Redefining the Insular Tradition: 
Illuminated Manuscripts of the Seventh through Ninth Centuries

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ABSTRACT

Redefining the Insular Tradition: 7th through 9th Century Illuminated Manuscripts
(Under the direction of Nancy L. Wicker)

During my studies as an undergraduate student with an interest for medieval art, I found myself drawn to the beautifully painted works of illuminated manuscripts. Especially interested in the history, culture, and tradition of the British Isles, I became intrigued by the oftentimes-interchangeable term Insular. Textbooks, scholars, and various journal articles that I read all viewed Insularity in a slightly different light. So when given the chance to explore a unique topic for my honors thesis, I immediately knew that I had to research this problematic designation.

My research began with a broad reading of the core of books, journals, and essays written on the topic of Insular art and history. I honed in on the tendency by scholars to limit the Insular world to works produced only in the British Isles. To examine this problem in more detail, I extended my research in the summer of 2014 beyond the classroom and library cubicle. I visited ten European countries over a ten-week period in the summer. I made connections and relationships with professors, curators, and librarians. I was able to first-hand examine medieval manuscripts and illuminations. Many of the illuminations in this thesis are from text and images that I examined myself. Upon return from my exploratory research, I built a database of manuscripts that I thought were of the Insular tradition or were the foundation for my own redefinition of the complicated term.
In this thesis, I propose two major assertions that differ from those of many other scholars — I propose a later dating of the Insular tradition and I assert its autonomy apart from the Hiberno-Saxon tradition. After extensive research I decided that the Insular tradition is not fully formed until the ninth century and that Insularity extends beyond the British Isles. In fact, the Insular orbit extends far beyond the coast of Britain and deserves to be rightfully redefined.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Illuminated manuscripts proliferated across Western Europe in the seventh through ninth centuries, evolving in style and functionality.\textsuperscript{1} For this reason, manuscripts serve as a perfect vehicle to explore the complicated configuration of Western Europe during the Early Medieval Period. In this paper, I demonstrate that the illumination style prominent in ninth-century Britain represents the blending of several external cultural influences, along with distinctive local traditions, instead of the predominance of any particular artistic school. The two major influences on illuminations during this time were the Hiberno-Saxon tradition (Irish and Anglo-Saxon) and the Continental tradition (Frankish, Italian, and Germanic). When scribes in the ninth century began borrowing from the two above styles, a blended style developed known as the Insular tradition. Semantically this term has plagued art historians and scholars since its creation, which is ironic since the definition was intended to clear up the already convoluted field.\textsuperscript{2} One scholar that I believe missed the mark in explaining the Insular definition is Rosemary Cramp. In an overview to explain the complex term, she writes:

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\textsuperscript{1} François Henry, \textit{Irish Art: In the Early Christian Period to 800 A.D.} (London: Methuen, 1940), 60–65.

Although the term ‘Insular’ has a very wide semantic field in modern scholarship, I shall try to use the term with as radical a meaning as possible, referring to the distinctive cultural traditions of that group of islands to the west of the European and Scandinavian land masses, occupied by those peoples who today call themselves English, Irish, Scots, and Welsh, or sometimes Irish and British. It is, as I see it, the distinctiveness of the material culture of these islands rather than a consideration of every type of activity, which occurs in these islands, which is the concern of this overview.\(^3\)

I maintain that Cramp focuses too narrowly on the activity solely from the British Isles and does not set a chronological boundary. What I propose in this thesis is that the Insular world extends far beyond the coast of England. The Insular tradition is the blending of the Hiberno-Saxon and Continental styles, which fully culminates during the ninth century. Additionally, I believe that the chronological dating of manuscripts from the ninth century is vital for the synthesis of the Insular style because of the highly developed formation of the Christian Church in the British Isles through increased communication between the Isles and the rest of Europe. In this thesis, I use illuminated manuscripts as well as broad historical information to demonstrate that a better definition of the Insular tradition needs to respect the many distinct aspects that coalesce and makes the Insular style a truly borrowed tradition.

Britain, under the rule of the Romans and Anglo-Saxons through the first seven centuries of the Common Era, was dominated by paganism not based in religions of the book, in particular, Christianity. The fact that they did not have a text-based religion is

significant when studying how early Christian missionaries attempted to convert the pagans. Many early inhabitants of Britain were illiterate; therefore, written evidence of the divine through text was not of great importance.

Christianity differed from pagan religions by offering a new way to explain religion. Evidence of Christianity’s emphasis on words is found in the opening of the Gospel of John. The author of the Book of John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”\(^4\) Christ himself is described as “the Word made flesh.”\(^5\) 

\(\text{\textit{Word}}\) here is translated from the Greek word \textit{logos}, which is a fundamental philosophical concept for Greek philosophers.\(^6\) The conception of divine word from the Gospel of John is similar to the first chapter of Genesis and also explicitly to Psalm 33 in the Old Testament. In these comparable writings, God brings about all creation through his word, as opposed to a physical, creative action. God’s ability to accomplish his will by word bears significant weight for the importance of scripture, if it too is supposed to be the divine word of God. Scripture as \textit{logos} therefore embodies God’s presence among his people in material form.

Word as a form of revelation can be found in texts from Christian scripture, though some scholars propose a parallel form in the notion of revelation by \textit{image}. William Diebold thoroughly compares and contrasts the medieval concepts of \textit{word} and \textit{image} as forms of revelation in medieval art.\(^7\) He specifically explicates the dichotomy apparent in Pope Gregory the Great’s understanding of these two notions. Diebold

\(^4\) John 1:1, New Revised Standard Version.  
\(^5\) John 1:14, NRSV.  
defends his thesis by quoting Pope Gregory’s letter to Serenus. Pope Gregory states, “For a picture is displayed in churches on this account, in order that those who do not know letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they are unable to read in books.”

Gregory attempts to highlight the problem of illiteracy amongst the majority of Europeans. The same inspiration that literate men receive from scripture, illiterate people can perceive from illustrations and artistic expression. The codification of his attempt to explain the balancing nature of word and image is evident in the Italian Gospels of St. Augustine, the manuscript rumored to have arrived with St Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604) on his mission from Pope Gregory to evangelize to the Anglo-Saxons at the end of the sixth century. The Gospels not only represent the living Word of God according to John, as referenced above, but they also are filled with images of the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as well as other decorative images of sacred figures and ornamentation similar in style to other Italian works.

Scripture was obviously important in the early Christian Church. Not only did the manuscripts contain an intrinsic value, but they also were extremely valuable in terms of production value. During the Medieval Period, manuscripts were costly due to the immense span of time it took to produce an individual manuscript and because of the

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Manuscripts were produced on treated animal skin (vellum) by hand under the guidance of highly skilled calligraphers and artists, most commonly in monasteries. Most manuscripts created were religious in nature – typically they are Gospel Books and other works of Scripture. John Lowden has noted that the value of the manuscripts was high not only because of the time it took to create them or the skilled artisans needed to produce the manuscripts, but also because the ink often contained gold or silver. Therefore, the word illumination has the double meaning referring to the illustrations in the manuscript and the illumination of the ink with the precious metals.

Due to the richness of the codices (bound manuscripts), manuscripts were created for rich patrons and religious establishments. Some manuscripts were for liturgical use or study, but more often manuscripts were simply too ornate for common use.

Due to the illiteracy of the majority of inhabitants of Britain at the time, manuscripts would have seemed quite odd. The unusual nature of books may have proved to be the very catalyst that appealed to the inhabitants of Anglo-Saxon Britain. A century and a half after Gregory sent Augustine to preach to the Anglo-Saxons, an Anglo-Saxon missionary, Boniface (d. 754), continued the mission into the area that is modern-day Germany. He requested for his journey an illuminated manuscript in order “to impress honor and reverence for the Sacred Scriptures visibly upon the carnally minded to whom I preach.” Diebold explains that Boniface did not care whether they could read the

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scriptures in order to receive the message; instead, he valued much greater the aura that the manuscript itself portrayed.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Vienna Genesis}

The ability to express the scriptural story through art is quite visible in an example from the manuscript known as the Vienna Genesis that dates to the sixth century. The text and illustrations of prophets from the Old Testament meet on multiple folia in the codex. This interplay of word and image highlights the dichotomy between the two and reinforces the importance of manuscripts as a lens for better understanding scribal intent during the Early Medieval Period. Lowden writes:

\begin{quote}
[T]he image functions more obviously as an illustration, since it is near the text that narrates the event, but it also comments on and interprets that event at the same time. The viewer is actively involved in this process, for he or she must read and speak and think about the words on the page.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

In the Vienna Genesis illumination (Fig. 1.1), word and image are not two separate entities, but together they play as one in order to convey and strengthen the same message.

\textsuperscript{16} Diebold, \textit{Word and Image}, 20.
\textsuperscript{17} Lowden, \textit{Early Christian and Byzantine Art}, 87
The Book of Durrow

There are two distinct styles that aided in the ultimate creation of an Insular style, the Hiberno-Saxon and Continental traditions. The purest form of their decorative styles occurs in the seventh century, before the high volume of contact and communication between the Isles and the rest of Europe. In my opinion, the best example of the medieval illuminated style from the British Isles is a manuscript produced in Northumbria, the northeastern region of modern-day England, the Book of Durrow.
The scribe portrays the evangelist symbol of Matthew, the Human, in a simple Hiberno-Saxon style (Fig. 1.2). One reason that the illustration of the evangelist is simple is because of the lack of clothing folds; instead, his garments are shown in a bell-shaped pattern. The way drapery folds in clothing are shown will be a point of interest for later manuscripts. Also, the Durrow Matthew is typical of the framework for Hiberno-Saxon carpet pages. A carpet page often occurs at the frontispiece of sections in manuscripts and is a decorated page that separates portions of text. In the Durrow manuscript, a large border surrounds the image of Matthew, ornamented in bold multicolored Celtic swirl knotwork. Matthew’s Evangelist symbol is centered in the

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middle of the page with a blank background behind him. The Book of Durrow is the quintessential Hiberno-Saxon Manuscript; with it in mind the manuscripts that will follow it chronologically begin to show more influences from outside sources.\textsuperscript{20}

Conclusion

The word Insular serves as a sort of pun for the complexity of the definition. Insularity denotes a sense of isolationism, which is the common practice of many art historians and scholars when labeling a work or period as being Insular, because they often forget the larger picture of the Insular tradition. The Insular orbit though is anything but isolationist; in fact, the Insular world was highly developed culturally. Its own influence stretched far beyond the borders of Ireland and England, and the influences that shaped the Insular characteristics were not restricted to the Isles themselves. Insular culture may have heavily drawn upon the Celts, Scots, and the Anglo-Saxons; however, the differentiation between the sixth-century Hiberno-Saxon culture and Insular culture is the compilation of other influences, specifically European Continental traditions from Mediterranean cultures, such as Italy and France. The transmission of art, the spread and cultivation of Christianity across Europe, and the increased communication between Rome and its ecclesiastical posts on the frontier in the British Isles served as the means of evolution for the Insular tradition.

If one views artwork of Britain and Ireland, specifically manuscript illuminations, “Hiberno-Saxon” is a better term for earlier works of the seventh and beginning of the eighth century. It is not until increased connection and interplay with the rest of Europe

\textsuperscript{20} Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, \textit{Celtic Britain and Ireland} (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 129.
that the Hiberno-Saxon cultural style begins to morph into a more blended style, as mentioned above.

With the Insular tradition in mind, I support my case for this blended style by underlining several key points in a number of manuscripts that were created in Britain and Europe from the seventh to the ninth century. The manuscripts analyzed are categorized as Hiberno-Saxon, Continental, or the blended Insular Tradition. My goal in this thesis is that by highlighting stylistic points in the manuscripts and by providing essential historical background, the knowledge of the borrowed tradition of Insular manuscripts is better understood. I propose to provide a working framework to better understand the borrowed tradition of Insular art. Meyer Schapiro expertly summarizes the Insular tradition by placing the subject into a workable perspective. Schapiro wrote:

… the polarity of the Celtic and Roman within Insular art, like that of Lindisfarne and Jarrow – the difference corresponding to the larger opposition of Celtic and Roman Christianity in the islands – does not exclude the rich interplay of the opposed traditions in the same works, as in the church itself – although one or other may dominate in the most individual achievements.\footnote{Meyer Schapiro, “The Decoration of the Leningrad Manuscript of Bede,” \textit{Scriptorium} 12 (1958): 241–242.}
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In my thesis I view the complicated definition *Insular* in a new light. In my opinion, the definition of “Insular” encompasses the cultural aspects and history of the British Isles and its subsequent effect on the rest of Western Europe during seventh through ninth centuries of the Early Medieval Period. Many of the problems I have with this term revolve around the reductionist nature of the term “Insular.” Historians often simplify the term so that it only covers the material culture of Ireland and Britain or make “Insular” synonymous with “Hiberno-Saxon,” thus losing the unique aspects of each culture.¹ In my own study of Hiberno-Saxon culture, the Insular tradition tends to be discussed by scholars with little regard to its formation.² I explain the synthesis of the Insular tradition through the lens of a comparative stylistic study using unique aspects of the Insular composition that lead to a single style and culture.

