

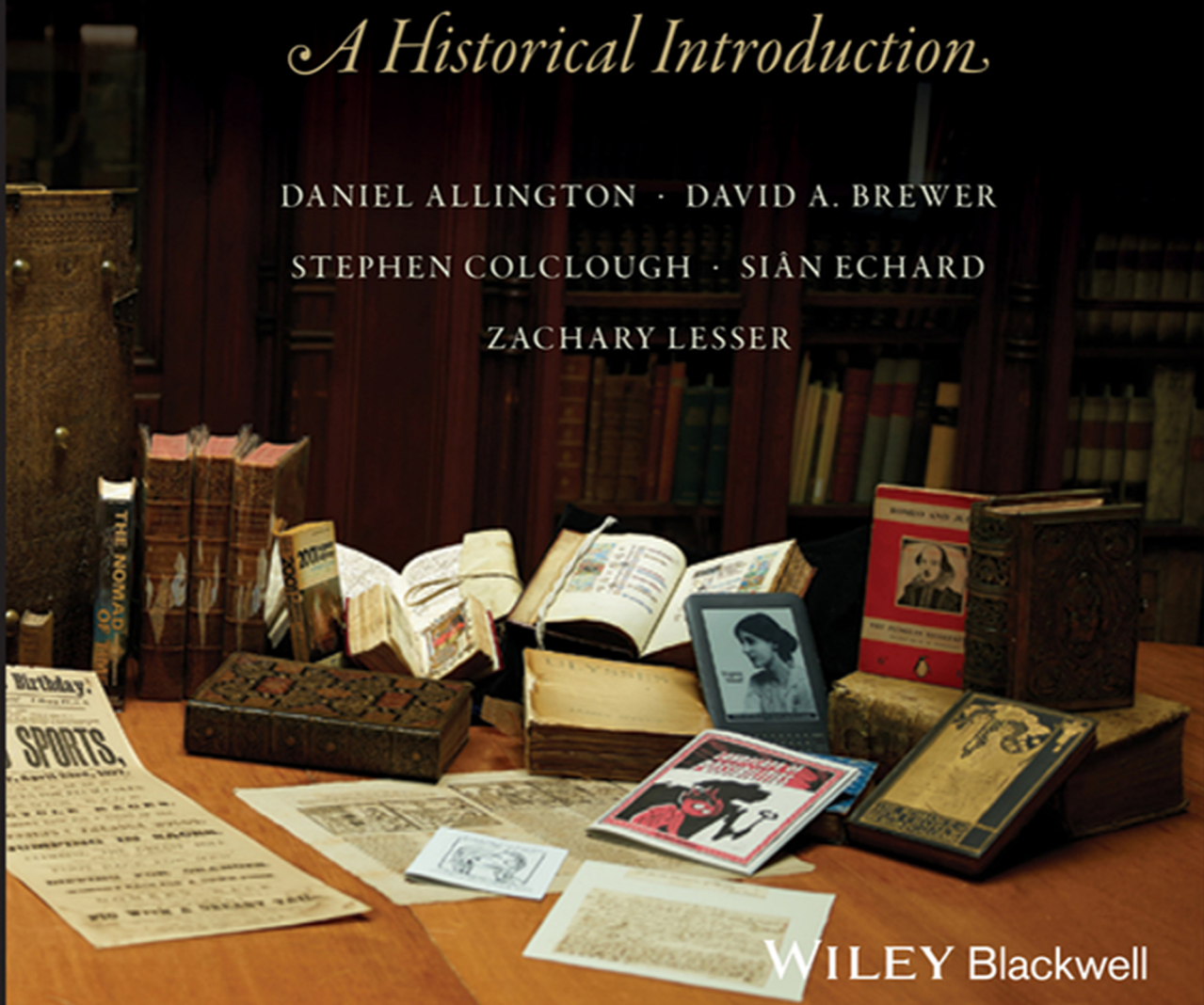
# THE BOOK — IN — BRITAIN

## *A Historical Introduction*

DANIEL ALLINGTON · DAVID A. BREWER

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WILEY Blackwell



## **The Book in Britain**





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A Historical Introduction

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**WILEY** Blackwell

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## Editor's Note

In planning this book, I hoped to do something different from other introductions to the field of book history. There were already several excellent anthologies of classic essays and collections of new topical essays. What there was not yet, it seemed to me, was a clear, up-to-date narrative of the long history of the book in Britain. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for one scholar to tell that story in any real detail. The goal of *The Book in Britain: A Historical Introduction* was to combine the benefits of a multiply authored volume – the expertise in each historical period that no single author could have – with the coherence and readability of a monograph. Although we have not sought to eliminate the distinctiveness of each author's approach, we have worked collaboratively throughout the planning, writing, and revising stages in order to create that narrative coherence. Our plan was for each of us to edit the entire manuscript and revise based on those suggestions.

Sadly, Stephen Colclough died suddenly in 2015. While he had already written his chapters, he was not able to revise as the other authors were. We therefore lightly edited his chapters to enhance their connections to the rest of the volume. These interventions were minor, with the exception of a few more substantial passages on the abolitionist use of print (which I wrote) and on lithography and hot-metal composing machines (which Daniel wrote). We have largely let Stephen's excellent work stand as is, making only occasional revisions based on our reading of the entire manuscript, which Stephen was tragically unable to see.

— Zachary Lesser

## A Note on Money

Until February 15, 1971 (known as Decimal Day), English currency was based on a non-decimal system of pounds (£), shillings (s), and pence (d, from the Latin *denarius*). There were 12 pence in a shilling, and 20 shillings in a pound. A penny therefore equaled 1/240 of a pound, as opposed to 1/100 of a pound after decimalization. Whenever monetary figures are mentioned in the pre-decimal period, we have not converted their value into decimal currency. Over the centuries covered here, the value of money – what it could purchase – changed drastically. It is hard to compare these values across time, but one good way to do so is by reference to average wages. (The other main way is to compare the purchasing power of money over time, since core expenses like food, clothing, and shelter changed in price relative to earnings at different rates over time.) We need to bear in mind, however, that in earlier periods wages did not represent the full compensation a worker received, as employment could include meals and sometimes lodging, and not all people worked in the cash economy. The website [MeasuringWorth.com](http://MeasuringWorth.com) offers reliable estimates of average annual earnings in the United Kingdom over the past several centuries, taking account of the various kinds of in-kind compensation some workers received. We use their data as a rough guide to the historical value of money.

Around 1600, a journeyman might earn between £3 and £8 per year, depending on his trade, plus food and drink. The average annual total compensation for workers of £8 15s equates to between 6d and 7d per day. While a ballad could be had for a penny, one of Shakespeare's plays printed in quarto was usually 6d, the equivalent of a day's wage, which would have made it a substantial purchase. Longer bound volumes sold for considerably more: the Shakespeare First Folio (1623) retailed for around £1, and Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) around £2 10s. Both were obviously well out of reach for the typical worker.

In 1700, the same journeyman might earn £12 annually, or about 9d per day. A chapbook containing a brief tale in one or one-and-a-half sheets of paper cost 2d, not something to be purchased unthinkingly but affordable if considered important. Meanwhile, the 1719 first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* cost 5s, or about a week's earnings: this publication was not aimed at most working people.

In 1800, a worker's annual earnings were now, on average, around £23 10s. Some cheap reprinted novels cost 6d, or about 5% of weekly compensation – certainly within reach, although not all of this compensation was in cash and hence available for use in buying a book. New novels of the time often appeared in three-volume sets at 3s or 4s per volume, a much more considerable expenditure of an entire week's earnings or more. The rise of lending libraries suggests that plenty of readers were not purchasers.

By 1900, the annual earnings for a typical worker had risen to £68. A new novel by Thomas Hardy might retail for 6s, or a bit less than a quarter of weekly earnings, but plenty of cheaper editions could be found, including reprints of classics for a penny.

Compare that to today. In 2016, the average annual earnings in the United Kingdom was £26 200. A new paperback bestseller can be had from Amazon or at W.H. Smith for £5 or £6, less than 2% of weekly pay (before taxes). Certainly books have gotten cheaper over time relative to average earnings. But these very long-term trends mask more local rises and falls in the standard of living of British men and women and in the relative prices of books, both new and old. They are intended simply to give readers a broad overview of the value of money at different moments in the history of the book in Britain.

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## Introduction

Zachary Lesser

How does the material form of a text affect its meaning? What was the cultural impact of different technologies for producing texts, from the monastic scriptorium to moveable type and the printing press to the typewriter and the Xerox machine to the photo-offset lithographic printer and the desktop publishing application? Does it matter if a word is printed on paper, or written on parchment, or electronically rendered on a mobile device? Was the Renaissance philosopher Francis Bacon correct that the modern world had been ushered in by “the art of printing, gunpowder and the nautical compass,” which “have changed the face and condition of things all over the globe ... so that no empire or sect or star seems to have exercised a greater power and influence on human affairs than those mechanical things” (Bacon 2000, p. 100)? How do books – not merely the words they contain and the ideas those words express – shape political and religious movements? And how do people with different racial, gender, class, and socio-cultural identities interact with books and the book trade? Who has been included in and who excluded from the world of books, and why?

These are the kinds of big questions asked by the scholarly field usually known as “the history of the book.” Most fundamentally, scholars interested in the history of the book seek to understand the influence of material texts and textual formats on the world in which we live. As a field, book history is both theoretically and historically oriented. The principles and concepts underlying it – such as *materiality* and *textuality*, *remediation*, *censorship* and *regulation*, *typography*, *mise-en-page*, *orality* and *literacy*, addressed throughout the pages that follow – are broad and applicable across historical periods and geographical areas. But these concepts are only fully realized in specific historical moments, which differ greatly in the particularities of printing technology, the social organization of the book trade and its customers, the relationship of the state to the press, and so on. We have structured *The Book in Britain* as a narrative history, while developing key theoretical concepts over the course of that narrative, as the best way to introduce readers to the dynamic relationship between the abstract/theoretical and the particular/historical that is a hallmark of the history of the book as a scholarly field.

But of course the material forms that texts take cannot be limited to “the book,” even though the field of “book history” has often focused on printed books, the printing press, and “print culture.” Scholars of the medieval period have long addressed questions of textual production, transmission, and reception through the intensive study of manuscripts. Indeed, much of the current dynamism of the field has been generated by a push to break down the supposed dividing line of Gutenberg’s “invention” of the printing press. (Precisely what, if anything, Gutenberg actually “invented” has also been the

subject of increased debate; see Smith 2001; Agüera y Arcas 2003). Manuscripts do not simply stop being produced after the invention of moveable type in the West. Nor do people stop writing by hand once they can type on a keyboard, just as they do not stop reading novels as printed books once they can carry around hundreds of them electronically on a Kindle.

And not all books are printed as opposed to handwritten (or indeed entirely blank), if we understand the word *book* in one of its scholarly definitions, which has nothing to do with how the *text* in the book was produced: a series of pages sewn or glued together and bound between covers. It has been crucial in recent work in “book” history to stress the interaction at any given historical moment of multiple forms of material text – some of them “books” and many others not – and multiple ways of producing those texts. The term *print culture* itself, which once helped to cohere the field, has been heavily critiqued for its teleological focus on the supersession of manuscript by print and for the false uniformity it implies (Dane 2003; Ezell 2009). We continue to use the term in this volume – and the related term *manuscript culture*, even though the idea of *manuscript* (“written by hand”) is a back-formation from print, as evidenced by the fact that the word itself dates only from the sixteenth century. But we use them with an awareness of and attention to the overlapping of different forms of textual production.

The term *book* in the title of this volume is therefore clearly problematic; we use it for the sake of convenience because “book history” has been the most common name for this broad-ranging scholarly field. But we discuss not only bound volumes but also unbound pamphlets, advertisements glued up on walls, office memos and stapled newsletters, texts inscribed and incised on metal, stone, and wood. “Book” may be a convenient shorthand, but we must be wary that its convenience does not make us forget the numerous other material forms in which we encounter texts in our daily lives and through which those texts transform us and our world.

Indeed, this multiplicity represents one of the major lines of continuity in our study. Since our narrative covers some 1500 years of the history of the book in Britain, it may be useful to draw attention in this introduction to some of the threads that weave their way through its entirety, and this is the first one:

- 1) Modes of textual production and reproduction never simply supersede each other. Whichever modes are available in a given historical moment interact and overlap in sometimes surprising ways.

The *meaning* of these forms may well change: manuscript signifies differently in a world in which it is distinguished from print; typewriting looks very different once laser printing becomes available. Newer forms of textual production often *remediate* older ones (see Bolter and Grusin 1999): early printing typefaces were based on different kinds of scribal handwriting; e-book readers often reproduce the illusion of turning pages, as do websites like the Internet Archive that provide digital scans of print books; the PDF file format has been so successful because it appears to mimic the supposed fixity of print documents as opposed to the perceived ephemerality of digital text (see Gitelman 2014, pp. 111–135). Contrary to the narrative we often tell ourselves in the moment, forms of textual production almost never disappear completely.

