

Book of Kells



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Introduction

We are pleased to recommend a fine reproduction of The Book of Kells by Faksimile Verlag Luzern in Switzerland.

Irish monks, once the storms of the mass migrations had quietened down, took to spread the Christian faith all over Europe by their dedicated mission during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries. The age-old Irish-Celtic culture began to fuse with the impressions gathered by the monks during their extended dangerous travels. At that time, also called *The Time of Scholars and Saints*, the Irish monasteries were influential cultural and spiritual centres of Europe. At the height of Irish monasticism its most precious work was created, the *Book of Kells*.

A Masterpiece Created 1200 Years Ago

The *Book of Kells* is thought to be the work of a number of unknown genius-artists living in the monastery of Iona around the year 800. It is first mentioned in an account of a theft in the church of Kells in 1007, which describes the book as “The great gospel book of Columcille, the holiest relic of the western world”.

Soon after that the manuscript was found buried at Kells. And it would remain there until, during the reign of Cromwell, it was brought to Dublin for safety reasons. Around 1661 Henry Jones, bishop of Meath, donated it to the library of Trinity College where it is kept to this day.

The Pinnacle of Early Medieval Bookmaking

There are very few other works which express a similar symbolic power and magical radiation as this magnificent Gospel Book. Its mysticism lies in its rich and complex decoration. The impression of the holiness of the text is enhanced by its decorative apparatus, which seems truly supernatural.

Analysts examining the style of the decorative elements used in the *Book of Kells* have come to ascribe it to an artistic tradition, which is also found in other works of art of the same period. However, too little information survives to exactly localise and date the manuscript according to its geographical or historical background.

Letters Evolve into Pictures – and Pictures Into Letters

The *Book of Kells* contains mainly the Four Gospels. However, other texts were also included in the book; at the beginning of the book, the canonical tables which contain of concordance compiled by Eusebius of Caesarea, and a number of property deeds relating to the monastery of Kells. The Latin text is written in proud insular semi-uncial, which like its magnificent illuminations, marks a highlight of Irish art creation.

The *Book of Kells* contains diverse miniatures of the Early Middle Ages, which count among the most beautiful ever made. All, except two, pages of the manuscript are decorated with a truly unbelievable wealth of symbolic and mystical paintings. The manuscript fascinates not only by the great number but also by the sheer size of its vellum pages, measuring 33 x 25 cm on average. It was neither intended for daily use nor for the study purposes but rather considered as a sacred work to represent the Word of God on the altar on high holidays of the Christian year.

The book contains the Four Gospels as the most sacred texts of Christendom, and also a number of amusing quotes. One of them shows a mouse, having stolen a consecrated wafer, which is chased by a cat across the page (fol. 48r). In the Bible verse “No one can serve two masters”, the initial letter of the Latin word N(emo) (no one) is composed of two male figures pulling each other’s beard.

The Fine Art Facsimile Edition – A Work of Art In Its Own Right

The fine art facsimile edition is composed of two volumes, the facsimile itself and a scientific commentary both in a presentation case. The edition is limited worldwide to 1480 numbered copies of which 740 are reserved for the Anglo-Saxon countries.

All 680 pages of the manuscript were reproduced in the finest detail, a faithful copy of the original, in the format of approx. 33 x 35cm. This fine art edition is the result of combining the most up-to-date technical processes with qualified craftsmanship.

The facsimile is bound in the finest white leather. The sheets have been trimmed according to the original pages and bound by hand on four cords.

The Commentary Volume

The commentary volume contains 400 pages. Authors: Dr. J.J. Alexander, Professor of History of Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York; Anthony Cains, Director of the Restoration Department, Trinity College Library, Dublin; Gearóid MacNiocaill, Professor of History, University College Galway; Dr. Patrick McGurk, Lecturer of Medieval History, Birkbeck College, University of London; and Dr. Bernhard Meehan, Director of the Department of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, Dublin. Professor Dr. Anton von Euw, Curator at the Schnutgen-Museum Cologne and Professor of Medieval Art History at the University of Cologne, is the editor of the volume. The world famous author Umberto Eco wrote the fascinating preface.

The Specially Designed Presentation Case

Decorative elements of the *Book of Kells* reappear in both fittings and embossing in silver and brass. The facsimile edition is presented in a specially designed hand-crafted presentation case.