The reason that the broader picture of the tradition is lost is due to the interconnectivity of this term, which crosses many academic disciplines. What has been previously written on this subject is thorough; however, it tends to be focused acutely on

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the given scholar’s field. In this literature review, I highlight a number of the scholars and their contribution to the Insular tradition. Consequently, I raise the need for a broader conception of Insularity that depicts the blended nature of the British Isles during the Early Medieval Period and its footprint on the rest of Europe.

The Term Insular

The two difficult problems in defining the Insular tradition are chronology and the tendency to limit the Insular world to Ireland and Britain geographically. Roger Stalley believes that the “Insular period” begins with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the British Isles, the creation of the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata, and the Christianization of the Isles.¹ All of these events occur within a century and bring with them three different cultures into one space.

The Anglo-Saxons as Gildas (d. 570 C.E.) describes were called to defend the Britons at the beginning of the fifth century from the Scots and Picts from the North and Northwest. Gildas writes:

Such is the protection they find for their country (it was, in fact, its destruction) that those wild Saxons, of accursed name, hated by God and men, should be admitted into the island, like wolves into folds, in order to repel the northern nations. Nothing more hurtful, certainly, nothing more bitter, happened to the island than this.²

The Anglo-Saxons were a collection of Germanic tribes from the European Continent, and they brought with them their own unique cultures to Britain. As Gildas wrote, the hope that the mercenaries would provide protection and then return home did not quite turn out as planned. The Picts and Scots were repelled, but the Anglo-Saxons established the Kingdoms of Mercia, Northumbria, and Kent. The Britains were pushed into Cornwall and Wales.

The Celts, or Scots, invading from Ireland established the kingdom of Dál Riata in Northern modern-day Scotland at the turn of the sixth century. Bede wrote about the Scots in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*:

In process of time, Britain, besides the Britons and the Picts, received a third nation, the Scots, who, migrating from Ireland under their leader, Reuda, either by fair means, or by force of arms, secured to themselves those settlements among the Picts which they still possess. From the name of their commander, they are to this day called Dalreudini; for, in their language, Dal signifies a part.

Bede describes effectively here how the Scots brought with them the Celtic influences and culture from Ireland.

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Among the many influences that the Scots brought to Dál Riata, a major one was the Irish rite of Christianity. When Pope Gregory I sent Augustine of Canterbury in 595 C.E. to bring Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons, he brought the rite of Rome. The Scots brought with them Christianity from the traditions of St. Patrick and St. Columba. These differences were less theological and more based in ritual and tradition, such as the dating of Easter or the type of tonsure worn by clergy. Also, it was a fairly common practice to recuse oneself from society and lead an ascetic life. The other part of Britain was exposed to Roman Christianity from the South. The various kingdoms of the British Isles would nominally claim Christianity as the official religion over the course of a few hundred years. With Christianity came exposure to the cultures of Italy, Carolingian France, and other parts of Continental Europe.

The arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, the creation of Dál Riata, and the Christianization of the British Isles are separate, yet intertwined events that highlight the difficulty of harnessing the overarching term Insular. The end of the Insular Period is also debatable. One common dating school, which is supported by many scholars including Michelle Brown, ends the period with the invasion of the Normans in 1066 C.E. I disagree though with this assertion. I accept that the Anglo-Saxon period ends in 1066 C.E., but that the Insular tradition continues to prevail. Insular does not revolve so much

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around a power structure or reigning civilization, as much as it defines a collection of influences in art, language, religion, and other areas of culture.

Few scholars challenge the accepted view that the Insular tradition only occurs within Britain’s borders. One scholar who presents a differing opinion is Benjamin Tilghman who highlights the limited view of the tradition by many medieval art historians. Tilghman writes:

Ascribing artistic decisions to a particular ‘influence’ undervalues the agency of the makers of a work of art, who are presented as powerless to escape the authority of particularly important or well-known works, which is to say that the dominant tradition acts upon newly made works, as opposed to makers consciously responding to, and making selective use of, existing works.⁹

In this quotation, Tilghman efficiently explains how artist lose their agency when historians limit their ability to pick and choose what they wish to incorporate into their works. This agency issue is an important aspect in the complexity of the Insular tradition. The Insular world is expanded if a historian accepts that an artist could consciously blend traditional styles. So, a scribe in Italy who has been exposed to an Anglo-Saxon manuscript and wishes to incorporate a type of knotwork into his own work is now an active agent in this borrowing tradition.

In her attempt to provide an overview of the complex Insular tradition, Rosemary Cramp mentions that there are many unique aspects that produce the larger tradition. Additionally Cramp writes, “It is, as I see it, the distinctiveness of the material culture of

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these islands rather than a consideration of every type of activity which occurs in these island which is the concern of this overview.\textsuperscript{10} I think it is interesting that she limits \textit{Insular} to the material culture of the Insular tradition. I disagree, because I think that Insularity includes aspects of culture, religion, and politics; however, I do think her narrower vision of the Insular tradition focusing on the material culture provides an appropriate frame of reference for better understanding the complicated term. Due to Cramp’s narrow definition — held as well by other historians who have struggled with the term Insular, I maintain that approaching the definition through the lens of illuminated manuscripts, and noting the important history associated with the selected works, places the Insular tradition within a broader historical discourse.

\textbf{The Manuscripts}

My method to explore the broader understanding of the Insular tradition is to analyze stylistically six manuscripts. The Insular tradition exhibits a blended nature because of many influences involved in the artists’ interpretation of the material. Due to this blending, I have divided the manuscripts into three artistic traditions: the Hiberno-Saxon tradition, the Mediterranean tradition, and the \textit{Insular tradition}. The manuscripts I have chosen in the Insular tradition contain ninth-century works that draw on the other two distinct styles. The six core manuscripts are: The Echternach Gospels, The Durham Gospels, British Library M.S. 40618, The Codex Amiatinus, The Homilies of St. Gregory from the Vercelli Capitulary Library, and the Book of Cerne.

Echternach Gospels

A few important scholars — Michelle Brown, François Henry, George Henderson, Carl Nordenfalk, and Robert Stevick — have extensively researched the Echternach Gospels (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS. lat. 9389), also known as the Willibrord Gospels. This particular manuscript was created c. 700 A.D. The Echternach Gospels are decorated in an early Hiberno-Saxon Style. One of the major points of contention is the place of origin. The most respected theory is that of Michelle P. Brown who proposes that the Echternach Gospels falls in line with other manuscripts in the Northumbrian/Lindisfarne School. According to Henderson, other manuscripts that belong to this school are the Lindisfarne Gospels, Durham Gospels, and possibly the Durrow Gospels and the Book of Kells.

William O’Sullivan disagrees with Brown and Henderson by asserting that the Echternach and Durham Gospels do not have Northumbrian origins. Instead, O’Sullivan proposes that the majuscule script has Irish origins. I disagree, however, with O’Sullivan because during the late seventh and early eighth century Northumbrian and Irish artistic styles are almost indiscernable due to the aforementioned Dál Riata Irish Kingdom in modern-day Scotland and Northumbria. O’Sullivan’s assertion is also supported by Nees, who agrees that the Echternach Gospels were created in Echternach Abbey, the

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monastery established by St. Willibrord. This differs from the belief that the Gospels were created in Northumbria and transported to Echternach. They base this assertion not on style but rather on the parchment used.

Nordenfalk does not attribute the manuscript to a particular origin, but he states that the manuscript was most likely presented to Willibrord before his mission to evangelize to the Frisians in 690 C.E. Nordenfalk also notes that the layout of the Echternach Gospels uses a particular page layout method called *per cola et commata*. This style lays out text in rows and columns and is a tool that allows scribes to write faster when there were production time constraints before an imminent outgoing mission.

An example of a Continental work that is found in the British Isles is the Maccabees Fragment found in the Durham Cathedral Library. The practice of *per cola et commata* allows for fewer pages and the ability to use a miniscule hand as opposed to a majuscule, which takes longer to produce. Nordenfalk also compares the Echternach carpet pages to the illumination style of the Book of Durrow, which chronologically precedes Echternach. In a chapter solely dedicated to manuscripts for missionaries, Christopher de Hamel asserts that the Echternach Gospels is a vital work when one is discussing the spread of Christianity and the spread of text and style from Britain to the

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When making his assertion on the importance of viewing the impact of manuscripts as a means to better understand the Insular tradition de Hamel writes, “It is hardly possible to think of a more striking way of illustrating the impact of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries on German cultural life than by looking at their books.”21 I agree with de Hamel that there is almost no better way to examine the impact that the Anglo-Saxons, as well as the Irish for that matter, had on the Continental culture.

Durham Gospels

The Durham Gospels (Durham, Durham Cathedral Library, MS A.II.17) is a late seventh-century manuscript housed in the Durham Cathedral Library. The manuscript is fragmentary, with the only remaining illuminations a full carpet page with the crucifixion of Jesus and the initial page of the Gospel of St. John.22 Nordenfalk notes that scholars commonly attribute the Durham and Echternach Gospels to the same scribe.23 There are noticeable similarities according to Nordenfalk: coupled script descenders (e.g. \( p \), \( q \), and \( g \)’s), the flow of the interlace filling, the center of the cross-member of the \( N \), and a number of other similarities. There are, however, many differences. The interlace is filled with quadrupeds, the framing fillet, or border, is no longer yellow, but green. The stem of the initial generates a cluster of spiral work.24 For these reasons Nordenfalk believes that the two manuscripts share a tradition but were made by two different scribes.

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23 Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 56.
24 Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 56.
Richard Gameson is the expert on the manuscripts housed in the Cathedral Library in Durham. He skillfully makes note of the Italian influences in the Durham manuscript both in artistic style and textual makeup. According to Gameson, the majority of the illumination and text styles are comparable to Lindisfarne and other Northumbrian gospel texts. The historiated capitals in the text are decorated in an Insular manner. Gameson also asserts that the proportions of the script are comparable to other contemporary Italian manuscripts. In addition, he points out that the scribe of the Durham Gospels wrote his Latin in what is called a “majestic Insular Half-Uncial.”

The Latin itself is composed with a mixed Italian Vulgate with Insular spellings of particular Latin words. Also, Gameson draws comparisons of this particular Northumbrian manuscript to the artistic illuminated style of the Oxford, or Cambridge, Italian Gospels. Another interesting point that Gameson makes comes from the notes along the side of two scripture passages (Luke 7.19, and Luke 2.1). Luke 7.19 is typically recited during the season of Advent, and Luke 2.1 is recited during Christmas mass. These notes in the manuscript raise the possibility for its use during liturgy. If this is so, Gameson considers whether other large scale illuminated manuscripts, e.g. The Book of Kells, could have been used during services, as opposed to only being used for adoration.

Henderson compares the Durham Gospels and the Echternach Gospels. On the ordinary text-pages, the Durham Gospels shares similar aspects of the Book of Kells in their small decorative initials spread throughout a number of the pages. Henderson also

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compares the scribes’ interlace technique, spiral patterns, and zoomorphic style to contemporary metalwork pieces, for example, a hanging bowl from the Sutton-Hoo burial and the Monymusk Reliquary.\textsuperscript{30} 

Carol Neuman de Vegvar agrees with Gameson on a number of points.\textsuperscript{31} First, she draws on a comparative analysis of the scribal hands by C. D. Verey from the corrections made in in both the Lindisfarne and Durham gospel texts.\textsuperscript{32} Also, Neuman de Vegvar agrees that the Durham Gospel book was brought with the Community of St. Cuthbert that left Lindisfarne to form the monastery at Chester-le-Street in the tenth century. Interestingly, though, Neuman de Vegvar believes that the Durham Gospels were produced after the Lindisfarne Gospels. The Lindisfarne Gospels draws on Late Antique models in human form and drapery, for example the Codex Amiatinus (c. 700).