Equally worth unpacking is the other key word in our title: “Britain.” In a history as rich and variegated as the one we are telling here, it is impossible to cover everything, of course. We have limited ourselves to the British Isles to enable the level of detail

necessary to do justice to the history of writing, printing, publishing, and reading. Any attempt to tell a global history would produce either a multi-volume series or a narrative at such a level of abstraction and generality that it would obscure most of the subtleties that make this work so fascinating in the first place. At the same time, the very nature of material texts makes it impossible to tell their history strictly according to traditional geographic boundaries – and the geographic boundaries of “Britain” are, in any case, always shifting, no less so *now* than they were *then*. From the early monks who brought manuscripts back to Britain after trips to the Continent, to the sixteenth-century Jesuits smuggling Catholic books into England, to the puritans bringing books to New England on the Mayflower, to the Victorian authors navigating the complexities of copyright in an increasingly global book trade, to the multinational corporations that own many publishing houses today and stage global media events around the release of mega-bestsellers such as the Harry Potter books, the history of the book is marked by continual movement.

- 2) Books are mobile. They pass across boundaries, from one jurisdiction to another, posing problems for political, religious, and economic authorities that would seek to regulate the flow of texts.

While rooted in the British Isles, therefore, our narrative comes to encompass continental Europe, North America, South Asia, Australia, South Africa – everywhere that the economic, cultural, political, and ideological investments in “the book in Britain” take us.

I have stressed that we are interested not only in books but in material texts of all kinds, but it is also worth underlining that these material forms are not simply different vehicles for texts, different ways of moving a message from producer to consumer. Throughout the volume, we stress material texts as objects in the world as well as carriers of linguistic meaning, objects that can be put to a range of cultural uses quite apart from reading.

- 3) Books – and all material texts – are more than just vessels for words. They are symbolic objects that can support community formation, religious affiliation, cultural identification, or personal development.

Books have been buried with saints and carried aloft into battle (see Section 1.7); the particular typeface chosen for a prayer book provoked riots and ultimately war between Scotland and England (see Section 3.9); radicals placed polemical pamphlets in their hatbands as a sign of their politics (see Section 4.1); annual “gift books” have been important tokens of friendship and familial bonds, even if unread (see Section 8.1); the aesthetics of papermaking, margin-setting, and type-design could function to distinguish an early twentieth-century modernist “artist” from a “commercial” writer appealing to the masses (see Section 9.1); e-readers like the Kindle become the focus of panicked declarations about the decline of literacy and reading – and in turn inspire nostalgically designed “retro-books” (see Section 12.16). In none of these cases is actually reading the text in question of central importance.

The signifying power of material texts – their ability to function both as symbolic objects in the world and as carriers of textual messages – distinguishes them from most other commodities and makes them especially suspicious to those in power. Particularly since the printing press made the multiplication of copies of a text vastly easier, the

book trade has been heavily regulated by the government, and this is the fourth thread that runs through our narrative:

- 4) Political, religious, and economic authorities have always attempted to control the spread of material texts, although in Britain that control has also always been tenuous. Press regulation emerges out of both ideological and commercial motives.

The mobility of books makes them difficult to control, and factionalism within governing authorities has meant that enforcement was varied, often ad hoc and capricious. Licensing and regulation of books in Britain depended on a mutually beneficial relationship between the Crown and the guild of the book trade, the Stationers' Company (see Section 3.2). The Stationers' Company received a monopoly on printing, publishing, and bookselling and a guarantee that their intellectual property (later known as "copyright") would be protected. The Crown gained the help of those in the trade in enforcing pre-publication censorship and controlling the spread of "undesirable" texts. This relationship was continually under strain, however, and ultimately collapsed (see Chapters 4 and 5), leading to new forms of post-publication prosecution for libel and obscenity. Repeatedly we see attempts to crack down and repeatedly we see agitation against censorship, with juries refusing to convict publishers and authors, whether the texts in question were partisan newspapers in the eighteenth century (see Section 4.7) or D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the twentieth (see Section 11.9).

The relationship between the economic interests of the book trade and the ideological interests of political and religious authorities relates to the fifth thread:

- 5) Books – and material texts of all kinds – are produced out of a combination of motives, not simply profit-driven commercial interests.

In this sense as well, books tend to distinguish themselves from other commodities, since their textual content opens up a host of rationales for publication. Religious proselytizing and political propagandizing are two obvious examples. Think only of the huge numbers of religious leaflets handed out on the street in any major city today. In earlier centuries as well, the printing of some religious texts, along with official government documents like royal proclamations, was done with little or no expectation of turning a profit. Even here, however, various motives are intertwined: "jobbing" work such as the printing of proclamations or legal notices was a crucial source of income for printers, even if they were not produced in the normal way for the retail trade (Stallybrass 2007). In the period before printing in Britain, many manuscripts were produced in scriptoria (see Section 1.4) as part of the daily religious practice of monks and nuns, with no eye on the "market" for books. But neither should we presume that the medieval period was some completely pre-capitalist world of devotion, free of the profit motive: in major urban and university centers such as London, Oxford, and Paris, the *pecia* system of piecemeal manuscript production developed to ensure the more rapid production of texts for purchase by students (see Sections 2.5 and 3.9). Economic and non-economic interests are likewise intertwined at the end of our history of the book in Britain, as major twentieth-century publishers often produced "loss leaders" such as modernist poetry, in essence subsidized by the sale of the bestselling fiction in their lists, which could not, however, provide the cultural prestige that top publishing firms wanted. This arrangement was crucial to the justification of the Net Book Agreement (see Sections 9.4 and 11.8), a restrictive arrangement among publishers and booksellers to prevent



the lowering of retail prices. In some aspects similar to the monopolistic cartel of the Stationers' Company in earlier periods, the Net Book Agreement too eventually fell as late-capitalist ideas of "free trade" superseded long-held beliefs about the public interest in having a wide range of books available on the shelves, even if some of them were not earning their keep in the marketplace.

Just as twentieth-century publishers attempted to balance "prestige" literary works with more commercially viable fiction, so too throughout much of the history of the book in Britain, we see a need to minimize risk by balancing the publication of new works against the reprinting of older, proven texts:

- 6) Book publication is a risky business, and "steady sellers" have always been crucial to the trade, even if these older, frequently reprinted texts have often been ignored by literary critics and historians focused on what was new in any given historical moment.

The importance of the Bible (and related texts such as prayer books and psalters) to the history of the book in Britain cannot be overstated. While these were sometimes produced evangelistically without regard for profit – from those created by early monastic communities to the huge output of the nineteenth-century Bible Societies (see Section 8.1) – plenty of Bibles were sold to book buyers in the usual way as well. Other steady sellers included school texts such as primers and ABCs, perennially useful books like almanacs, and, in later periods, the works of canonical literary authors. The durable value of the plays of Shakespeare, for example, remains important to contemporary publishers like Bloomsbury, who are also always seeking the next blockbuster bestseller like *Harry Potter* (see Section 12.4), a quest that inevitably results in more failures than successes. Likewise, James Thomson's steady-selling poem *The Seasons* was important enough to the eighteenth-century book trade – valuable enough as an intellectual property, and appealing enough to so-called book pirates – that it became the central text in a landmark court case concerning copyright (see Section 6.3), which brings us to another thread in our narrative history:

- 7) The formation of a canon of English Literature – and of the very idea of "English Literature" as a discrete category of text – was intimately linked to the book trade, and especially to the development of the notion of copyright.

Book-history scholars have argued, for instance, that while Shakespeare may have written his plays first and foremost for performance, his status as the most canonical British author had at least as much to do with the printing, publishing, and reading of his plays as books – both individually and in collection in the First Folio of 1623 (see Kastan 2001; Farmer and Lesser 2006; Smith 2015; Hooks 2016). The copyright to Shakespeare's works was jealously guarded throughout the eighteenth century. But when the court decision surrounding *The Seasons* finally abolished the Stationers' Company's perpetual copyright, creating the modern idea of the "public domain," a host of older literature became available for reprinting and repackaging in series of "great British authors." The literary canon emerged in many ways alongside the public domain, a question of economics as much as aesthetics (see Section 9.2; St. Clair 2004). Major Victorian authors like Charles Dickens and Walter Scott carefully managed their authorial "brand" in print and in turn were carefully managed by their various publishers (see Sections 8.1 and 8.2). Between the world wars, the book trade was likewise integral to

the emergence of modernist literature, which located itself in a coterie environment that crucially included small presses and low-circulation magazines (see Section 10.6). Modernist authors like Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot (himself a working member of the book trade at Faber & Faber) were keen analysts and manipulators of copyright law as they tried to forge a “new” literary aesthetic (Saint-Amour 2003).

This focus in our study may make it seem as if literature were the key driver of the book trade, but in fact it has usually been a decidedly secondary if not tertiary part of the world of print:

- 8) The landmark texts that are most important to literary critics and historians play a smaller role in the full history of the book than we might expect. More mundane and often overlooked material texts can have a huge influence.

Newspapers, truly “quotidian” in the root sense of the word (“daily”), have been amply discussed by historians of the book for their role in nation-building, the creation of a public sphere, and even the reorganization of our experience of time (Frank 1961; B. Anderson 1991; Sommerville 1996). The development of periodical newspapers and newsbooks plays a key role throughout our narrative history, and these texts were always among the most subject to government censorship and regulation. But our history also explores the effects on people’s daily experience of papal indulgences, which were in fact the earliest texts printed both by Gutenberg and by William Caxton, the first printer in England (Section 2.8); of weekly “Bills of Mortality” listing the causes and numbers of deaths in London (Section 4.5); of abolitionist slogans on teacups and other household objects (Section 7.3); of advertisements posted up in railway stations (Section 8.3); of Xeroxed punk rock ‘zines and parish newsletters (Section 12.12) – among a host of other material texts that are often overlooked by scholars, and indeed by everyone, so familiar and ubiquitous are they.

This is not to say that literature is unimportant – and cultural importance, in any case, cannot be equated simplistically with economic metrics like “market share.” Rather, it is to emphasize that the history of “the book in Britain” encompasses a very wide range of written, printed, lithographed, Xeroxed, digitally rendered, and otherwise produced material texts, which had far-reaching and often unexpected effects on the cultures and societies of the British Isles, from the earliest years of that history to today. Our aim in *The Book in Britain: A Historical Introduction* is to provide readers with a compelling narrative, one that takes in both large, ongoing trends like those outlined here and the smaller stories that reveal the false starts, dead ends, and forgotten byways that enliven and illuminate those broader histories.

While we have written this book collaboratively to create that single narrative, as five scholars who specialize in different historical periods with different methodological emphases we inevitably approach our subject with particular interests, and we each pursue different paths through this history. We consider this methodological diversity to be a virtue, for the field of book history historically has been shaped by scholars from a range of traditional academic disciplines. Foundational work was done by intellectual and cultural historians like Marshall McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1962) and Elizabeth Eisenstein (*The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 1979), who sought to trace the large-scale impact of the printing press on the course of history and the development of the human mind. They saw its effects in the emergence of Protestantism, modern scientific rationality, capitalism, and democracy. Like most scholars working

today, we are more skeptical of such grand narratives and the “technological determinism” they seem to imply. But the relationship between technology and the history of ideas – now understood as a more flexible and less predictable one – remains a key focus of our work and of work in the field more broadly (see Darnton 1979, 1982, 1996; Johns 1998).

Large-scale narrative of a somewhat different kind was a specialty of the *Annales* school of French social historians. In *L'Apparition du Livre*, first published in 1958 and later translated as *The Coming of the Book*, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (1976) used an early form of what we would now call “big data” to study the social and economic effects of the spread of printing throughout Europe. Their influence continues to be seen in important work that amasses quantitative data to understand trends in the history of publishing and reading, or to trace cultural patterns that cannot be perceived by studying only the traditional “canon” of texts (see St. Clair 2004; Moretti 2005; Suarez 2009b; Piper and Portelance 2016). While *The Book in Britain* is not dominated by statistical analyses, nonetheless data of this kind is crucial in drawing our attention to neglected areas of book history and in contextualizing key moments within it, and we draw on this strand of scholarship throughout our volume.

By contrast with these wide-angle views, many book historians working today are literary critics by training and instinct, used to “close-reading” highly valued literary texts. They have been interested in the traditional literary question of how form affects meaning, but in this case form is not only or primarily the structure of a poem or a novel but also the way it is printed, packaged, and understood as a book or as pages in a periodical. Other strands of the field have emerged from disciplines traditionally associated with the study of literature: bibliography (mainly dealing with printed books) and codicology (dealing with manuscripts), the study of texts as physical objects that offer clues to how they were made; and textual editing, the attempt to establish the definitive text of a work that exists in various different versions.

While this brief overview may seem to compartmentalize the field, however, most book historians have moved across scholarly disciplines. The cultural historian Roger Chartier, initially associated with the *Annales* school, has sometimes sounded more like a literary critic in books such as *Forms and Meanings* (1995) and *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind* (2013). Meanwhile, especially with the rise of “digital humanities,” some literary critics who are focused on, or moving toward a focus on, book history have compiled masses of data and made their arguments in the form of graphs and charts, rather like the early *Annales* historians (see Moretti 2005; Farmer and Lesser 2005a, 2005b, 2013; Piper and Portelance 2016). And indeed in writing *The Book in Britain*, the five of us, who were all trained principally in the study of literature, have been made ever more aware that any study of the relationship between material texts and human culture cannot be delimited by traditional disciplinary boundaries.

