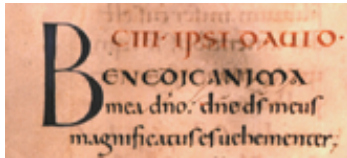


The medieval manuscripts.



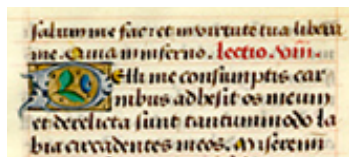
Carolingian, Uncial and Roman Capitals. Earley Psalter, Canterbury, 1020



Early or Proto-Gothic script is a stage between the clear rounded forms of Carolingian Minuscule and the angular fence-like look of the full-scale Gothic Textur. This is fol 15v from Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Ashmole 1511, a Bestiary or illustrated encyclopaedia of animals, written in England in the early 13th century.



A Psalter is a book of the Psalms, used in the services of the Church. The Vespasian Psalter was written in Canterbury in the second quarter of the 8th century, in the elegant artistic form of Roman Uncials often known as Artificial Uncial, typical of the English development of this script.



Bastard script. Book of Hours 1480.

The period in European history between the collapse of Rome and the Renaissance, from 476 CE to about 1450. Also known as the medieval period, and as the dark ages. Before the invention of mechanical printing, books were handmade objects, treasured as works of art and as symbols of enduring knowledge. Indeed, in the middle Ages, the book becomes an attribute of God for several hundred years, from about the first to around the fifth century AD; Rome was the greatest power on Earth, ruling Britain and the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. However, in northern Europe, there were fierce tribes that were only held at bay by the Romans. Around 400 AD, the Roman Empire began to weaken and the northern tribes swept across the continent of Europe and plundered the city of Rome.

The Roman Empire collapsed and was gradually replaced by many small kingdoms ruled by a strong warrior. For many years, Europe was without the luxuries and riches that had marked the height of Rome. Many centuries later, a new interest in learning would mark the beginning of the Renaissance. The thousand years between is called the middle Ages or the medieval period. This period began and ended for different countries at different times across Europe. It also affected different areas of the continent in different ways. The northern tribes did not stamp out learning completely, only momentarily set it back. The Catholic Church was already a powerful institution at the end of the Roman Empire and it continued to be the unifying force between the many small kingdoms that would become Europe. The Church salvaged much from the ruins of the ancient world and became one of the centres of learning during the middle Ages.

The people of the middle Ages had a rich culture and produced many advances in art, literature, science, and medicine and paved the way for the ideas that would become the beginning of the Renaissance. Many bookmakers in the middle Ages were monks, and monasteries kept libraries filled not only with sacred texts but also with literary, scientific, and philosophical works by Greek and Roman authors. Multivolume Bibles and huge liturgical books were housed and used in churches. Princes and emperors commissioned gospel books with many-colored illustrations and lettering in gold and silver ink.

Carolingian writing was named after Carl the Great, and is one of the great developments in writing history. Charlemagne, King of the Franks was the main motivator from AD 768 to AD 814. He appointed Alcuin of York to revise the texts of scriptures and liturgy. The hand of Charlemagne's Court Scriptorium provided the immediate model for the Carolingian minuscule. The Carolingian minuscule developed into a beautiful and legible book script could be written very rapidly as well as only taking up little space. Probably the most distinctive or imposing version of the English Caroline minuscule is the Ramsey Psalter from around AD 970 - AD 980. It is an extremely legible hand and as Edward Johnston said "it would form an almost perfect model for a modern formal hand" and later used it as the basis for his Foundational Hand. Johnston used the term Foundational not only because it makes a good starting point, but also because it lends itself well to development.

The Ramsey Psalter is a powerful and assured hand, soundly constructed and free of mannerisms. Later when the degenerated styles of Gothic had run their course, humanist scribes were to revive the Caroline minuscule. As early as AD 1012 can be seen the start of the slow transition from the Caroline script to the Gothic. The Arundel Psalter shows the compressed minuscules. Although written with firm structure, rhythmic movement and lightness of weight, there is an insistent narrowness. By the 12th century there are hints of Gothic angularity in addition to the clearly evident compression and weight. As the Gothic hand advanced it became more mechanically rigid and lacked life. The Quadrata script written around AD 1300 however combines the lateral compression, weight and angularity with a rhythmic flow and liveliness. Around the same time the Priscissus Hand developed. It was labelled Priscissus due to its abrupt termination of certain letters, mainly i, m and n. The decline of legibility in Gothic scripts is shown clearly by the Textura scripts with its heavy weight and lateral compression, giving an interlacing effect, hence the name Textura. In Spain and Italy, the rigid angular form of Gothic was largely avoided. In their place a hand evolved which was truly but more rounded, hence the name Rotunda. It carried the weight of the Gothic hand but not their excessive compression and harsh angularity.