

History

of the

times

of the **Book of Kells**

Ireland in the Early Middle Ages

- Celtic tribes from Europe colonized Ireland between the 8th and 1st centuries BCE, during the Iron Age, bringing a great artistic tradition.
- Roman troops left Britain in the early 5th century.
- Britain was inhabited by confederations of tribes like the Picts, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—clans were governed by a warrior nobility and kings.
- Kings made policy, declared war or peace, but did not own property of the village; royal succession was voted upon by all free men, not inherited.
- The Celts were a cultural group linked by language and religious and political beliefs, not race or economics.
- Most people were subsistence farmers, some were craftsmen and a few were warrior nobility.
- Charlemagne was assuming power in Europe.

"The most beautiful book ever written."

◆ **Book of Kells** ◆

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The British Isles



The Irish Preserved History

In the latter part of the 5th century, St. Patrick enabled Irish monks to preserve parts of the extensive Celtic oral literature when he introduced the Roman alphabet. Had it not been for the excellence and isolation of these Irish Catholic monasteries, the art of writing and much Latin learning might not have survived the fall of the Western Roman empire.

The Times Were Brutal

In the early Middle Ages, Vikings were attacking and conquering towns like Dubh Linn (Dublin). Terrifying Viking raids occurred with fleets as large as one hundred and sixty longships. They attacked Ireland, plundering monasteries and towns.

Irish Art Flourished Despite Brutal Times

During this time, arts like manuscript illumination, metalworking, and sculpture flourished. Such treasures as the *Book of Kells*, ornate jewelry, and carved stone crosses that still dot the island were created. At the same time, Irish monasteries, particularly the Abbey of Iona, became centers of learning, attracting students from across the continent. Missionaries from Ireland spread news of the flowering of learning to England and Continental Europe, and scholars from other nations came to Irish monasteries to study.

Out of that artistic renaissance came the “most beautiful book ever written”...

The Book of Kells—A Masterpiece...

- One of the most significant and beautiful books ever written
- One of the earliest surviving books created in the form of a codex, the format we use today
- Considered one of the most beautiful and important artworks of western civilization
- An extraordinary book in its own right, the facsimile version made publishing history

“The richness, vitality and beauty of the illustration, together with the dedication and craft of its execution combine to create a breathtaking work of art.”

Thomas Mitchell, Provost
Trinity College, Dublin



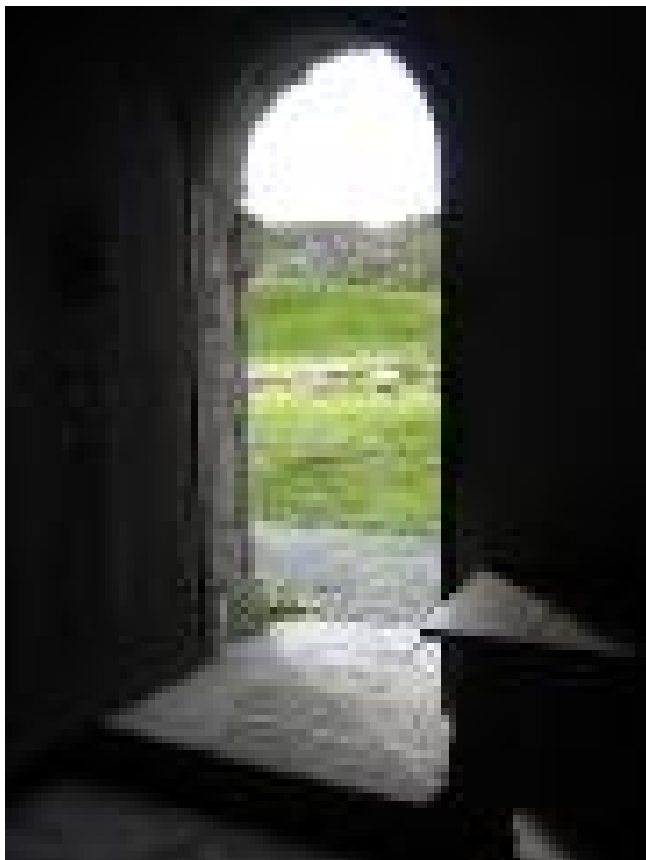
The *Book of Kells* at Washington-Centerville Public Library...

Our Library is honored to display this rare donated facsimile edition of the *Book of Kells*, the world-famous 9th century illustrated manuscript acclaimed as the most beautiful book ever written. The Library, which advances no religion or belief system, presents this destination book which has transcended its religious origins to become an object worth of study— as a window into the past and a source of artistic inspiration for the future.

Project funded in part by the Washington-Centerville Public Library Foundation and others. For more information about the Book of Kells and the Library Foundation, visit www.wcpl.lib.oh.us.

Join the quest

Are you ready to seek adventure? Take the challenge and join the quest. Learn about the times that created this extraordinary artifact. Explore the most beautiful book in the world. Reveal for yourself a great treasure. The *Book of Kells* --illuminating the past, an inspiration for the future.



"In the history of civilization there can scarcely have been a more fundamental change than from prehistory to historic times—from an age of oral tradition only, to one of written records. The book, the principal tool of "historic" civilization, thus became the transmitter of an art which preserved its essentially "prehistoric" character."

Carl Nordenfalk,
Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting

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