

4-1-2008

## The Clash of Civilizations through Art

Kelsie Lysen  
*Roger Williams University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/rr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lysen, Kelsie (2008) "The Clash of Civilizations through Art," *Reason and Respect*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 10.  
Available at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/rr/vol4/iss1/10>

Copyright ©4-1-2008 by the authors  
Reason and Respect is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).  
For more information, please contact [mwu@rwu.edu](mailto:mwu@rwu.edu).

## **The Clash of Civilizations through Art**

### **Kelsie Lysen, Art and Architectural History '11**

Throughout time, civilizations have fought each other for many reasons. It is one opinion that conflict among civilizations results from significant cultural differences and not from economic or political reasons. Civilizations express their cultural identity through art and architecture, much of which, in ancient civilizations, is of a religious nature. Focusing on religious depictions in art and architecture, one can see that early Christian art is much different from Islamic art and that Christian architecture evolved due to the clash between Christians and Muslims during the Crusades.

Early Christians believed in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Christians used catacombs for burials and funeral services. The Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus has a painted ceiling that depicts the Good Shepherd, orant figures, and the story of Jonah. Located in Rome during the late third-early fourth century, this is one example of religion being expressed through art. Sculpture was another form of religious expression. On the sarcophagus found in the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua, many figures are depicted. These figures strike natural poses and are draped in cloth that is revealing. This sarcophagus is also located in Rome and is made out of marble. It is dated around 270. These different forms of art and architecture express Early Christianity. The Bible stories are told through the use of figures like actors on a stage. The stories told, Jonah and the whale and Abraham and Isaac for example, are allegories and prefigurations of religious principle. In addition, single figures like the Good Shepherd stand as evocations of Christ.

In contrast to the Christian faith, the Muslim faith does not encourage figures being represented in religious themed art and architecture. Mohammad in founding the religion banned images he considered pagan idols from holy sites. Figural imagery detracted from worship of Allah. This is much different from Christian art where figures were celebrated and revered. The Great Mosque of Cordoba was one prayer hall built with many arches and painted stripes, but no figures. Located in Spain, it began construction in 785. This attention to detail in the design and architecture is just one way Muslims celebrated their religion. The Dome in Front of Mihrab on the Great Mosque, which was constructed in 965, also shows very complex design located in the geometric configuration. It reflects the very structured way the religion is practiced. As one of the Five Pillars of Islam, a personal relationship with God requires daily prayer at prescribed times with certain ritualistic gestures.

During the Romanesque period, Christian architecture took a new turn due to the Crusades. The Crusades introduced Europeans to goods from the Middle East, stimulating trade, as well as to new cultures that were reflected in Romanesque architecture. The Church of Saint Vincent in Cardona, constructed in 1040, used a type of floor plan that came to be known as Benedictine. The designers used the techniques of the Late Roman and Early Christian architects, but added more. They created a decorative system that enlivened the stone wall expands of the Church. Elaboration of architectural forms referenced the Islamic architecture seen in the East. In addition, since

the Christians won many Muslim victories, travel became more available to Europeans and more Christians began making religious pilgrimages to see famous relics. Thus, Pilgrimage Churches were built along the road that contained famous relics of saints. One famous pilgrimage church was the Cathedral of Saint James located in Galicia, Spain. Here, the plan was to build the shape in a type of crucifix so pilgrims could enter and leave easily and keep crowds down so everyone could see the relics. This cathedral was very different from the church plans of Early Christianity and definitely differed from the way Muslims expressed their religious beliefs in art and architecture.

Early Christian and Islamic faith were born with different emphasis on religious ritual. Islam emphasizes group prayer and ritual structure. Christianity developed elaborate hierarchical procession and pageantry. The spaces designed to enact these faithful traditions embody their differences. Christianity, through the Crusades and growing familiarity with the East, borrowed forms which they then applied to their buildings.