*The Book in Britain* therefore brings together all of these methodological strands that have been crucial to the development of book history as a scholarly field. Throughout, we provide clear explanations of the technicalities of printing and publishing, and of the formal elements of books and manuscripts, which are necessary to understand that history. And we explore the impact of changing textual technologies on texts themselves. But our focus, always, is less on technology than on culture: our world has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the material texts that surround us.



## **Part I**

### **The Middle Ages and the Renaissance**

*Siân Echard*



## 1

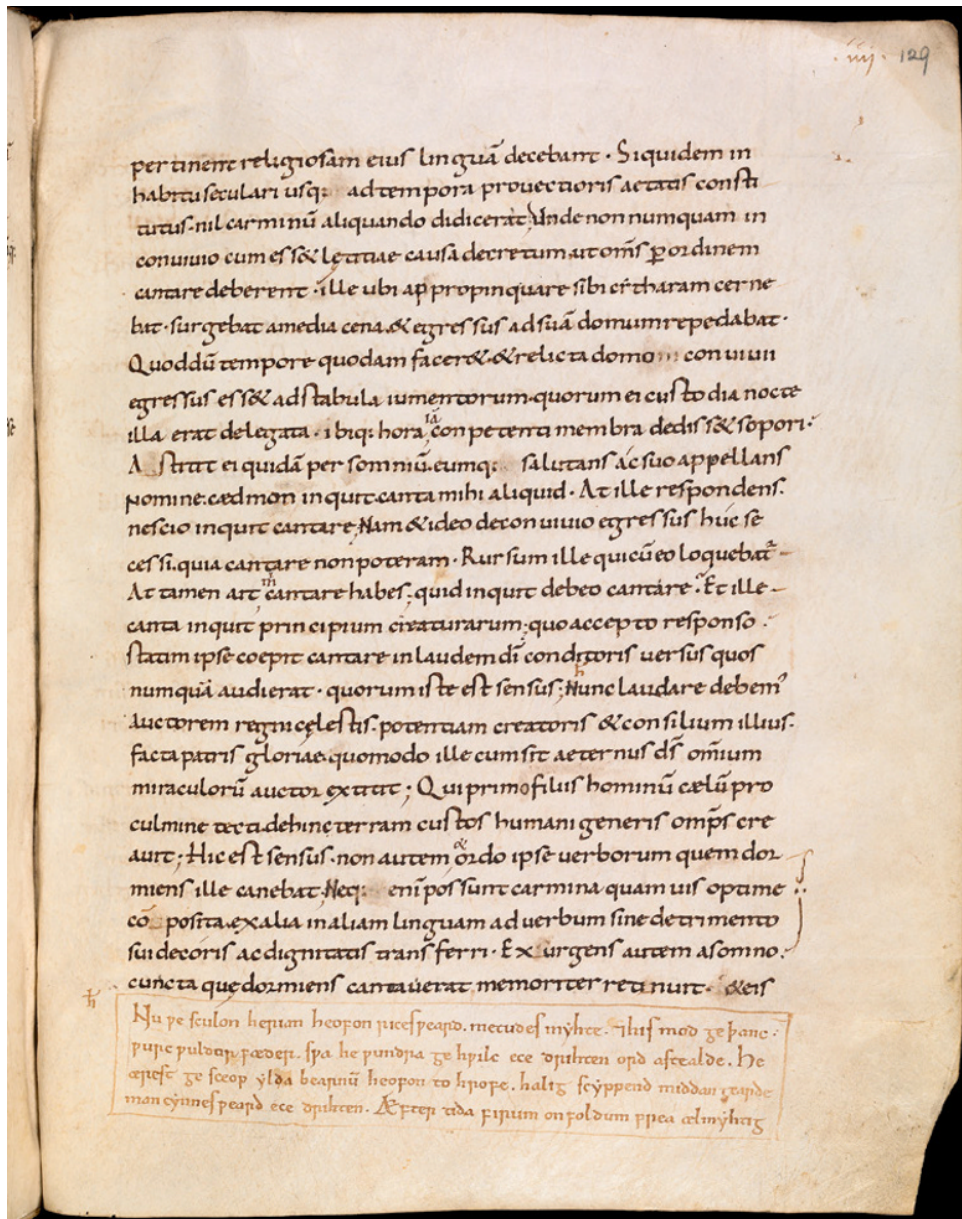
## Early Beginnings to the Norman Conquest of 1066

### 1.1 Prequel I: Medieval Remediation

Sometime around 731, the venerable Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar, finished his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* [*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*]. The book is an account of the early history of England with special attention to the spread of Christianity. While the work would eventually be translated into Old English, Bede wrote it originally in Latin, as was the custom for learned men of his day. In the fourth book of his history, Bede recounts the story of an Anglo-Saxon cowherd named Caedmon who, in a dream, saw a figure who told him to sing of the creation of all things. The illiterate man protested that he could not sing, but at the figure's urging, found that he could. The song he produced is recorded by Bede in Latin translation as part of the story. Figure 1.1 is an early eleventh-century Latin copy of Bede's text. The text frames Caedmon's song – now commonly called *Caedmon's Hymn* – by saying, "This is the sense, but not the exact arrangement, of the words that he sang." Bede's Latin translation of the song precedes this remark, and explanation and translation are presented continuously in the text block. But in this particular copy, the Latin text has been bracketed in the right margin, and in the bottom margin a somewhat later hand has written the song in Old English, with points marking the breaks between the lines of the verse.

This page dramatizes several crucial aspects of the early history of "books" in Britain. First, while today *Caedmon's Hymn* often appears as one of the first entries in anthologies of English literature – in big books that suggest an orderly sequence of literary history – its first bookish appearance is very much post hoc, according to Bede's account. Bede's remarks about conveying the "sense" of the song reflect that he is writing down something which was not originally written at all, nor ever intended for a book. For many medieval works this gap between a non-written creation and an eventual bookish transmission is an important fact.

Second, Bede is not the only mediator between this work and its audience. This manuscript page materializes a textual history – the fact that someone added an Old English version at some later date – and dramatizes a linguistic fact. Bede translated the song from oral to written, and from Old English to Latin. The manuscript page arranges those facts in a particular way, effecting another kind of translation, a material and visual one that has the potential to affect meaning.



**Figure 1.1** An eleventh-century copy of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, in Latin, with Caedmon's Hymn added in Old English in the bottom margin. Source: Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bodleian Hatton MS 43, folio 129r.

Third, this particular presentation of Caedmon's Hymn is only one of several different arrangements, each likely to affect a reader differently. Not all Latin copies mark out the Hymn as the copy in Figure 1.1 does. What is more, the *Historia ecclesiastica* was translated from Latin into Old English, and in the manuscripts of that translation, the Old



English poem is simply written as part of the Old English text. The importance of the poem to Bede's text – whether it is understood to be marginal or integral, both linguistically and spatially – would appear very different depending on which manuscript a reader saw.

Fourth and finally, the manuscript in Figure 1.1 dates from the early eleventh century; that is, it is removed from Bede's original writing by several centuries of transmission. There are eighth-century copies of Bede's work, and the normal scholarly editorial practice is to seek to establish a best text based on the earliest and most reliable witnesses. If we are thinking about how a medieval reader might have experienced Bede, however, then the variety of manuscripts (and there are many Latin manuscripts of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, as well as the handful of Old English ones) is at least as important as the reconstruction of an original text. We do not know where the manuscript featured in Figure 1.1 was produced, but we do know that manuscripts of the *Ecclesiastical History* could be found across Britain. We also know that most reading situations would be local; that is, a typical reader would be likely to encounter very few copies of any given text. This kind of local, limited access means that the presentation of a text in a particular material manifestation is integral to how it might have been understood. At the same time, we also know that individual books (and scribes) traveled, and so a particular presentation could in some cases have an influence outside its original production context. Variety and singularity exist in a productive tension in medieval manuscript culture, determining the practices of both producers and readers alike.

Remediation – “the representation of one medium in another” (Bolter and Grusin 1999, p. 45) – is a term originally coined by new media theorists to explore how digital technologies related to earlier technologies. It is also, however, an important element in the early history of the book in Britain. The period covered in this section of our study – from the early Middle Ages to 1640 – sees several major technological shifts, as works move from oral to written form, and then from manuscript to print. Each shift involves a two-way and often messy process of social and cultural transformation and adaptation. Linguistic change, again as highlighted in the treatment of *Caedmon's Hymn*, also enacts a kind of remediation, as both forms and expectations from one linguistic context adapt to (or cause adaptation in) new contexts. In the past, histories of the book have sometimes suggested a clean, teleological narrative of ever-increasing technological and cultural sophistication, telling a supersessionist story in which a new technology wipes out its predecessor. Our book, by contrast, will often tack between technologies, crossing and recrossing various kinds of boundaries, as we attempt to show some of the complexity of the webs in which texts can be embedded. It will also move back and forth between individual objects, like the manuscript in Figure 1.1, and object-traditions, like the various forms in which a text like *Caedmon's Hymn* appears. Much book history is rooted in the careful examination of individual physical objects, whose materiality seems to offer a reassuring certainty: we may not know how everyone in the Middle Ages understood *Caedmon's Hymn*, but we can perhaps know how the readers of the manuscript in Figure 1.1 might have received it. At the same time, book history may also concern itself with multiple objects – aggregates that offer useful information about broader cultural, social, and historical trends. Some critics have been suspicious of the generalizations and elisions that can result from such overviews (Dane 2003, 2013), but we believe that the combination of individual realizations with larger traditions will allow readers to see both forest and trees.

## 1.2 Prequel II: Orality, Aurality, and Aureates

*Caedmon's Hymn* highlights the importance of the oral transmission of many medieval British works. Bede's history is bookish from the start – written in Latin, and imagined as categorically different from the oral hymn that Bede relates by “sense” but not “exact arrangement.” Bede represents one kind of literacy, organized around the ability to read and write in Latin, the language of the Church: this is what *litteratus* meant to Bede and his contemporaries. This form of literacy was associated in Britain with the spread of Christianity, particularly the Roman form of Christianity, especially after Pope Gregory I sent missionaries to Britain in 597 to convert the Anglo-Saxons (the story Bede tells in his *Ecclesiastical History*). As we will see, both the Roman and Celtic strands of Christianity had a central place for books, and thus for those who could read and write those books in Latin. Both monks and nuns, in the monasteries of Anglo-Saxon England, might be charged with writing books, reading them, or both. Not everyone who could read could write, and people who could write did not always do so: many people of means or importance made use of secretaries to do their writing for them. Further down the social scale, too, people might have important relationships to the written word without necessarily being able to produce or read it themselves. As Michael T. Clanchy points out in his seminal study of literacy in medieval Britain, being “prejudiced in favour of literacy” (Clanchy 2013, p. 7) can over-determine how we interact with the surviving evidence of medieval people's relationship to the written word. Throughout the Middle Ages, “textual communities” (Stock 1983, p. 88) could organize themselves around the centrality of a book like the Bible, and even though the vast majority of people in those communities could not read, whether in Latin or in the vernacular, their lives could be profoundly influenced by books. While it is generally true that in the early Middle Ages in Britain literacy as we understand it was more likely to be found in the Church than among secular people, and in men rather than in women, this broad statement risks eliding these other important relationships to books.

The reforms instituted in the ninth century by Alfred, King of Wessex (849–899; later Alfred the Great), emphasized the translation of Latin works into Old English, suggesting the growing importance accorded to vernacular, as well as Latin, literacy. In the later Middle Ages, we see vernacular literacy, including the ability to write as well as to read, appearing in the men and sometimes women of the merchant class, as represented for example by the Paston letters, the correspondence exchanged between male and female members of a gentry family between 1422 and 1509. But there were other forms of early written language that were not organized around Latin and the Church (see, for example, the discussion of runes and ogham in Section 1.6), and there were also other ways of experiencing texts, apart from reading them.

*Beowulf* is one of the most famous examples of a poem that began its life in the oral world. This account of the monster-killing exploits of Beowulf, hero and later king of the Geats, begins with an appeal for attention, “Hwaet,” variously translated as *So*, *Listen*, *Lo*, among other possibilities. It also includes many instances of oral story-telling as part of its own fabric, as for example in the references to the songs of the *scop* (oral poet) and in the hero's own retelling of his exploits to the poem's several internal audiences (see Niles 2016). Any number of medieval British works bear similar markers of oral origins and transmission. Even after the rise in literacy in Britain after the Norman Conquest of 1066 – something Clanchy attributes to the spread of documentary

administrative culture under the Norman kings and their successors (Clanchy 2013) – many people outside those professional circles could not read. Scholars continue to debate whether appeals for silence at the opening of the anonymous popular romances of the later Middle Ages are truly indicative of oral origins and performance, or whether instead these are artifacts of an oral past in a more literate present (see, for example, Coleman 1996; Zaerr 2012). And even when a medieval text is unequivocally bookish, self-conscious invocations of various forms of reception remain. For example, in the second book of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus, seeking his niece, finds her sitting in a parlor with her women where, we are told, they "Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the siege of Thebes" [Heard a maiden read to them the story of the siege of Thebes] (Chaucer 1986, II. lines 83–84). This situation, in which one person reads aloud from a written book for the entertainment of others, was a common one, particularly in well-to-do and noble households in the later part of the Middle Ages (Coleman 1996). Indeed, one famous frontispiece to a manuscript of *Troilus and Criseyde* appears to show the poet reading his work aloud to a listening aristocratic audience (Pearsall 1977).<sup>1</sup> Thus, even when books (rather than scopos or bards) have become the primary means of delivering texts, an oral/aural component remains very much part of how many people experienced those books.

