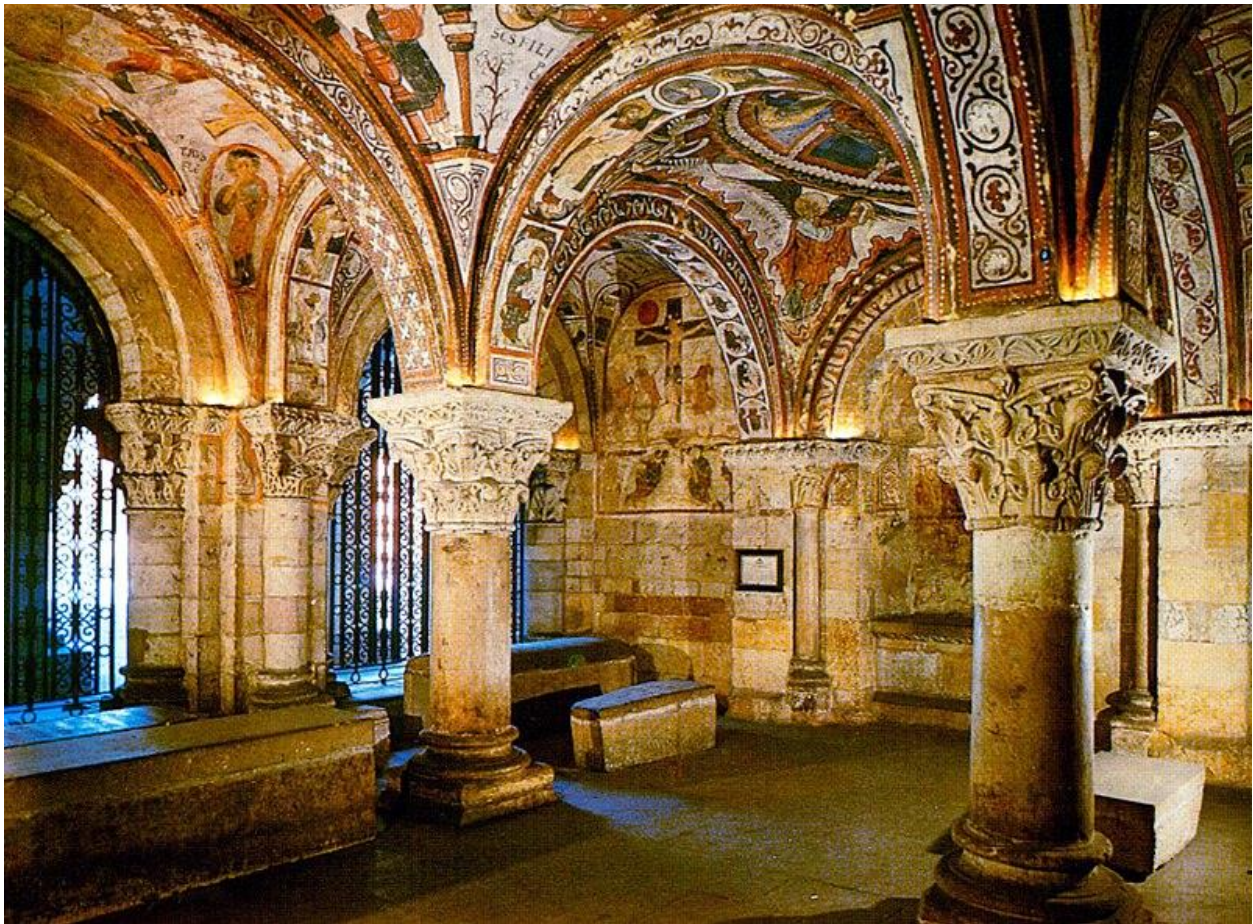


ART HISTORY
Journey Through a Thousand Years

“Forms Assembled in the Light”

Week One: Early Medieval Art

The Craftsmen Who Saved Civilisation – The Civilisation that Survived –
Controversy Over Images – Decoding Anglo-Saxon Art – Basilicas –
Illuminated Manuscripts – In Search of Three Dimensions – From the Vaults:
The Lindau Gospels – Ottonian Art – The Bernward Doors – An Introduction
to the Bestiary, Book of Beasts in the Medieval World –



The painted crypt of San Isidoro at León, Spain By Megginede - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45924271>

“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts[;] the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these works can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.” – Ruskin

Kenneth Clark: “The Craftsmen Who Saved Civilization”
From *Civilisation: A Personal View* (1969)

People sometimes tell me they prefer barbarism to civilization. I doubt if they have given it a long enough trial. Like the people of Alexandria they are bored by civilisation; but all the evidence suggests that the boredom of barbarism is infinitely greater. Quite apart from discomforts and privations, there was no escape from it. Very restricted company, no books, no light after dark, no hope. On one side of the sea battering away, on the other the infinite stretches of the bog and the forest. A most melancholy existence, and the Anglo-Saxon poets had no illusions about it:

A wise man may grasp how ghastly it shall be
When all this world's wealth standeth waste
Even as now, in many places over the earth,
Walls stand windbeaten,
Heavy with hoar frost; ruined habitations...
The maker of men has so marred this dwelling
That human laughter is not heard about it,
And idle stand these old giant works.

Yet it was probably better to live in one of those tiny houses on the very edge of the world than in the shadow of one of those old giant works, where at any moment you might be attacked by a new wave of wanderers. Such at least was the view of the first Christians who came to the West. They came originally from the Eastern Mediterranean, the first home of monasticism. Some of them settled at Marseilles and Tours; then when life became too dangerous, they struggled on in search of the most inaccessible fringes of Cornwall, Ireland, or the Hebrides. [...]