Later Insular manuscripts are rapidly developing in their style away from this Antique model, causing the Lindisfarne Matthew, or even the Amiatinus Ezra, to look staid in comparison. I will raise the argument over whether a more representational human model or a pull away from Antiquity for a more abstract depiction with other manuscripts in this thesis, but Neuman de Vegvar asserts that the scribes’ depiction of the drapery folds are a case for a later date of the Durham Gospels.

\textsuperscript{30} Henderson, \textit{From Durrow to Kells}, 67.
British Library, M.S. 40618

Little has been written about the British Library, London, M.S. 40618, also known as the “Irish Pocket-Gospel Book.” Its origin is unknown, but the earliest reference to the manuscript is when King Æthelstan was gifted the M.S. 40618 in the tenth century. He ordered new illuminations for multiple decorated initials, and two new evangelist portraits. The earliest illuminations can be dated to the late eighth century. It resembles other Irish Pocket-Gospel Books, such as the Book of Mulling. This is a reason to believe that it was created in Ireland. Thus, it must have been transported at some time to the British Isles before the tenth century.

Codex Amiatinus

The Codex Amiatinus (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Amiatinus I) is a late seventh-century manuscript produced at the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. The history of these monasteries is well documented in Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica. François Henry writes about the twin monasteries and of the provenance of the Codex. Benedict Biscop (d. 690) made five trips from Northumbria to Rome, each time returning with gifts. From Gaul he brought home masons and glaziers, from Italy he

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33 Alexander, Insular Manuscripts, 68.
35 Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, 126–127.
36 Alexander, Insular Manuscripts, 32–35.
brought back manuscripts — the greatest of them the Codex Grandior — and all of these gifts he brought back were in the Continental styles.  

The twin monasteries became centers of Mediterranean culture. Nordenfalk notes that Eastern influences enter Hiberno-Saxon art by way of Northumbria. The scribes at the twin monasteries, according to Nordenfalk, Brown, and William Diebold, were copying or drawing heavily in their manuscripts from the styles of the treasures that Biscop had brought back. Diebold compares, like other scholars, the almost identical likeness of the Lindisfarne Matthew to the Amiatinus Ezra.

Neuman de Vegvar notes the scribal hand. The script is an Italian uncial, typical of the Wearmouth-Jarrow monasteries. Also, the classicizing environment at Wearmouth-Jarrow apparently did not affect such neighboring scriptoria as Lindisfarne, according to Neuman de Vegvar. In her analysis of the artistic style, she examines the classical, or late Antique, elements present in the manuscript.

De Hamel notes the inscription in the dedication page of the codex named “Petrus Langobardorum.” The inscription caused scholars for years to believe that the Codex was an Italian work. De Hamel cites that in 1886 G.B. de Rossi discovered that the inscription on the dedication page had been tampered with. De Rossi was able to piece together the original name of the donor as “Ceolfridus Anglorum.” This new piece of

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information allowed scholars to recognize that the Codex Amitatinus was the same original copy Ceolfrith attempted to bring to Rome at the beginning of the eighth century.

**Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli**

The Homilies of St. Gregory (Vercelli, Capitulary Library, M.S. 148) are housed in the Museo del Tesoro del Duomo e Archivio Capitolare, Vercelli, Italy. It is a set of homilies from St. Gregory. Very little has been written on this manuscript. The main scholar who has researched the manuscript is Fabrizio Crivello.\(^44\) He believes that the manuscript was produced in the ninth century at the abbey of Nonantola, in Northern Italy. The prominent illuminations in the manuscript are a large carpet page of Gregory, a dedication page to a deacon named Pertus with St. Peter, and an illumination with Christ enthroned. In addition to these large pages, there are smaller ornamental illuminations as historiated capitals. Crivello notes that the script is similar to the other Nonantola works that scholar E. A. Lowe cites as Beneventan script of the ninth century.\(^45\)

**Book of Cerne**

Michelle Brown has written the most complete study on the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library, M.S. L1.I.10), is a ninth-century illuminated manuscript.\(^46\) Its primary function was more than likely a devotional or book for private

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meditation. According to Brown, the Book of Cerne is written in “Insular Latin.” Brown places the Book of Cerne in a subgroup of manuscripts known as the Canterbury school, notes the relationships between the members of the this school (also known as the Tiberius School), and provides an accurate assessment of the dates of the manuscripts in the school. Alexander also writes about the text and illumination style of the Book of Cerne in relation to other sixth- through ninth-century manuscripts.

**Conclusion**

We can see that these six manuscripts (The Echternach Gospels, the Durham Gospels, British Library M.S. 40618, the Codex Amiatinus, the Homilies of St. Gregory, and the Book of Cerne) encapsulate the breadth of the Insular tradition. They range from as early as the seventh century to the ninth century. Art historians have extensively researched some of these manuscripts, while others have been studied less. In addition to these six core manuscripts, I have added a number of other manuscripts, metalwork, and sculpture to add depth to the analysis of the broader redefinition of the Insular tradition. These works and the scholars who have researched the art will be explained in the following chapters.

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Chapter Three: Hiberno-Saxon Manuscripts

The problematic nature of the term Hiberno-Saxon is similar to the confusion of Insularity. “Hiberno-Saxon” is used to explain a tradition that contains many facets. “Hiberno” refers to the Roman term Hibernia for Ireland, and “Saxon” refers to Anglo-Saxon culture. The material culture represented by the Hiberno-Saxon tradition is neither fully Anglo-Saxon nor Irish. According to Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, everyday life in early Christian Ireland was comparable to that in early medieval Britain. Society and economics in both places were similar, as well as material products. Rome controlled Britain until 410 C.E., thus leaving behind a great influence on it. Early medieval Ireland had never been under subjugation of the Romans; however, the Romans were active in trade with them through sea and land trade contacts. These Roman connections led to the early transmission of Mediterranean and Continental cultural traditions. In addition to the material culture that early Ireland and Britain inhabitants were exposed to, Christianity was crucial to the development of the British Isles and the ultimate formation of an Insular tradition.

1 Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, *Celtic Ireland and Britain* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 93.
The conversion of Ireland to Christianity was first recorded in 431 C.E. when Pope Celestine (d. 432 C.E.) sent the bishop Paladius (d. c. 451 C.E.) to the Irish. This initial contact from Rome to Ireland parallels the other connections that added to the earliest Continental influences on parts of the British Isles. England received Christianity on two separate fronts. The North of Britain converted to Christianity under the guidance of Irish missionaries in the Columban (of St. Columba) tradition. The South received missions at the end of the sixth century starting with St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604 C.E.). St. Augustine was charged with bringing Christianity to the English. His work is remembered partially through the founding of his bishopric in Canterbury, but it is also not forgotten due to the illuminated manuscript, the St. Augustine’s Gospels (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, M.S. 286). According to Francis Wormald, the work textually resembles other Italian manuscripts of the sixth century by its Italian uncial script and its later seventh-century English notes that place it in Canterbury prior to the seventh century. These Continental influences highlight the difficulty of categorizing a uniquely British style but foreshadow the Insular structure and how manuscripts can serve as a valid and important mode for explanation of Insularity. The three Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts that I examine to explain the Hiberno-Saxon style and its relation to the Insular tradition are the Echternach Gospels, the Durham Gospels, and the British Library M.S. 40618, also known as the “Irish Pocket Gospel.”

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The Echternach Gospels

The Echternach Gospels is a late seventh-century manuscript of the New Testament Gospels housed in the Bibliotèque Nationale, Paris. It is a safe assertion to derive a Northumbrian origin for the Echternach Gospels because of key Hiberno-Saxon stylistic traits, scribal intent, and its provenance history and tradition. The monastery at Lindisfarne is notable for the creation of many famous illuminated manuscripts, including the Durham Gospels and the Lindisfarne Gospels, which will be mentioned later. St. Aidan (d. 651), formerly a member of the community of Iona, founded the monastery in 635 CE. The Iona connection is particularly important because of the relationship of Lindisfarne to the Irish Catholic Rite and Irish artistic style. Due to this link, Lindisfarne produced many works of art exhibiting the traditional Hiberno-Saxon Style through the seventh and eighth centuries. An explanation of an origin of the Hiberno-Saxon style and its characteristics comes from Carl Nordenfalk, who writes:

The Irish monks were intelligent enough to enlist in the service of the Church the artists employed by the pagan chieftains, without forcing them to replace the indigenous craftsmanly tradition with idioms of foreign provenance. An artificer skilled in decorating shields with spirals, interlaces and animal figures was

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allowed to adorn in much the same manner a chalice, a reliquary or the cover of a Gospel Book.  

At Lindisfarne at the end of the seventh century, there was a famous scribe known as Egbert who could have produced this manuscript, as well as the Durham Gospels, the Otho Cv, and Corpus Christi 197. According to Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, Egbert (d. 729) was from the Iona abbey and active in both Pictland and Northumbria around 700 C.E. Henderson believes that the similarities between Echternach and the other illuminative styles such as the Corpus Christi manuscript derive from Pictish formulas.

One of the most renowned images of the Echternach Gospels is the evangelist’s carpet page for the opening of the Gospel of Mark (Fig. 3.1) with the evangelist’s symbol, the lion. Two key points of the lion in the scribe’s depiction are the lion’s kinetic motion and the texture of the lion’s coat. Nordenfalk notes the particular motion and proposes that Hiberno-Saxon artists are unique in their aim at kinetic effect. The Hiberno-Saxon art style has a sense of energy and movement that differs from other contemporary medieval artistic forms, which seem rigid and frozen in comparison. According to Nordenfalk, the only other medieval form comparable to this movement is the Moslem Arabesque style later in the Medieval Period. The lion’s leap is also

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8 Laing and Laing, *Celtic Britain and Ireland*, 134.
10 Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 52.
paralleled exegetically to Christ’s ascension into Heaven, and the scribe’s ability to show this motion in the evangelist’s symbol is described by Carol Neuman de Vegvar:

[the scribe’s ability] to carry the sense of being an eyewitness beyond earthly events into the representation of a vision or theophany such as Christ’s Transfiguration . . . . To represent it all required an art that is capable of displaying . . . a vision of Christ’s successive states, human and divine.  

Figure 3.1: Opening of the Gospel of Mark, Echternach Gospels, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, M.S. lat 9389, f. 75v, seventh century C.E.

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The first unique aspect of Hiberno-Saxon art, as exemplified through the lion of Mark, is kinetic motion. The other major point of interest in the illumination is the texture of the lion’s coat. I maintain that the scribe attempts to show three-dimensionality by layering the coloration of the fur, overlaying red and yellow curls.

Additionally, Neuman de Vegvar comments on the unique nature of the labyrinth framework of the Echternach Gospels.\(^\text{14}\) One reason for the original structure may be that because the lion is emulating Jesus’s ascent from the human to the divine, the evangelist’s symbol is trying to escape his earthly construct, or the labyrinthine structure of this analogy. Nordenfalk contrasts the Echternach Gospels’ illuminative style as a medieval work with a Classical style.\(^\text{15}\) In his view, classical art is precise and distinct, as opposed to the medieval counterpart which is more elusive; thus according to Nordenfalk the perfect metaphor for this polarity is fittingly a labyrinth.

The Echternach Gospels exhibit a progression towards an Insular style by the scribe’s depiction of the human form. In the opening of the Gospel of Matthew (Fig. 3.2), he depicts the evangelist Matthew in a Hiberno-Saxon fashion. This style typically shows the human with gold hair, white face, egg-shaped head, and proportionally large eyes. This style is concurrent with other Hiberno-Saxon works, such as “Pocket Gospel Books” the Book of Mulling, British Library M.S. 40618, or St. Gall Codex 51, as well as other large illuminated Gospel Books including the Book of Durrow and the Lichfield Gospels.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{14}\) Neuman de Vegvar, “Echternach Lion: A Leap of Faith,” 175.
\(^{15}\) Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, 52.
\(^{16}\) Alexander, Insular Manuscripts, 42.
This scribe, though, differs in his depiction of the human from that of the scribe of the Book of Durrow. The Échternach scribe depicts the human frontally, as opposed to the Durrow scribe who uses twisted perspective. It is hard to ascertain, but it appears that the Échternach Matthew is depicted frontally because he is seated in a throne or chair. Depictions of the seated evangelist will continue to develop in the Hiberno-Saxon style; however, this is an early example of the enthroned human figure. Secondly, the Échternach scribe has begun to show the folds in cloth by depicting them with teardrop-shaped creases. This differs from the bell-shaped vestments in the Durrow Matthew. Lastly, one more aspect of the early nature of the Échternach Gospels is its use of Anglo-
Saxon miniscule.\textsuperscript{17} The scribe’s hand is typical of the late seventh century in its use of the miniscule and its simple decorative style with multi-colored letters and dot ornamentation.

