

= Book of Kells =

The Book of Kells (Irish : Leabhar Cheanannais ; Dublin , Trinity College Library , MS A. I. [58] , sometimes known as the Book of Columba) is an illuminated manuscript Gospel book in Latin , containing the four Gospels of the New Testament together with various prefatory texts and tables . It was created in a Columban monastery in Ireland or may have had contributions from various Columban institutions from both Britain and Ireland . It is believed to have been created c . 800 . The text of the Gospels is largely drawn from the Vulgate , although it also includes several passages drawn from the earlier versions of the Bible known as the Vetus Latina . It is a masterwork of Western calligraphy and represents the pinnacle of Insular illumination . It is also widely regarded as Ireland 's finest national treasure .

The illustrations and ornamentation of the Book of Kells surpass that of other Insular Gospel books in extravagance and complexity . The decoration combines traditional Christian iconography with the ornate swirling motifs typical of Insular art . Figures of humans , animals and mythical beasts , together with Celtic knots and interlacing patterns in vibrant colours , enliven the manuscript 's pages . Many of these minor decorative elements are imbued with Christian symbolism and so further emphasise the themes of the major illustrations .

The manuscript today comprises 340 folios and , since 1953 , has been bound in four volumes . The leaves are on high @-@ quality calf vellum , and the unprecedentedly elaborate ornamentation that covers them includes ten full @-@ page illustrations and text pages that are vibrant with decorated initials and interlinear miniatures and mark the furthest extension of the anti @-@ classical and energetic qualities of Insular art . The Insular majuscule script of the text itself appears to be the work of at least three different scribes . The lettering is in iron gall ink , and the colours used were derived from a wide range of substances , many of which were imports from distant lands .

The manuscript takes its name from the Abbey of Kells , which was its home for centuries . Today , it is on permanent display at Trinity College Library , Dublin . The Library usually displays two of the current four volumes at a time , one showing a major illustration and the other showing typical text pages , and the entire manuscript can be viewed on the Library 's Digital Collections Repository .

= = History = =

= = = Origin = = =

The Book of Kells is one of the finest and most famous of a group of manuscripts in what is known as the Insular style , produced from the late 6th through the early 9th centuries in monasteries in Ireland , Scotland and England and in continental monasteries with Hiberno @-@ Scottish or Anglo @-@ Saxon foundations . These manuscripts include the Cathach of St. Columba , the Ambrosiana Orosius , fragmentary Gospel in the Durham Dean and Chapter Library (all from the early 7th century) , and the Book of Durrow (from the second half of the 7th century) . From the early 8th century come the Durham Gospels , the Echternach Gospels , the Lindisfarne Gospels (see illustration at right) , and the Lichfield Gospels . Among others , the St. Gall Gospel Book belongs to the late 8th century and the Book of Armagh (dated to 807 ? 809) to the early 9th century . Scholars place these manuscripts together based on similarities in artistic style , script , and textual traditions . The fully developed style of the ornamentation of the Book of Kells places it late in this series , either from the late 8th or early 9th century . The Book of Kells follows many of the iconographic and stylistic traditions found in these earlier manuscripts . For example , the form of the decorated letters found in the incipit pages for the Gospels is surprisingly consistent in Insular Gospels . Compare , for example , the incipit pages of the Gospel of Matthew in the Lindisfarne Gospels and in the Book of Kells , both of which feature intricate decorative knot work patterns inside the outlines formed by the enlarged initial letters of the text . (For a more complete list of related manuscripts , see : List of Hiberno @-@ Saxon illustrated manuscripts) .

The name Book of Kells is derived from the Abbey of Kells in Kells , County Meath , which was its home for much of the medieval period . The manuscript 's date and place of production have been the subject of considerable debate . Traditionally , the book was thought to have been created in the time of Columba , possibly even as the work of his own hands . This tradition has long been discredited on paleographic and stylistic grounds : most evidence points to a composition date c . 800 , long after St. Columba 's death in 597 . The proposed dating in the 9th century coincides with Viking raids on Iona , which began in 794 and eventually dispersed the monks and their holy relics into Ireland and Scotland . There is another tradition , with some traction among Irish scholars , that suggests the manuscript was created for the 200th anniversary of the saint 's death .

