The Book of Kells
Work of Iconography, Book of Theology
Soiscelae Mor Coluim Cille

‘PRIMH-MIND IARTHAI R DO MAIN’

(‘the most precious object of the Western world’)

Annals of Ulster, 1007
Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales)

• St Brigid’s Church, Kildare (1185)

• ‘among all the miracles of Kildare, nothing seems to me more miraculous than that wonderful book which they say was written at the dictation of an angel during the lifetime of the virgin [that is, Brigid].’
What is the Book of Kells?

- A gloriously illuminated manuscript reproducing the text of the four gospels by Mathew, Mark, Luke and John.

- The text of the gospel that is copied
  - St Jerome
  - Old Latin Text
What is the Book of Kells?

- A concordance
- A listing and part explanation of Hebrew names
- A brief summary of the gospel narratives.
Soiscelae Mor Coluim Cille

- St Columcille and the Iona monks
- Monastery in Kells
- Stolen in 1006 for its ornamental cover/shrine
- Poem added in 15th c (folio 289v) – venerated as a relic of the saint
Iona ---- Lindisfarne --- Kells
Text and Context

- Literacy in Latin
- High culture
  - Theological insight
- Ecclesial structure
- 680 surviving pages, 340 folios
Multi-disciplinary Studies

• A work of art
• A cultural and historical treasure
• A book of technique and colour
Multidisciplinary study

Several mysteries surround the manuscript

- Where was it produced?
- For what purpose – liturgical use?
- By whom? How long did it take?
- What techniques were used to create the tiny, intricate, intensely complex decorations?
- How many artists worked on it?
- Why was it left unfinished?
Video Introduction to Kells: Part of a series

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRGQPJIO5CM&index=2&list=PLv-RhiNUREDykcChUoc34bb5xOX4yFP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRGQPJIO5CM&index=2&list=PLv-RhiNUREDykcChUoc34bb5xOX4yFP)
Thank You