**Durham Gospels**

Written soon after the Echternach Gospels is the Durham Gospels, a manuscript presumably created at the monastery of Lindisfarne sometime around the turn of the eighth century.\textsuperscript{18} There are a number of connections between the Durham Gospels and Lindisfarne. The most notable connection is the provenance of many other early Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts deposited in the Durham Cathedral Library that were brought with the Community of St. Cuthbert when they left Lindisfarne to found Durham.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, the illuminations in the Durham Gospels follow a similar style to that of the Echternach Gospels and the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The image of the Crucifixion of Christ in the Durham Gospels (Fig. 3.3) resembles the Hiberno-Saxon style in several ways. First, the framework is fairly simple, with a monochromatic border and a blank background. Moreover, the focal point is in the center of the page. The scribe uses a technique described by Nordenfalk as *Lebensraum*, which means filling available space, by adding simple braidwork within some of the blank space inside the border.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, 43.
\textsuperscript{18} Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, 40.
\textsuperscript{19} Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, 41.
\textsuperscript{20} Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 13.
The Durham scribe’s human form, though, differs from that of the Echternach and Durrow scribes. His human figure of Christ is more representational than the previous two. He adds pigment to the skin of Christ, and the drapery folds are seemingly flowing compared to the rigid bell-shape or teardrops of the Echternach Matthew. Also, this human has a halo, which is an addition to Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts. Above the image of Christ are two angelic figures with wings. Wings are also a new development in
Hiberno-Saxon illumination here. The decorative style of the human figures in the image still falls in line with that of Durrow and Echternach. The angels’ clothing is speckled and multicolored, similarly to the vestment of the human in the Durrow Matthew. The clothing of Christ also is similar to the layered approach of the lion’s coat in the Echternach Gospels.

Figure 3.4a: Beginning of the Gospel of St. John, Durham, Durham Gospels, Cathedral Library, M.S. A.117, f.1, beg. eighth century C.E.

Figure 3.4b: Depiction of animal pictorial art, (detail of f.1, Fig. 3.4a)

In the illuminated text page of the Durham Gospels (Fig. 3.4), there are several signs of Continental influence and Hiberno-Saxon developments. According to Richard Gameson, the text hand used by the scribe is still Anglo-Saxon miniscule like the Echternach Gospels, but the language used is the mixed Italian Vulgate tradition, as
opposed to the Irish Latin translation that was found in the Book of Durrow and other early Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts.\textsuperscript{21} Another key point is the use of lacertine animal ornamentation inside the historiated initials of the opening text. This pictorial use of biting animals and fillers such as spirals is, according to Henderson, characteristic of the early and mid-eighth-century Hiberno-Saxon Art.\textsuperscript{22}

**British Library, M.S. 40618, the “Irish Pocket-Gospel Book”**

The last Hiberno-Saxon manuscript that I analyze is the late eighth-century or early ninth-century codex British Library M.S. 40618, also known as the “Irish Pocket-Gospel Book.”\textsuperscript{23} This manuscript is comparable to other pocket books in the Irish tradition, such as The Book of Mulling.\textsuperscript{24} A single individual more than likely used this pocket gospel book for personal prayer, devotion, or meditation. Typically, pocket books are written in a minuscule or cursive in order to pack as much text onto a single page to keep the codex small for carrying.\textsuperscript{25} The unique aspect of this book is that scholars know that by the tenth century King Æthelstan owned it.\textsuperscript{26} Æthelstan ordered a renovation of the text to include tenth-century Anglo-Saxon illuminated miniatures. The only remaining eighth-

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\textsuperscript{22} Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 68.
\textsuperscript{24} Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 126
\textsuperscript{26} Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, 68.
century aspects of the text are the Insular miniscule used by the scribe and an opening carpet page for the Gospel of Luke, depicting the evangelist.\textsuperscript{27}

Figure 3.5: Opening of the Gospel of Luke, “Irish Pocket Gospel Book,” British Library, MS 40618, London, f. 21v, late 8\textsuperscript{th}–early 9\textsuperscript{th} Century C.E.

Upon a closer examination of this carpet page (fig. 3.5), there are a few key aspects of the Hiberno-Saxon style present. First, the evangelist is centered on the page, similar to the Echternach Matthew. He is pictured as more representational than the Durham Jesus or Echternach Matthew; however, he is still more abstract than the Amiatinus Ezra, which will be discussed later. According to Nordenfalk, the Pocket Gospel’s Luke follows a Hiberno-Saxon stylistic trait of having large eyes in proportion

\textsuperscript{27} Alexander, \textit{Insular Manuscripts}, 68.
to the rest of the face or body. Two suggestions I can think of for the size of the eyes are that they seem to have a way of gazing into one’s soul or possibly calling for a concentration on the divine presence in front of oneself.

Luke in the Pocket Gospel has a body structure comparable to the Echternach Matthew — he has an elongated torso, white face, golden hair, large eyes, and disproportionally large appendages. This Luke, though, displays a later model contemporary with Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts of the late eighth century. He has a halo and his clothing is more representational than the bell-curves of the Durrow Matthew or the curvilinear hoop folds of the Echternach Matthew. There are many similarities between the evangelist Luke in the ninth-century Book of Mulling (Fig. 3.6) and the “Irish Pocket-Gospel Book (Fig. 3.5). Like the British Library, M.S. 40618, the Book of Mulling has many similar qualities that exhibit Hiberno-Saxon tradition, most notably though in the representation of the human form.

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29 Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 126.
Figure 3.6: Opening of St. John’s Gospel, Book of Mulling, Trinity College Library, M.S.60.A.I.15, Dublin, f.81v, c. 9th Century C.E.

*Book of Mulling*

Similar to the figure of John in M.S. 40618, the Mulling John (Fig. 3.6) is centered on the page between two large decorated columns filled with lacertine animals. Other than the coloration, their clothing is almost identical. Both humans are depicted with large heads, large eyes, elongated torsos, white faces, gold hair, and halos. Also, both evangelists are holding their Gospel books. Nordenfalk compares the tubular flaps of the clothing in the Book of Mulling to the similar human depiction in the Book of Kells.30 The unique aspect of the Book of Mulling Pocket Gospel Book, compared to other human illuminations that have previously been referenced, is the smile on the evangelist St. John. This odd feature

30 Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, 126.
is simple, but it does not seem to be a key feature in Hiberno-Saxon evangelist portraits. The Book of Mulling and British Library, M.S. 40618 depict many aspects of the Hiberno-Saxon tradition, most specifically the manuscript details of texts produced in Ireland.

**Conclusion: The Hiberno-Saxon Tradition**

These three manuscripts, the Echternach Gospels, the Durham Gospels, and the “Irish Pocket Gospel Book,” all give insight into the Hiberno-Saxon tradition found in sixth-through ninth-century manuscripts. The stylistic details and the history of the manuscripts lay the foundation for my argument for an expanded Insular definition. These three manuscripts were all created in the British Isles and share similar stylistic characteristics. Insular manuscripts differ from strictly Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts by taking many of the basic Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts structures discussed in this chapter and blending them with a variety of Continental influences from manuscripts and other artistic works from the rest of Europe, as will be examined in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Continental Manuscripts

In the previous chapter, I explained the place of the Hiberno-Saxon tradition within the Insular tradition and the difference between the two. This chapter illustrates the breadth of Insularity. Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts produced in the British Isles were brought with missionaries and scribes to the European continent. Hiberno-Saxon aspects of illumination and style influenced Continental scribes; and in this chapter I highlight how these scribes incorporated those aspects into the larger corpus of other European artistic traditions. The two main manuscripts that are analyzed to show how Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts mixed with the Continental tradition are the Codex Amiatinus (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, M.S. Amiatinus I) and the Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli (Vercelli, Fondazione Museo Del Tesoro Del Duomo di Vercelli, M.S. 148). Also to be incorporated, in order to provide a larger picture of the Continental tradition, are a number of other manuscripts and a few works of sculpture.

Hiberno-Saxon Missionaries to the Continent

A few Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries have been mentioned who shaped the formation of the Christian West during the Early Medieval Period. St. Aidan (d. 651 C.E.) left the monastic community of Iona in order to found the abbey of Lindisfarne on
Lindisfarne was the center where the Lindisfarne Gospels and possibly the Durham and Echternach Gospels were produced. As discussed in the last chapter, the community of St. Cuthbert left Lindisfarne in c. 875 C.E. to found the monastic community at Chester-le-Street which ultimately became Durham Cathedral and Library. Durham Cathedral houses the Durham Gospels, the Durham Cassiodorus, a sixth-century Maccabees fragment, and other impressive works. Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries led the Christianization of England and Scotland, as well as mission work into Gaul, Frisia, and Germany. Three notable missionaries from Ireland and England who brought Christianity to previously pagan regions on the Continent were St. Columbanus (d. 615), St. Willibrord (d. 739), and St. Wilfrid (d. 709). With a deeper examination of these Hiberno-Saxon saints’ missions, the impact that the Irish and Anglo-Saxon traditions had on the Continent provides the perspective needed before analyzing the texts.

*St. Columbanus*

Around the year 590 CE, St. Columbanus and twelve friends set off from Ireland to bring Christianity to the Gauls. Henderson states that he first gained the favor of the Merovingian ruler of Austrasia, and that to aid in the missionary efforts, he was given an abandoned Roman fortress at Annegray. He also maintains that in order to have a quieter location for his monks to devote themselves to prayer, Columbanus established the

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second famous monastery of Luxeuil. The Luxeuil illumination style that developed is a sub-style of the Merovingian style. The monastery is credited most importantly with the evolution of the first calligraphic miniscule, the Luxeuil script.\textsuperscript{4} This script and its variations leading up to the creation of the more famous Caroline miniscule will be investigated later in this chapter. After establishing the Luxeuil monastery, Columbanus and his company were expelled by the Merovingian ruler Theodoric II.\textsuperscript{5} First they went to Metz in Austrasia before slowly making their way down the Rhine to the Northern Alps. According to Henderson, in the year 612, they arrived at the Lombard capital in Milan.\textsuperscript{6} After the Lombard King Agilof received the company graciously, Agilof provided Columbanus land for the abbey of Bobbio, which was established c. 613 CE.

Figure 4.1: Initial INI monogram, Bobbio Jerome, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M.S. S. 45. sup., page 2, early seventh century.

\textsuperscript{5} Henderson, \textit{From Durrow to Kells}, 12.  
\textsuperscript{6} Henderson, \textit{From Durrow to Kells}, 12.
Bobbio Jerome

Under the patronage of Agilof and the Irish Celtic direction of Columbanus, many Lombard-Insular works were produced. Two examples of the early Lombard-Insular manuscript style are the seventh-century Bobbio Jerome and Bobbio Orosius.\(^7\) The Bobbio Jerome (Fig. 4.1) is connected to Columbanus’ successor at Bobbio, Atalantus, who was trained in Celtic illumination.\(^8\) His miniscule is a combination of early Merovingian and half-uncial. His decoration is also a combination of the Celtic dissolution of letterforms, as seen in the historiated capital, and Merovingian ornamentation with fish and other zoomorphic forms. The majuscule is also similar to the heading of the Lindisfarne Gospel and other Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

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\(^8\) Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 27–28.
Bobbio Orosius

The Bobbio Orosius (Fig. 4.2) has the earliest recorded carpet pages in a Celtic-style manuscript. The carpet page (f.1v) differs from other carpet pages by not containing a cross in the center of the illumination. It also is constructed in a fairly simple manner.

Figure 4.3a: Carpet Page, Bobbio Orosius, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M.S. D. 23. sup. f. 1v., early seventh century;
Figure 4.3b: Slab at Carndonagh, Donegal, c. seventh century.

Françoise Henry notes a parallel between the Bobbio Orosius carpet page and the sculpture ornamentation from a slab at Carndonagh, Donegal (Fig. 4.3b). The text page (f.2r) ornamentation is simple in comparison to other initials and comparative majuscule. The incipit (P) fills the left border of the page and is decorated with dots and ribbon-like cables. The majuscule lettering is filled in to emulate enameling with pink and orange

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ink, according to J. J. G. Alexander. The script is a combination of early Merovingian script with Insular half-uncial.