Scholars continue to debate the original date for the heroic Old English account of the exploits of Beowulf. Sometime around the year 800 is the date often given. The only surviving manuscript, however, seems to date from around the year 1000. Similarly, the Welsh *Gododdin* of the poet Aneirin, a series of elegies for British heroes who died in battle with the Saxons around 600, is preserved in only one manuscript, this one dating to c. 1265.<sup>2</sup> Both of these poems have, then, been subject to the kind of remediation introduced at the start of this chapter, but they also point to another important thread in the story of British books: their post-medieval reception.

*Caedmon's Hymn* has become important, in our era, as a starting point in the English canon, and canon-formation and the search for foundational and aureate poets has been a powerful driver in the recovery and the remediation of British books, both within and beyond Britain. When *Beowulf* was first printed, in the early nineteenth century, its Danish-Icelandic editor, Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, presented it on the title page as the first Danish epic, and provided a parallel translation into Latin in order to heighten the work's claim to a status similar to that of classical works such as the *Aeneid*. The Danish government supported Thorkelin in his preparation of an edition of the poem, and the first complete modern-language translation of the text was an 1820 Danish translation. Today *Beowulf* has become so common a starting point for English literature survey courses that they are often described as overviews "from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf," but the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history of the poem shows how crucial Scandinavian national impulses were in drawing attention to this particular British book and its contents.

Indeed, we would not know as much about the poem as we do, had it not been for Thorkelin's project. In 1787, he commissioned a scribal transcription of the poem from the manuscript, and wrote out his own transcription as well. These were working papers, but they also ended up serving the purpose of preservation. The manuscript had been seriously damaged in the Ashburnham House fire of 1731 and was not properly conserved until the nineteenth century. Words that were still visible when Thorkelin and his copyist saw the manuscript had crumbled away by the time the manuscript was

stabilized. Thorkelin's transcriptions have thus become crucial to establishing the text of the poem, although the digitization of the manuscript has allowed some damaged sections to be read again (Prescott 1997).

For its part, the *Gododdin* has been described by one of its most important scholars as "the oldest Scottish poem" (Jackson 1969). It is featured on a tourist information sign at Edinburgh Castle (the warriors in the poem depart from "Din Eidyn," or the Edinburgh castle mound), while the National Library of Wales describes the manuscript of the poem, the *Llyfr Aneirin / Book of Aneirin*, as "one of the oldest and most important Welsh manuscripts." This British book has since the nineteenth century been known as one of the so-called Four Ancient Books of Wales (Skene 1868), a term coined by a nineteenth-century Scottish antiquarian, William Forbes Skene. After years in the Cardiff Central Library, the manuscript was rehoused at the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, an institution that has been at the forefront of digitizing medieval manuscripts, particularly those of importance to Welsh history and literature. This history illustrates, among other things, how fraught and slippery terms like "Welsh," "Scottish," and even the "British" implied by our title really are.

In the pages to follow, we will be dealing with books produced in the areas we now call Wales, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England. The political histories and relationships of those entities and their peoples shift frequently throughout the long period this book covers. For example, Figure 1.2, a map of England in the ninth century, shows the effects of multiple invasions in the period covered in our first chapter. The Roman occupation of Britain, which began in 43 CE, led to a period of influence that lasted until the Romans withdrew in 410, leaving behind traces in roads, buildings, and settlements, as well as in the practice of Christianity among some Brythonic-speaking Celts, who would later convert other Celtic communities. From the mid-fifth century onward, the arrival of pagan Germanic peoples from the Continent caused some Celts to migrate across the English Channel and settle in Brittany, while others remained in the areas we now call Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, and Ireland. The Germanic invaders settled down, converted to Christianity, and established their own Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and institutions. Next came the Vikings, first as raiders and then as settlers in the area of England called the Danelaw. The importance of the Scandinavian influence is exemplified in a figure like Cnut (c. 995–1035), who ruled parts of what we now call England, along with Norway and Denmark. It was no accident that Thorkelin saw *Beowulf* as a Danish text, even though it now stands, along with *Caedmon's Hymn*, at the beginning of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Some anthologies have eschewed "English," as for example does the *Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, which includes excerpts from the *Gododdin* in its opening pages. If we think of the *Llyfr Aneirin* as a "British" book, the term can encompass the Brythonic (early Celtic) roots of the manuscript, alongside its competing modern identities (Scottish and Welsh). Both *Beowulf* and the *Gododdin* were eventually written into national and nationalist canons and narratives of literary tradition and transmission. They have become foundational books, even though, at their inception, they were not books at all.

Chapter 1 of our study will explore the role of medieval books as symbols and as meaning-laden artifacts. We will also discuss pragmatic matters: where medieval books came from, how and where they were made, by whom, and for whom. This chapter takes us from the beginnings of book production in Britain, in the monasteries of the



Figure 1.2 England in the ninth century. Image provided by iStock.

Anglo-Saxon world, through the upheavals and changes that came with the Norman Conquest of 1066, setting the stage for the gradual expansion of manuscript production into urban contexts, explored in Section 2.5. Through a focus on a few particular books and their production contexts, we will lay out the technical vocabulary associated with the production and study of medieval manuscripts. And we will begin to trace a few themes that are constant throughout our study, such as the movement of books through time and space, their influence on the communities in which they circulate, and the long history of attempts to control and direct book production to any number of ideological ends.

### **1.3 The Saint Cuthbert Gospel: “The Earliest Intact European Book”**

In April 2012, the British Library successfully concluded a massive fundraising campaign and purchased, for £9 million, the St. Cuthbert Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The campaign noted the Library’s role in “safeguarding the nation’s heritage” and described the effort as a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to acquire “one of the most important books in the world and the starting point for books as we know them today” (British Library 2012a). While there was of necessity a certain amount of salesmanship involved in the efforts to sell the acquisition to the British public and to funding organizations such as the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the book is indeed a unique survival. It was written in the late seventh century and retains its original binding, making it, as the Library points out, “the earliest intact European book” (British Library 2012b).<sup>4</sup> This small book, measuring about 13.8 × 9.5 cm, was perhaps St. Cuthbert’s personal copy, and as discussed later in this chapter, was found with the saint in his coffin. The main text consists of 90 parchment folios. The script is called capitular uncial. Uncial script was a major bookhand of late antiquity and the early medieval period, surviving in some 500 manuscripts from the fourth century onwards, and capitular uncial is a small, unornamented form of uncial characteristic of the Northumbrian monastery of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow (Bischoff 1990, pp. 68, 71). One element of the manuscript’s importance, then, is as a witness to the local production of books. While importing books from the Continent was important during the period of conversion to Roman Christianity (just as, in a later period, Bibles were imported from the Continent via Scotland to advance the Reformation, as discussed in Section 3.7), there was symbolic and practical significance in Britain having the means to make its own books as well.

### **1.4 Making and Using Medieval Manuscripts: Monkwearmouth–Jarrow, its Scriptorium, and its Library**

We have already used several terms – bookhand, folio, binding – that belong to the technical language of three of the disciplines that contribute to book history. These include paleography, which is the study of ancient handwriting, with an emphasis on the history of these scripts; codicology, which is the study of manuscripts, in particular their form; and bibliography, a term which, among other things, refers to the description of

both the form of books and their conditions of production and consumption. It is easiest to attach these and other terms to specific examples. Our first such example is the scriptorium of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow, the monastery that Bede called home. While the monastery was undoubtedly an important producer and consumer of books in this early period, very little of its output survives. Nevertheless, the combination of Bede’s accounts of his monastery’s history; Bede’s own work, which allows us to make some conjectures about what books the monastery must have held; and the striking examples of the St. Cuthbert Gospel and the Codex Amiatinus, discussed further below, make Monkwearmouth–Jarrow a suitable peg on which to hang our first discussions of the technical aspects of manuscript production.

While it is common today to refer to Monkwearmouth–Jarrow as if it were one place, in fact it was two monastic foundations in its origin, although both houses soon came under the rule of one abbot. St. Peter’s at Monkwearmouth had been founded in c. 673 by Benedict Biscop (c. 628–689), a well-born Northumbrian who had professed a religious life and made his first trip to Rome in 653. His travels included a period in the monastery at Lérins (now on the French Riviera). In 669, Biscop returned to Northumbria (an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in what is now northern England and south-east Scotland) in the entourage of Theodore of Tarsus, the newly appointed archbishop of Canterbury. Biscop’s continental experiences were important in his plans for and work on the new monastery, and he continued to make periodic trips to the Continent in order to secure, among other things, books for the new foundation, as well as for its twin, St. Paul’s, founded in 681 or 682 at Jarrow. Bede, himself a monk of Jarrow, documents several of Biscop’s book-related trips in his *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Weremouth and Jarrow*. For example, he writes that Biscop “accomplished a third voyage from Britain to Rome, and brought back a large number of books on sacred literature, which he had either bought at a price or received as gifts from his friends” (Bede 1843–1845, vol. 2, p. 86). In Bede’s telling, these books are instrumental in Biscop’s securing the means to found St. Peter’s: “He displayed the holy volumes and relics of Christ’s blessed Apostles and martyrs, which he had brought, and found such favour in the eyes of the king, that he forthwith gave him seventy hides of land out of his own estates, and ordered a monastery to be built thereon for the first pastor of his church” (Bede 1843–1845, vol. 2, p. 86). A fourth voyage to Rome brought even more books and earned even more royal patronage, leading to the foundation of St. Paul’s.

By the time of Biscop’s death in 689, the monastery had a substantial library and a commitment to maintaining and fostering it. Bede recounts that on his deathbed, Biscop was thinking about books: “The large and noble library, which he had brought from Rome, and which was necessary for the edification of his church, he commanded to be kept entire, and neither by neglect to be injured or dispersed” (Bede 1843–1845, vol. 2, p. 92). The St. Cuthbert Gospel was produced under the rule of Biscop’s successor Ceolfrith (642–716), who had become abbot of both St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s on Biscop’s death. As Biscop had commanded, he preserved and expanded the twin foundation’s commitment to books. Bede records, for instance, that Ceolfrith had the monks make three copies of the “new translation” of the Bible (Jerome’s Latin Vulgate), an immense undertaking. One of these Bibles survives in fragments; a second is lost, as indeed are most of the books associated with Monkwearmouth–Jarrow (Ker 1964, pp. 104–105; Ker et al. 2009); but the third survives intact, and from it we may infer a great deal about the quality of book-making at the monastery.



This Bible was offered to Pope Gregory II as a gift. It is now referred to as the Codex Amiatinus.<sup>5</sup> This enormous book (50.5×34cm, weighing over 34kg) is the oldest surviving copy of Jerome's translation. The book is a pandect; that is, a single volume containing all the books of the Old and New Testaments. The script is uncial, which was, as noted above, a major Roman script used not only for Bibles but also, from the fourth century onwards, for many classical texts (Bischoff 1990, pp. 58–59). Italian books might also have provided models for the three major illustrations included in the Codex Amiatinus: a tabernacle, Christ in Majesty, and Ezra in his study. Figure 1.3, the Ezra miniature, is characteristically late antique in appearance and may have been copied from an Italian pandect that Biscop is said to have brought to the abbey (Marsden 1998; Marsden 2012, p. 417). The Codex Amiatinus is clearly a self-consciously Roman production, then, and the significance of that packaging will be discussed in due course. First, however, the manuscript's incredible size presents an opportunity to pause and think about the implications of its material construction and requirements.

Like most British books until the very end of the medieval period, the Codex Amiatinus is written on parchment, that is, animal skin. In this case, the skins came from calves, but goats and sheep were also frequently used. Young animals produce finer-grained and therefore higher-quality parchment; this fine grade of material is sometimes called vellum, from the Old French *velin*, or veal. More than 500 calves were needed to produce the material for the Codex Amiatinus's 1030 folios (Gameson 1992). Later medieval British book production would come to rely more on sheep than on cattle, but one basic fact remains: book-making required a huge supply of animal skins. Writing of a later enormous Bible, the Winchester Bible (c. 1160–1175), Christopher De Hamel has suggested that these skins “were no doubt often a by-product left over by the abbey butcher. Since a massive book like the Winchester Bible would probably have needed skins from some two hundred and fifty sheep, it is difficult to imagine so many animals being killed for the sole purpose of supplying vellum” (De Hamel 1994, p. 86). If this conjecture is correct, the monks of Jarrow must have eaten quite well during the production of the Codex Amiatinus. It is also possible that some monasteries purchased parchment: “Even in the early Middle Ages it is likely that parchment was manufactured commercially, and not by the monks themselves, in most cases. In the later Middle Ages, major centres at least had specialist providers of parchment” (Alexander 1992, p. 36). The conditions of life in the Anglo-Saxon period would inevitably have affected the supply and quality of parchment, with factors as varied as the weather and Viking raids having an effect on the raising of livestock: “ensuring a regular supply of membrane in the right place at the right time undoubtedly required effort and organisation” (Gameson 2011, p. 16). The ability to provide or procure this material underlines the wealth and resources of a monastery such as Monkwearmouth–Jarrow.

