

The book of Kells

(Text taken from the video "The book of Kells and the secrets of Kells" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbqhU262qdc>)

Every year 500,000,000 (yes, half a million!) people pay to see the Book of Kells exhibit at Trinity College Dublin, and catch a glimpse to the book itself.

Housed in the old library in Trinity, the book of Kells is over 1200 years old. It is thought to have been started by Irish monks on the Scottish island of Iona and later moved to the abbey at Kells in Ireland.

It is a transcription of the 4 Gospels¹ by Irish monks, who were considered the most talented scribes and illustrators in Europe. It is well regarded as a masterpiece² and has been described as "the most beautiful book in the world", "the most remarkable artifact of medieval art", and the book that would "turn darkness *into light*".

The book is celebrated for its ornate illustrations and minute detail. It is so beloved that the story of the book was recently made into a beautiful, Oscar nominated, animated feature film. These images are featured on the Chi Rho³ page of the Book. The Chi Rho page is one of the best known pages in the book. It introduces St. Matthew's Account of the nativity. The page is illustrated with images of people and animals, including an otter⁴ with a fish, a peacock⁵ and two mice fighting over a Eucharistic host while two cats watch.

Folio 7v is the oldest surviving portraiture of the Virgin Mary and Christ's child in western art. It is considered to have been influenced by oriental and Egyptian art. A recurring motif throughout the book is the use of illustrations that act as visual aids to guide the reader's eye to the facing page. A fine example of this motif is the six onlookers⁶ in the bottom right of this page.

This page of the book shows the four Evangelists and their symbols: Matthew the Man, Mark the Lion, John the Eagle and Luke the Ox.

This sumptuously illustrated is my personal favorite. It opens the gospel of St. John. However with 680 pages all but⁷ two being illustrated and each more beautiful than the last, it is hard to pick one above all others. Sadly 30 folios from the book have been lost over the years. Viking raids were what spurred the book's move from Iona to Kells. Then Kells in turn⁸ was sacked.

The book was never fully completed. The Vikings raided the Abbey at Kells repeatedly during this time and how the book survived at all is unknown. Its bejewelled cover was never found. The book was kept in Kells until 1654. In 1661 it was presented to Trinity College where it has enjoyed sanctuary and preservation ever since.

In the 1980's, a Swiss company created a limited number of replicas of the book that are so detailed they include tiny worm-holes in the vellum. One of this replicas is held at the University of British Columbia

For more information on the Book of Kells visit : www.bookofkells.ie; www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/kells.html .

¹ Vangeli

² Capolavoro



³ le iniziali greche della parola Cristo

⁴ lontra

⁵ pavone

⁶ spettatori

⁷ All but= tranne

⁸ a sua volta