*St. Boniface*

Another famous saint known for his mission work is the Anglo-Saxon St. Boniface (d. 754), also known as the Apostle to the Germans, who traveled extensively across Europe. He began his journeys in Southwest England and first traveled through the land of the Frisians, crossing paths with St. Willibrord at Utrecht. According to Wilhemmus Levison, his efforts to evangelize to the pagan Frisians were hindered by war between the Frisian king and Charles Martel, and Boniface was forced to return to Britain. He returned to the Continent on his mission to bring the Gospel to the Frisians and Germans. In 732 C.E. he journeyed farther south to Italy, where he met Pope Gregory II (d. 741), who conveyed the name Boniface to the previously named Wynfrid. According to M. B. Parkes, in Rome Boniface acquired several manuscripts, including the “Codex Fuldensis,” and other materials for impressing the pagans. This codex was a copy of a Harmony of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, which was possibly owned by Victor (d. 544), the Bishop of Capua, as determined based on Victor’s handwriting found in the margins of the codex. This manuscript as well as other materials from Rome aided Boniface’s efforts in Germany. After leaving Rome, the greatest impact Boniface

left was his monastery founded in Fulda in 742 C.E. Fulda proved to be the chief scriptorium for Boniface and his later followers’ missions.\textsuperscript{15} According to Michelle Brown, accounts from Fulda indicate that there were requests late into the ninth century to Britain for scribes trained in the Hiberno-Saxon illumination style. Many of his letters have survived and have aided scholars in understanding the history of the Christianization of Europe and the reforms of the Frankish church.\textsuperscript{16}

The saint known as the Apostle to the Frisians, St. Willibrord (d. 739), is crucial for the creation of two major centers for the transmission of Celtic Christianity into Continental Europe.\textsuperscript{17} He was born and raised in his faith in Yorkshire in Northumbria, the home of other notable missionaries including Wilfrid (d. 709) and Alcuin (d. 804).\textsuperscript{18}

Carol Neuman de Vegvar makes note that Willibrord then continued his education in Ireland at Rath Melsigi, County Carlow, under the direction of Bishop Ecgberht. From Ireland, Willibrord traveled to Frisia in 690 CE to begin his mission, where he founded the monastery at Utrecht and then later the monastery at Echternach. The two notable manuscripts attached to Echternach are the Echternach Gospels and the Trier Gospels (Fig. 4.4). A Hiberno-Saxon scribe known as the “Echternach-Durham Scribe,” as explained in the previous chapter, produced the Echternach Gospels in the British Isles.

\textsuperscript{15} Brown, \textit{Manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon Age}, 12.
\textsuperscript{17} Brown, \textit{Manuscripts for the Anglo-Saxon Age}, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Carol Neuman De Vegvar, \textit{The Northumbrian Renaissance}, 246–247.
Trier Gospels

On the other hand, the Trier Gospels (Fig. 4.4, 4.5) were created at Willibrord’s monastery in Echternach during the eighth century.¹⁹ Brown explains that the so-called “Insular Problem” results from the tendency of scholars to assign an Irish or British origin to all Hiberno-Saxon style manuscripts.²⁰ The Trier Gospels, as well as many other Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, offers an example of how the borrowed tradition in Britain and abroad widens the scope of the “Insular orbit.”

²⁰ Brown, Manuscripts for the Anglo-Saxon Age, 12.
Nancy Netzer has attributed the blended nature of the Trier Gospels to collaboration between two scribes, one Merovingian and one Insular.\textsuperscript{21} She states that upon closer analysis of the script, the two hands found are an Insular half-uncial that evolved in the sixth and seventh centuries in Britain and an eighth-century Merovingian uncial that is derived from a Late Antique miniscule. According to Carl Nordenfalk, the illuminations share elements of both the Hiberno-Saxon and Merovingian styles, as well

\textsuperscript{21} Netzer, \textit{Cultural Interplay in the Eighth Century}, 35.
as some Greek and Byzantine influences. The many influences that are blended in the Trier Gospels reflect the complicated problem of defining the Insular style.

*Benedict Biscop*

Besides infusing the Continental style of art into the Insular framework through mission work, Benedict Biscop (d. 690 C.E.) directly brought Continental works and the Continental style to Northumbria. Born a nobleman in Northumbria, Biscop left military life at age twenty-five to pursue a religious vocation. Instead of following a standard monastic education, Biscop left Britain to learn on the Continent, first traveling to Rome in 653 C.E. According to Neuman de Vegvar, he returned to Britain with images and knowledge of the great churches of Italy. He returned to Rome four more times after his initial trip, and on his second journey in 665 C.E., he studied at an ascetic community in Lérins for two years. In 671 C.E. on his third journey to Rome, he purchased or acquired a variety of religious texts. Additionally, he brought home to Northumbria from the Continent many relics of martyrs and apostles. Upon returning from the third journey, King Ecgfrith of Northumbria granted him land at Monkwearmouth. He built his first monastery here and dedicated it to St. Peter. After a fourth trip to Rome, he returned and was granted more land at Jarrow where he built a twin monastery, which he dedicated to St. Paul. St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s, simply known as Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, proved

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to be important strongholds of Roman Catholic Christianity in the majority Celtic
Christian North of Britain. In addition to bringing back manuscripts, Biscop returned with
stonemasons from Gaul to construct the twin monasteries in the Roman way, and he sent
messengers to obtain glaziers.\textsuperscript{27} From archaeological finds, Rosemary Cramp deduces
that there is ample evidence of Biscop’s intent.\textsuperscript{28}

Before his death, Biscop conferred his authority of the twin monasteries to
Ceolfrith (d.716 C.E.). Before being brought to Northumbria to be the abbot of
Monkwearmouth, Ceolfrith accompanied Biscop on his fourth trip to Rome. Six months
after returning from their trip he was named the joint abbot of Monkwearmouth and
Jarrow.\textsuperscript{29} Over the next twenty-seven years he held this title, and during this time in my
opinion his two most famous accomplishments were being the abbot for the Venerable
Bede and being the force behind the production of three impressive, complete Italo-
Northumbrian Vulgate Bibles. Before Ceolfrith died, he attempted to travel to Rome and
present the Pope a copy of the Northumbrian Bible.\textsuperscript{30} Soon after beginning his journey,
he passed away in Langres, c.716 C.E. After Ceolfrith’s death, the copy of the great text
that he brought with him on his journey seemingly passed into thin air. However, the
manuscript arrived by mysterious means at the monastery of Monte Amiato in Southern
Tuscany, although it was later moved to the Laurentian Library in Florence. Until the end
of the nineteenth century, it was a commonly held belief that the manuscript was

\textsuperscript{27} Bede, \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum}, 258.
\textsuperscript{28} Rosemary Cramp, “Jarrow Church,” \textit{Archaeological Journal} 133, (1976): 220–
226; and Rosemary Cramp, “Excavations at the Saxon Monastic Sites of Jarrow and
\textsuperscript{29} Neuman de Vegvar, \textit{Northumbrian Renaissance}, 130.
\textsuperscript{30} Lawrence Nees, “Illustrated Bibles From Northwest Europe,” in \textit{Imaging the
Early Medieval Bible}, ed. John Williams (University Park: The Pennsylvania University
Press, 1999), 148–175.
produced in Italy. However, Giovanni Battista de Rossi discovered that the dedication to “Petrus Langobardorum” had been placed over an erasure, which formerly stated a dedication to Ceolfrith. This allows scholars to be able now to place the origin of the Codex Amiatinus rightfully in Northumbria.

**Codex Amiatinus**

The manuscript MS Laurentian Amiatino I, better known as the Codex Amiatinus, has been described by many art historians since de Rossi’s pronouncement in the late nineteenth century that it was a copy of an earlier Italian work.\(^3^1\) The prior model is known by the title *Codex Grandior*. The model for the Codex Amiatinus answers why the manuscript is a seemingly stereotypical Italian-style anomaly produced in Celtic Northumbria. Lawrence Nees offers a different point of view, however, on the influences on the codex.\(^3^2\) Nees believes that simply stating that the scribes at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow directly copied the Codex Grandior takes away from their artistic ability. Also, since the Codex Grandior no longer exists and two copies survive only in small fragments dispersed in other codices, in the absence of contradiction, the Codex Amiatinus is in my opinion a unique work. Additionally, Nees points out the differences that would have appeared in the Codex Grandior versus Amiatinus, as well as the fact that Amiatinus was produced with presentation to the papacy in mind.\(^3^3\) Due to this, he states that the decorative program of the manuscript was for presentation, which often gets forgotten in lieu of the copying theory of other art historians. Nees is not saying that the Codex

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\(^3^1\) Nordenfalk, *Book Illumination: Early Middle Ages*, 39.
\(^3^2\) Nees, “Illustrating Bibles From Northwest Europe,” 149.
\(^3^3\) Nees, “Illustrating Bibles From Northwest Europe,” 149.
Amiatinus did not have any resemblance to the Codex Grandior, but that the uniqueness of Amiatinus should not be overlooked because of preconceived notions without a comparison available.

The Codex Amiatinus is unique because of its Northumbrian origin and its apparent lack of Hiberno-Saxon influences. The manuscript is recognized by Nordenfalk as of Italo-Northumbrian style.\textsuperscript{34} The points that differ in the Codex Amiatinus versus other contemporary Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts are many. The way that the human form is presented in the manuscript resembles the greater representational style of Roman models. The scholarly tradition that formed after de Rossi discovered the Northumbrian origin of the codex allowed for a link to be made with letters between the twin-monasteries and the Pope, who received a pandect, or treatise, that impressed him because of how “Roman” it was.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Nordenfalk, \textit{Book Illumination: Early Middle Ages}, 40.
\textsuperscript{35} Brown, \textit{Manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon Age}, 15.
The two major portrayals of human form in the Codex Amiatinus are the carpet page of Christ in Majesty (Fig. 4.6) and the Old Testament Prophet Ezra (Fig. 4.8). Images of Christ, or other humans for that matter, are fairly rare late into seventh century or the early eighth century. \textsuperscript{36} One example in a manuscript that has already been mentioned is the Durham Gospels’ scene of the Crucifixion of Christ. T. D. Kendrick mentions two other examples of early human depictions in Hiberno-Saxon art on the sculpture of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses (Fig. 4.7).

\footnote{Thomas Downing Kendrick, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Art} (London: Methuen, 1938), 128, pls. 47 and 48.}
These contemporary late seventh- and early eighth-century crosses share a resemblance to the Christ in Majesty page from the Codex Amiatinus in human form. One similarity is their use of a nimbus halo, which was not common yet in Anglo-Saxon or Celtic depictions of holy persons. Another point of interest is the increasingly realistic depiction of the cloth folds. This contrasts with the abstract method of depicting cloth, referenced in the previous chapter, beginning with the bell-shaped curvature of Matthew in the Book the Durrow (Fig. 1.2), the harsh chevronesque drapery depicted in the Durham Christ (Fig. 3.3), and the Echternach Matthew’s teardrop folds (Fig. 3.2).

Another stylistic point found on both the Christ in Majesty page and the Ezra page in the Codex Amiatinus that is typical of the Italian manuscript style is the ornamentation of the page. In the borders of the carpet pages, long monochromatic bands build the
framework. The four corners of the framework are filled with simple squares. The inside of the long bands of the border are decorated with small dots. The Christ in Majesty border seems to be adorned with small red rubies, and the Ezra page is decorated with gold and silver. This ornamentation differs from the highly intricate designs, such as Celtic knotting, found in contemporary Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts.

Figure 4.8: Ezra Page, Codex Amiatinus, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, M.S. Amiatinus I, f.5, beg. eighth century C.E.

Another unique aspect of the illuminations in the Codex Amiatinus is the filling of the backgrounds. Many other early illuminated depictions of figures in Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, such as the Durrow Evangelists, are shown standing with their heads and
bodies facing forward and their feet turned to the sides.\textsuperscript{37} Behind them is a blank page.