There are at least five competing theories about the manuscript 's place of origin and time of completion . First , the book , or perhaps just the text , may have been created at Iona , then brought to Kells , where the illuminations were perhaps added , and never finished . Second , the book may have been produced entirely at Iona . Third , the manuscript may have been produced entirely in the scriptorium at Kells . Fourth , it may have been produced in the north of England , perhaps at Lindisfarne , then brought to Iona and from there to Kells . Finally , it may have been the product of an unknown monastery in Pictish Scotland , though there is no actual evidence for this theory , especially considering the absence of any surviving manuscript from Pictland . Although the question of the exact location of the book 's production will probably never be answered conclusively , the first theory , that it was begun at Iona and continued at Kells , is widely accepted . Regardless of which theory is true , it is certain that the Book of Kells was produced by Columban monks closely associated with the community at Iona .

= = = Medieval period = = =

Kells Abbey was plundered and pillaged by Vikings many times in the 10th century , and how the book survived is not known . The earliest historical reference to the book , and indeed to the book 's presence at Kells , can be found in a 1007 entry in the Annals of Ulster . This entry records that " the great Gospel of Columkille , (Columba) the chief relic of the Western World , was wickedly stolen during the night from the western sacristy of the great stone church at Cenannas on account of its wrought shrine " . The manuscript was recovered a few months later ? minus its golden and bejewelled cover ? " under a sod " . It is generally assumed that the " great Gospel of Columkille " is the Book of Kells . If this is correct , then the book was in Kells by 1007 and had been there long enough for thieves to learn of its presence . The force of ripping the manuscript free from its cover may account for the folios missing from the beginning and end of the Book of Kells . The description in the Annals of the book as " of Columkille " ? that is , having belonged to , and perhaps being made by Columba ? suggests that the book was believed at that time to have been made on Iona .

Regardless , the book was certainly at Kells in the 12th century , when land charters pertaining to the Abbey of Kells were copied onto some of its blank pages . The practice of copying of charters into important books was widespread in the medieval period , and such inscriptions in the Book of Kells provide concrete evidence about its location at the time .

The Abbey of Kells was dissolved due to the ecclesiastical reforms of the 12th century . The abbey church was converted to a parish church in which the Book of Kells remained .

= = = = Book of Kildare = = = =

The 12th @-@ century writer Gerald of Wales , in his *Topographia Hibernica* , described in a famous passage seeing a great Gospel Book in Kildare which many have since assumed was the Book of Kells . The description certainly matches Kells :

This book contains the harmony of the Four Evangelists according to Jerome , where for almost every page there are different designs , distinguished by varied colours . Here you may see the face of majesty , divinely drawn , here the mystic symbols of the Evangelists , each with wings , now six , now four , now two ; here the eagle , there the calf , here the man and there the lion , and other forms almost infinite . Look at them superficially with the ordinary glance , and you would think it is

an erasure , and not tracery . Fine craftsmanship is all about you , but you might not notice it . Look more keenly at it and you will penetrate to the very shrine of art . You will make out intricacies , so delicate and so subtle , so full of knots and links , with colours so fresh and vivid , that you might say that all this were the work of an angel , and not of a man .

Since Gerald claims to have seen this book in Kildare , he may have seen another , now lost , book equal in quality to the Book of Kells , or he may have misstated his location .

= = = Modern period = = =

The Book of Kells remained in Kells until 1654 . In that year , Cromwell 's cavalry was quartered in the church at Kells , and the governor of the town sent the book to Dublin for safekeeping . Henry Jones , who later became bishop of Meath after the Restoration , presented the manuscript to Trinity College in Dublin in 1661 , and it has remained there ever since , except for brief loans to other libraries and museums . It has been on display to the public in the Old Library at Trinity since the 19th century .