Apart from his small, enclosed society of scholars, what kept that wandering culture alive? Not books. Not building. Even allowing for the fact that most of the buildings were in wood, and so have vanished, the few surviving stone structures are pitifully humble and incompetent. It's amazing that they couldn't do better – but the wanderers seem to have lost the impulse to make durable habitations. What did they have? The answer comes out in the poems: *gold*. Whenever an Anglo-Saxon poet wants to put into words his idea of a good society, he speaks of gold.

There once many a man
Mood-glad, gold bright, of gleams garnished
Flushed with wine-pride, flashing war-gear,
Gazed on wrought gemstones, on gold, on silver,
On wealth held and hoarded, on light-filled amber.

The wanderers had never been without craftsmen; and all their pent-up need to give some permanent shape to the flux of experience, to make something perfect in their singularly imperfect existence, was concentrated in these marvelous objects. They achieved,

even in the chasing of a torque, an extraordinary intensity. But nothing shows how clearly the new Atlantic world was cut off from the Graeco-Roman civilisation of the Mediterranean. The subject of Mediterranean art was *man*, and had been ever since early Egypt. But the wanderers, struggling through the forests, battling with the waves, conscious chiefly of the birds and animals that hung in the tangled branches, were not interested in the human body. Just before the last war two hoards of treasure were discovered in England – both in Suffolk, about sixty miles from each other. They are both now in the British Museum. The one from Mildenhall is decorated almost entirely with human beings –



The great dish from the Mildenhall Treasure in the British Museum, [JMiall](#) , [CC BY-SA 3.0](#),

- all the old characters from antiquity, sea gods, nereids, and so forth.[...] The other hoard was from the ceremonial ship [found at] Sutton Hoo. Two hundred years have passed – perhaps a little more – and man has almost vanished.



Purse lid from the Sutton Hoo ship burial, early 7th century, gold, garnet and millefiori, 19 x 8.3 cm (excluding hinges) © Trustees of the British Museum

When he appears, he is a decorative cipher or hieroglyphic; and in his place are fabulous animals and birds. [...] But although the subject is what we call barbarous, the sense of material and the craftsmanship is finer and more confident and technically more advanced than the Mildenhall treasure.

This love of gold and wrought gemstones, this feeling that they reflected an ideal world and had some kind of enduring magic, went on right up to the time when the dark struggles for survival were over. It is arguable that Western Civilisation was saved by its craftsmen.

The unthinkable had happened. The Roman Empire had fallen – the jewel that had once united the western world in trade, cultural influence, religion, military peace, had crumbled to ashes. Men argued about what had caused it – political corruption, barbarian invasions, decadence, sheer wearing out after a thousand years of glory – but it little mattered now what had caused it. The old laws and systems were burning as invaders torched them. Those in the south, in the dilapidated streets of strangled Rome that had ruled the world, on the islands of Greece where cunning sculptors had chiselled statues so graceful and true to life one could fall in love with them unawares, and anywhere else that had been near the heart of society – these people lived in terror, for wave after wave of barbarians swept through. The plunderers ravaged what treasure and captives they could find in the wake of all the scavengers and attackers who had come before them. Churches burned, mosaics burst asunder, statues were by Visigoths or carried off by greedy foreign traders. As for the artists, how could they even afford to live by their craft? Even the most inspired artist must have bread – and bread requires coin – and coin comes only to an artist if a patron is willing to hire him to create art. Who would hire him now, when the average man any time for delicate artistry when survival from day to day, finding food and staving off attack, was matter of the moment? Even the rich had to pour their money into men at arms, fortification, defence – not sculpture and paint!

And in the North? Rome was a swiftly fading memory there in the dark woods. Areas that had been colonized, converted, Romanized, were swiftly reverting to ancient pagan ways, or to the cults of new gods like Odin and Thor, and cared more for the hunt and barrels of drink than for high culture.

Those who clung to the ways of Rome were often killed on account of the newly-accepted Christian faith. Literacy died. Centuries of civilisation had been undone in those wild northern climes.

To some, it might have seemed like this disaster was the end of culture in the west, and from now on it would be every man for himself in a dark wood of ignorance. But those who despaired were wrong, for hope still sparked even as civilization turned on its head, and creativity continued to flow in the blood of man....

Hilaire Belloc: The Civilization that Survived From *Europe and the Faith* (1920)

From these [years which are sometimes called the Dark Ages] again rose, after another 600 years of adventures and perils, the great harvest of medieval civilization. Hardly had the Roman Empire turned in its maturity to accept the fruit of its long development (I mean the [...]Church), when it began to grow old and was clearly about to suffer some great transition. But that transition, which threatened to be death, proved in the issue not death at all, but a mixture of Vision and Change.

The close succession of fruit and decay in society is what one expects from the analogy of all living things: at the close of the cycle it is death that should come. A plant, just after it is most fruitful, falls quickly. So, one might imagine, should the long story of Mediterranean civilization have proceeded. When it was at its final and most complete stage, one would expect some final and complete religion which should satisfy its long search and solve its ancient riddles: but after such a discovery, after the fruit of such a maturity had fully developed, one would expect an end.

