



The Book of Kells

Glossary



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 Future
Learn

Boniface IV	Pope from 608 until his death in 615.
Breves Causae	Summaries of the gospels often included as preliminary material in Insular gospel books.
Byzantine	Term used to refer to the culture focussed around the ancient city of Byzantium (now Istanbul), which fused Greek, Roman and Christian cultural elements.
C	
Canon table	A system whereby numbers placed in the margins of the gospel texts correspond to a table that indicates concordance of passages between the different gospels.
Carpet page	An ornamental page, particularly favoured in Insular art, typically used to preface each gospel text.
Caedmon	(fl. c. 657–684 AD) a poet and lay brother at Whitby abbey in north-east England.
Celtic	A term used to refer to an Iron Age culture current across Europe in the pre-Christian era, but which lingered along the north Atlantic into early Christian period.
Chalice	A cup, usually made from precious materials, used to hold wine for the celebration of the Mass.
Chi Rho	A monogram composed of the letter XP (the Greek Chi and Rho), the first two characters of Christ's name. In Insular gospel books the start of Matthew 1:18 typically has an elaborately embellished Chi Rho.
Codex	A book composed of folded sheets sewn along one edge.
Codicology	The study of the physical structure of a book.
Colophon	An inscription recording information relating to the production of a book.
Columbanus, Saint	(Also known as St Columban, c. 543–615) ùn Irish missionary credited with founding a number of monasteries across Europe, including at Luxeuil in present-day France and Bobbio in present-day Italy.

Colum Cille, Saint	(Also known as St Columba, 521–597). Born in County Donegal; he founded monasteries at Derry and Durrow in Ireland and as a missionary established a church at Iona from where he is credited with spreading Christianity through Scotland.
Concordances	Cross referencing. Used in the context of the four gospels this word indicates the parts of one gospel that match the same events in another.
D	
Display script	Decorated script, usually of a higher grade than the adjacent text, often used to emphasise the opening of a particular passage.
Divinity	Refers to the realm of the supernatural, of the gods. In Christianity it has the specific meaning of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Drolleries	Small decorative images found in the margins of illuminated manuscripts.
E	
Ecclesiastical	Relating to the Christian Church or its clergy.
Eucharist	Also called the Holy Communion, Mass, the Lord's Supper or the Divine Liturgy, is a sacrament celebrated by most Christians. The English word eucharist comes from the Greek noun εὐχαριστία (eucharistia), meaning “thanksgiving”. The Eucharist is a recalling of the Last Supper, the final meal that Jesus Christ shared with his disciples. Catholic Christians believe a radical encounter with God, through the sharing of consecrated bread and wine, is made possible by this sacrament.
Evangelist portraits	Depictions of the authors of the four gospels typically placed at the start of their respective gospels.
Evangelist symbols	Symbols derived from Ezekiel’s vision of four heavenly creatures: the man, lion, ox and eagle (Ezekiel 1:1–14), conflated with the four ‘living creatures’ that surround God's throne, as described in Revelation 4:7. Early Christian writers linked different evangelists with different creatures. In Irish art two interpretations are found: that of St Irenaeus of Lyons (Matthew-man, John-lion, Luke-ox and Mark-eagle), for example in the Book of Durrow, and, more commonly, that of St Jerome (Matthew-man, Mark-lion, Luke-ox and John-eagle).

Exemplar	A book from which another is copied.
F	
Facsimile	An exact copy, especially of written or printed material.
Flabellum (pl. flabella)	A fan used during the Christian Mass to keep away insects from the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist, as well as to show honour.
Folio	A sheet of writing material.
G	
Gerald of Wales	(Also known as Gerald de Barri and Giraldus Cambrensis c. 1146 – c. 1223) a cleric of mixed Welsh and Norman descent, who, as royal clerk and chaplain from 1184 documented his visit to Ireland with the King's son, John in 1185 in a text known as Topographia Hibernica.
Gospel	The word itself is pre-Christian, but it was adopted by Christians. The Gospel of Mark opens with the words “the beginning of the Gospel {literally “Good News”} of Jesus Christ. The word ‘euangelion’ occurs in Greek inscriptions around the turn of the Common Era. The Priene Calendar Inscription of 9 BCE, for example, says that “the birthday of the divine [Emperor] Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings (euangelion) for the world. The writers of the Four Gospels in the Christian Bible were called ‘evangelists.’ “Good news” was translated into Latin, the language of the Christian Church in the West, as bona annuntiatio or bonus nuntius. The Old English translation of this was god spel or “good news” which in time was simplified into a single word “Gospel.”
Gospel book	The text of the four accounts of Christ's life attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
I	
Icon	A venerated likeness of a sacred person or subject.
Iconoclasm	The destruction of images or monuments, usually for religious or political reasons.
Iconography	The subject or meaning of an image.
Incipit	The opening words of a text (from the Latin incipere).