Books like the Codex Amiatinus witness the importance accorded at Monkwearmouth–Jarrow not just to the collecting of books, but to their production. The *scriptoria* (spaces set up for the copying of manuscripts; sing. *scriptorium*) of monastic foundations were a crucial source of books in Britain throughout the medieval period, and especially in the early Middle Ages. At first, as the accounts of Biscop's buying trips indicate, many books essential for the foundation and spreading of Christianity were imported. Eventually, however, monasteries began to produce books for their own use and, at times, for the use of others. The provision for time devoted to labor in





**Figure 1.3** Ezra in his study, from the Codex Amiatinus. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Amiatino 1, folio 5r. Licensed by Art Resource.

monastic guidelines such as the sixth-century Rule of St. Benedict coincided nicely with the need for monasteries to produce books, and before the movement of book production into urban centers – a feature of the later medieval period – monastic scriptoria were also a primary source of books for local laypeople. Still, while we tend to talk freely about monastic scriptoria, in fact we have little sense of their physical layout, particularly in the early period (Horn and Born 1986). We do know, however, the steps involved in making a medieval book.

The first point to be made is that we are in fact generally talking about books – that is, about codices and not about the scrolls (usually made of papyrus) on which the ancient world recorded texts. A *codex* is a manuscript book made up of folded sheets, usually bound together. The codex began to displace the scroll in the late antique period, so that 90% of surviving fifth-century manuscripts are in the codex form (O'Donnell 1998, p. 51). The term *manuscript* – which literally means written by hand – is often used to describe medieval books in general discussion, although a formal catalogue description will often use *codex*. For example, the British Library's physical description of the St. Cuthbert Gospel begins "Fos. ii + 90. Approximately 137 × 95 mm. Parchment codex." Notice that the description includes the number of folios (see below for more information about this terminology), the size, the material, and the format. Not all manuscript catalogue descriptions are the same, but most will include some basic descriptive information of this sort. They will also often include the place of production, if known, and an account of the *provenance*, which is the history of ownership for an object. The St. Cuthbert entry, for example, has one brief line on "Ownership: Apparently produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow by a local scribe in the early 8th century." Because the St. Cuthbert Gospel went into Cuthbert's coffin in 698, that is the extent of the provenance description, but other medieval manuscripts will have very long provenance entries, often including what happened to, say, a monastic text after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century.

The first step in making a manuscript was the preparation of this writing surface. The animal hides first had to be soaked in a lime solution to loosen and remove hair and grease, then stretched on special frames for scraping with a metal instrument called a *lunellum*, and finally dried. An abrasive chalky substance called *pounce* could be used to further clean and smooth the surface, and the hide could also be treated to produce a particular surface texture or color. Deluxe manuscripts of the Carolingian period (late eighth to early tenth centuries), for example, were sometimes written on parchment that had been stained purple. Sheets would then be cut from the prepared hides. As parchment was an expensive substance, it was common to try to get as large a sheet as possible out of any given hide, and so it is possible to find pages that include curves that witness the animal's living form. Hides were sometimes damaged in the process of preparation, in which case they might either be recycled as scrap or, if the damage was not too severe, repaired by sewing or patching. Occasionally one can find pages where a small hole has been left, and the text simply written around it. Sometimes parchment would be reused, with an old text either scraped or washed off and a new one written over it, resulting in a layering of texts. This kind of manuscript is called a *palimpsest* (from the Greek for "scraped again"). In these cases, we can often recover the previous text through chemical treatment or photography with certain filters, as in the spectacular case of the Archimedes Palimpsest, in which the earliest known texts of the ancient mathematician – by some 400 years – were recovered beneath the writing in a thirteenth-century Greek prayer book (Netz and Noel 2007).

Once the parchment had been prepared and cut, an individual sheet would be folded in half to produce a *bifolium*. The resulting leaves – called *folios* – have a *recto* (front) and *verso* (back) side, and it was common to arrange the leaves so that, when a book was open, the same sides of the hide – hair or flesh – would face each other. This was not a universal practice, however, particularly in the early period; for example, the Cathach of St. Columba, an early Irish manuscript discussed in Section 1.7, does not observe this rule (Gameson 2011, p. 34). As the St. Cuthbert Gospel indicates, not all manuscripts would have been as large or magnificent as the Codex Amiatinus, and the preparation of the writing surface could involve further folding, to produce smaller sheets. A bifolium folded again yields four leaves in a size called *quarto*, and a final fold produces eight small leaves, in the format called *octavo*. Not all leaves of these smaller sizes were necessarily produced by the folding method – they might have been cut to size instead – but the terms have become standard and are still used today to describe book sizes, both for manuscript codices and for printed books. Usually these terms strictly refer to the *format* of books (how the sheets were folded) not their *size*, since the original sheet could be of variable dimensions, but a common table of approximations would yield 30 × 48 cm for folio; 24 × 30 cm for quarto; and 15 × 23 cm for octavo. There are larger and smaller conventional sizes, but these are the most common in the manuscript world.

There is an observable “hierarchy of size” in the early manuscript books being discussed here, with Bible texts produced in the largest format, liturgical books in quarto, and reading books in octavo (Gameson 2011, p. 23). By the end of the medieval period, the range of liturgical books included psalters, which contained the text of the Psalms; missals, which contained the text of the Mass; graduals, which contained music for the Mass; breviaries, which contained texts for the Office, the prayers and texts set for reading throughout the day in ecclesiastical institutions; and antiphonaries, which contained musical texts for the Office. Some of these liturgical books were very large, probably intended for communal use by choirs. Even in the earlier period, a book like the St. Cuthbert Gospel indicates that it is use, as well as content, that determines size; that is, a biblical text could be rendered in a grand, public format, like the Codex Amiatinus and the great insular Gospel books discussed in Section 1.7, or in a smaller format designed for private reading, like Cuthbert’s own copy.

The writing was done by scribes, people trained to copy text. In the early monastic period, these were usually monks of the foundation. They could also have been nuns: while the experience of Anglo-Saxon women can be notoriously difficult to reconstruct from their limited appearance in historical sources (Lees and Overing 2009), some surviving books suggest female, as well as male, literacy, even in this early period, although as with men, literacy was most likely to be found in the higher levels of society, and in the Church (Lerer 1991; McKitterick 1994a, 1994b; Bell 1995; Brown 2001). Indeed, the first female author in the English language we can name was a late fourteenth-century anchoress, Julian of Norwich, whose *Revelations of Divine Love* was a work of mystical theology. But women (and men) did not have to be literate to produce texts. Another female mystic contemporary with Julian, Margery Kempe (c. 1373–1438) is considered the author of the first autobiography in English, although she could not write herself and had to dictate the work to a male amanuensis. Patronage, too, could be the occasion of book production, and even in the Anglo-Saxon period, there is reason to think of both men and women as involved in the commissioning of books and texts.

The tendency for monastic scribes to learn their craft in close local circles doubtless contributed to the development of common forms of writing. We have already noted that the St. Cuthbert Gospel is written in capitular uncial, while the Codex Amiatinus is written in uncial. Malcolm Parkes argues that the formal uncial of the Codex Amiatinus was developed through imitation, while the capitular uncial of the St. Cuthbert Gospel was a genuinely local development (Parkes 1991, p. 96). E.A. Lowe has shown how a distinctive form of English uncial can even be found on the Continent: Anglo-Saxon figures like Willibrord and Boniface founded monasteries abroad (Lowe 1960, pp. 13–14), and the habits formed in their English scriptoria traveled with them, doubtless along with books in their local script.

Parkes and Lowe are both paleographers, and paleographers categorize scripts according to certain features. The *aspect* of a script is its general appearance. The *ductus* refers to the way that the letters are written, considering such things as the order, direction, and number of strokes. Distinctions are also made between *calligraphic* (formal) scripts – also known as *bookhands* – and faster, *cursive* scripts (Bischoff 1990, p. 51). The join between letters that is often found in these latter kinds of scripts is called a *ligature*. The individual letterforms, and more particularly, the parts of each letter, are also used to describe and differentiate scripts. The upright strokes that make up letters like i or n or m are called *minims*. *Ascenders* (as on a lower-case b or d) are the strokes that rise above the baseline, while *descenders* (as on a lower-case p) fall below. A *serif* is a short stroke at the top or bottom of a stroke (the common description of certain print fonts as “sans serif” means that they lack these kinds of strokes). The closed curve of a letter like p or b or d is called the *bow*. A *hand* is, properly speaking, an individual realization of a particular script, and paleographers can often recognize scribal hands through particular unique versions of the main strokes and forms of a script.

Scribes would prepare their pages for writing by using a knife or awl to prick holes as guides for the drawing of lines that structured the placement of elements on the page (Figure 1.4 shows a scribe with his tools). The lines might also be made with a pointed instrument of some kind or, particularly later in the period, with lead or crayon (Gameson 2011, p. 60). Lines could be both horizontal (to guide the individual lines of text) and vertical (to guide left or right justification of the text column). In the later Middle Ages, red ink lines often became a decorative feature of the text. When a text was to be decorated, the scribe would typically leave space for that work, to be done later either by the scribe himself or by another who might specialize in decoration. It was not uncommon for decorative programs to be left incomplete: we can often still see the small letters that scribes left in the spaces to be later filled by large decorated capitals, and sometimes, mostly in later medieval manuscripts, written directions to artists for pictures to be included. It is not unusual for a manuscript to copy the text of its *exemplar* (the manuscript from which the new manuscript is being made), but with quite different plans for decoration. Sometimes, however, a decorative program can itself be copied, as we will see in the discussion of the Utrecht Psalter in Section 1.9.

Scribes wrote with quill pens, favoring geese and swans (Thomson 2008, p. 81), using inks they made in a variety of ways. The typical ink of the ancient world was carbon-based, consisting of a dark pigment such as charcoal, an adhesive agent such as gum arabic, and water. More common in the early Middle Ages were iron-gall inks; these are based on acidic matter from vegetable sources such as oak galls, mixed with iron salt and gum arabic (Thomson 2008, p. 82; Gameson 2011). The advantage of the acidic inks





**Figure 1.4** A portrait of the scribe, from the twelfth-century Eadwine Psalter. Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1, folio 283v. *Source:* Reproduced by permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College Cambridge.

was that they would “bite” into the parchment and thus stand less chance of fading, although mistakes in the formula could lead to damage of various kinds – too much acid might damage the surface, while too much gum could lead to flaking. Pigments could be made from vegetable or mineral sources, powdered and mixed with binding agents including egg or gum arabic. Some of the sources for pigments depended on trade, so as with parchment, factors affecting trade routes and financial means played a role in the colors that might be used in decoration. Greens might be yielded by malachite or verdigris, for example, the former exotic in Britain, and the latter, produced by the exposure of copper to air (or acid), much easier to obtain. Blue might come from lapis lazuli, but the mineral had to travel all the way from Afghanistan to reach Britain. Red sourced from lead was easily found; red based on cinnabar, much less so. Gold and silver could be used in leaf or paint form. The Viking raids affected the choice of pigments: “between the mid ninth and the early tenth century the range of colours in general use declined, corresponding to the reduction in the quality and quantity of book production as a whole ... it is likely that all but the most readily available ingredients were difficult to obtain during the Viking onslaught” (Gameson 2011, p. 77).

As Figure 1.4 shows, a scribe would typically have a knife at hand, both to sharpen his pens and to scrape away errors made while writing. Scribes would sometimes test their pens before they began writing. These pen trials are often still to be found in inconspicuous parts of medieval manuscripts, as for example the flyleaves at the beginning or ending of a book. Where a book was intended to have more than one color, the black text would be written first, and then either the same scribe or another would add initial letters and various textual elements (book and chapter divisions, the opening *incipit* and closing *explicit*, colophons), often in red (hence the term *rubric*, from the Latin *ruber*, or “red”). When scribes found errors, they might scrape them out and write over the erasure, or they might strike out or put a series of dots beneath the offending word, and then write the correct word between the lines or in the margin. Longer insertions could be written in the margin and marked with a *signe de renvoi*, a symbol indicating where in the text the correction should go. Sometimes these corrections seem to be the result of a kind of supervision or checking stage not unlike what we might think of when we think of copyediting. Other corrections might be made by later readers, using similar methods, and so it is not always easy to tell at what stage of production an error was spotted.

Pages were arranged in bundles called *quires* or *gatherings*; the most common Anglo-Saxon form was quires of eight leaves (Gameson 2011, p. 42). When a book was ready for binding, the quires would be stacked and then sewn together in a process that remained roughly the same throughout the pre-modern period, whether for manuscripts or printed books. The rare survival of the original binding on the St. Cuthbert Gospel allows us to see that it was sewn with a chain stitch technique that originated in Coptic bindings (Marks 1998, pp. 31–32), and that might have been familiar to monks at Jarrow from the Italian books brought back by Biscop (Needham 1979, p. 57). Most commonly, horizontal thongs or cords were incorporated into the sewing, lying across the spine, so that the thread passes through the quire, around the cord, through the next quire, and so on. This kind of sewing distributes the stresses of the sewing more evenly. The text block was then attached to wooden boards, either by the thread being passed directly into holes in the boards, or by feeding the thongs into grooves (Marks 1998, p. 38). Hardwood was preferred; the boards of the St. Cuthbert Gospel, for example, are

made of birch. The inner side of the boards could have material pasted over them to hide the binding grooves and attachments. These *pastedowns*, as they are called, were sometimes made from older, dismembered manuscripts. It is not uncommon to find valuable fragments of older manuscripts buried in the bindings of manuscripts or even later printed books.

