

CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON CONTRIBUTIONS TO FRAMING AND SPATIAL  
CONVENTIONS IN MEDIEVAL CODEX DESIGN


by

Donna Marie Kelly  
B.F.A., University of Victoria, 1984


A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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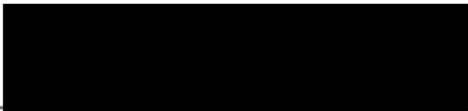
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in the Department of History in Art

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ABSTRACT

An interpretation of the framing and spatial system used in medieval codices will be offered. Using a cross-disciplinary approach, a tentative reconstruction of medieval visual literacy will provide a framework for assessing the amalgamation of frames and space in folia. It will be proposed: that medieval folio space aligns with the fourfold symbolic sense of Scripture; and that the characteristic spatial structure of western Christian manuscript compositions was based on a framing and spatial system first introduced in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Early Medieval codices.

The spatial compendium in medieval folio design was a mosaic of spatial systems dependent upon an exoskeleton of pauses for compositional support and cohesion. Frames linked and locked disparate elements according to a spatial and framing system devised by Insular artists. Celtic and Anglo-Saxon frames, inhabited by abstract or semi-abstract vibrantly coloured, densely patterned shapes, were emphatically abstract frames. Insular frame forms integrated completely into formal two-dimensional compositions. By adopting this scheme, medieval folio designers overcame the constraints of the working space.

Insular frames reconciled elements with no perceptual

clash, a quality that ensured their continued use in folia. The contributions of the Insular system have not received serious attention. Art historical study has emphasized Classical and Renaissance pictorial perspective systems.

The Celtic and Anglo-Saxon spatial scheme emphasized the formal properties of two-dimensional composition, especially spatial tension and fields of energy. With neither a tradition of painting nor writing, Insular artists adapted their indigenous artistic idiom to codex production. Their folio compositions displayed spatial phenomena: felt gravitational pulls and vortices and vectors of energy, forces that push and pull in all directions in pictorial fields, and nuances of spatial shifts along, in front of, and behind the surface. Formal micro-themes effected the pervasive energy forces of the physical world.


Based on the reciprocity of Nature and Scripture and word and image in medieval thought, folio space can be interpreted using the method of Scriptural exegesis. The predictable placement of images and words in hierarchical surface and hierarchical spatial order in folio compositions parallels the progressive journey toward enlightenment which preoccupied medieval theologians.

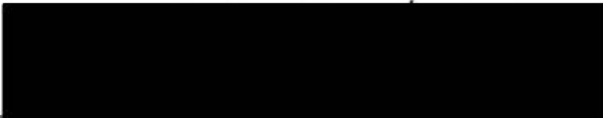
The spatial system in medieval folio design relied on borders, margins and a myriad of other frame forms. Frames - the substance and glue of folio space - intervened


between elements, established compositional fields of energy and provided the basic scaffold for literal, anagogical, tropological and allegorical imagery. Moreover, the combination of many diverse images and types of pictorial space provided ample possibility for sensory, emotional, intellectual and spiritual appeal. The Celtic and Anglo-Saxon legacy to medieval folio design was a framing and spatial system that expanded folio space to the limits of the medium and imagination. Diverse elements and styles were accommodated by the Insular system which encouraged subjective interpretation - an invaluable quality that imbues folia with profoundly personal appeal and establishes fertile ground for dense religious symbolism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many frames that were adapted and developed for medieval religious manuscript folia made the transition into mechanically printed books, and they are still in use in contemporary media. Consequently, the technical aspects of medieval framing conventions continue to be understood. It is more problematic, however, to ascertain what, if any, other services frames and framed spaces may have performed in Christian codices. The potential for expanded meaning, inherent in the combination of formal and illusionistic spatial qualities, may have been intentionally exploited considering that "The Middle Ages never forgot that all things would be absurd, if their meaning were exhausted in their function and their place in the phenomenal world, if by their essence they did not reach into a world beyond this."<sup>1</sup> Christian values underscored all aspects of manuscript production in the Middle Ages.