Over the years , the Book of Kells received several additions to its text . In the 16th century , one Gerald Plunkett of Dublin added a series of Roman numerals numbering the chapters of the Gospels according to the division created by 13th @-@ century Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton . The prominent Anglican clergyman James Ussher counted and numbered its folios in 1621 , shortly after James VI and I named him Bishop of Meath . Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were invited to sign the book in 1849 ; however , they in fact signed a modern flyleaf which was erroneously believed to have been one of the original folios . The page bearing their signatures was removed when the book was rebound in 1953 .

Over the centuries , the book has been rebound several times . During an 18th @-@ century rebinding , the pages were rather unsympathetically cropped , with small parts of some illustrations being lost . The book was also rebound in 1895 , but that rebinding broke down quickly . By the late 1920s , several folios had detached completely and were kept separate from the main volume . In 1953 , bookbinder Roger Powell rebound the manuscript in four volumes and stretched several pages that had developed bulges . Two volumes can normally be seen displayed at Trinity , one opened at a major decorated page , and one opened to show two text pages with smaller decorations .

In 2000 , the volume containing the Gospel of Mark was sent to Canberra , Australia , for an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts . This was only the fourth time the Book of Kells had been sent abroad for exhibition . Unfortunately , the volume suffered what has been called " minor pigment damage " while en route to Canberra . It is thought that the vibrations from the aeroplane 's engines during the long flight may have caused the damage .

= = = Reproductions = = =

In 1951 , the Swiss publisher Urs Graf Verlag Bern produced the first facsimile of the Book of Kells . The majority of the pages were reproduced in black @-@ and @-@ white photographs , but the edition also featured forty @-@ eight colour reproductions , including all the full @-@ page decorations . Under licence from the Board of Trinity College Dublin , Thames and Hudson produced a second facsimile edition in 1974 . This edition included all the full @-@ page illustrations in the manuscript and a representative section of the ornamentation of the text pages , together with some enlarged details of the illustrations . The reproductions were all in full colour , with photography by John Kennedy , Green Studio , Dublin .

In 1979 , Swiss publisher Faksimile @-@ Verlag Luzern requested permission to produce a full @-@ colour facsimile of the book . Permission was initially denied , because Trinity College officials felt that the risk of damage to the book was too high . By 1986 , Faksimile @-@ Verlag had developed a process that used gentle suction to straighten a page so that it could be photographed without touching it and so won permission to publish a new facsimile . After each page was photographed , a single @-@ page facsimile was prepared so the colours could be carefully

compared to the original and adjustments made where necessary . The completed work was published in 1990 in a two @-@ volume set containing the full facsimile and scholarly commentary . One copy is held by the Anglican Church in Kells , on the site of the original monastery .

Mario Kleff also reproduced folios from the Book of Kells and together with Faksimile @-@ Verlag Publisher Urs Duggelin , curated an exhibition of the Book of Kells which included these facsimile pages . These facsimiles were created using the original techniques and were also presented in the Diocesan Museum of Trier .

In 1994 , Bernard Meehan , Keeper of Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin , produced an introductory booklet on the Book of Kells , with 110 colour images of the manuscript . His 2012 book contained more than 80 pages from the manuscript reproduced full @-@ size and in full colour .

A digital copy of the manuscript was produced by Trinity College in 2006 and was made available for purchase through Trinity College on DVD @-@ Rom . It included the ability to leaf through each page , two pages at a time or look at a single page in a magnified setting . There were also a number of commentary tracks about the specific pages as well as the history of the book . Users were given the option to search by specific illuminated categories including animals , capitols and angels . It retailed for approximately ? 30 but has since been discontinued . The Faksimile @-@ Verlag images are now online at Trinity College 's Digital Collections portal .

