

# Glossary

by Conna ingen Úi Chearbhaill

This is a brief (and very incomplete) list of common terms that you may encounter.

**Acanthus** Stylized rendering of acanthus plant foliage.

**Anglo-Saxon** Period from c. 500 to 1066.

**Bas-de-page** Literally, “bottom of page.” Unframed images, common to Gothic illumination from 13th century on.

**Book of Hours** A book used for private devotion. A medieval “best seller.”

**Border** An illuminated border that can be donated to the Crown; calligraphy can be filled in at a later date by the Royal Scribe to complete the scroll.

**Burgundian** Style that flourished under the Duke of Burgundy, primarily in Flanders from late 14th to mid-16th century.

**Burnishing** Polishing gold to a shiny and smooth finish with a smooth, hard stone (e.g., agate), bone, or dog’s tooth.

**Byzantine** Early style characterized by iconography of Biblical scenes and used of flat gold backgrounds.

**Calligraphy** From Greek for “beautiful writing.”

**Carolingian** Dynasty established under Charlemagne (emperor 800–814), which lasted until late 10th century.

**Carpet page** Ornamental page (no text) seen in insular manuscripts.

**Decorated initial** An enlarged capital letter with decorative elements that add interest to the page and acts as a way for the reader to find the beginning of a section (very important in the days before indexes).

**Diaper pattern** From French *diapré* (“variegated”), a repeated pattern, often geometric, used as a background, especially in Gothic illumination.

**Drollery** Humorous grotesque figures. Used throughout period.

**Exemplar** An original book from which other books are copied.

**Gilding** The application of thin leaves of gold or silver to the surface of a page.

**Girdle book** Tiny book that can be attached to a girdle or belt. Most often books of hours or books of devotions, especially popular in 15th and 16th centuries.

**Gloss** Commentary on or translation of a text, often written in the margins or between the lines.

**Gothic** Period beginning around 1300, used decorative initials, borders, and backgrounds. Secular (rather than monastic) book production began during this time.

**Grisaille** Monochromistic illustration (French *gris*, “gray”). Especially popular from 1350 through 15th century.

**Grotesque** Humorous or imaginative figure, often in the margins. Popular from 13th century on.

**Headpiece** A heading or ornament used at the beginning of a text.

**Historiated initial** A capital letter that contains a scene from the text. Borders can also be historiated.

**Humanistic** Style of script and design begun in Italy in late 14th century and was important during the Renaissance.

**Icon** Greek for “image.” Religious illustration that was venerated.

**Illumination** From the Latin *illuminare* “to enlighten or illuminate.” To embellish a manuscript with color, usually including gold or silver.

**Insular** c. 550 to 900. Style reflected by regions of Ireland and British Islands; isolated from the continent.

**Marginalia** Latin for “things in the margin.”

**Model book** A book used by artists to catalog original designs and those from other sources, too; a place to store ideas.

**Paper** Manufactured in Italy as early as 13th century from cotton or linen rags. Used in low-grade books from c. 1400.

**Parchment** Animal skin prepared for writing. Some people use *parchment* for sheep and goat skin and *vellum* for calf skin. The flesh side is smoother than the hair side. In books, the layout was planned so that flesh side pages were set together make a spread, and the same with hair sides. Pounce is used to decrease the greasiness and help ink and paint stick better.

**Pen-flourished initial** Capital letter decorated with colored ink flourishes made with a thin pen; also called *littera florissa*. Typically red or blue; green was used in Anglo-Norman manuscripts and purple was found in 14th and 15th centuries. Rarely used after 1200.

**Pigment** The material that provides color in paint, often ground minerals or extracts.

**Pounce** A pumice or mildly abrasive material used on parchment to remove some of the greasiness to help ink and paint stick.

**Preprint** AoA-level scrolls that are drawn and calliged (except for names, dates, and locations) by the Royal Scribe, copied onto good cardstock, and distributed to the kingdom’s scribes for illuminating.

**Rubric** A heading written in red ink.

**Scriptorium** A place where scribes and illuminators work; typically used to describe a monastic setting.

**Whitework** Fine white decorative linework painted on top of bars, borders, or initials (typically red or blue). Common from 13th to 15th centuries, but found much earlier.