It will be suggested that the same tenacious medieval imagination that believed divine truth was revealed in nature probably charged every form and space created by a spectrum of frames with religious significance. The potential for stimulating, informing and enhancing religious conviction existed in the spatial miscellany of medieval folio design. Continued use of programs comprised of both conceptual and representational spatial modes will be shown

to have had many possible catalysts: theology, aesthetics, constraints of the codex medium prior to universal phonetic literacy, perceptual conditioning and a need to incorporate a range of indigenous artistic predilections - not artistic ineptitude. It will be demonstrated that the spatial systems employed in folio programs were both sophisticated and multi-functional. Although the semantic potential of folio space cannot be definitely determined, it will be suggested that the characteristic spatial scheme of medieval folia composition served the demands of the codex medium and the needs of the Christian religion.

This thesis will illustrate how the inherent qualities of line and frame - constituting the scaffold of medieval folio design - in conjunction with medieval mental perspective provided fertile ground for interpretation. Image and word, bound together in pictorial space, ensured the successful dissemination of sacred content.<sup>2</sup>

Since Miriam Bunim's comprehensive study of medieval pictorial space focuses on the use of perspective, her discussion appropriately jumps from the Early Christian to the Carolingian period.<sup>3</sup> She is not concerned with the considerable accomplishments or ramifications for later medieval codices of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon compositional space. This is the topic developed in this thesis.

In the process of looking at and researching the frames and spatial qualities in medieval folio design, it became

apparent that Insular codices contained a formal scheme of composition that became profoundly important in codex design in the Middle Ages and later. It also became obvious that early medieval spatial concepts were founded in 'acoustic' thinking<sup>4</sup> and that there were no distinct boundaries between Nature and Scripture or word and image. In medieval gestalt the fourfold symbolic sense of Scripture may have applied equally to words and images. Symbolic potential will be explored in an attempt to show how the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon attitude toward frames and space, when used in codices designed specifically to communicate Christian information and values, succeeded in heightening religious experience by stimulating sensory and emotional responses in the viewer. The formal compositional system first used in Insular codices was eminently well suited to subjective interpretation, a process of active viewer involvement which will be shown to have encouraged personal religious and aesthetic experience.

To establish the claim of considerable contribution to codex design by Insular compositional devices, the insights of scholars in a number of disciplines will be cited to compensate for the unfortunate absence of written art theory in the Middle Ages. Through the adoption of a cross-disciplinary inquiry - a holistic approach similar to that employed in medieval literature - a tentative reconstruction of medieval visual literacy and

interpretation will be presented. This method is encouraged, or at least tolerated, by recent critical evaluations of the methods and structure of Art History<sup>5</sup> and its history which embraced a number of perspectives for interpreting art of the past in order to further understand historical cultures.<sup>6</sup>

Select folia from medieval codices will be considered in an attempt to identify: 1) the technical role of frames in the organization of pictorial and surface space; 2) the perceptual effect of frames and frameworks; 3) the probable symbolic meaning of frame forms, the images on their planes and in the fields that they enclosed; and 4) the feasibility that framed space stimulated specific religious experiences. Wherever possible, examples from Gospel Books and the Bible are used because they were vital books in Christian liturgy, devotion and study.<sup>7</sup> These meticulously and consistently hand copied manuscripts were indispensable to Christian life and probably set design precedents for other codices.

Spatial divisions in Bible and Gospel Book folia assisted images in many capacities: indicating the sections of text before chapter titles and numbers were introduced; drawing attention to significant letters; proclaiming and honouring the sacred content of the texts; protecting the content from harm; asserting the talismanic quality of the Word; attracting attention to the Word at a distance (liturgical processions, rituals etc.), and sustaining

attention at close range (study and personal devotion); giving the Word tangible visual form; inducing sensory stimulation; and expanding the meaning of the texts. Perhaps the most important role of visual material was to illuminate the Word.