= = Description = =

The Book of Kells contains the four Gospels of the Christian scriptures written in black , red , purple , and yellow ink in an insular majuscule script , preceded by prefaces , summaries , and concordances of Gospel passages . Today , it consists of 340 vellum leaves , or folios . The majority of the folios are part of larger sheets , called bifolios , which are folded in half to form two folios . The bifolios are nested inside of each other and sewn together to form gatherings called quires . On occasion , a folio is not part of a bifolio but is instead a single sheet inserted within a quire . The extant folios are gathered into 38 quires . There are between four and twelve folios (two to six bifolios) per quire ; the folios are commonly , but not invariably , bound in groups of ten . Some folios are single sheets , as is frequently the case with the important decorated pages . The folios had lines drawn for the text , sometimes on both sides , after the bifolios were folded . Prick marks and guide lines can still be seen on some pages . The vellum is of high quality , although the folios have an uneven thickness , with some being close to leather while others are so thin as to be almost translucent .

The book 's current dimensions are 330 by 250 mm . Originally , the folios were of no standard size , but they were cropped to the current size during a 19th @-@ century rebinding . The text area is approximately 250 by 170 mm . Each text page has 16 to 18 lines of text . The manuscript is in remarkably good condition considering its great age , though many pages have suffered some damage to the delicate artwork due to rubbing . The book must have been the product of a major scriptorium over several years , yet was apparently never finished , the projected decoration of some pages appearing only in outline . It is believed that some 30 folios of the original manuscript have been lost over the centuries . Ussher counted 344 folios in 1621 , but several leaves had already been lost by then . The overall estimate is based on gaps in the text and the absence of certain key illustrations .

= = = Contents = = =

The extant book contains preliminary matter , the complete text of the Gospels of Matthew , Mark and Luke , and the Gospel of John through John 17 : 13 . The remainder of John and an unknown amount of the preliminary matter is missing and was perhaps lost when the book was stolen early in the 11th century . The remaining preliminary matter consists of two fragmentary lists of Hebrew names contained in the Gospels , Breves causae (Gospel summaries) , Argumenta (short biographies of the Evangelists) , and Eusebian canon tables . It is probable that , like the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Books of Durrow and Armagh , part of the lost preliminary material

included the letter of Jerome to Pope Damasus I beginning *Novum opus* , in which Jerome explains the purpose of his translation . It is also possible , though less likely , that the lost material included the letter of Eusebius to Carpianus , in which he explains the use of the canon tables . Of all the insular Gospels , only the Lindisfarne manuscript contains this letter .

There are two fragments of the lists of Hebrew names ; one on the recto of the first surviving folio and one on folio 26 , which is currently inserted at the end of the prefatory matter for John . The first list fragment contains the end of the list for the Gospel of Matthew . The missing names from Matthew would require an additional two folios . The second list fragment , on folio 26 , contains about a fourth of the list for Luke . The list for Luke would require an additional three folios . The structure of the quire in which folio 26 occurs is such that it is unlikely that there are three folios missing between folios 26 and 27 , so that it is almost certain that folio 26 is not now in its original location . There is no trace of the lists for Mark and John .

The first list fragment is followed by the canon tables of Eusebius of Caesarea . These tables , which predate the text of the Vulgate , were developed to cross @-@ reference the Gospels . Eusebius divided the Gospel into chapters and then created tables that allowed readers to find where a given episode in the life of Christ was located in each of the Gospels . The canon tables were traditionally included in the prefatory material in most mediaeval copies of the Vulgate text of the Gospels . The tables in the Book of Kells , however , are almost unusable because the scribe condensed the tables in such a way as to make them confused . In addition , the corresponding chapter numbers were never inserted into the margins of the text , making it impossible to find the sections to which the canon tables refer . The reason for the omission remains unclear : the scribe may have planned to add the references upon the manuscript 's completion , or he may have deliberately left them out so as not to spoil the appearance of pages .