Ezra (Fig. 4.8), on the other hand, is shown seated on a stool in a library memorizing the word of God, which he would later recite after the Temple was destroyed.\textsuperscript{38} The scribe of this page built Ezra into a larger narrative by placing him within his story. Other scribes in Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts seem to value the representation of the given form, human or symbolic, by placing it front and center with no background. In my analysis of the illumination, the Ezra scribe differs by seemingly offering a window from which to view Ezra transposing his text. The Ezra scribe attempted to use linear perspective to render the items in the prophet’s room. The scribe’s intent, according to William J. Diebold, is “a valiant attempt to indicate depth and his lack of comfort with the technique for doing so.”\textsuperscript{39}

Additionally, the scribe’s attempt to show shading is intriguing. Of the early Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts that I have examined, none used shading techniques. In the bottom right of the Amiatinus folio, Ezra has his writing tools sprawled on the floor, and one of his writing utensils is an inkpot.\textsuperscript{40} Next to the black inkpot is a brown duplicate of the ink pot rotated ninety degrees. This depiction, according to Alexander, is the scribe’s attempt to produce a shadow effect. Other contemporary scribes do not repeat the Northumbrian scribe’s attempt.

\textsuperscript{37} Diebold, \textit{Word and Image}, 33–36.
\textsuperscript{38} Nehemiah 8:1–12
\textsuperscript{39} Diebold, \textit{Word and Image}, 34.
\textsuperscript{40} Alexander, \textit{Insular Manuscripts: 6\textsuperscript{th} to 9\textsuperscript{th} Century}, 33.
Another parallel to the Codex Amiatinus that art historians commonly point to is the Carpet Page of Matthew the Evangelist in the Lindisfarne Gospels (Fig. 4.9a).\textsuperscript{41} The Lindisfarne Gospels were created in the eighth century at the Lindisfarne Monastery, which is less than a day’s walk from St. Paul’s monastery in Jarrow, where the Codex Amiatinus was created. The Lindisfarne Matthew, like Ezra (Fig. 4.9b), is seated in a Continental style.\textsuperscript{42} This is in contrast to the earlier seated position of the Echternach

\textsuperscript{41} Nordenfalk, \textit{Celtic and Anglo Painting}, 65.
\textsuperscript{42} Canterbury Codex Aureus, \textit{St. Matthew Evangelist}, MS A. 35, f.9v, National Library of Sweden; and Book of Kells, \textit{Christ Attended by Angels}, MS A. 1, f.32v, Trinity College Dublin; and Gospels of St. Medard of Soissons, \textit{St. Mark}, MS lat. 8850, f.81v, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.
Matthew (Fig. 3.2), who is shown frontally. Also, the Lindisfarne Matthew is much more realistic. His hair has texture, as opposed to the monochromatic golden hair of the earlier humans in the other Lindisfarne manuscripts (Echternach and Durham Gospels). In addition, the background is filled in contrast to, for instance, the Durrow Matthew, which has only the central figure and nothing behind him. The Lindisfarne Matthew is shifted left of center and is seemingly placed in a scene in which he is writing the gospel. There is a white, blank background, which differs from the wall and room behind the Ezra page, but the Lindisfarne Matthew is closer to the Continental style in Amiatinus. Also, in the Lindisfarne Matthew the border is simple and decorated in the corners with acanthus ornaments. Besides the Codex Amiatinus, another Mediterranean manuscript that displayed vegetal ornamentation in Britain at the time was the sixth-century Gospels of St. Augustine, which was housed in Canterbury. This vegetal style rather than zoomorphic decoration is a major transition toward the Insular style.

Lastly, the Codex Amiatinus is unique in another way in relation to contemporary Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts. The script used for the codex is in the Continental Style known as Uncial. Michelle Brown and Patricia Lovett note that Uncial is clearer and more concise than the Anglo-Saxon miniscule. Uncial emulates the classical flavor of precision and uniformity over the flowing and eccentric cursive local scripts of the Anglo-Saxons, the Irish, the Merovingians, and the later Beneventan script. I note that after increased contact with Uncial scripts, such as the Amiatinus text at the beginning of

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the eighth century, many English monasteries began using the Continental script for more formal religious works, such as gospel books. This is seen in the large Uncial in the Codex Amiatinus and other Northumbrian manuscripts such as the Durham Northumbrian Gospel-Book in Uncial (A.II.17).\(^{46}\) The English Uncial evident in works like Amiatinus, according to Brown and Lovett, seems to be an informed one.\(^{47}\) Brown and Lovett state that the models that were produced in Romanized centers, such as the twin monasteries of St. Peter’s and Paul’s in Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, were meticulous in their construction and favored the works of Pope Gregory and the See of Peter over the European counterparts from Merovingian scriptoria.

Another way that the Codex Amiatinus emulates Italian and Frankish models is in the use of the column and arch structure. The famous dedication page that confused historians prior to de Rossi about the Northumbrian roots of the manuscript mirrors the framework of Eusebian Canon Tables.\(^{48}\) Other manuscripts that precede Amiatinus also began to use this model from Antiquity with regularity. Two illuminated works that will be discussed later in this thesis that use the Eusebian Canon Tables, as well column and arch structures, are the Cerne Gospels and the Book of Kells.

\(^{48}\) Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts of the Sixth to Ninth Century*, 34.
During the summer of 2014, I traveled to the small archive at the Vercelli Cathedral in northern Italy. While perusing manuscripts I discovered the interesting illuminated work known as the Homilies of St. Gregory (Pope Gregory I). Little is known of this Mediterranean manuscript, M.S. 148 from the Fondazione Museo del Tesoro del Duomo di Vercelli (Foundation for the Museum for the Treasures of the Vercelli Cathedral). According to Fabrizio Crivello, M.S. 148 is an early ninth-century codex from the Nonatola Abbey in the Emilio Romagna region of Italy. Crivello’s provenance of the manuscript is concurrent with the knowledge from the Vercelli Archive, but how the
manuscript arrived at the library or who brought it is not known. Upon a closer examination of the text and illuminations, many questions can be raised concerning its date and influences.

Figure 4.11: Pope Gregory the Great, Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli, Fondazione Museo Del Tesoro Del Duomo di Vercelli, M.S. 148, f. 9v, late eighth or early ninth century C.E.

Three aspects to consider in relation to the composition of the manuscript are the script, the illuminated decorative style, and the historical perspective of manuscripts that compare stylistically with M.S. 148. Crivello attributes the manuscript, also known as the

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Homilies of St. Gregory the Great, from the Vercelli Cathedral Library with a Nonantola origin.\textsuperscript{50} Nonantola Abbey lies in Northern Italy and was founded during the middle of the eighth century as a Benedictine monastery.\textsuperscript{51} He cites the paleographer Elias A. Lowe who notes that a similar manuscript from the Bamberg library (Ms. Patr. 20 di Bamberg) is “a true specimen of the Nonantola School.”\textsuperscript{52} The other manuscripts that Crivello refers to in relation to the Bamberg manuscript fall in line with the Beneventan style of manuscript.

The Beneventan script developed, much like the cursive variations in Ireland and Britain with Insular script or the Corbie ab miniscule, as a quicker adaptation to the uniform Uncial.\textsuperscript{53} The Beneventan script originated in southern Italy during the mid-eighth century. The connection Crivello asserts is logical because of the relationship between the abbey and the Benedictine capital of Monte Cassino. Additionally, the monastery of Monte Cassino held a compact with the Lombard state in the North through the principality of Benevento beginning in 744 C.E., as well as several other Byzantine city-states.\textsuperscript{54} Thus the style Lowe associates with the Nonantola abbey, evident in the Bamberg manuscripts, shares many connections with the influences found in the Homilies of St. Gregory; however, in my opinion, Crivello draws too heavily from his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Crivello, \textit{Le Omilie di Gregorio Magno a Vetrcelli}, 9
\item \textsuperscript{51} Abbazia di Nonantola, Abbazia di Nonantola Official Website, accessed 27 February 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Michelle P. Brown, \textit{The British Library Guide to Writing and Scripts: History and Techniques} (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1998), 81.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Neil Christie, \textit{From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy AD 300–800} (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 113.
\end{itemize}
assertion that the script is Beneventan, like many of the Bamberg manuscripts observed by Lowe.\textsuperscript{55}

Figure 4.12: Initial R, Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli, Fondazione Museo Del Tesoro Del Duomo di Vercelli, M.S. 148, f. 15r, late eighth or early ninth century C.E.

I suggest that the manuscript could have come into the possession of the Library of Nonantola and may have had a different origin. The first abbot of the abbey of Nonantola also had a relationship with the monastery of Monte Cassino — the Lombard King exiled him to the monastery before being reinstated by Charlemagne a few years

later. Because of the numerous Insular influences found in the Homilies of St. Gregory, a case could be made that the Homilies of St. Gregory the Great housed in the Vercelli Library may have had a different origin that was closer in style to the Bobbio or Luxueil schools of Columbanus. This is simply an observation, but the question should be raised why Nonantola has been credited with the manuscript.

In addition to the origin, the presumed date also should be brought into question for a second look. Crivello, as well as the Vercelli Library, both propose an early ninth-century date for the homilies. The Columbanus influences that are present in the manuscript can be seen first in the script. By my own analysis, there are two different script hands used in the manuscript. The script differential does not seem to be as obvious as a switching of scribes, as in the Trier Gospels; instead, the openings of the homilies are produced with green ink in a late Mediterranean Uncial. The second script is a hybrid of the Merovingian miniscule. Upon analysis of the manuscript, paleographer Gregory Heyworth referred to the script as a Lombard Beneventan-hybrid. A Lombard origin makes sense because of the Nonantola connection, as well as the ultimate destination in Vercelli; however, it also makes sense for other centers of production in the late eighth century. Early Beneventan script and Lombard script are often considered interchangeable, and Lowe was the first paleographer to differentiate the two. The script is confused commonly with Merovingian hands because of their common evolution from

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58 Gregory Heyworth, Director, Lazarus Project, University of Mississippi, interview by the author, Vercelli, Italy, 18 July 2014.
Uncial, as well as similarities in attenuated ascenders and descenders. The Homilies of St. Gregory in Vercelli has a miniscule that is similar to Merovingian and early forms of Caroline miniscule.

The ornamentation in the manuscript is most pertinent to understand the blending of the Insular tradition. The historiated initials are the predominant forms of illuminations in this Lombard manuscript, and they differ from the large Hiberno-Saxon capitals that predominate on opening pages. The initials are bold, but calculated and contained on the page. This differs from Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, in which, the historiated initials eccentrically predominate on the pages. An example of the Hiberno-Saxon historiated initial that takes up the majority of the page proportionally can be found in the previously mentioned manuscripts such as the Durham Gospels or the Lindisfarne Gospels. Additionally, instead of free-hand capitals of Hiberno-Saxon works, these capitals are quite precise because of the scribe’s use of a ruler to make his lines tight. Many of the letters are filled with various forms of Celtic knotwork, which eerily resemble the knots that border the Durham Cassiodorus. Also, some of the knotworking has spiral patterns similar to the illuminated carpet page of the Bobbio Orosius.

Another key feature of the initials is that many of the smaller incipits for the homilies feature animal forms that are similar to Merovingian ornamentation. Carl Nordenfalk writes that one of the most identifiable features of Merovingian decoration is the use of birds and fishes for initials. It was simple to build letters with fish because any sickle or almond-shaped character could be transformed by adding an eye at one end.

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60 Nancy Netzer, *Cultural Interplay in the Eighth Century*, 41.
61 Nordenfalk, *Book Illumination: Early Middle Ages*, 47.
A bird was slightly more difficult, but with the curvature of a tail, many birds could be squeezed into round or curved shapes.

Figure 4.13a: Initial O, Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli, Fondazione Museo Del Tesoro Del Duomo di Vercelli, M.S. 148, f. 76r, late eighth or early ninth century C.E.

Figure 4.13b: Initial S, Initial R, Homilies of St. Gregory, Vercelli, Fondazione Museo Del Tesoro Del Duomo di Vercelli, M.S. 148, f. 63v, late eighth or early ninth century C.E.

Conclusion

The Homilies of St. Gregory in Vercelli, M.S. 148, shares many characteristics with Merovingian works of the mid- to late-eighth century. Additionally, this manuscript has many similarities with other Insular works. The comparisons drawn between Mediterranean and Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts explain the very root of this thesis: that the Insular world was influenced by more than just the artistic styles of Celtic and Anglo-
Saxon cultures. The Insular world was not constricted to simply the British Isles, and it was not truly until the late eighth and the ninth centuries that the Insular tradition emerged as an independent style. This time period saw the British Isles convert to Christianity, as well as Anglo-Saxon and Irish missionaries take the Christian faith across the Channel to the Germanic and Frankish peoples. The style seen prior to the Insular tradition is marked by separate cultural styles assimilating into the pre-Insular style that includes both Italian influences in the Codex Amiatinus and a hybrid cultural style of the Irish and Anglo-Saxons, the Hiberno-Saxon style. The Insular world truly emerges at the end of the eighth century with the increased communication and blending of Continental with Hiberno-Saxon cultures.