Now it has been the singular fortune of our European civilization that an end did not come. Dissolution was in some strange way checked. Death was averted. And the more closely one looks into the unique history of that salvation—the salvation of all that could be saved in a most ancient and fatigued society—the more one sees that this salvation was effected by no agency save that of the [...] Church. Everything else, after, say, 250 A.D., the empty fashionable philosophies, the barbarians filling the army, the current passions and the current despair, made for nothing but ruin.

There is no parallel to this survival in all the history of mankind. Every other great civilization has, after many centuries of development, either fallen into a fixed and sterile sameness or died and disappeared. There is nothing left of Egypt, there is nothing left of Assyria.

[...] But the civilization of Europe—the civilization, that is, of Rome and of the Empire—had a third fortune differing both from death and from sterility: it survived to a resurrection. Its essential seeds were preserved for a Second Spring.

For five or six hundred years men carved less well, wrote verse less well, let roads fall slowly into ruin, lost or rather coarsened the machinery of government, forgot or neglected much in letters and in the arts and in the sciences. But there was preserved, right through that long period, not only so much of letters and of the arts as would suffice to bridge the great gulf between the fifth century and the eleventh, but also so much of what was really vital in the mind

of Europe as would permit that mind to blossom again after its repose. And the agency, I repeat, which effected this conservation of the seeds, was the [...] Church.

Slowly the years crept. In the south, the Church was the sole remaining institution to unite the people, and it led the charge in rebuilding from the disaster of Rome's fall. And at last, when the first dangers and chaos had passed, the time came. Life was dark indeed in a world where art had been all but forgotten. In the south, where the faith still had its strongholds in the hearts of the people, the heartbeat of art returned. It was time to renew the beauty that had gladdened men's hearts in times past.

Central to the teaching of Christianity was the teaching that God did not merely regard the world from a distance, but had Himself entered it in the flesh when Jesus Christ became man. Since humanity had looked upon the face of God – the most beautiful image of all – it was right that man should portray God and all things holy, and indeed, all creation, in images. Not to be worshipped, as pagans had worshipped idols, but to capture the imagination of the faithful that they might be moved to prayer and consideration of God and His ways.

Besides which, the disaster of the fall of Rome had created a culture where even fewer people had the time to invest in learning to read. Young people were needed at home to hunt, to till the land, to earn a means of support. With a largely illiterate population, it became more crucial than ever that the Gospel message must be shown to the people in the language that all people could understand – namely that of art. A beautiful image full of meaning could be read like a book even by the lowliest peasant.



“Crucifixion,” Santa Maria Antigua, Rome Santa Maria Antigua, located at the foot of the Palatine Hill beside the Roman Forum (originally part of the Roman emperor Domitian’s palace complex of c. 81-96 C.E.), consecrated in the 6th century with paintings from the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries.

Furthermore, the Church taught that man's creativity was a reflection of God's creativity. Humans could not create something from nothing. But they nonetheless did something wonderful in imitating God's act of creation whenever they created art.

For these reasons, the Church became the bastion of the artists. Bishops and abbots commissioned artists, architects, and craftsmen to continue the great work of creating beauty, even though some might have scoffed and thought it useless in light of the overturn of society. Devout kings and lords donated that churches might be erected that would be full of beautiful, decorated where possible with holy images. Monasteries "scriptoria" (book departments) were filled with monks who not only copied out Bibles and other great works, but lavished them with beautiful designs, illustrations and covers. Though the times dictated that art was limited and could not flourish, the watchfires of devotion kept the sparks of artistry alive.

As a result, the majority of great art created during this period tended to be religious in theme, both because it was created by churchmen or under the Church's patronage, but also because it was thought that if time and expense were to be given to something so impractical as art, it was only fitting that it should concern something considered extremely important – religion.

Not all within the Church were united in this attitude toward art – particularly toward the beginning of the Christian era, there was reason for controversy.

Dr. Nancy Ross: "Controversy Over Images" From "A New Pictorial language: The Image in Early Medieval Art" (2015)

Tertullian, an influential early Christian author living in the second and third centuries, wrote a treatise titled *On Idolatry* in which he asks if artists could, in fact, be Christians. In this text, he argues that all illusionary art, or all art that seeks to look like something or someone in nature, has the potential to be worshiped as an idol. Arguing fervently against artists as Christians, he acknowledges that there are many artists who are Christians and indeed some who are even priests. In the end, Tertullian asks artists to quit their work and become craftsmen.

Another influential early Christian writer, [...] Augustine of Hippo, was also concerned about images, but for different reasons. In his *Soliloquies* (386-87), Augustine observes that illusionary images, like actors, are lying. An actor on a stage lies because he is playing a part, trying to convince you that he is a character in the script when in truth he is not. An image lies because it is not the thing it claims to be. A painting of a cat is not a cat, but the artist tries to convince the viewer that it is. Augustine cannot reconcile these lies with patterns of divine truth and therefore does not see a place for images in Christian practice.

Fortunately for art and history, not everyone agreed with Tertullian and Augustine, and the use of images persisted. Nevertheless their style and appearance changed in order to be more compatible with theology.

