

# **SOKKURAM GROTTO**

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** Religion

**OBJECTIVE:** To explore Sokkuram Grotto

**MATERIALS:** PowerPoint presentation on Sokkuram Grotto (attached)

**PROCEDURE:** Present each slide in PowerPoint presentation and discuss

## **Sokkuram Grotto:**

### **Sacred Spaces in Korea**

"Form follows function-that has been misunderstood. Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union."

**Frank Lloyd Wright**



# Historical Background

- Buddhism first reached Korea in the fourth century CE; it passed from India, through central Asia to China, then to Korea.
- The Kingdom of Silla officially recognized Buddhism as state religion during the mid-seventh century.
- Unified Silla leadership used Buddhism to justify and consolidate its authority; it resulted in an era of great building in Korea.
- This building commemorates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of unification of the Three Kingdoms in Korea under Unified Silla rule.
- Sokkuram Grotto and Pulguk Temple were built by the Unified Silla royal family as a manifestation of the ideal world of a Buddhist land.



## Location of Sokkuram Grotto



- **The 1200 year old cave temple is located near the summit of Mt. Toham in Kyongsangbuk-do Province in the southeastern region of Korea.**

Far beyond the mountain ranges at the southeastern tip of the Korean Peninsula, Sokkuram overlooks the East Sea; The site was believed to act as a protective force and supernatural defense against external threats.



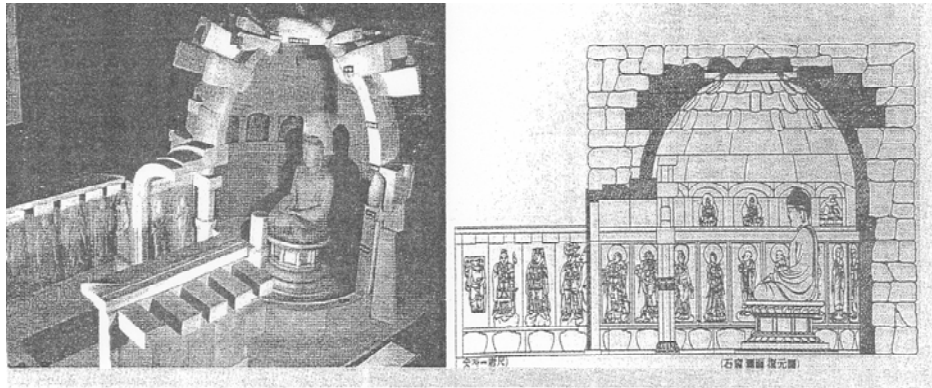
**Buddhist grottos originated in ancient India, but came to Korea through Chinese interaction.**



- Today, it takes about an hour-long walk up a steep winding mountain path to reach the famous eighth century temple cave which testifies to the enthusiasm and sacrifice of early Korean pilgrim monks.

## Sokkuram Grotto Design

- The grotto was designed to be private sanctuary.
- The layout followed the traditions of ancient Indian cave temples while adapting to Korea's mountainous typography.
- The grotto has a rectangular front room and a circular room connected by a passage way.
- The passage way symbolizes the worshiper leaving behind the secular world to find Buddha in the main rotunda.

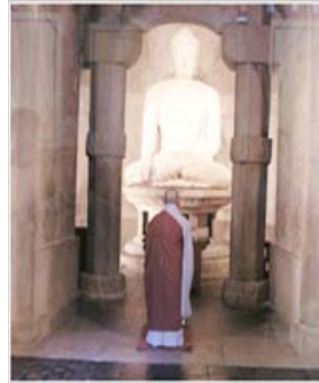


Construction of Sokkuram began during the reign of king Kyongdok in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, under the guidance of Silla Prime minister Kim Tae-song.



## Grotto Construction

- It took 24 years to complete.
- Unlike Chinese rock cave temples, this Korean one is human-made.
- It is made of locally found white granite.
- It was a “caitya”: a sanctuary to house a sacred object to be worshiped.
- It was built as a private chapel for Silla royalty, not as a public site.



## The Antechamber

- The rectangular antechamber marks the transition from earth to heaven, secular to divine.
- Natural ventilation provides control of temperature and humidity.

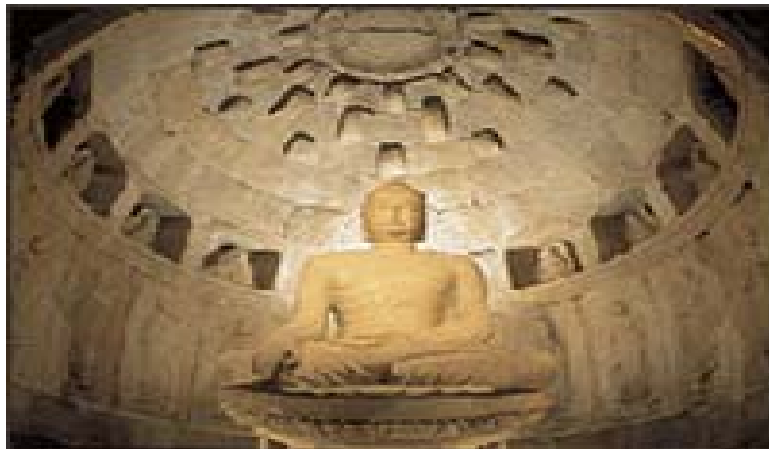


# The Rotunda

- The rotunda is formed with hundreds of granite stones held together with stone rivets; no mortar is used in the structure.
- The rotunda represents heaven and the rectangular antechamber represents earth.
- The Buddha sits in the center surrounded by three bodhisattvas, ten disciples and two Hindu gods carved in *bas relief*.

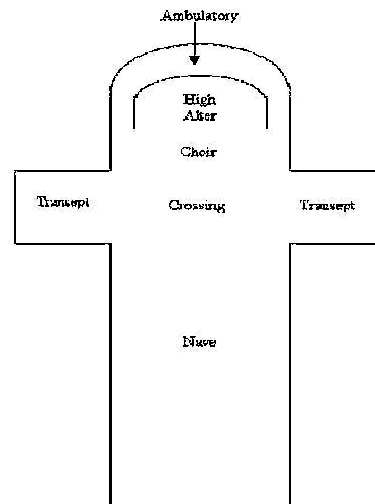


The domed ceiling is capped with a round granite plate decorated with a lotus design.

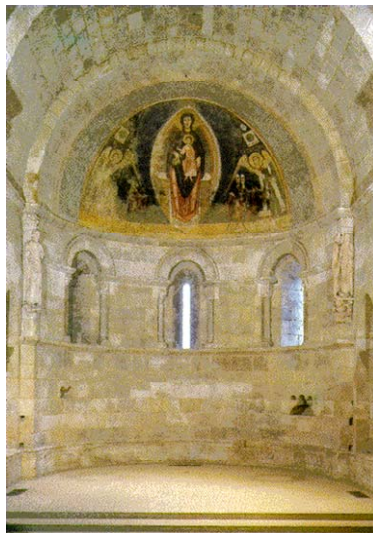


## Cross Cultural Comparisons: Romanesque Architecture in Europe 800-1100 CE

- What similarities and differences do you see with this Romanesque floor plan?
- How might you account for these similarities and differences?



## Romanesque Structures



- How is this Romanesque rotunda similar to and different from the Sokkuram rotunda?
- What might account for these similarities and differences?

# Bibliography

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