Chapter Five: Insular Tradition

In the previous chapter, I analyzed manuscripts that were heavily influenced by Continental models, and in Chapter Three, I examined manuscripts that were either created in Britain or Ireland and exemplified the early Anglo-Saxon and Celtic style decoration. In this chapter, I will explain how the culmination of Continental and Hiberno-Saxon traditions after an establishment of Christianity in Northwestern Europe resulted in the style aptly labeled as the Insular tradition for its largely inclusive nature. To show the blended nature of the Insular tradition I will present two Gospel texts from the Anglo-Saxon Mercian school from the ninth century, one Carolingian manuscript from the end of the eighth century that shows influences from an Insular scribe and style, and, finally, the most enigmatic Insular manuscript, the Book of Kells, produced in Northumbria. Rosemary Cramp skillfully summarizes the complexity of the Insular question:

The Insular tradition is not monolithic; there are perceptible regional and cultural differences, particularly between those who did and those who did not accept without adaptation Mediterranean traditions. This is a period of swift assimilation, which produces an art which is patternmaking and motif making, breaking the flowing repetitive rhythms of classical art into isolated densely packed elements, and this remains an important aspect of Anglo-Saxon art right up to the Conquest.¹

¹ Cramp, Rosemary, The Insular Tradition, 283.
In the previous chapters, the unique aspects of the Hiberno-Saxon and Continental traditions were explained. This chapter embodies the borrowing tradition of the Insular culture. Cramp, in much better words than I can articulate, encompasses the Insular scribes’ pattern of incorporating various features of both styles. This blending, as evidenced, is the very nature of the manifold Insular tradition.

The Book of Cerne

The first manuscript that I will analyze is the ninth-century Mercian Book of Cerne (M.S. L1.1.10). Mercia is one of the traditional Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Britain located in the center of modern-day England in the region now known as the Midlands.

Figure 5.1: Opening of the Gospel of Luke, The Book of Cerne, Cambridge, U.L., M.S. L1.1.10, f.21v, ninth century C.E.
It follows a typical style for the region, known either as the Cambridge or Canterbury Group. The most intriguing aspect of this manuscript is how many various influences are represented in the book. Whether it is the multiple styles of script hand or the blending of classical and Hiberno-Saxon decorative elements, the Cerne codex encapsulates the Insular question brilliantly.

When pointing out the various influences on the Book of Cerne, Michelle Brown first of all makes a case for a one-scribe theory. Brown notes that individual scribes during the Medieval Period followed a systemized gradation of script. Some scholars disagree with Brown and the one-scribe theory in the belief that there was no way that one scribe could write with multiple styles. Brown, on the other hand, suggests that perhaps a scribe who could write in different ways made a conscious effort to show off his skills. The highest grade of hand for religious works, and a lesser for secular works, developed from the miniscule half-uncial. Brown asserts that the use of more than one hand in the manuscript was a conscious choice of design over basic scriptural intent. Brown presents that a scribe may use Uncial in order to create a faster miniscule for production, and that the use of Uncial in the Book of Cerne represents a high level of respect for the religious material being produced.

From the beginning of Roman missions to Britain in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and the intense scribal activity in Ireland and Northumbria in these two centuries, a hierarchy of Insular scripts was produced. The formation of a working

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minuscule that allows for minimal input of effort, yet with reverence for the work, is contemporary with the cursive minuscules on the Continent, including the Merovingian, Beneventan, and the Carolingian minuscule developed by Alcuin of York (d. 804) in the late seventh century. According to Ian Wood, towards the end of the eighth century, typically south of the Humber, Anglo-Saxon scribes were less strict about following a single hierarchy of script than Continental scribes using the Roman model of Uncial, which was based on precision and uniformity. This is why in the Book of Cerne square capitals, rustic capitals, uncials, half-uncials, and multiple minuscules are used. The Book of Cerne contains seven letter A’s alone, six of which use different hierarchies of half-uncial or Insular Hybrid capitals.

The human figure representation displayed in the Book of Cerne (Fig. 5.1) is similar to other ninth-century Insular illuminations. However, the Book of Cerne displays a higher level of ability to depict the naturalistic human form. Interestingly, the Cerne illuminator decided to show only the bust of the human figure. The evangelist’s human forms are youthful, slightly frowning, clean-cut, and with large but not overly exaggerated eyes as often occur in Hiberno-Saxon illuminations. The scribes’ ability to depict drapery has developed in Insular figure-style since the bell-shaped clothing of the Durrow Matthew. Instead of the bell-shaped clothing of the Durrow Matthew, we now see a more representational depiction in the Book of Cerne and other Insular ninth-century illuminations.

6 Brown, The Book of Cerne, 64, pl. II (a).
I have noticed that the Cerne figures are comparable to the Evangelist Luke (Fig. 5.2a) and the figure of Christ in the Homilies of St. Gregory from Vercelli (Fig. 5.2b). The Cerne Luke and the Homilies of St. Gregory Christ are both youthful with dark hair parted in the middle, almond-shaped eyes, and similar clothing. Both have complex halos and are holding codices and instruments usually attributed to them. They have elongated fingers and oddly flexible ranges of motion. The similarities found in the contemporaneous Northern Italian Homilies of St. Gregory raises the question of how much training in the Continental style did the Insular scribe have, or what other works was he influenced by in his creation of the Cerne manuscript.

The particularly Hiberno-Saxon element in the decoration of the Book of Cerne is the placement of the evangelist symbol in the center of the carpet page. Also reminiscent of the Hiberno-Saxon tradition is the blending found in the framework and the text within
the simple border resembling earlier Hiberno-Saxon works. It differs from the traditional Hiberno-Saxon style with its use of the column and arch structure resembling the Continental style. Also the blank background drawing emphasis to the central figure is typical of Hiberno-Saxon works. Although the manuscript is a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon illumination, there are many features that draw on earlier styles. First, the placement of the evangelist himself in relation to the symbol is similar to the Lindisfarne Matthew, as noted previously; however, the placement of the evangelist in a roundel above the symbol is unique. Other Mediterranean manuscripts have the basic structure of depicting both the evangelist and his symbol. However, in most Mediterranean manuscripts the evangelist symbol related to the evangelist is usually placed within the roundel.⁷

⁷ Saint Mark, in the Gospels of St. Medard of Soissons (Paris: Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, M.S. 599), f. 81v.
Another contrast to the earlier Hiberno-Saxon figure-style of both the lion and human is found in manuscripts such as the Book of Durrow or Echternach, which show the later Cerne scribe’s advanced ability of depicting representational form. The two beings in the Cerne text (Fig. 5.3) are holding books, and the Lion symbol also has been given wings.\(^8\) These additions are typical of the ninth century, influenced by Continental works. This depiction of the evangelist and symbol contrasts the earlier works of Durrow or Echternach, whose symbols are known as *terrestrial* because of their lack of wings or

\(^8\) Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts: Sixth to the Ninth Century*, 84.
a codex. Also in the Book of Cerne, the capitals on the columns exhibit vegetable
ornamentation, which reveals the influence of Mediterranean works.\(^9\)

In Insular culture, books were more highly venerated than relics of saints on the
Continent.\(^10\) This veneration is seen in the high level of intricacy of Insular manuscripts.
Some manuscripts, including the Book of Durrow, were thought to heal ailments or bring
good luck. In addition to the respect garnered through their liturgical and religious uses,
many manuscripts both in Ireland and Britain, as well as Carolingian France, were
attributed to and produced for kings. One such manuscript that exhibits a high level of
reverence for the sacredness of scripture as well as the borrowed tradition of the Insular
world is the Royal Bible (BL, Royal M.S. 1.E.vi).

The Royal Bible

The Royal Bible (Fig. 5.4) is a ninth-century text also commonly attributed to the
Mercian schools of manuscripts, the same family of manuscripts that includes the Book
of Cerne.\(^11\) According to T.D. Kendrick, the Royal Bible manuscript is attributed to the
archbishop Wulfred (d. 832) and displays a richness befitting such a patron of his office.
Richly adorned with gold and dyed purple pages, the manuscript is Insular in many ways,
but it would not be out of place in a Byzantine court. In my observation, the human figure
is still similar to the Hiberno-Saxon figure-style with an egg-shaped head, almond eyes,
elongated appendages, and an overall body shape that is proportionally skewed. The

\(^9\) Cassidorius, *The Durham Cassiodorus* (Durham: Cathedral Library, M.S.
B.II.30), f. 268; and the Decorated Page, *Gellone Sacramentary* (Paris: Bibliothèque
National, M.S. Lat. 12 048), f. 99v.

\(^10\) Michelle Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe*


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human is placed in a roundel at the center of the arch above his evangelist symbol. The scribe shows a sense of control in his framing of the classical column and arch structure and contained historiated initials. This lack of energy found in the early Northumbrian manuscripts, but heavy use of Hiberno-Saxon ornamentation, imparts a feeling of conflict within the scribe to maintain a sense of tradition, but also experimentation with Continental styles.

Figure 5.4: Luke Incipit Page, The Royal Bible, London, British Library, Royal M.S. I.E.vi, f.43r., beginning of the ninth century C.E.
The typical ornamentation of zoomorphic and trumpet figures that are found in Northumbrian Insular works are replaced with ribbon patterns and curved leonine figures in the Royal Bible (f.43r). This “leonine figure” as T.D. Kendrick names it, begins to assimilate itself into Southern Anglo-Saxon manuscripts at the end of the eighth century. He writes:

Though the patterns sometimes recall the Northumbrian tradition, nevertheless what we really see in this later Canterbury work is the new Frankish lion being dissolved into new types of ‘barbaric’ ornament.

These lion figures begin to replace the vegetable or trumpet figures that previously are found at the end of initials or corners of frames. Rather than initial ornamentation, this type of lacertine ornamentation, according to Francis Wormald, derives from Carolingian sources. Lacertine ornamentation simply refers to the thin, ribbon-like interlace that is woven in a pattern. From my observation, I have found such ornamentation most often in Celtic-influenced art with ribbons in the figures of animals, including lions, birds, dragons, or horses. There are three categories of interlace that develop from Carolingian experimentation with fillers and decoration. The first is the gripping beast which usually comprises the head of a bird, dragon, or horse gripping the jaws or an appendage of another animal figure; the second is intricate multi-colored interlace; and I previously noted the third category of interlace that influences the Hiberno-Saxon tradition — the acanthus ornament. Interlace

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derives from Celtic knotwork, but the way it shifts to a more ribbon-like figure is derived from Carolingian sources.\footnote{Wormald, \textit{Studies in Medieval Art: Sixth to Twelfth Century}, 51.}

One new development in Insular works when the scribes begin to draw on Continental models is the use of ‘roundels’ or bull’s eye shapes. Kendrick points out a comparable sculpture, the Bakewell cross-shaft, in Derbyshire (Fig. 5.5a).\footnote{T.D. Kendrick, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Art}, pl. LXVII.} The cross has large spiral pendants that look similar to the roundels adorning the Royal Bible’s columns in the Canon Tables or the evangelist page for Luke.

Figure 5.5a: Cross-shaft, Bakewell, Derbyshire
Figure 5.5b: Canon Table, Royal Bible, London, British Library, Royal M.S. I.E.vi, f.4a, beginning of the ninth century C.E.
As mentioned previously, the Insular world extends far beyond the British Isles. One particular manuscript not produced in the British Isles that lies chronologically and stylistically between the Merovingian and Carolingian traditions is the Godescalc Evangelistary (Nouv. Acq. Lat. 1203). Different from the Gospel texts or monumental Bibles, the Godescalc manuscript is a lectionary, which contains the readings for Mass.\textsuperscript{18} The Carolingian period begins with the coronation of Charlemagne as the King of the Franks in 768. Besides expanding the borders of his empire, he called for a major rebirth of knowledge. Florentine Mütherich notes how Charlemagne challenged clergy and scholars to attain a higher level of learning and a uniformity in civil and ecclesiastical law, liturgical practices, and most importantly and possibly the most lasting a sense of uniformity in manuscript production.\textsuperscript{19} He famously gathered together at his court schools outstanding men to aid in his revival of art and culture. Notable people at his court included Alcuin of York, Theodulf the West Goth, Angilbert the Frank, Leidrad and Arn from Bavaria, and the Lombard Paulinus.\textsuperscript{20} The Carolingian illuminated style that developed at the end of the eighth century was blended with decoration and script styles from all over early Medieval Europe. Drawing from classical models, Charlemagne’s dynasty and tradition is marked by his efforts to renew learning and an artistic drive to develop a new sense of order and uniformity. His legacy is rightfully named the Caroline Renaissance.