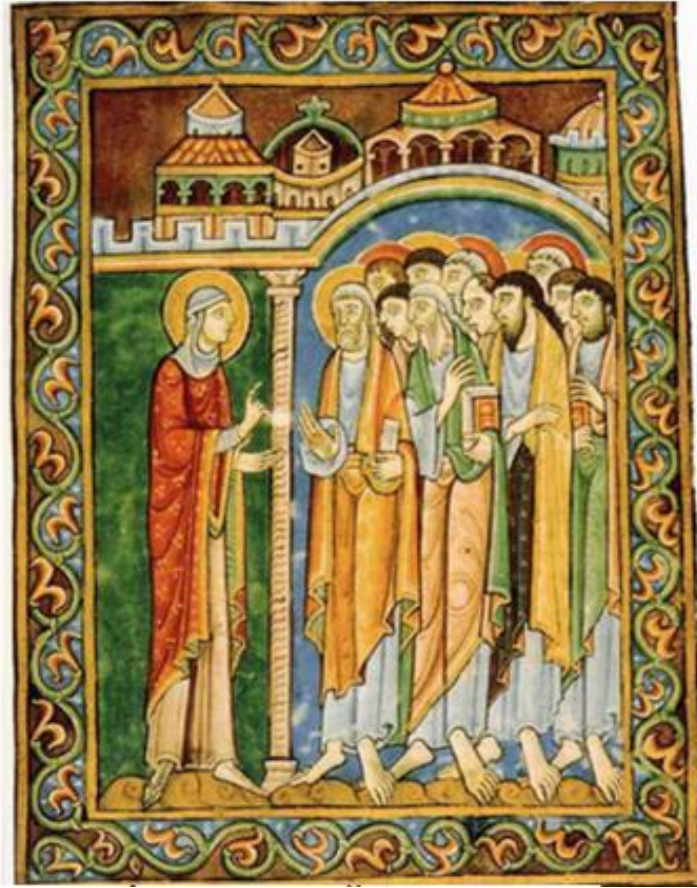


Mosaic in the apse of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, 6th century (Ravenna, Italy), , photo: [Dr. Steven Zucker](#), CC BY-NC-SA

Christian art, which was initially influenced by the illusionary quality of classical art, started to move away from naturalistic representation and instead pushed toward abstraction. Artists began to abandon classical artistic conventions like shading, modeling and perspective conventions that make the image appear more real. They no longer observed details in nature to record them in paint, bronze, marble, or mosaic.

Instead, artists favored flat representations of people, animals and objects that only looked nominally like their subjects in real life. Artists were no longer creating the lies that Augustine warned against, as these abstracted images removed at least some of the temptations for idolatry [since they did not look realistic.] This new style, adopted over several generations, created a comfortable distance between the new Christian empire and its pagan past. In Western Europe, this approach to the visual arts dominated until the imperial rule of Charlemagne (800-814)[.]

Most of the artwork that survives from this period is either metalwork or decoration of architecture, such as paintings on church walls, or carvings in doors. While there may have been more work on flat portable pieces, very little art of this kind has been preserved, if it was popular at all.



“Mary Magdalene Announcing the Resurrection to the Disciples,” From the St. Albans Psalter, 12th cent. Although this image was painted six centuries after the one on the previous page, it is easy to see that the highly stylized, two-dimensional approach to art for theological reasons was still very influential.

Rosie Weetch: “Decoding Anglo-Saxon Art” From The British Museum & smARThistory (2017)

Not all art in the early Medieval period was religious, of course. In the north, where Christianity had less sway, and missionaries were only just starting their work, what art there was tended to be secular rather than religious – Norse and Saxon gods, for example, did not have a tradition of being portrayed in art. Designs of creatures, warfare, and everyday life have survived and continue to fascinate us today. Every region in Europe had its own particular style of local art. One particularly mysterious and rewarding style to examine is Anglo-Saxon and Viking art – at a casual glance, it can often look like a chaotic mess of knots and strange faces. Yet a trained eye can find all kinds of answers in these “visual riddles.” Please follow the link to this article, where British museum curator Rosie Weetch will draw the curtain back on the vagaries of Saxon designs!

Link to the article:

<https://smarthistory.org/decoding-anglo-saxon-art/>

While the first part of the Dark Ages certainly saw the creation of many artistic works, the first true flowering of great art of the Middle Ages was under the rule of Charlemagne, who united much of continental Europe in a new "Holy Roman Empire." Although Charlemagne himself was not a highly educated man who had a profound respect for scholarship and the arts. He and his nobles facilitated a rebirth of art, known as the Carolingian Renaissance. Under his leadership, more children were able to attend school, leading to a greater number of readers and a demand for books. These books were often works of great beauty.

**Eva March Tappan: "Illuminated Manuscripts"
From *When Knights Were Bold* (1911)**

The painting that was done on manuscripts was called illuminating. At the beginning of the Middle Ages the parchment was sometimes dyed purple, and the whole book written in letters of gold or silver almost as regular as print. Of course such books as these were enormously expensive. In the thirteenth century, a finely written Bible was sold for enough to pay a workman's wages for twenty-six years. Of course not many books were as expensive as this, but they were all very costly. Most volumes were decorated, even those that cost no more than a house or two. The margin of the frontispiece was generally painted, and there were often borders to the pages and most elaborate initials, sometimes entwined with flowers and vines and sometimes showing pictures of saints or even of whole Bible scenes. No one [had much in the way of means to research] how people dressed in Bible times, and therefore the illuminators simply copied the dress of their own day. Artistically, this was not very correct; but it is a great help in learning about the costumes of the Middle Ages.