The *Breves causae* and *Argumenta* belong to a pre @-@ Vulgate tradition of manuscripts . The *Breves causae* are summaries of the Old Latin translations of the Gospels and are divided into numbered chapters . These chapter numbers , like the numbers for the canon tables , are not used on the text pages of the Gospels . It is unlikely that these numbers would have been used , even if the manuscript had been completed , because the chapter numbers corresponded to old Latin translations and would have been difficult to harmonise with the Vulgate text . The *Argumenta* are collections of legends about the Evangelists . The *Breves causae* and *Argumenta* are arranged in a strange order : first come the *Breves causae* and *Argumenta* for Matthew , followed by the *Breves* and *Argumenta* for Mark , then , quite oddly , come the *Argumenta* of both Luke and John , followed by their *Breves causae* . This anomalous order mirrors that found in the Book of Durrow , although in the latter instance , the misplaced sections appear at the very end of the manuscript rather than as part of a continuous preliminary . In other insular manuscripts , such as the Lindisfarne Gospels , the Book of Armagh , and the Echternach Gospels , each Gospel is treated as a separate work and has its preliminaries immediately preceding it . The slavish repetition in Kells of the order of the *Breves causae* and *Argumenta* found in Durrow led scholar T. K. Abbott to the conclusion that the scribe of Kells had either the Book of Durrow or a common model in hand .

= = = Text and script = = =

The Book of Kells contains the text of the four Gospels based on the Vulgate . It does not , however , contain a pure copy of the Vulgate . There are numerous differences from the Vulgate , where Old Latin translations are used in lieu of Jerome 's text . Although such variants are common in all the insular Gospels , there does not seem to be a consistent pattern of variation amongst the various insular texts . Evidence suggests that when the scribes were writing the text they often depended on memory rather than on their exemplar .

The manuscript is written primarily in insular majuscule with some occurrences of minuscule letters (usually e or s) . The text is usually written in one long line across the page . Françoise Henry identified at least three scribes in this manuscript , whom she named Hand A , Hand B , and Hand C. Hand A is found on folios 1 through 19v , folios 276 through 289 , and folios 307 through the end of the manuscript . Hand A , for the most part , writes eighteen or nineteen lines per page in the

brown gall @-@ ink common throughout the West . Hand B is found on folios 19r through 26 and folios 124 through 128 . Hand B has a somewhat greater tendency to use minuscule and uses red , purple and black ink and a variable number of lines per page . Hand C is found throughout the majority of the text . Hand C also has greater tendency to use minuscule than Hand A. Hand C uses the same brownish gall @-@ ink used by hand A and wrote , almost always , seventeen lines per page .

= = = Errors and deviations = = =

There are a number of differences between the text and the accepted Gospels . In the genealogy of Jesus , which starts at Luke 3 : 23 , Kells names an extra ancestor .

Matthew 10 : 34b The canonised Bible reads " I came not to send peace , but a sword , " but the manuscript reads gaudium (" joy ") where it should read gladium (" sword ") and so translates as " I came not [only] to send peace , but joy . "

The lavishly decorated opening page of the Gospel according to John in the Book of Kells had been deciphered by George Bain as : " In principio erat verbum verum " [In the beginning was the True Word] . Therefore , the Incipit is a free translation into Latin of the Greek original ?????? rather than a mere copy of the Roman version .