\textsuperscript{19} Florentine Mütherich, \textit{Carolingian Painting} (New York: George Braziller, 1976), 7–22.
\textsuperscript{20} Mütherich, \textit{Carolingian Painting}, 8.
The Godescalc Evangelistary (Fig. 5.6), besides being Carolingian, is very closely linked to Byzantine, Merovingian, and Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts. The most notable illuminated page in it that exudes the Insular style is the initial page to the Vigil for Christmas (f.4r). Like the Royal Bible Lucan incipit page, the Vigil page is dyed purple. In addition, it is highly adorned with gold and silver ink. Joachim Gaehde notes that the scribe who created the page was learned in the “works of two different worlds.”

Figure 5.6: The Fountain of Life and The Initial Page to the Vigil for Christmas, Godescalc Evangelistary, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. Acq. Lat. 1203, Ff. 3v and 4r, late eighth century C.E.

The majuscule capitals are Italian Uncial, but the interlace filler and ornamentation is Hiberno-Saxon. The Evangelistary is reminiscent of manuscripts,

including the Echternach Gospels, that missionaries brought from the British Isles to the Continent. Also, like the Royal Bible, its historiated initials are compact, lacking the energy of the Northumbrian sprawling initials. A respect for order was exactly what Charlemagne sought in his scribes. Gaehde summed up the culmination of the multiple styles and influence for the scribe as follows: “Two disparate traditions are joined here in a new statement of solemn magnificence.”

The Book of Kells

The quintessential Insular manuscript is the ninth-century, heavily illuminated Northumbrian Book of Kells. Manuscripts of the ninth century are lavish, incorporating intricate designs, full pages of illuminations, and many bright colors including inks of gold and silver. The Book of Kells is simply a masterpiece of Western art, transcending both the material and the spiritual. The techniques used by the scribes are highly complex, and according to Henderson, many different pigments were used in its making. Much scholarship has been written about this special manuscript, so much that other manuscripts have a hard time standing on their own in relation to Kells because either they are dwarfed by its grandeur or they are compared and contrasted to Kells. The important characteristics to mention about Kells for this thesis are — as for other manuscripts — its script, decorative styles, and influences.

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22 Gaehde, Carlingian Painting, 35.
According to Carl Nordenfalk, the Book of Kells for the most part is a perfect example of Hiberno-Saxon majuscule.24 The text pages (Fig. 5.7) are meticulous and highly decorated. The scribe(s) seemingly attempted to create a unique work, thoughtful about each and every letter or decoration on each page. One example of how the scribe(s) thought of each aspect is evident in the fact that there are four hundred uses of the Latin word et in the whole manuscript, and no two et’s are the same; each one is unique.

The use of illuminated initial pages is another typical Insular practice that has been noted previously. The Book of Kells Chi Rho initial page (The Incarnation of Christ) is similar in many ways to illuminated incipit pages of the Durham Gospels or the Lindisfarne Gospels. In comparing the Kells text with other Hiberno-Saxon illuminated works, the reader gets a certain sense of scribal independence. The Kells scribe’s capitals seemingly have no boundaries restricting them, allowing them to flow across the greater part of the folio (Fig. 5.8). They use the larger part of a whole page to emphasize one word. Some Hiberno-Saxon influences are found in the ornamentation. Both majuscules are filled with lacertine interlace, but the Durham text uses small zoomorphic figures, while the Book of Kells scribes chose filler that is similar to the Royal Bible or the Godescalc Evangelistary. A combination of knotwork, ribbon-patterns, and roundels covers the Kells illuminated initial pages. Upon my closer inspection of the pendants in the Book of Kells (e.g. f. 130r.), I see that the inner spiral patterns seem eerily similar to the large roundel carpet page of the Bobbio Jerome from Northern Italy (Fig. 4.1). Additionally, Alexander points out that the most interesting addition to the ornamentation is the playful placement of small human figures throughout the illumination.

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26 Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts: Sixth to the Ninth Century*, 73.
Alexander notes that there are three main decorative features that are unique in Kells and not present in other Insular manuscripts. The first is the use of the human miniatures in the decoration just as a zoomorphic figure or acanthus figure would have been used in earlier Hiberno-Saxon or Carolingian works. Next is organic plant ornament, which was not common in early Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts but was more akin to later eighth-century Carolingian sources. Finally, the beast canon tables are

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original in the Book of Kells, although they are somewhat similar to the Canon Table of the Gospels of St. Medard of Soissons, which has a tetramorph, or combination of the four evangelists’ symbols, painted in the tympanum.  

Certainly the Kells tables are unique.

One major issue in studying the Insular tradition is its chronological parameters. I agree with Henderson, who sets Kells as the height of illuminated manuscript production in the Early Medieval Period (9th c.). Like many Insular manuscripts, another confusing aspect is the text’s origin. The majority of scholars argue in favor of an Iona provenance for the Book of Kells. Other scholars tend to attribute it to the same scriptorium as the Lindisfarne and Echternach-Durham scribes. I believe that a stronger case should be made for an origin in Northumbria.

*Monymusk Reliquary*

A work that shows strong similarities to the ornamental style of the Book of Kells is the Monymusk Reliquary (Fig. 5.9). As previously mentioned, illuminations and text are forms of divine revelation. Scripture and images are intertwined as one form of the sacred. One way to venerate the divine or sacred is through relic shrines found in both the Celtic and Roman Church.

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30 Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 131.
Two types of reliquaries are those that are in the shape of the relic (for example, St. Lachtin’s arm) and those in the shape of a steep roofed house for the relic. The Monymusk reliquary is a house box. The silver and bronze plates adorning the wooden relic box are covered with circular pendants and rectangular plaques with zoomorphic interlaced designs. The zoomorphic designs differ from the unambiguous animal forms in the Durham Gospel Incipit page. The Monymusk animals are similar to the twisted leonine or dragon forms of later works such as the Book of Kells and the Royal Bible. That the form of the animals in the Monymusk reliquary is comparable to those in the Book of Kells aids in dating the manuscript.

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32 Henderson, From Durrow to Kells, 192.
Conclusion

By viewing these four manuscripts and highlighting their notable features, I find the blended nature of the Insular illuminated style of ninth-century manuscripts fairly evident. Students and scholars often forget that the cultures of early medieval Europe were not isolated. There are many instances of intermingling whether through trade or mission work. This interconnectedness links the history of medieval communities as well as pinpoints the roots of the influences for contemporary styles in medieval artistic styles. The Insular tradition, as examined here, is a broad term. It incorporates a blended style with Hiberno-Saxon and Continental influences. The tradition, however, is also larger than an artistic style. Insular as a definition, when properly used, should connect the historical significance behind the artistic style, as well as put into perspective the closely linked activities of the British Isles and the remainder of Europe. As shown through these four manuscripts, this interconnectedness in history and style exhibits what can be defined as a truly borrowed tradition in the Insular Style.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have pointed out the isolationist point of view of Insularity by many scholars. The Insular orbit, though, is anything but isolationist. The Insular world was highly developed culturally. Its own influence stretched far beyond the borders of Ireland and England, and the influences that shaped the Insular tradition were not restricted to arising from within the Isles themselves. The Hiberno-Saxon tradition draws upon the Celts, Scots, and the Anglo-Saxons, but what makes the Insular tradition “Insular” is the Hiberno-Saxon tradition plus the outside influences, predominantly from Continental Europe. The transmission of art, the spread and cultivation of Christianity across Europe, and the increased communication between Rome and its Church posts on the frontier in the British Isles served as the means of evolution for the Insular tradition.

One problem that I have experienced facing many art history students is the misuse of the term Insular. For instance, one of the preeminent art history textbooks for beginning art history students, *Gardner’s Art through the Ages*, does two things with the term Insular that I find troubling. First, the textbook describes the Hiberno-Saxon and the Insular styles as synonymous. This mistake is telling of the desire to reduce the broader term into a ductile form by making it synonymous with a well-understood tradition. Secondly, the author of the textbook uses the terms Hiberno-Saxon and Insular,

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“to denote the monastic art produced in the Irish-English islands.”

It is the facile syncretism that sparks the need to challenge established terminology.

I believe that by viewing the distinct decorative styles in Hiberno-Saxon and Continental manuscripts, and then comparing them with Insular works, the blended nature of the tradition is apparent. The blending of different styles is crucial in the call to redefine the problematic view of Insularity.

We understand that Scripture during the medieval period was extremely important. Even though the literacy rates were quite low, the word of the Bible was divine. This divinity raised simple text on vellum to the unquestionable authority of God. Also, since the medieval population was predominantly illiterate, illuminations in the manuscripts were valued just as much as the text itself. To reiterate the importance of word and image, I believe it is important to remember Gregory the Great’s statement in his letter to Serenus at the end of the sixth century. Pope Gregory states, “For a picture is displayed in churches on this account, in order that those who do not know letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they are unable to read in books.”

Therefore, because of the high importance of Holy Scripture and the illuminations therein, the study of the convoluted nature of the Insular tradition through the lens of manuscripts makes perfect sense. I began with the illuminated work of St. Augustine of Canterbury in 597 C.E. This work encompasses the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the new church post in Britain. Also, Augustine’s text is a precursor for the brilliant illuminated works produced over the next three to three and a half 2

2 Kleiner and Mamiya, Gardner’s Art Through the Ages, 305.


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centuries. To end the Early Medieval Period and harken the height of the Insular tradition, I believe it is most appropriate to expand the view beyond the traditional Insular world of the British Isles and look towards Europe’s first Renaissance. Charlemagne (d. 814 C.E.) was a visionary and patron of the arts at the turn of the ninth century. He was only able to read simple text himself, yet he urged and supported the court schools across Europe to raise their standards. The most talented scribes and monks were hired all across the Continent to serve in these court schools. These schools are best remembered for the numerous illuminated works produced in the scriptoria.

If the Gospels of St. Augustine serve as the beginning of the Early Medieval Period, I believe that a suitable end to the period and a telling manuscript that shows the breadth of the Insular tradition is the ninth-century Psalter of King Louis (Berlin, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, Theol. Lat. Fol. 58). The psalter (Fig. 5.10) is an extremely blended manuscript of Insular work produced on the Continent. Its framework exhibits the dichotomy of being contained, yet energetic. The border and capitals are polychromatic like Hiberno-Saxon decoration. Also the scribe(s) used an assortment of zoomorphic, vegetal, and geometric designs that draw from Hiberno-Saxon and Continental ornamentation. The borrowed tradition substantiated in this work supports the call to revisit the Insular tradition and its larger orbit.

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I think it is fitting to end with Charlemagne to explain the problematic Insular tradition. His reign’s enduring influence is remembered in his revival of literacy across Europe. While he could hardly read himself, he employed many Irish and Anglo-Saxons to aid him in his Renaissance. Previously I referenced Alcuin of York, but there were many more important figures. Dungal, an Irish monk at St. Denis outside Paris, helped
explain to Charlemagne what a solar eclipse was. The Irishman Dicuil was the first medieval geographer residing in the Frankish court under the instruction of Charlemagne. There are more examples, but the point lies in the extensive influence Irish and Anglo-Saxons had on the entirety of European and medieval culture as a whole. This influence is the Insular tradition — the tradition that is remembered not only for its artistic style, but also for its influence on history. Charlemagne’s biographer Einhard writes about the emperor’s relationship with the foreign monks “amabat peregrinos.” This can be translated to mean that Charlemagne was “loving the foreigners,” or in the context in which Einhard was writing, “the wandering monks.” The connections that these monks made across the English Channel and in the opposite direction make the Insular tradition different from the Hiberno-Saxon or the Continental. The world of the Early Medieval Period was much more interconnected than scholars in the Modern Period give it credit. These wandering monks who illuminated the works that I have examined in this thesis are the evidence necessary to challenge the isolationist model of the Insular tradition.

5 Cahill, How the Irish Saved Civilization, 207.
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Miller, 1986.