The reds and blues and greens in these illuminations are as fresh and bright as ever, and the gold looks as if it had been put on only an hour ago. Much expense went into the binding. The covers were sometimes of wood and sometimes of leather. They were ornamented with gold and silver filigree work at the corners, or with heavy knobs of the precious metals. Often they were set with jewels. Sometimes the covers were of ivory, most delicately carved. If a man was fortunate enough to own a book, he was exceedingly careful to whom he gave the privilege of opening its clasps. As to lending it, that was not done as a matter of friendship by any means. The borrower must give ample security that he would return it uninjured. Even kings were not excepted. When Louis XI, king of France, wished to borrow of the faculty of medicine of the university of Paris the works of a certain Arabian physician, he was not only obliged to give valuable security, but he had to obtain a wealthy endorser just as if he were an ordinary man, and not the ruler of the land.

**Dr. Nancy Ross: "In Search of Three Dimensions"
From "Carolingian Art: An introduction" (2015)**

Figurative art from [the time of Charlemagne] is easy to recognize. Unlike the flat, two-dimensional work of Early Christian and Early Byzantine artists, Carolingian artists sought to restore the third dimension. They used classical drawings as their models and tried to create more convincing illusions of space.

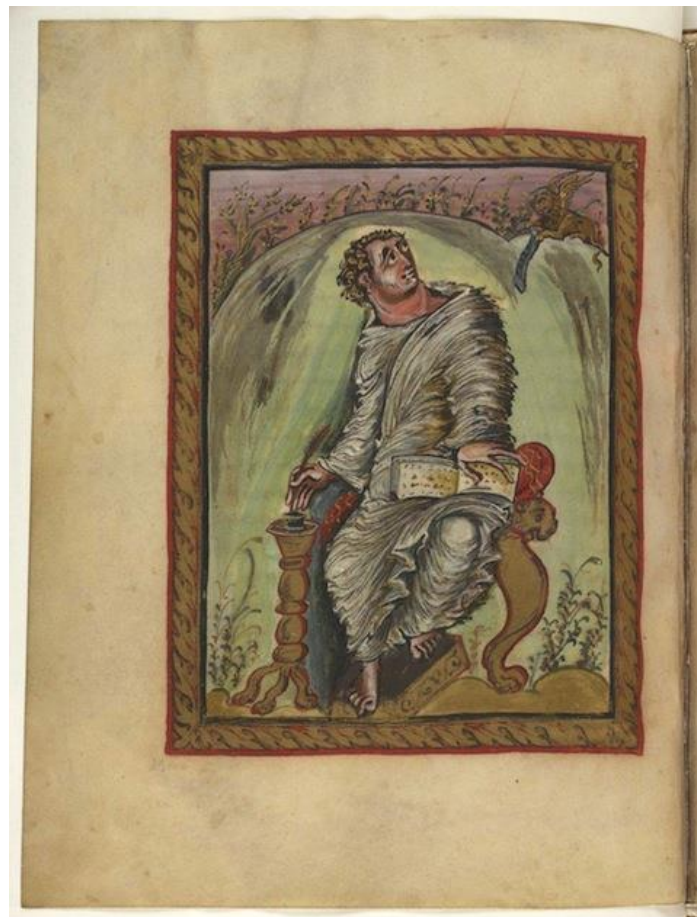


St. Mark from the Godescalc Gospel Lectionary, folio 1v., c. 781-83

This development is evident in tracing author portraits in illuminated manuscripts. The Godescalc Gospel Lectionary, commissioned by Charlemagne and his wife Hildegard, was made circa 781-83 during his reign as King of the Franks and before the beginning of the Carolingian Renaissance. In the portrait of St. Mark, the artist employs typical Early Byzantine artistic conventions. The face is heavily modeled in brown, the drapery folds fall in stylized patterns and there is little or no shading. The seated position of the evangelist would be difficult to reproduce in real life, as there are spatial inconsistencies. The left leg is

shown in profile and the other leg is shown straight on. This author portrait is typical of its time.

The Ebbo Gospels were made c. 816-35 in the Benedictine Abbey of Hautvillers for Ebbo, Archbishop of Rheims. The author portrait of St. Mark is characteristic of Carolingian art and the Carolingian Renaissance. The artist used distinctive frenzied lines to create the illusion of the evangelist's body shape and position. The footstool sits at an awkward unrealistic angle, but there are numerous attempts by the artist to show the body as a three-dimensional object in space. The right leg is tucked under the chair and the artist tries to show his viewer, through the use of curved lines and shading, that the leg has form. There is shading and consistency of perspective. The evangelist sitting on the chair strikes a believable pose.



St. Mark from the Ebbo Gospels, folio 18v., c. 816-35

Charlemagne, like Constantine before him, left behind an almost mythic legacy. The Carolingian Renaissance marked the last great effort to revive classical culture before the Late Middle Ages. Charlemagne's empire was led by his successors until the late ninth century. In early tenth century, the Ottonians rose to power and espoused different artistic ideals.

Medieval Christian artists sought to create religious imagery that not only served as a visual narrative of the stories of the Bible and the history of the Church, but also revealed symbolically mysteries that might not be clear if they were portrayed with photographic naturalism. An excellent example may be found on the cover of the Lindau Gospels. The creation of books was an extremely time-consuming and expensive process, since every volume had to be copied by hand. While there were certainly many complete Bibles in existence, it was also popular to create volumes with sections from the Bible, so that those who could not afford a full Bible might at least have a volume of the Gospels and the Book of Psalms, for example, or a set of the letters of Paul the Apostle. The Lindau Gospels are such a selection of Scriptures bound in a single volume, painstakingly laboured over by different groups of monks during and after the Carolingian Renaissance, in stages over the course of a century. The inside pages are a glory of brightly coloured illuminations and marvelous calligraphy. It is the covers, however, that most often stops viewers in their tracks – and there are many facets that often escape their notice!