= = = Decoration = = =

The text is accompanied by many full @-@ page miniatures , while smaller painted decorations appear throughout the text in unprecedented quantities . The decoration of the book is famous for combining intricate detail with bold and energetic compositions . The characteristics of the Insular manuscript initial , as described by Carl Nordenfalk , here reach their most extreme realisation : " the initials ... are conceived as elastic forms expanding and contracting with a pulsating rhythm . The kinetic energy of their contours escapes into freely drawn appendices , a spiral line which in turn generates new curvilinear motifs ... " . The illustrations feature a broad range of colours , with purple , lilac , red , pink , green , and yellow being the colours most often used . Earlier manuscripts tend toward more narrow palettes : the Book of Durrow , for example , uses only four colours . As is usual with Insular work , there was no use of gold or silver leaf in the manuscript . The pigments for the illustrations , which included red and yellow ochre , green copper pigment (sometimes called verdigris) , indigo , and possibly lapis lazuli , would have been imported from the Mediterranean region and , in the case of the lapis lazuli , from northeast Afghanistan . Though the presence of lapis lazuli has long been considered evidence of the great cost required to create the manuscript , recent examination of the pigments has proven that lapis lazuli was not used .

The lavish illumination programme is far greater than any other surviving Insular Gospel book . There are ten surviving full @-@ page illuminations including two evangelist portraits , three pages with the four evangelist symbols , a carpet page , a miniature of the Virgin and Child , a miniature of Christ enthroned , and miniatures of the Arrest of Jesus and the Temptation of Christ . There are thirteen surviving full pages of decorated text including pages for the first few words of each of the Gospels . Eight of the ten pages of the canon tables have extensive decoration . It is highly probable that there were other pages of miniature and decorated text that are now lost . In addition to these major pages , there are a host of smaller decorations and decorated initials throughout the text ; in fact only two pages have no decoration .

The extant folios of the manuscript start with the fragment of the glossary of Hebrew names . This fragment occupies the left @-@ hand column of folio 1r . A miniature of the four evangelist symbols , now much abraded , make up the right @-@ hand column . The miniature is oriented so that the volume must be turned ninety degrees to view it properly . The four evangelist symbols are a visual theme that runs throughout the book . They are almost always shown together to emphasise the doctrine of the four Gospels ' unity of message .

The unity of the Gospels is further emphasised by the decoration of the Eusebian canon tables . The canon tables themselves inherently illustrate the unity of the Gospels by organising

corresponding passages from the Gospels . The Eusebian canon tables normally require twelve pages . In the Book of Kells , the makers of the manuscript planned for twelve pages (folios 1v through 7r) but for unknown reasons , condensed them into ten , leaving folios 6v and 7r blank . This condensation rendered the canon tables unusable . The decoration of the first eight pages of the canon tables is heavily influenced by early Gospel Books from the Mediterranean , where it was traditional to enclose the tables within an arcade (as seen in the London Canon Tables) . The Kells manuscript presents this motif in an Insular spirit , where the arcades are not seen as architectural elements but rather become stylised geometric patterns with Insular ornamentation . The four evangelist symbols occupy the spaces under and above the arches . The last two canon tables are presented within a grid . This presentation is limited to Insular manuscripts and was first seen in the Book of Durrow .

The remainder of the book is broken into sections with the divisions set off by miniatures and full pages of decorated text . Each of the Gospels is introduced by a consistent decorative programme . The preliminary matter is treated as one section and introduced by a lavish decorative spread . In addition to the preliminaries and the Gospels , the " second beginning " of the Gospel of Matthew is also given its own introductory decoration .

The preliminary matter is introduced by an iconic image of the Virgin and Child (folio 7v) . This miniature is the first representation of the Virgin in a Western manuscript . Mary is shown in an odd mixture of frontal and three @-@ quarter pose . This miniature also bears a stylistic similarity to the carved image on the lid of St. Cuthbert 's coffin of 698 . The iconography of the miniature may derive from an Eastern or Coptic icon .

The miniature of the Virgin and Child faces the first page of text and is an appropriate preface to the beginning of the Breves Causae of Matthew , which begins Nativitas Christi in Bethlem (the birth of Christ in Bethlehem) . The beginning page (folio 8r) of the text of the Breves Causae is decorated and contained within an elaborate frame . The two @-@ page spread of the miniature and the text makes a vivid introductory statement for the prefatory material . The opening line of each of the sections of the preliminary matter is enlarged and decorated (see above for the Breves causae of Luke) , but no other section of the preliminaries is given the same level of treatment as the beginning of the Breves Causae of Matthew .