Insular	Deriving from the Latin <i>insula</i> (island), the term is used to describe the artistic style current in Ireland and areas under Irish cultural influence from c. 600–900, elements of which persisted until the sixteenth century.
Interlace	Decoration consisting of apparently interwoven strands.
J	
Jones, Henry	(c. 1605 –5 January 1681) the Anglican Bishop of Clogher (1645–61), vice-chancellor of Trinity College, Dublin (from 1646) and Bishop of Meath (1661–81) credited with presenting the Book of Kells to the Library at Trinity College Dublin.
L	
Limp binding	A binding made of parchment, soft leather or fabric without boards.
M	
Majuscule	Large letters, often in upper case, in which all the letters are the same height.
Manuscript	A book written by hand abbreviated in the singular to <i>ms</i> , plural <i>mss</i> .
Minuscule	Small letters written cursively and in lower case.
Monogram	A symbol made by combining two or more letters.
N	
New Testament	The second, later, part of the Christian Bible. It contains the four gospels, which recount the story of Jesus; the Acts of the Apostles, which tells the story of the early expansion of the Christian community, a collection of letters written by the early apostles, and the Book of Apocalypse, a mystical work.
O	
Old Testament	The first part of the Christian Bible, sometimes called the First Testament. It tells the story of the beginning of the human race and the story of the beginning of the Jewish people. It is a library of books, most of which both Jews and Christians revere.
P	

Palladius	(d. c. 457/461 AD) one of the earliest Christian missionaries to Ireland, sent by Pope Celestine to preach there in 431AD.
Parchment	A writing support made from prepared animal hide. The term vellum is typically reserved for calf skin.
Paruchia	An affiliation of churches often linked through devotion to a common saint.
Paten	A plate, typically made of precious materials, used to hold the bread during the Eucharist and sometimes as a cover for the chalice.
Patrick, Saint	(Fifth-century AD) a Romano-British Christian missionary traditionally credited with the conversion of the Irish to Christianity.
Pigment	The colouring agent in paint.
Pope Boniface IV	Pope from 608 to 615. He is venerated as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church.
Pricking	The marking of a folio with a sharp pint to guide the layout of a page.
Q	
Quire	The gatherings of bifolia from which a book is formed.
Quoniam	(Latin = 'Forasmuch as') the opening word of the Gospel of Luke.
R	
Raman spectroscopy	A non-destructive technique used to identify the molecules present in material.
Recto	The front side of a folio, abbreviated to r.
Revivalism	The use of art or architectural styles that consciously echo the style of a previous era.
Ruminatio	A method of meditation usually on a religious text.
S	

Sacraments	Moments of concentrated encounter with God. They mark the Christian journey. Sacraments use familiar, everyday things, – water, oil, bread – to make real the presence of God.
Saltire	A cross in the form of an X.
Scribe	A person engaged in the act of writing books or documents.
Scriptorium	A room used for writing.
Stylus	A pointed implement used for writing on wax tablets and pricking and ruling manuscripts.
T	
Tabernacle	From the Latin tabernaculum meaning ‘tent’ or ‘hut’. In the Bible the word referred to a portable central place of worship for the Israelites. In Catholic Christianity it came to be the name for the place where the consecrated bread is kept in the church.
Tetragonus mundus	Literally ‘four square world’ a philosophical concept that considers elements of the universe based around the number four.
Theophany	The visible appearance of God in human form.
V	
Vellum	Prepared calf skin used as a writing surface.
Verso	The back of a folio, abbreviated as v.
X	
X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy	A non-destructive method of investigating pigments that provides elemental information about inorganic materials.