Colin B. Bailey: “From the Vaults: The Lindau Gospels” From the Morgan Library and Museum (2020)

In this video, Colin B. Bailey will tour you through some of the lesser-noticed details of the Lindau Gospels, including features that can only be noticed by staring at the book sideways! **Please watch the first six minutes** of the video – the rest is optional if you find it interesting. To access the video, follow this link to the Morgan Library website. Scroll down past the article at the top, and the video is right there to be played.

Link to the video:

<https://www.themorgan.org/collection/lindau-gospels>

Ask yourself after you have watched the video:

- *Later, more naturalistic depictions of Christ on the Cross usually showed Him in terrible pain, as we might expect. Such depictions were called “Christus patiens” (Christ suffering, or undergoing with patience.) However in the art of this earlier Medieval period, and on the cover of the Lindau Gospels, Christ is usually seen as though fully in control and in no pain, in spite of being nailed to the Cross. He is not portrayed suffering, but upright and calm, and he looks as though his arms were spread in triumph rather than being forced wide by the nails. There are no signs of wounds or blemishes on his body. Why would the artist choose to depict him in this way? Is it unnatural? Unreasonable?*



**Martha Kearney: “The Book of Kells: Medieval Europe’s Greatest Treasure?”
From the British Broadcasting Company Website (2016)**

Many an argument (and many a box and blow!) could be exchanged over which illuminated manuscript is the greatest. But in the minds of many, the crowned queen of all illuminations is The Book of Kells, a stunningly complex collection of the Gospels that disappeared for years before being rediscovered. Follow this link to read about the Book of Kells – and make sure to take a little time taking in the stunning, swirling knotwork!

Link to the article:

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160425-the-book-of-kells-medieval-europes-greatest-treasure>



“The Uta Codex,” by an Anonymous Monastic Artist, was created in in the 1020’s at the request of the powerful Abbess Uta von Niedermunster. The codex was an evangeliary, or book of the Gospels divided into short readings to be read during Mass. It is most famous for its jewel encrusted cover, but this page in particular is a wonderful example of the glorious detail in Ottonian art. The central image of Abbess Uta lifting the green codex up as a gift to the infant Jesus, sitting on the lap of his mother. The amount of gold leaf used in this page is quiet something, as is the vibrant blue paint, which was very difficult to produce. Notice the peculiar lions and griffins, which symbolize Christ’s strength and kingship, but can also look quite comical!

Jean Sorabella: “Ottonian Art” From “The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,” Metropolitan Museum of Art (2008)

The revival of culture instituted by Charlemagne continued throughout the ninth century, but the empire that he had founded slowly disintegrated. Yet just as Charlemagne had aspired to Roman glory, later German princes yearned to restore his northern Christian empire. By the early tenth century, a ducal family from Saxony (in northern Germany) had mustered the power to claim royal standing, and in 936, Otto I, known as Otto the Great, was crowned king at Aachen[...] The Holy Roman Empire was revived, albeit with a different geography and a different character. The Ottonian empire encompassed the lands that now are Germany, Switzerland, northern and central Italy, but not the vast French territories that Charlemagne had held.

The Ottonian emperors styled themselves the equals of the greatest rulers. They constructed a palace in Rome and spent long periods there near the pope, whose spiritual authority bolstered their claim to rule by God-given right. They also sought close ties with Byzantium, a power of much superior might and sophistication, and sealed a strategic alliance when the Byzantine princess Theophano married Otto II in 972. In addition to political advantage, the Ottonians gained exposure to works of art that glorified other empires, and they in turn trumpeted their own aspirations by promoting the visual arts. The Ottonian revival coincided with a period of growth and reform in the church, and monasteries produced much of the finest Ottonian art, including magnificent illuminated manuscripts, churches and monastic buildings, and sumptuous luxury objects intended for church interiors and treasuries.

[...] Political imagery was often integrated with sacred scenes. For example, the cathedral of Magdeburg, founded by Otto I, counted among its treasures a set of ivories that adorned a piece of liturgical furniture. Most of these are carved with scenes from the life of Christ, but one (41.100.157) celebrates the partnership of the church and the Ottonian state, for it represents Christ receiving the cathedral from the hands of Otto I, who approaches with draped hands and an escort of saintly protectors.



Contemporary image of Otto I, lower left, in one of the [Magdeburg Ivories](#), carved from the tusks of elephants. Otto presents [Magdeburg Cathedral](#) to Christ and Saints, and is depicted smaller than them as a sign of humility.

Like their Carolingian forebears, Ottonian artists privileged late antique sources and appreciated their imperial pedigree while treating them with a distinctively northern touch. An ivory panel depicting the three women at the holy sepulcher (1993.19), for instance, employs the same poses and arrangement of figures found in Early Christian versions of the subject, but the Ottonian artist has modified the style of his model, translating it into a new idiom rather than slavishly repeating it. [...]



Plaque with the Holy Women at the Sepulchre, Early 10th Cent., Milan, Italy, Cloisters Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

[...] At Hildesheim, the redoubtable Bishop Bernward, tutor and later advisor to Emperor Otto II, commissioned ambitious works in bronze, including a column adorned with a helical frieze and a set of church doors with biblical scenes in relief, forms based on ancient imperial and Early Christian monuments in Rome. The reliefs on Bernward's bronzes are full of figures that are rather unlike anything in Roman art, attenuated, expressive, and engaged in scenes of wonderful narrative coherence. Other workshops

developed styles based on Byzantine models, including the splendid imports that Otto II's Byzantine wife brought with her from Constantinople.