The book was designed so that each of the Gospels would have an elaborate introductory decorative programme . Each Gospel was originally prefaced by a full page miniature containing the four evangelist symbols , followed by a blank page . Then came a portrait of the evangelist which faced the opening text of the Gospel which was given an elaborate decorative treatment . The Gospel of Matthew retains both its Evangelist portrait (folio 28v) and its page of Evangelist symbols (folio 27r , see above) . The Gospel of Mark is missing the Evangelist portrait but retains its Evangelist symbols page (folio 129v) . The Gospel of Luke is missing both the portrait and the Evangelist symbols page . The Gospel of John , like the Gospel of Matthew , retains both its portrait (folio 291v , see at right) and its Evangelist symbols page (folio 290v) . It can be assumed that the portraits for Mark and Luke and the symbols page for Luke at one time existed but have been lost . The use of all four of the Evangelist symbols in front of each Gospel is striking and was intended to reinforce the message of the unity of the Gospels .

The decoration of the opening few words of each Gospel was lavish . These pages were , in effect , turned into carpet pages . The decoration of these texts is so elaborate that the text itself is almost illegible . The opening page (folio 29r) of Matthew may stand as an example . (See illustration at left .) The page consists of only two words : Liber generationis (" The book of the generation ") . The lib of Liber is turned into a giant monogram which dominates the entire page . The er of Liber is presented as an interlaced ornament within the b of the lib monogram . Generationis is broken into three lines and contained within an elaborate frame in the right lower quadrant of the page . The entire assemblage is contained within an elaborate border .

The border and the letters themselves are further decorated with elaborate spirals and knot work , many of them zoomorphic . The opening words of Mark , Initium evangelii (" The beginning of the Gospel ") , Luke , Quoniam quidem multi , and John , In principio erat verbum (" In the beginning was the Word ") , are all given similar treatments . Although the decoration of these pages was

most extensive in the Book of Kells , these pages were decorated in all the other Insular Gospel Books .

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus . At Matthew 1 : 18 , the actual narrative of Christ 's life starts . This " second beginning " to Matthew was given emphasis in many early Gospel Books , so much so that the two sections were often treated as separate works . The second beginning begins with the word Christ . The Greek letters chi and rho were normally used in mediaeval manuscripts to abbreviate the word Christ . In Insular Gospel Books , the initial Chi Rho monogram was enlarged and decorated . In the Book of Kells , this second beginning was given a decorative programme equal to those that preface the individual Gospels . Folio 32 verso has a miniature of Christ enthroned . (It has been argued that this miniature is one of the lost evangelist portraits . However , the iconography is quite different from the extant portraits , and current scholarship accepts this identification and placement for this miniature .) Facing this miniature , on folio 33 recto , is the only carpet page in the Book of Kells , which is rather anomalous ; the Lindisfarne Gospels has five extant carpet pages and the Book of Durrow has six . The blank verso of folio 33 faces the single most lavish miniature of the early mediaeval period , the Book of Kells Chi Rho monogram , which serves as incipit for the narrative of the life of Christ .

In the Book of Kells , the Chi Rho monogram has grown to consume the entire page . The letter chi dominates the page with one arm swooping across the majority of the page . The letter rho is snuggled underneath the arms of the chi . Both letters are divided into compartments which are lavishly decorated with knot work and other patterns . The background is likewise awash in a mass of swirling and knotted decoration . Within this mass of decoration are hidden animals and insects . Three angels arise from one of the cross arms of the chi . This miniature is the largest and most lavish extant Chi Rho monogram in any Insular Gospel Books and is the culmination of a tradition that started with the Book of Durrow .