By uttering and illuminating the written word, concepts acquired a sensory dimension. Ideas came alive for the senses. The bond between word and image has concerned philosophers for centuries, but in the Middle Ages words and images appear together with apparent nonchalance. Alice expressed what may well be a medieval view when "Once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?"<sup>8</sup> Alice would have loved medieval codices.

Frames were indispensable for order in folio programs and provided a spectrum of spatial nuances to guide the viewer from one communication mode to another. A fully illuminated text presents a multi-sensory experience. Frames secure the unity and coherence of the composition.

A frame's most basic function is that it "delimits the field of activity both for the decorator and the viewer."<sup>9</sup> Because folio frames take myriad forms, imply different spatial modes, delineate pictorial fields and infiltrate the design in medieval folia, E. H. Gombrich's definition is apt:

The border or frame may be described as a continuous break which sets off the design from its environment. It matters little how this break is achieved; it may be done by a contrast in shape or colour, a change of direction, or even by a blank space. Suffice it that some firm disruption of regularity alerts the viewer. Discovering such an enclosed field we expect an area that repays scrutiny.<sup>10</sup>

This definition considers two common occurrences in folio design in the Middle Ages: lines, which delimited fields, often expanded into additional fields; and lines, except in the rare cases where brushwork was used to model volume and form, outlined figures filled with flat colour washes. Line was the fundamental element in folio design; line determined frames, figures and fields. Linear scaffolds established the spatial qualities of a folio and everything within its bounds.

The conceptual character of a line and a frame never changes. Meyer Schapiro explains that line is a conceptual facsimile. He explains that "The thick black outline is an artificial equivalent of the apparent form of a face and has the same relation to the face that color and thickness of the outline of a land mass in a map has to the character of the coast."<sup>11</sup> At the most rudimentary level a frame, like any outline, is both pictorially neutral and completely abstract. However, unlike an outline, the width of a frame is elastic; a frame can be expanded to the dimensions of a full pictorial field. This characteristic of a frame was almost endlessly exploited by medieval draftsmen to create

prime and auxiliary fields for images.

Beyond the fundamental role of a frame as a neutral boundary that separates ground and field, a wide range of subtle nuances attend the perception of frames. The impetus for incorporating abstract and representational spatial modes in manuscripts is now thought to have been the result of the gradual transformation of predominantly oral societies into the alphabetically literate, and unified, social structure - Christendom. To examine folio framing programs formulated in monastic scriptoria, the mental stance of the designers is critical. Since they were not given to writing about their theoretic motives, the only recourse is to rely on recent research that pertains to medieval mental attitudes.

#### RECENT THEORIES PERTAINING TO THE MEDIEVAL MENTAL APPARATUS AND ITS EFFECT ON FOLIO FRAMES AND IMAGES

Medieval artistic choices in codices were influenced by the needs of Christianity, the demands of the medium and the mental stance of designers and patrons. Some scholars believe that the process, sponsored by the Church, which gradually transformed western Europe into an alphabetically literate society, had profound perceptual ramifications. The evolution is seen by Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders to find tangible, visible form in codex programs. Their belief

is that "The transformation of the manuscript page during the eight hundred years that precede Gutenberg illustrates the steps through which the mind of the West came into being."<sup>12</sup> Mental attitudes and alphabetic literacy are seen to have been symbiotic. The choice of visual form, style and spatial qualities were neither arbitrary nor simple.

The two mental spatial stances that alternated in the Middle Ages are described as 'acoustic' and 'visual' by Marshall McLuhan.<sup>13</sup> The former, thought to be a consequence of right-hemisphere brain function, predominates in societies that have an oral tradition; whereas, the latter, believed to engage left-hemisphere brain activity to a greater extent, is prevalent in alphabetically literate societies. An alphabetically literate stance favors linear, continuous spatial thinking which gives rise to linear perspective systems that disassociate the figure from the ground and represents it in static, uniform and linear space. By contrast, 'acoustic' space is 'spherical', 'discontinuous' and 'dynamic', which tends to position figure and ground in oscillating relationship. For the most part, early Christian manuscripts produced in the West are characterized by 'acoustic' thinking; Gothic manuscripts became characteristically more 'visual'; and in the intervening period folia combined aspects of both stances.