The Bernward Doors, c. 1015, Hildesheim Cathedral, Germany

Please follow this link to a short video exploring the scenes on the Bernward Doors:
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/carolingian-ottonian/ottonian1/v/saint-michaels-hildesheim>

[...] Ottonian craftsmen also excelled in fine metalwork and astonishing luxury objects. The court required brilliant ornaments to complement a splendid mode of dress and ceremonies magnified to match the pomp of Byzantium. Ottonian goldsmiths furnished jewels of all sorts, from imperial regalia to elaborate brooches (17.191.7) and rings (2004.274).



Brooch, Date: c. 970–1030, Probably Northern Italy, Gold, pearls, glass, cloisonné enamel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Ring, 10th – 11th Century, Germany, Gold with cloisonné enamel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

This material displays the old Germanic love of geometric pattern, minute detail, and technical intricacy, but some pieces also integrate ancient gems (1988.15) and classical design elements. Goldsmiths applied a similarly eclectic style on larger objects made for churches, such as liturgical vessels, bindings for sacred books, and furnishings in precious metal. A particularly grand example is the altar frontal made for the cathedral at Basel around 1019 (now Musée Cluny, Paris), a vision of otherworldly splendor and august grace.

Finally, Ottonian craftsmen lavished their art on containers for relics of the saints, which the faithful venerated with growing intensity. The simplest Ottonian reliquaries were small boxes meant for individuals to hold or to wear, but the most innovative were in fact three-dimensional statuary encasing sacred material, such as the gilded wooden figure of Christ on the Cross made for Cologne Cathedral around 970.



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Elizabeth Morrison and Larisa Grollemond: “An Introduction to the Bestiary,
Book of Beasts in the Medieval World”
From “The Iris” (2020)



*Griffin (detail) from Book of Flowers, 1460, unknown illuminator, made in France and Belgium.
Parchment, 16 1/16 × 11 1/4 inches (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National Library of the
Netherlands, Ms.72 A 23, fol. 46)*

The bestiary — the medieval book of beasts — was among the most popular illuminated texts in northern Europe during the Middle Ages (about 500–1500). Medieval Christians understood every element of the world as a manifestation of God, and bestiaries largely focused on each animal’s religious meaning. The book brought creatures both real and fantastic to life before the reader’s eyes, offering Christian inspiration as well as entertainment. The stories and images from the bestiary became so popular that they escaped from the book’s pages to inhabit a myriad of other art forms, ranging from magnificent tapestries to exquisitely carved ivories. In fact, the stories of the bestiary pervaded both medieval and modern popular culture. Even if you haven’t heard of the medieval bestiary, you will recognize many of its stories.[...]

How bestiaries work — The unicorn

The [unicorn](#) offers a primary example of the bestiary’s complex symbolism, as well as its influence on both medieval and modern imaginations. The unicorn was described in the text of the bestiary as a wild, untamable beast that could be captured only by a maiden in the

woods. Upon meeting the maiden, the unicorn would lay its head in her lap, making it vulnerable to the attack of hunters.



Unicorn (detail) from [The Ashmole Bestiary](#), about 1210–20, unknown illuminator, made in England. Parchment, 10 7/8 × 7 3/16 inches (The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Ashmole 1511, fol. 14v)

In the bestiary, however, the unicorn's appearance and capture were only half the story. The unicorn also symbolized the Incarnation, the moment when Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, rendering him human and vulnerable to death. In the luxurious image shown above, the beast rests in the lap of a maiden seated before a tree, while a hunter on the right stabs the animal in its side. The unicorn symbolizes Christ and the maiden represents his mother the Virgin Mary, while the killing of the creature serves as an allegory for Christ's death.

The widespread diffusion of the bestiary popularized the unicorn's tale, which was adapted in many other media in addition to manuscripts. At the center of this carved bone saddle, for example, a stately unicorn looks over its shoulder at an elegant maiden, echoing the bestiary story. Thanks to its proclivity for maidens, the unicorn also became a focus of

stories of romance and chivalry, transforming from a religious symbol into an emblem of courtly love.



Parade Saddle, about 1450, unknown creator, made in Germany or Tyrol, bone, polychromy, wood, leather, iron alloy, 16 1/2 × 17 × 21 9/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1904, 04.3.250)

[...] **The Lion**



Lion (detail) in a bestiary, about 1225–50, unknown illuminator, made in England, parchment, 11 5/8 × 7 1/2 inches ([The Bodleian Libraries](#), University of Oxford, Ms. Bodl. 764, fol. 2v)

The lion was known in the bestiary as the “king of beasts,” and as such, was placed first. In this spectacularly colorful image, a jaunty lion waves to the viewer at top. In the middle, three cubs playfully crawl over their adult counterpart. At bottom, cubs are brought to life by their parents, who lick and breathe on them. According to the bestiary, lion cubs are born dead, and after three days their parents literally breathe life into them. This behavior was believed to have been put into the lion at the beginning of time by God as a reflection of the Crucifixion of Christ and his Resurrection three days later.

Land animals



Parandrus in a bestiary, about 1200–1210, unknown illuminator, made in England, parchment, 8 11/16 × 6 5/16 inches ([The British Library](#), image: Granger)

After introducing the lion, the typical bestiary presented a section devoted to land animals. According to the text in this example, the four-legged beast depicted at bottom can move its long horns independently, so that one can face forward and the other backward to defend against dual threats. The artist emphasized this flexibility by showing one of the

animal's horns slicing through the text itself. Such interaction between text and image was a hallmark of the bestiary tradition.

