

Definitions

- *illuminated manuscripts*—handwritten books embellished with gold or silver.
- *scriptorium*—writing room.
- *scrittori*—scholar, editor (akin to our current art director).
- *copisti*—production letterer.
- *colophon*—inscription, usually at the back of a book, with production notes.
- *illuminator*—illustrator.
- *frontispiece*—initial page of manuscript with a portrait of the author.
- *uncial*—rounded majuscules.
- *semi (half) uncial*—created true ascenders and descenders.
- *scriptorium*—writing room.
- *Book of Durrow, Lindisfarne Gospels, Book of Kells*—see pp46–50.
- Caroline miniscules—forerunners of present day lower case letterforms.
- *The Commentary of Beatus on the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine*—776 A.D., predicted the end of the world at 1,000 A.D.
- *textura*—style of lettering, dominant lettering during the Gothic period (approx. 1,150 A.D.–14th Century [Renaissance]). Also called *littera moderna* (modern lettering).
- *Books of Hours*—prayer books popular during the early 1400s.
- *Les Tres Riches heures du Duc de Berry*—1413–1416. Presented a reversal of Gothic abstraction, a convincing realism. Produced by the Limbourg brothers for the Duc de Berry. Never completed because all three Limbourgs and the Duc died in 1416.

Important Information

During the Medieval era, there was one reason for producing and preserving the written word—the Christian belief in sacred religious writings. Christian monasteries became centers of cultural, educational and intellectual activity and the making of what became known as illuminated manuscripts.

An illuminated manuscript is a book, handwritten and embellished with gold or silver, that was produced during medieval times. Graphics and illustrative elements were used to expand the visual word and great care was put into the design and production of these manuscripts.

Certain individuals were assigned to produce the parts of these books—scholars (*scrittori*) presided over production, letters (*copisti*) and illustrators (*illuminators*) had their specific tasks.

Styles developed and standardization of page layout, writing style and illustration occurred. Uncials (rounded majuscules) were used. Their roundness made them more suited to rapid writing than the original more angular capitals.

Half uncials demonstrated strokes which produced ascenders and descenders—a step toward the development of miniscules. Half-uncials began to occur approx. 400 A.D. but really began to flourish after 700 A.D.

In the early 600s, Christian missionaries (i.e. Saint Patrick) arrived in Ireland. Their conversion of the Celts led to a merge of Celtic ornamental craft with religious book design. Celtic manuscripts are noted for their use of ornamentation and a radical design element of leaving space between words to enable the reader to decipher them more quickly.

Celtic manuscript design ended abruptly with invasions of Ireland around 800 A.D.

On Christmas day in Rome 800 A.D., Charlemagne was crowned emperor of central Europe (The Holy Roman Empire). He fostered a revival of learning and the arts, mandated reform and assembled scribes to prepare manuscripts of important religious texts. Books and scribes were sent throughout Europe to promote reform of manuscript preparation. Charlemagne's scribes adapted a form of script, the Caroline miniscule. A forerunner to today's miniscule, it was clear, practical and easy to write.

From 1,000 into the 1200s, a stabilization occurred—towns and villages grew, stable central governments were established and the social and economic climate of Europe became more predictable.

During the 1200s, universities developed and the demand for books became great. Literacy was expanding. A Gothic style of book design developed, characterized by elongated vertical figures and increasing naturalism of illustration. Letterforms were dense and black and letters and spaces were condensed to save space on the parchment upon which they were lettered.

Stunning, ornate liturgical books were produced throughout the 1300s and 1400s and illuminated manuscripts produced for private use came into demand.

In the early 15th Century a French nobleman established a private scriptorium in his castle, where the pinnacle of the illuminated manuscript was reached with the production of *Les Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.

The production of the illuminated book continued through the 15th and into the 16th Centuries, however the advent of typography in the mid-15th Century signalled its eventual extinction.