A literary campaign was both necessary and obvious to the Church<sup>14</sup>. It was unavoidable given it was a religion of

the Book. However, depending on the progress and success of the move to alphabetic literacy during different times and geographic areas, the proportions of 'acoustic' and 'visual' thinking varied. In general, wherever oral literacy was the dominant feature of a society, abstract imagery assisted to disseminate religious concepts. In circumstances where text was readily understood, visual elements provided auxiliary information. In both situations formal elements were possibly vital stimulants of sensation.

To accommodate a great amount of material on folia, framing systems were expedient technical tools, and for as long as Christian ideology predominated western culture <sup>15</sup> frames were probably exploited for their symbolic and perceptual potential to enhance religion. Any suggestion that the formal properties of frames, apart from their obvious technical capacity for spatial order and clarity, were superfluous or devoid of religious potency is based on post-medieval western values: supremacy of linear perspective and realism in the western tradition, and the division of media into 'fine' and 'popular' forms. Neither value, spawned by alphabetic literacy, is appropriate for medieval folio design. Because mental perspective in the Middle Ages differs from that which followed, only the technical aspects of frames remain clear to the modern observer of medieval folia.

THE PHENOMENON OF CONTEMPORARY CROSS DISCIPLINE RESEARCH AND ITS PERTINENCE TO MEDIEVAL THOUGHT AND FOLIO FRAMES

The past few decades have seen a great surge of enthusiasm for collaboration between disciplines<sup>16</sup>, which promises to elucidate present understanding of how visual art is perceived. Notable scholars from many disciplines (Umberto Eco, E. H. Gombrich, Nelson Goodman, Susanne Langer, Rudolf Arnheim, W. J. T. Mitchell, Margaret Miles, Marshall and Eric McLuhan among many others in the fields of media studies, cognitive philosophy, perceptual psychology, semiology, history of art, religion and medieval studies) are collaborating to better understand how human perception and art cooperate to inform historical inquiry.

Cross discipline research methods are remarkably in tune with the 'New Science' proposed in Laws of Media. This is the culmination of the thought of Marshall McLuhan, who "In his later years...was working on a 'unified field' theory of human culture...", which retrieves "another way of understanding our world..."<sup>17</sup> The approach proposed by McLuhan is ideal for studying the Middle Ages. The ideas of linear time (history), linear space (perspective), division between theology and philosophy and art and science had yet to form in the West. These consequences of the use of an alphabet culminated in the Renaissance.

McLuhan's premise is that all human ideas and things made by human hands are 'media', or 'artefacts'. They are

all "equally human, all equally susceptible to analysis, all equally verbal in structure. So, the accustomed distinction between arts and sciences and between things and ideas, between physics and metaphysics, are dissolved."<sup>18</sup> 'New science' brings man-made objects and concepts together in a vibrating field ('acoustic') in which invention is bred by that which exists. Each existing human 'artefact' (idea or thing) operates as the ground out of which new media (figures) emerge, and they in turn become the grounds for subsequent figures. In many ways 'new science' reverberates a medieval characteristic: the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature were seen to inform each other, and the same fourfold symbolic sense applied to the interpretation of both texts. Divisions between God and Nature (aesthetics and science) or word and image had not yet occurred.

The gestalt of medieval thinking must have affected the arts. Even if individual artists were predisposed to linear thinking, the environment in which they worked would have influenced their ideas. Until approximately the twelfth century, religious codices were produced primarily in monastic scriptoria and folio artists, who worked alongside scribes and scholars, were privy to mainstream religious theories and commentaries of Scripture. Reading aloud and dictating texts was standard practice. Western European monks (except Celtic ascetics prior to

the Council of Whitby, 663-664) were characteristically communal. The working climate in a scriptorium was that of active interaction and stimulation - an 'acoustic' workplace. The framed visual programs produced in this environment often juxtapose sacred and natural imagery. The copious employment of frames, frame planes and their attendant spatial characteristics provided ample areas for a broad range of elements and styles of representation.

