially pertinent in the medieval era because such massive uninterrupted vertical spaces were unseen at the time. The fact that most of population at the time was illiterate and prone to influence from anything they considered ‘super-human’, the height of Gothic Cathedrals served to augment their belief and made them more devout towards the church.

Another factor that influenced the height of the Gothic Cathedral was the ongoing Crusades. Relics were brought in by returning Crusaders which had to be displayed prominently; hence the need for increased height as hordes of worshippers on pilgrimage kept on increasing in number. Moreover, natural light was the primary source of illumination so greater windows and open spaces had to be created to provide sufficient light. This need to dispel darkness and illuminate the Cathedrals pushed masons to build bigger and wider windows that inspired the great size of the Gothic Cathedrals. Greater illumination was also important because it had a dramatic effect on the faithful who associated light with mysticism and worship. One of the first cathedrals to adopt huge windows design was Basilica Saint-Denis upon its remodeling, inspired by The Abbot Suger. Not wanting to be left behind - unsurprisingly - other cathedrals soon followed suit.

The three major structural characteristics of Gothic architecture were ribbed vaults (connecting the several stone columns for greater strength), flying buttresses (structures that shifted the enormous weight of the roof outwards towards external elements) and the pointed arch. These design elements were central to enable the construction of high columns which provided great vertical height.