The Book of Kells contains two other full @-@ page miniatures , which illustrate episodes from the Passion story . The text of Matthew is illustrated with a full @-@ page illumination of the Arrest of Christ (folio 114r) . Jesus is shown beneath a stylised arcade while being held by two much smaller figures . In the text of Luke , there is a full sized miniature of the Temptation of Christ (folio 202v) . Christ is shown from the waist up on top of the Temple . To his right is a crowd of people , perhaps representing his disciples . To his left and below him is a black figure of Satan . Above him hover two angels .

The verso of the folio containing the Arrest of Christ contains a full page of decorated text which begins " Tunc dicit illis " . Facing the miniature of the Temptation is another full page of decorated text (folio 203r " Iesus autem plenus ") . In addition to this page , five other full pages also receive elaborate treatment . In Matthew , there is one other full @-@ page treatment (folio 124r , " Tunc crucifixerant Xpi cum eo duos latrones ") . In the Gospel of Mark , there are also two pages of decorated text (folio 183r , " Erat autem hora tertia " , and folio 187v , " [Et Dominus] quidem [Iesus] postquam ") . The Gospel of Luke contains two pages of fully decorated text (folio 188v , " Fuit in diebus Herodis " , and folio 285r , " Una autem sabbati valde ") . Although these texts do not have miniatures associated with them , it is probable that miniatures were planned to accompany each of these texts and have either been lost or were never completed . There is no surviving full page of text in the Gospel of John other than the Incipit . However , in the other three Gospels , all the full pages of decorated text , except for folio 188c , which begins the Nativity narration , occur within the Passion narrative . However , since the missing folios of John contain the Passion narrative , it is likely that John contained full pages of decorated text that have been lost .

The decoration of the book is not limited to the major pages . Scattered through the text are decorated initials and small figures of animals and humans often twisted and tied into complicated knots . Many significant texts , such as the Pater Noster have decorated initials . The page containing text of the Beatitudes in Matthew (folio 40v) has a large miniature along the left margin of the page in which the letter B which begins each line is linked into an ornate chain . The genealogy of Christ found in the Gospel of Luke (folio 200r) contains a similar miniature in which the word qui is repeatedly linked along the left margin . Many of the small animals scattered throughout the text serve to mark a " turn @-@ in @-@ the @-@ path " (that is , a place where a

line is finished in a space above or below the original line) . Many other animals serve to fill spaces left at the end of lines . No two of these designs are the same . No earlier surviving manuscript has this massive amount of decoration .

The decorations are all high quality and often highly complex . In one decoration , which occupies a one @-@ inch square piece of a page , there are 158 complex interlacements of white ribbon with a black border on either side . Some decorations can only be fully seen with magnifying glasses , although lenses of the required power are not known to have been available until hundreds of years after the book 's completion . The complicated knot work and interweaving found in Kells and related manuscripts have many parallels in the metalwork and stone carving of the period . Since their gradual rediscovery from the 19th century on , these designs have also had an enduring popularity . Many of these motifs are used today in popular art including jewellery and tattoos .

= = Purpose = =

The book had a sacramental rather than educational purpose . Such a large , lavish Gospel would have been left on the high altar of the church and removed only for the reading of the Gospel during Mass , with the reader probably reciting from memory more than reading the text . It is significant that the Chronicles of Ulster state the book was stolen from the sacristy , where the vessels and other accoutrements of the Mass were stored , rather than from the monastic library . Its design seems to take this purpose in mind ; that is , the book was produced with appearance taking precedence over practicality . There are numerous uncorrected mistakes in the text . Lines were often completed in a blank space in the line above . The chapter headings that were necessary to make the canon tables usable were not inserted into the margins of the page . In general , nothing was done to disrupt the look of the page : aesthetics were given priority over utility .

= = In film = =

The 2009 animated film The Secret of Kells tells a fictional story of the creation of the Book of Kells by an elderly monk Aidan and his young apprentice Brendan , who struggle to work on the manuscript in the face of destructive Viking raids . It was directed by Tomm Moore and nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2009 . It was praised for sequences of animation drawing from the illuminated pages .