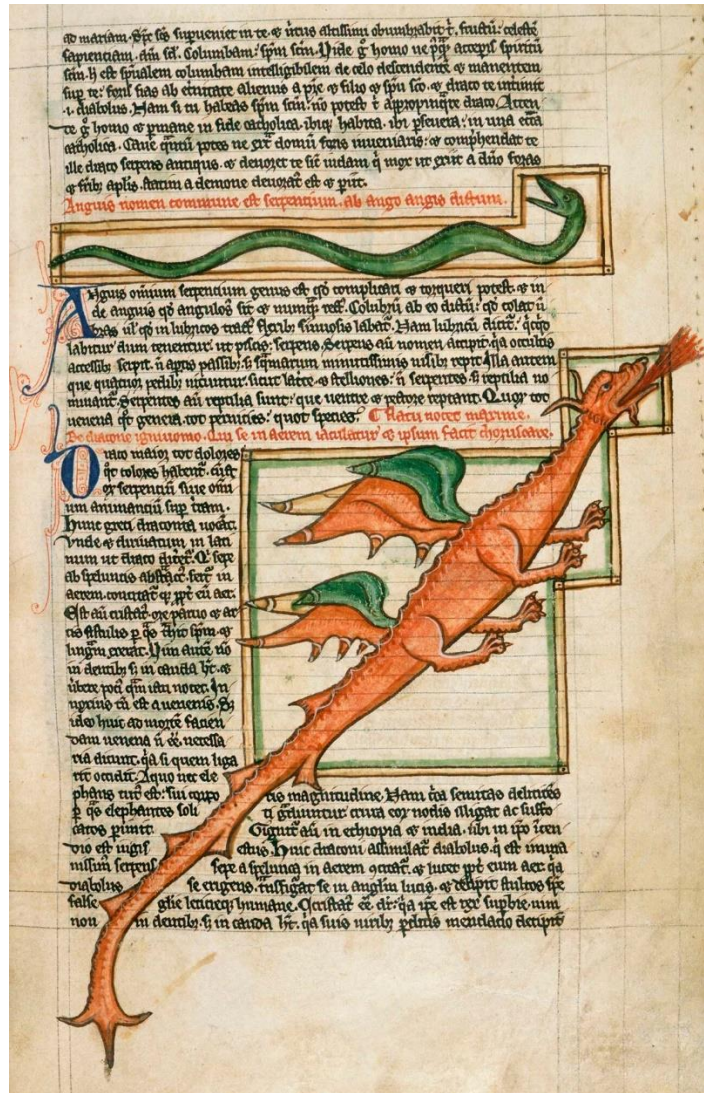
Birds



Eagles (detail) from a Workshop Bestiary, about 1185, unknown illuminator, made in England, vellum, 8 7/16 × 6 1/8 inches ([The Morgan Library & Museum](#), New York, Ms. M.81, fol. 48)

This opening shows a manuscript's transition from land animals to birds. Just as the lion was known as the king of beasts, the eagle was supreme among birds. The eagle was described as losing its sight as it grows old, only to be rejuvenated by gazing at the sun.

Serpents



Dragon in a bestiary, about 1240–50, unknown illuminator, made in England, parchment, 11 × 6 1/2 inches (The British Library, London, Harley Ms. 3244, fol. 59.)

Serpents often came next. This page depicts the dragon, king of serpents, with a fire-breathing specimen stretching diagonally across the page. The section of the text that describes the power of the dragon's tail is visually interrupted by the tail itself, demonstrating the formidable nature of the beast as well as the meaningful ways in which text and image interacted in the bestiary.

Sea creatures



Whale (detail) from a bestiary, about 1270, unknown illuminator, made possibly in Théroutanne, France, tempera colors, gold leaf, and ink on parchment, 7 1/2 × 5 5/8 inches ([The J. Paul Getty Museum](#), Ms. Ludwig XV 3 [83.MR.173], fol. 89v. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)

The final section of the bestiary usually dealt with sea creatures. Here an enormous whale plunges into the depths, dragging two hapless fishermen with it. The text describes this beast as so massive that sailors confuse its back for an island. When they make camp and light a fire, the whale feels the heat and dives down, drowning its surprised visitors. This story is presented as a warning against the deceptions of the devil. The artist skillfully evokes

the sense of horror felt by the sailors at the exact moment they discover their tragic mistake.
[...]

ATTRIBUTIONS

- p. 2 - "The Craftsmen Who Saved Civilization." Excerpted from Kenneth Clark. *Civilization: A Personal View*. Jolly and Barber Ltd, Rugby, Warwickshire, UK, 1969, pp. 7 – 9.
- p. 7, Ross, Dr. Nancy, "A new pictorial language: the image in early medieval art," in Smarthistory, August 8, 2015, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/a-new-pictorial-language-the-image-in-early-medieval-art/>. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
- p. 10, Ross, Dr. Nancy "Carolingian art, an introduction," in Smarthistory, July 6, 2018, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/carolingian-art-an-introduction/>. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
- p. 16, Sorabella, Jean. "Ottonian Art." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/oton/hd_oton.htm (September 2008), accessed August 24, 2020.
- p. 22, Elizabeth Morrison and Larisa Grollemond, "An Introduction to the Bestiary, Book of Beasts in the Medieval World," in Smarthistory, June 28, 2020, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/bestiary-book-beasts-medieval-world/>. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.