Alongside canonical subjects from the Old and New Testaments, Romanesque art presents a wide corpus of monstrous, grotesque and fantastic imagery, depiction of explicitly sexual subjects (for example intercourse) and other obscure subjects.
The existence of these images is often surprising to the modern viewer, but has also astonished the contemporary learned abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote in his celebrated *Apologia* of ca. 1125: "What are the filthy apes doing there? The fierce lions? The monstrous centaurs?....You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body. On one side the tail of a serpent is seen on a quadruped, on the other side, the head of a quadruped is on the body of a fish…” (trans. following Thomas E. A. Dale).

The seminar wishes to study this wide corpus of images, while discussing the varied and multileveled contexts of the monstrous and the grotesque in Romanesque Art. We will ask how are these images connected to notions of margins and marginality (both the physical margins of the building and the margins of society)? what is the connection between monstrosity and the depiction of the 'other' (infidels, Muslims, Jews)? and how are all these perceptions connected to the concept of apotropaic imagery – protecting against demons and malevolent forces? In addition the seminar will analyze the different methods used to decipher Romanesque monstrous and grotesque images, and question the basic assumptions and different conception behind each approach.


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