Once the text block had been attached to the boards, the boards would be covered with the outer binding material. The St. Cuthbert Gospel is covered with tooled leather, of either goat or sheep, that has been dyed a deep crimson. *Tooling* is a process in which heated metal tools are used to impress designs into the cover material; these were sometimes left as is (*blind-tooling*) and sometimes filled with colored pigments. Other decoration on the St. Cuthbert Gospel resulted from the damp leather being molded over cords that had been glued to the boards, creating the pattern on the cover (Brown 1969, pp. 14–16).

Clasps were often used to hold books closed, since the pressure helped to keep the parchment flat. Parchment responds to moisture by rippling and sometimes, in extreme cases, reverting to something approaching the shape of the original animal – obviously not a desirable result! Other metal fittings on a binding might include corner guards, and sometimes bosses. The bosses were particularly important in protecting the books, when they were stored, not upright as we are used to, but horizontally on shelves or in chests. In situations like this, the bosses protected the covers.

Very large, luxury books might also have plaques of ivory or metal, sometimes studded with jewels, affixed to their covers. These elaborate “treasure bindings” were often broken apart for their valuable materials in later periods, as for example during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and so there are only a few surviving English bindings. For example, at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York is an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon Gospel book that retains its original English treasure binding. Its survival can perhaps be attributed to the fact that its first owner, Judith of Flanders (c. 1030–1095), donated it to the Bavarian monastery of Weingarten, where she was buried. The tendency of books to travel, which has been something of a theme in our discussions thus far, probably saved this particular binding. The breaking-up of treasure bindings did not always result in absolute destruction; again, bits of books can likewise travel and thus survive. The Pierpont Morgan Library also holds an eleventh-century German manuscript in a seventeenth-century treasure binding that features an ivory plaque made in England in the twelfth century (see Needham 1979, pp. 53–54).<sup>6</sup>

As we have seen, few books produced at Monkwearmouth–Jarrow survive, and in pausing to discuss book production methods we have necessarily wandered from the English monastery in both time and space. A final aspect of early production and consumption contexts, however, allows us to return to our starting point and to consider the books that Jarrow owned, as well as those they made. These of course might often have been the same books; that is, while the purchasing of books has been an important part of the story thus far, the production of them for local use is also important. Under Ceolfrith, the scriptorium of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow developed considerably. Quite a few scribes, for example, worked on the Codex Amiatinus (Lowe 1960, p. 13; Gameson 1992; Parkes 1991), and finishing the book might have taken a year of work (Brown 1969, p. 11). As noted above, the book is illustrated, although not as splendidly as the great insular Gospels to be discussed further in Section 1.7. There must also have been more routine production. Scholars have, for example, drawn on Bede’s own writings to

develop a sense of the contents of the Monkwearmouth–Jarrow library in the eighth century, suggesting that anywhere from 150 to 250 volumes might be witnessed in Bede’s work, making the monastery “one of the best libraries in England in the eighth century” (M.L.W. Laistner, quoted in Lapidge 2005, p. 36). Viewed in this way, the library is a working collection; that is, its purpose is to hold, and in some cases to produce, the books that would be needed by a monastic community like Monkwearmouth–Jarrow and by scholars like Bede.

But as the production of the Codex Amiatinus suggests, book production also participates in another kind of economy, one that has to do with prestige-building and various kinds of claim-staking. The volume intended to be presented by the abbot of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow to the Pope in Rome was a tangible symbol of the success and status of the English Church. The uncial script in which it is written is witness to “the fierce allegiance of the Wearmouth / Jarrow communities to the papacy ... It is a script specifically associated with Rome” (De Hamel 1994, p. 21). The Roman version of Christianity was not, as noted above, the only version with influence in Britain, as the Celtic Church was also well established and engaged in sending out missionaries of its own. By means of this book, then, the Anglo-Saxon monks of Monkwearmouth asserted their connection to Rome, and their claims to be taken seriously as a successful new seed of the Roman Church. As Richard Marsden puts it, this “iconic gift” was “designed to advertise the achievements of the monastery at the ends of the earth” (Marsden 1998; Marsden 2012, p. 407). That monastery’s library, meanwhile, supported the work of scholars like Bede, who through their writing further added to its reputation and claims to status.

## 1.5 The Relics of St. Cuthbert

The Codex Amiatinus shows us the book as a symbol of wealth, power, and influence (or the desire for it), all connected to a particular imperial and theological narrative about the spread of Roman Christianity. We can return to that other manuscript associated with Monkwearmouth–Jarrow, the St. Cuthbert Gospel, to see a book functioning in a completely different set of symbolic frames. Small books like this one, which could easily be carried close to one’s person, remain central to devotion throughout the Middle Ages. At the same time, this particular personal book – if that is indeed what it was – rapidly acquired significance through its association with St. Cuthbert (c. 635–687). Cuthbert was an important figure, a monk and hermit who became bishop of Lindisfarne. He had a reputation for sanctity, and miracles were attributed to him both during his life and after his death. Bede recounts that Cuthbert was buried in the cathedral church on Lindisfarne when he died in 687, and when, the following year, the monks of Lindisfarne decided to move his bones above ground, they were astonished, upon opening his tomb, to find “his body intact and whole, as if it were still alive, and the joints of the limbs flexible, and much more like a sleeping than a dead man” (Colgrave 1994, p. 229). The monks moved Cuthbert’s body to a wooden chest placed on the floor of the church, and it is possible that the St. Cuthbert Gospel was put in the chest at that time, although there were several other moments, between 698 and 1104, when this might have occurred (Brown 1969, pp. 28–29). In the ninth century – a period of Viking raids – the monks moved to several locations in the north of England before finally



settling at Durham. Cuthbert's reliquary coffin-chest accompanied them on all their travels, and became an important attraction in the Anglo-Saxon church there and in the Norman cathedral that replaced it in the twelfth century. It remained at Durham until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1540, and after a gap in its history, was eventually gifted to a Jesuit institution, Stonyhurst College, in 1769 (Brown 1969, p. 1).

At the top of the opening folio of the manuscript, an inscription has been erased. This is a twelfth-century note recording the discovery of the book in Cuthbert's tomb when the tomb was opened at Durham Cathedral in September of 1104, when Cuthbert's remains were moved to the new shrine in the Cathedral (this kind of relocation of a saint's relics is called a *translation*). Durham made much of its association with Cuthbert, and the St. Cuthbert Gospel was sometimes shown to visitors as part of the veneration of the saint. For example, Ranulf Flambard, Bishop of Durham, held up the book during the sermon he preached on the day of the translation, and the miraculous preservation of the book is clearly aligned, symbolically, with the miraculous preservation of the saint's own body (Crook 2011, pp. 151–152). One miracle story has it that an attendee at the translation stole a thread from the ties of the bag containing the Gospel, and Cuthbert himself is said to have singled out the thief (Aird 1998, p. 176). It has been suggested that the book might have been placed in the coffin as a kind of magical talisman, to protect it, and it has also been pointed out that many Irish "pocket Gospels" were small enough to be worn as amulets, and that the Gospel of John was often held to have miraculous powers (Brown 1969, pp. 30–38). In all these miracle stories and possible functions, then, the book becomes an extension of the saint (as well, of course, as a visible artifact among many that attracted paying pilgrims). This function – as relic, as object of veneration, as a kind of metonym for the saint – reminds us that books were more than just textual vehicles. This particular book is important as well because it points us to another reality of early medieval textual production in Britain: not all written texts are found in books, nor are they all in the Roman alphabet.

## 1.6 Runes and Ogham

The wooden chest in which both the saint and the book were found was covered in incised decoration, including the symbols of the four Evangelists, and a depiction of Mary holding the infant Christ. A notable feature of the decoration is that it includes inscriptions in both Roman letters and in runes, the Germanic characters found on objects throughout Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England. Runes were developed for writing in Germanic languages, and were brought to the British Isles by speakers of those languages, during the period of migration and invasion discussed at the opening of this chapter. When the Roman alphabet came to be used for writing the language we now think of as Old English, some runic characters like *thorn* (þ) and *eth* (ð) were adapted and incorporated in order to represent sounds not used in Latin. Runes are alphabetic symbols, and on the chest containing the remains of St. Cuthbert they are used to render some of the names: Matthew, Mark, and John, as well as part of the inscription for Christ (Page 1999, pp. 171–172). The Runic alphabet is sometimes called the *futhorc*, from the sequence of the opening letters: a famous English example is the *seax* (knife) of Beagnoþ, which includes the name of either the owner or perhaps the smith who forged it, along with a 28-letter *futhorc*



**Figure 1.5** The Seax of Beagnoþ, a tenth-century knife inscribed with the name Beagnoþ in runic letters, as well as with a runic alphabet, known as a futhorc. Source: Image © The Trustees of the British Museum.

(see Figure 1.5). This object may point to the talismanic or magical use of runes: the knife is unusual and expensive, and there seems no other reason for the presence of the *futhorc* aside from magic (Page 1999, p. 113). Many early runic inscriptions in the British Isles – found on objects like rings, brooches, and weapons – have a talismanic quality, so the mixture of Roman and runic alphabets on St. Cuthbert’s coffin might stem in part from the sense that these symbols have a particular power.

Another key early text of the English poetic canon is, like *Caedmon’s Hymn*, witnessed in remediated form, in this case in a move from carved runic inscription to manuscript. In the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, the Cross upon which Christ was crucified speaks, telling of its own history and its witnessing of the Crucifixion. The poem survives in two main forms: the tenth-century anthology of Old English texts known as the Vercelli Book; and, in a partial version, as runic text carved onto the Ruthwell Cross, a seventh- or eighth-century stone cross from Northumbria (Figure 1.6). The cross is carved with biblical scenes, some of which are surrounded by Latin text in the Roman alphabet (just as some of the names on Cuthbert’s coffin were exclusively in Roman letters). It is also carved with runic text, which closely resembles part of the *Dream of the Rood* as it appears in the Vercelli Book. The cross thus materializes the poem’s subject, as it “speaks” the poetic text through the runes carved on it. This is “the most sustained piece of runic carving in Anglo-Saxon England” (Page 1999, p. 148), although it is by no means the whole of the poem as witnessed in the Vercelli Book. An inscription in Old English, resembling two lines from the poem, is also to be found on the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon reliquary known as the Brussels Cross, once thought to have held a relic of the True Cross (the cross on which Christ was crucified). In this case, the text is obviously appropriate, and while the characters are not runic, one can see again the fusion of textual signification with something more, and once again, the text is not in a book but on an object with visual appeal and ritual significance.

Another early medieval writing system, *ogham*, was used for early Irish and is found chiefly in memorial stone inscriptions, marking territories or graves. Thus, while there is no ogham parallel to the rendering of *The Dream of the Rood* on the Ruthwell Cross, the alphabetic symbol here retains a similar aura of significance, and it is thought that, like runes, ogham could be used for magical and talismanic purposes. Both runes and ogham persisted in manuscript records long after their primary use on objects and memorials had ceased. In *Lebor Ogaim*, or the Book of Oghams, is an Old Irish text on the subject of ogham, including word lists. The earliest version of the text is found in a fourteenth-century manuscript known as the Book of Ballymote (*Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta*),<sup>7</sup> a collection of what might be thought of as useful and entertaining texts, including saints’ lives, genealogical material, historical material, and stories of Troy and Alexander the Great. By the 1390s, then, ogham seems to be both desirable knowledge and, perhaps, something that requires a reference text.



**Figure 1.6** The Ruthwell Cross, showing Mary Magdalene and Christ, surrounded by a Latin inscription. *Source:* Licensed by Art Resource.

Runes, too, could be the subject of explanatory texts, the most famous of which is the Old English rune poem, once preserved in a tenth-century manuscript that was all but destroyed in a fire in 1731. We have the text of this poem because it was copied by the paleographer and Anglo-Saxon scholar Humfrey Wanley (1672–1726), and published in 1705 by another Anglo-Saxon scholar, George Hickes (1642–1715). The manuscript survivals of both ogham and runes, then, add another layer to the significance of alphabetic symbols: the antiquarian interest they eventually come to attract. As with many aspects of text-technology transitions, the lines are blurry. Ogham survives in post-medieval manuscripts in part because it remained a living aspect of the training of Irish poets beyond the Middle Ages. As for runes, Figure 1.7 is a page from a manuscript often called *St. Dunstan's Classbook*,<sup>8</sup> described in the catalogue of the Bodleian Library, where it is now found, as “a medley of useful knowledge” (Madan and Craster 1922, p. 243). That knowledge includes this runic alphabet, along with material relating to geometry and to the calculation of the calendar. The context, in other words, is similar to that found in the *Book of Ballymote*.

