

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

MEDIEVAL ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts are highly decorated and prized texts produced in the middle ages, in between the fall of Rome and the enlightenment, in Europe. Dates are approximate.

476 AD

The fall of Rome is typically cited as the beginning of the Medieval era, where classical knowledge was considered second to the rising importance of Christianity.



500-600 AD

The oldest surviving manuscripts are produced in Eastern Europe, inspired by the work of Islamic scholars. These are typically **Gospel books** made on vellum.

550-600 AD

First illuminated Books of Psalms, or **Psalters**, are produced in Ireland.

715-720 AD

Lindisfarne Gospels produced in England.

800 AD

Book of Kells, one of the most famous existing medieval manuscripts, is produced in Ireland.

1100 AD

Gothic period begins and more elaborate decorations are added, including full-page illustrations featuring long, elegant figures and whimsical animals in the margins.

1100-1200 AD

First private devotional books, called **Books of Hours**, are produced for nobility. These were extremely expensive luxury goods, often owned by women.

1250 AD

Manuscripts begin to be produced on **paper** rather than vellum, which is not as durable but is significantly less expensive and allowed a larger variety of people to own manuscripts.

1300 AD

Production of manuscripts is taken over from monks in cloisters and most manuscripts are created by private guilds in workshops called **Scriptoria**.

1440 AD

The invention of the **printing press** makes producing books significantly faster and cheaper, making them available to more people.

1440 - 1500 AD

Many manuscripts become hybrids of printed words and hand-illuminated details.

1500s

The beginning of the **Renaissance** in Italy leads to the downfall of Gothic manuscripts and the resurgence of classical literary texts and aesthetics.