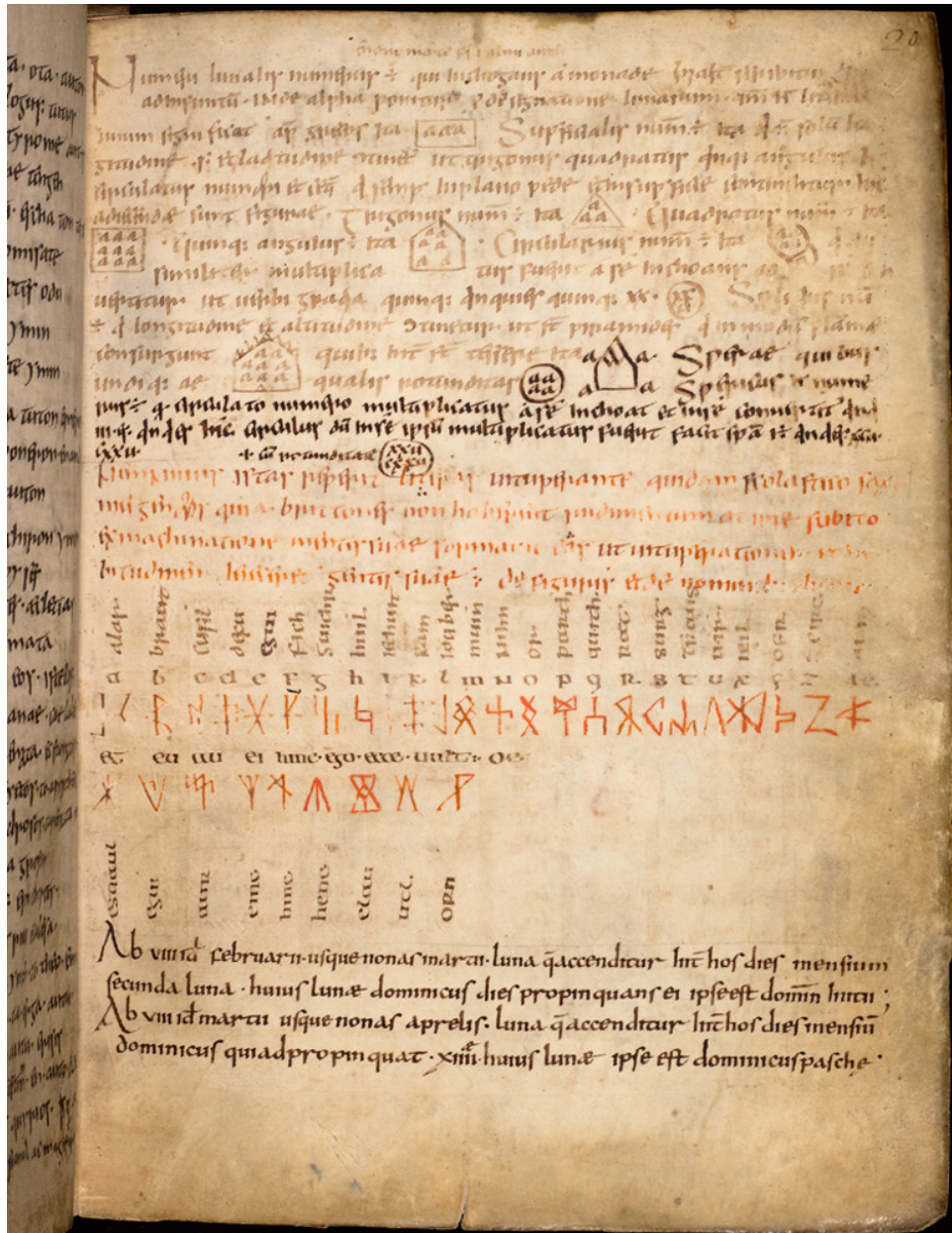


Figure 1.7 A runic alphabet in the ninth-century St. Dunstan's Classbook. Source: Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Auct. f.4.32, folio 20r.

Here, the runic alphabet is introduced in such a way as to suggest that the characters are regarded as somewhat exotic; the Latin original translates as: “Nennius devised these letters in response to a certain Saxon scholar who scandalously claimed that the Britons did not have even the rudiments of learning, and so he formed the letters



immediately, through the workings of his mind.” By this account, runes are a spontaneous creation of unique genius. Even though runes were still in use in the ninth century, the Classbook could be seen to suggest a kind of antiquarian interest; a need, perhaps, to write the runes and their story down in order to preserve them. The Classbook is not the only item in this manuscript. In fact, it is one piece in a medieval assembly of four different parts. While this part was written around 820 in Wales, the other three parts have a range of dates, places of composition, and contents. One was written in Brittany in the second half of the ninth century, and contained the first book of the *Ars* of Eutyches, with Latin and Breton glosses. Another part was written in Wales, in the second half of the ninth century, and contained Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, with glosses in Latin and Welsh. Still another part was an Old English homily on the finding of the True Cross, written at Glastonbury in the eleventh century. The composite manuscript, then, is a witness to the polyglot character of Britain in the first millennium, as well as to the efforts of medieval scholars to preserve and understand both the classical inheritance and older writing systems and languages of Britain itself. It also reminds us that books moved around – not just on special and spectacular journeys like those of the Codex Amiatinus to Rome, or the St. Cuthbert Gospel all over Northumbria in the saint’s reliquary, but also in more routine ways, as scholars or communities imported, created, carried, copied, and traded books.

## 1.7 Insular Gospels

The Codex Amiatinus and other products of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow often witness, in their choice of script and decoration, the community’s affiliation with Rome and the Roman form of Christianity. But other influences also matter in such books. There were other important book traditions, and the period in which the books we have explored so far were produced also saw the flowering of the insular book style associated with Celtic Christianity.

In Ireland, the conversion to Christianity, the language, and the production of script and books all had a distinct character. Ogham can be found in Ireland as early as the fourth century, with examples continuing into the ninth, but Latin writing was also produced in Ireland from an early period. The Cathach of St. Columba is a partial psalter written in Ireland in Latin, and dating to about 560–600. The book is traditionally associated with St. Columba, or Colum Cille in Irish (c. 521–597), an Irish abbot and missionary to what is now Scotland. Columba was said to have copied the manuscript himself with the aid of a miraculous light from a book owned by St. Finnian. Another tradition has it that Columba and Finnian got into a dispute over ownership of the manuscript after Columba copied the text, and the eventual result was a battle in 561 that resulted in many deaths. Columba founded the Celtic monastery at Iona in 563, and the monastery became a source of missionaries and books. The script used in the Cathach of St. Columba is not the Roman-inspired uncial and capitular uncial favored by Saxon foundations such as Monkwearmouth–Jarrow, but rather an Irish majuscule. This is a script that developed in Ireland and spread, through the efforts of Irish Christian missionaries like Columba, to Anglo-Saxon England and beyond.

This style of script and the decoration that comes to be associated with it is called “insular” (from the Latin *insula*, or “island”) because of its origins and use in the British Isles. It would eventually develop into such famous examples of insular style as the Book of Kells. Christopher De Hamel draws a link between early Irish books like the Cathach of St. Columba, and the ascetic and, from the Roman point of view eccentric, practices of the Irish Church: “The Irish – isolated, holy, ascetic, independent of Rome – produced no uncial manuscripts at all, and wrote entirely in their eccentric Irish majuscule and minuscule scripts. Their books were at first generally cramped and irregular and on poor-quality vellum, consistent with the primitive nature of the communities ... The leaves [of the Cathach of St Columba] are crooked and the lines uneven, but there is something deeply venerable about this relic” (De Hamel 1994, p. 22). The use of the word “relic” returns us to the function of books like the St. Cuthbert Gospel, and indeed the Cathach of St. Columba also eventually found its way into a reliquary container. In this case, this was a *cumdach*, or book shrine, made for the book at the monastery of Kells by Sitric between 1062 and 1098. Other Irish books have or had book shrines, but what makes the Cathach of St. Columba of particular interest is that it was carried into battle as a talisman. While it is somewhat larger than the St. Cuthbert Gospel, this too is a small, portable book (27 × 19 cm), even with its *cumdach*, and it was named “cathach,” or battler, in recognition of “the practice of carrying it thrice right-hand-wise around the field of battle as a talisman” (“The Cathach”). Indeed, the presence of the book inside the *cumdach* was eventually forgotten, so that when the shrine was opened in 1813, the manuscript was discovered afresh.

The Cathach of St. Columba is, as noted above, an early example of Irish book production. Another book that had its own *cumdach* (in this case, the shrine was lost in the seventeenth century), the Book of Durrow,<sup>9</sup> is sometimes described as “the earliest surviving fully decorated insular Gospel manuscript” (Meehan 1996, p. 9); that is, it is the earliest example of the insular decorative style which is only hinted at in the Cathach of St. Columba. It has several features that were to become ubiquitous in the great insular Gospel books of the period: elaborately interlaced, non-script decorative pages called carpet pages; evangelist symbols and portraits; and elaborately decorated Chi-Rho pages (the Chi-Rho is the monogram for Christ, created by superimposing the first two Greek letters of Christ’s name). The date and place of production have both been the subject of considerable debate, as summed up by De Hamel: “Scholars have argued for origins in Ireland (c. 650), Iona itself (c. 665), or even right across at Lindisfarne (c. 680).” He goes on to note that the “size of the book suggests it could easily slip into a traveller’s saddle-pack, and perhaps it was used in several missionary outposts” (De Hamel 1994, p. 22). This is another reminder that early books could travel, and in traveling could have influence, both religious (as the reference to missions suggests) and artistic. For example, the Echternach Gospels were produced in Ireland or Northumbria (Lindisfarne) c. 690, and were probably taken to Echternach, in what is now Luxembourg, by the Northumbrian missionary St. Willibrord (De Hamel 1994, p. 32).<sup>10</sup> Willibrord founded a monastery at Echternach, and the abbey soon had an important scriptorium. Missionary activity like this led to significant numbers of insular books finding their way to important continental libraries (De Hamel 1994, p. 32). The influence of these books is then shown by the adoption of insular scripts and methods of decoration both in Britain and abroad: “The early and slow uncial script was abandoned, even in Canterbury and Wearmouth/

Jarrow, and the insular script became standard both for the grand Gospel Books and for the simple missionary texts. In Ireland today it more or less still survives, the longest lasting European handwriting, far more than a millennium after the last Roman uncial was used. The script was so intimately linked with its Celtic origins that the ninth-century library catalogue of St Gall listed together a whole group of missionary books as 'libri scottice scripti' [books in Scottish script]" (De Hamel 1994, p. 37).

While the Synod of Whitby in 664 established the primacy in Northumbria of the Roman form of Christianity, the artistic influence of the insular tradition persisted. The best-known of the insular Gospel books are the Book of Kells (c. 800, Figure 1.8) and the Lindisfarne Gospels (c. 715, Figure 1.9).<sup>11</sup> De Hamel suggests a connection between Cuthbert and the Lindisfarne Gospels, aligning the production of the manuscript at Lindisfarne with the first translation of Cuthbert's remains: "The Lindisfarne Gospels was intended to be a showpiece. In 698 the monks of Lindisfarne reburied the body of St. Cuthbert in an elaborate wooden shrine, an event which brought many pilgrims to the monastery. The manuscript belongs exactly to this period and the colophon names St Cuthbert as co-patron. The volume was probably on display for about a hundred years" (De Hamel 1994, p. 30). When the monks left Lindisfarne for Durham, they took the Gospels with them. The twelfth-century chronicler Simeon of Durham writes that one night in a tempest, the monks lost a precious Gospel book overboard. One of the monks received a vision telling him where to search for the lost manuscript, and they all hastened to the sea:

When these men reached the shore, the sea had receded much further back than usual, and going out three miles or more they discovered the volume of the holy gospels, which had lost none of the external brilliancy of its gems and gold, nor any of the internal beauty of its illuminations, and the fairness of its leaves, but appeared just as if it had never come into any contact whatever with the water ... Moreover, the book which we have mentioned is preserved even to this present day in the church which is privileged to possess the body of this holy father; and, as has already been remarked, it exhibits no trace of having sustained injury from the water. There is no doubt that this is to be ascribed to the merits of St. Cuthbert himself, and of those other individuals who were employed in its production; that is to say, bishop Eadfrid of holy memory, who wrote it with his own hand in the house of the blessed Cuthbert; and his successor the venerable Aethelwold, who directed that it should be adorned with gold and gems; and the holy anchorite Bilfrid, whose skilful hand carried out the wishes of Aethelwold, and executed this beautiful piece of workmanship, for he was a master in the art of the goldsmith. These persons, influenced alike by their affection for this confessor and bishop beloved of God, left in this work a monument to all future ages of their devotion towards him.

(Simeon of Durham 1855, pp. 662–663)

Simeon is telling a miracle story, and he is doing so many centuries after the purported miracle is said to have occurred. The details about the production of the Lindisfarne Gospels that he gives, however, are strikingly explicit. The final folio of the Gospels includes an *explicit* and a *colophon*. "Explicit" simply means "here ends" (an *incipit*, Latin for "here begins," comes at the beginning of a text). In this case, the brief

explicit translates: “Here ends the book according to John.” A colophon is a passage giving details about the production or ownership of a book. Colophons are not uncommon in medieval manuscripts (or, as we will see later, in early printed books). This one is interesting for several reasons. It is clearly a later addition, and so not the work of the original scribe, as is sometimes the case. It does, however, name that scribe, as the first line of the colophon translates as, “Eadfrith, bishop of the church of Lindisfarne, first wrote this book, for God and for St Cuthbert and all those saints whose relics are in the island.” A description of the binding, attributed to Aethelwald and Bilfrith, follows. All of this so closely mirrors Simeon’s description of the Gospels that it seems clear he is drawing on the colophon. He must translate to do so, for while Simeon’s account is in Latin, the colophon – dated to the tenth century – is in Old English. Old English glosses can also be seen throughout the book, as in the examples written above some of the words in Figure 1.9. This running gloss, the colophon also tells us, is the work of Aldred (who was the provost of Chester-le-Street around 970). These glosses are a reminder that, while books large and small could, as we have seen, have significant symbolic value, they are also nevertheless textual supports. The Old English glosses show us an Anglo-Saxon reader working through Latin, the language which was simultaneously the *lingua franca* of the Church and yet also foreign to some churchmen.

The script that Aldred uses is much smaller and finer than the original letterforms of the manuscript, which certainly helps to keep the gloss clear by allowing him to align the Old English directly above its Latin equivalent. Even more important for the legibility of the gloss, however, is a feature that we tend today to take for granted: separation between the words. In the ancient world, words were not separated, but rather written in what is called *scriptio continua*, in which the words run together. This is a system that assumes high literacy and perhaps prior knowledge of the text in question; the text is in this context more an *aide-mémoire* than a tool of discovery. Text would be read aloud, and punctuation was unnecessary because the rhythm of the (familiar) text aided a reader in knowing when to pause. While this system originated on the scrolls traditionally used for texts in the ancient world, it carried over into the codex form, and late antique manuscripts such as the Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century copy of the Bible in Greek, and the Vatican Virgil, a manuscript of Virgil made around 400, are written in *scriptio continua*.<sup>12</sup> A specialized form of punctuation, which divided lines of text by clauses and phrases, was called *per cola et commata*, and was to be found in biblical manuscripts. While its use was partly educational – intended, St. Jerome said, to make the meaning of the biblical text clearer – it also, like *scriptio continua*, assumed reading aloud, as the sense units were those that would guide the declamation of the text. In the St. Augustine Gospels,<sup>13</sup> written in Italy in the late sixth century and traditionally said to have been brought to Britain by St. Augustine of Canterbury in 597 as part of the mission to Christianize the country, the words are not separated, but the beginnings of clauses are set off. This is a book for missionaries, and its layout reflects the Roman origin of those early missions (De Hamel 1994). But between the importation of books like the St. Augustine Gospels, and the creation of an indigenous book such as the Lindisfarne Gospels, there is a shift in the users of these books, one that is reflected in the glossing of the Lindisfarne Gospels discussed above. Aldred’s Old English gloss suggests that he is imagining at least some users of the book to whom Latin will be unfamiliar. The gloss is an aid to reading and perhaps also to language acquisition.



The gloss is possible because the words of the biblical text in the Lindisfarne Gospels are divided from each other rather than run together as in the more ancient systems we have just discussed. The unfamiliarity of Latin is in fact at the root of this new form of writing text. Word separation can be traced to Irish scribes in the seventh and eighth centuries, for whom (like Aldred's imagined Anglo-Saxon speakers) Latin was a foreign language. Whether or not the St. Augustine Gospels is really a book that Augustine brought with him on his mission, his books would surely have looked like this, and would have been easily navigated by an educated Roman monk such as Augustine. Paul Saenger points to the different ways that Romans learned languages, as opposed to Irish and English readers, as being at the root of word separation: "In ancient Rome, the only foreign language had been Greek, which Roman children learned naturally as a spoken tongue ... Irishmen and Englishmen learned Latin not as a spoken language, but artificially, in the schoolroom, from word-separated grammars and glossaries. As a result, insular pedagogy emphasized word-to-word correspondence" (Saenger 1997, p. 91). Word-separated text was not the only result of this approach to Latin. A whole new category of British books, word-separated glossaries, developed in England and Ireland in the same period (Saenger 1997, pp. 90–91). Word separation, glosses, and glossaries all suggest what we might think of as a reading orientation toward the page; that is, these are aids to those who wish to access the text, the words. A shift from the ancient practice of reading aloud, to the practice of silent reading, accompanies these shifts in the form of both the book and the text on the page. At the same time, insular Gospel books such as the Lindisfarne Gospels or the Book of Kells reveal, through their decoration, another possible stance in relation to the page.

The historian Gerald of Wales, in his *Topographia Hibernica* (*Irish Topography*) of 1188, describes a book that has been taken to be the Book of Kells, although Gerald claims to have seen it in Kildare, not at Kells Abbey. Whether this is the Book of Kells or another, now lost insular Gospel, the description clearly shows the wonder that these highly decorated manuscripts evoked in viewers:

Among all the miracles of Kildare nothing seems to me more miraculous than that wonderful book which they say was written at the dictation of an angel during the lifetime of the virgin. This book contains the concordance of the four gospels according to Saint Jerome, with almost as many drawings as pages, and all of them in marvellous colours. Here you can look upon the face of the divine majesty drawn in a miraculous way; here too upon the mystical representations of the Evangelists, now having six, now four, and now two, wings. Here you will see the eagle; there the calf. Here the face of a man; there that of a lion. And there are almost innumerable other drawings. If you look at them carelessly and casually and not too closely, you may judge them to be mere daubs rather than careful compositions. You will see nothing subtle where everything is subtle. But if you take the trouble to look very closely, and penetrate with your eyes to the secrets of the artistry, you will notice such intricacies, so delicate and subtle, so close together and well-knitted, so involved and bound together, and so fresh still in their colourings that you will not hesitate to declare that all these things must have been the result of the work, not of men, but of angels.

(Gerald of Wales 1983, p. 84)

Like the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Book of Kells has its own miracle story, in this case associated with its production. Gerald writes that an angel appeared to the scribe every night in a dream, showing him what was to be copied and enjoining the scribe to pray to St. Brigit before beginning his work. The language in the description above suggests that the drawings are a way into some kind of mystical or secret knowledge, and certainly some of the more elaborately decorated pages seem at first impenetrable to traditional reading. Figure 1.8 is the “Liber generationis” page from the Gospel of Matthew in the Book of Kells. The opening words of the Gospel of Matthew are “Liber generationis Iesu Christi filii David filii Abraham.” [The book of the ancestry of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham, etc.] Here, the letters of “Liber” are arranged almost as if a monogram, and intricate “liber generationis” pages are a common feature in insular Gospel books. The Chi-Rho, which actually is a monogram, is also a frequent subject for this kind of treatment: Figure 1.9 shows the Chi-Rho page from the Lindisfarne Gospels. In both cases, letters have become elaborate visual symbols, urging a viewer to pause, as Gerald suggests, and wonder at the intricacy of the design. The evangelist is shown holding a book, so the primacy of the book as the site or mediator of the viewer’s experience is clearly signaled. But while this is a textual encounter, it is not necessarily a reading one. The carpet pages also found in books like the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells contain no text at all. Some are purely geometric decoration; some, such as the carpet pages preceding each Gospel book in the Lindisfarne Gospels, may feature the cross. Writing about medieval memory practices, Mary Carruthers notes that these “are not pages which one can easily digest; like the texts they introduce they must be looked at and looked at again, ruminated, absorbed and made one’s own. The figures that peek through the interlace are not apparent until one looks long enough to begin putting together what seems at first fragmentary” (Carruthers 2008, p. 333). The activity imagined of a viewer here is contemplative and recursive.

These books are magnificent showpieces, witnesses to the glory of God to be sure, but also to the skills of their producers. Some may have been intended for display on the altar. But while the great insular Gospel books have a ceremonial, monumental orientation, insular style can also be found in personal books. The Gospel book now known as the Book of Deer<sup>14</sup> may be the earliest manuscript produced in Scotland, written sometime between 850 and 1000. While this Irish “pocket Gospel” book is by no means as elaborately decorated as are the Lindisfarne Gospels or the Book of Kells, it features stylized initials, interlacing, and geometric decoration, as well as evangelist portraits and symbol pages. Personal reading, in other words, is still mediated through design features that encourage contemplation and meditation.

The Book of Deer is also of interest because it includes twelfth-century additions in Scots Gaelic; these are the oldest surviving examples of writing in Gaelic. Another insular Gospel book, this one in the monumental format, the St. Chad Gospels, contains the oldest example of Old Welsh writing (Figure 1.10).<sup>15</sup> The manuscript dates to about 730, and the Welsh marginalia to between the ninth and tenth centuries. The Gaelic text in the Book of Deer includes details about land grants to a monastery, and the Welsh in the St. Chad Gospels includes accounts of legal disputes and land grants. Both books, in other words, have become repositories for material that, while clearly deemed significant, is not related to the text of the Gospels. The additions are also, like the Old English glosses in the Lindisfarne Gospels, a reminder of the multilingual climate in which many of these books functioned.

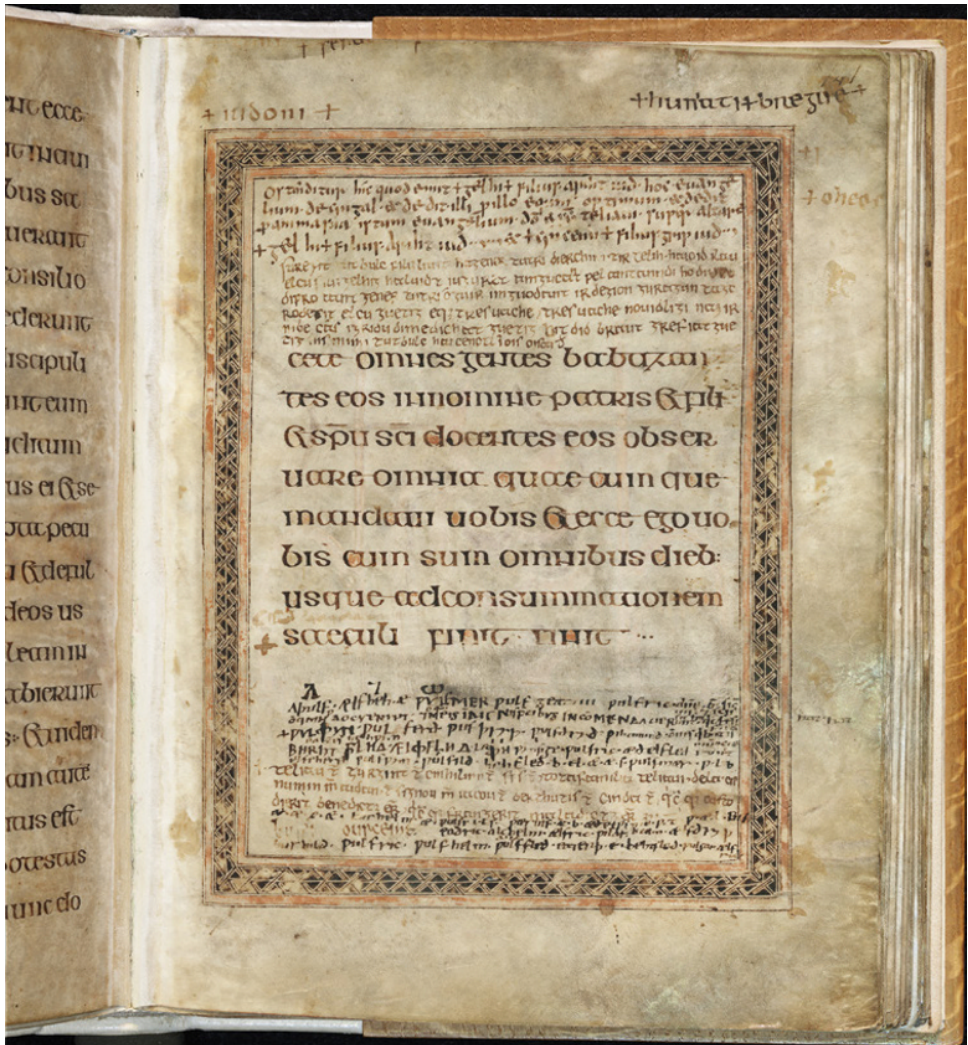


**Figure 1.8** The opening of the Gospel of Matthew in the Book of Kells, starting with the words “Liber generationis.” Dublin, Trinity College, MS 58, folio 29r. Source: Licensed by Art Resource.





**Figure 1.9** The Chi-Rho (the monogram for Christ) page from the Lindisfarne Gospels. London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D.iv, folio 29r. *Source:* Licensed by Art Resource.



**Figure 1.10** The St. Chad Gospels, p. 141: this page includes legal memoranda written in Old Welsh. Source: Reproduced by permission of Lichfield Cathedral.

The common practice of naming such books for places of origin or domicile is striking in this context, as it tends to imply a kind of fixity where in fact the context might have been much more fluid. The St. Chad Gospels are a case in point. They have also been called the St. Teilo Gospels, the Llandeilo Fawr Gospels, and the Lichfield Gospels. The first of the Welsh marginal inscriptions, on page 141 of the manuscript, records the gift of the manuscript to the Church of St. Teilo by a man called Gelhi, who had traded his horse for the book. The Gospels left the Church of Llandeilo Fawr before the end of the eleventh century for Lichfield Cathedral. Both sites have, in our time, asserted their claims on the book. The donation story and the early Welsh marginalia are an important part of imagining the Gospels as “Wales’s Elgin Marbles,” as they have been called