Proportional equations between natural and divine order occur frequently in medieval theology. Saint Augustine found biblical parallels for the six ages of man in the six days of creation from Genesis. And his 'historical symbolism' (typology) divided world history into six ages.<sup>19</sup> In the twelfth century, Saint Bonaventure still held Augustine's view that the sensible world provided a means of access to divine truth. He stated that, "All created things in the material world lead the contemplative soul to God, because they are shadows and images of their eternal origin and author."<sup>20</sup> McLuhan explains that medieval theology was grounded in the thought of Classical Antiquity; nature was a source of divine knowledge.<sup>21</sup> McLuhan continues, "The four causes as a mode of exegesis of nature had been regarded as parallel to the 'four levels' of interpretation of Scripture by medieval grammarians (e.g., St. Bonaventure)." And, that: "In each case, the 'fours' were simultaneous..."<sup>22</sup> This system became obsolete

in the Renaissance.

Is it a coincidence that four types of images were arranged in four distinct spatial entities in many folia? Did the custom of literary interpretation and the idea of the fusion of Nature and Scripture apply to visual programs? If pictorial elements were considered to be alternate forms for words, then they would be subject to the same symbolic scheme. Since every available means of spatial order was exploited to present four spatial types, it may have been to accommodate the fourfold symbolic sense of Scripture. The consistent use of specific imagery in predictable locations on folia supports the probability that pictorial elements were the equivalents of letters for expressing verbal meaning. Images and spatial entities may have been words in another guise.

Systems of spatial perspective were not pursued in the Middle Ages, although the rudiments were in place. It was only after writing became firmly established that the elements of linear perspective were worked out and codified. In medieval folio design, communicating the essence of the Word was of utmost importance. In 'acoustic' thinking letters and images presented in sequence may have communicated verbal meaning with equal precision. If spatial perspective systems had been followed in folio design, a wealth of potential meaning, stimulation and experience would have been sacrificed.

In order to unravel the ways in which frames fulfilled the expectations of medieval aesthetics in religious codices, a number of areas will be explored. The basic premise for the gestalt ('acoustic') method used here is that it is a similar 'ground' to that which gave rise to the framing system of medieval folia in the first place, and a similar approach may have been used to interpret visual material.

In Chapter One general theoretical ground will be explored in an attempt to establish how framing systems worked within the broad cultural base of Christianity. Some of the outstanding features of medieval folio frames will be examined in Chapter Two to determine their technical function for the organization and establishment of different qualities of pictorial and surface space in folia. In Chapter Three the spatial perception in Insular and Classical traditions will be considered to determine what characteristics were adopted for folio design, and what purpose they served. Since a great deal of scholarly interest has followed the course of Classical elements through medieval renaissances, emphasis will be placed on determining the qualities of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon system and their value in religious codices. The encyclopedic character of folio frames will be shown to parallel medieval mental attitudes, especially in regard to the union of word and image as conveyers of verbal meaning,

and heighten a sense of participation and intimacy for the viewer. Medieval mental perspective will be looked at in Chapter Four to test whether or not frames and the spaces they created served as visible parallels to the spoken word, to stages in religious growth, human sensation and experience. The possibility that the method of fourfold interpretation used for Nature and Scripture may have also applied to visual programs will be addressed. In Chapter Five the elusive area of medieval aesthetic experience and value will be discussed in an attempt to show that image, word, and religion were symbiotic. It will be suggested that formal visual elements were seen to give visible form to invisible concepts. Chapter Six will summarize the potential in medieval folio frames for expanded religious meaning, sensation and experience. It will be concluded that the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon contributions to medieval folio design were formal compositional space and the range of symbolic potential inherent in this scheme. This formal system of space and densely framed configurations was particularly well suited to Christian codices because it allowed subjective interpretation - a quality of great personal appeal.

## CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIEVAL FOLIO FRAMES AND SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN INTERPRETATION

Bible and Gospel Book production, a vast industry sponsored by Christianity in the Middle Ages, was loosely organized. Exemplars circulated, but the challenge of designing folia fell to the ingenuity of local monks in an expansive, but not artistically standardized, network of scriptoria. Although no singular monastic rule prevailed at any time in western Christendom, the training of scriptoria artists followed basic religious precepts. A number of influences affected codex production: religious conviction and idiosyncrasies, social mores and political structure - monasteries frequently subsisted on royal patronage and land grants - and local artistic traditions, the availability of materials and capable hands. Consequently, there was a spirit of artistic freedom in western Christendom.

Furthermore, since medieval folio design depended on line drawing - little brushwork modelling of form was employed, except during periodic Classical revivals - it employs the same linear methods used for writing. The codex medium included two communication modes - word and image. To define, order and balance words and images, lines evolved into frames. Complex linear frameworks counteracted the tyranny of restrictive working space on folia.

## THE GENESIS OF MEDIEVAL FOLIO FRAMES

In one of the earliest extant Celtic manuscripts, the Codex Ussherianus Primus, c. 600, (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS A.4.15., folio 149v), penwork ornament enhances a Chi-Rho modified cross and establishes its visual field (figure 1). Red pen marks reiterate the outer form of the symbol, thereby framing it. Three evenly spaced rows of slashes and small squares delineate an approximately square field for the cross. The subsequent surface spatial tension set up by this arrangement, which affects all framed figures to some degree, is the sole spatial concern here. Principles of spatial dynamics formed the nucleus of Germanic visual art (metalwork, carving etc.). No system of pictorial realism was employed, and drawing and painting were not pursued as autonomous media.

In the Classical tradition a system of spatial dynamics was used for geometric patterns (pavements etc.), but it was not employed in paintings. A fifth or early sixth century example of the Classical mode of pictorial space in painting is "Lot Defending His House" from the Cotton Genesis, (London, British Library, Cotton MS Otho B.VI, fragment 4. - figure 2). A simple colour band delineates the field for a depiction of a painted scene. Brush work models the form of the figures, and the frame signals an illusion of pictorial space. The frame is not elaborated; it does not

attract the viewer's attention to its form.

Two hierarchical systems, 'pictorial surface' and 'pictorial space',<sup>1</sup> were employed simultaneously in folia after the Classical and Insular traditions were assimilated in western European Christian scriptoria. Folio compositions frequently possessed elements of two systems of hierarchical order: surface and spatial. Hierarchical surface order utilizes surface direction; hierarchical spatial order depends on the apparent distance of planes in relation to the viewer. Both modes became characteristic in medieval Christian codex design in the West. It was a logical development that maximized folio area to oblige text and images. Available areas were treated as pictorial surface or pictorial space according to the image types they conformed to.

The combination of spatial orders, with their corresponding framing types, constituted a compendium of all available approaches to pictorial space in two-dimensional design. Some scholars consider it to be a compromise of Classical and Northern artistic traditions which implies a degree of sacrifice in purity.<sup>2</sup> This devalues the success of a communication medium which imaginatively combined word and image with a range of spatial modes, satisfying the requirements of indigenous aesthetic values and Christian ideology.

In their studies of codices produced in the

Northumbrian renaissance, Carol Neuman de Vegvar and Ernst Kitzinger note the combination of Classical and Insular pictorial styles and frames.<sup>3</sup> The free interplay of both systems is demonstrated in folia from both centers. In the "Opening of St. Luke's Gospel" from the Carolingian Harley Golden Gospels, (London, British Library, Harley MS 2788, folio 109r.), two-dimensionally patterned frames unify the visual field and provide a distinct area for the 'picture plane' of an enlarged 'Q' that occupies the hierarchically strong, slightly upper, central, position (figure 3). Formal (red/gold and figure/ground) shifts and frank formal compositional surface tension (an arch springing from capitals that rest on the frame's inner edge) counterpoint an illusion of spatial depth (the capitals and arch crown overlap the frame) with modestly naturalistic figural representations in the fields defined by the 'Q' shaped and medallion frames. The configuration counterbalances degrees of representation: a double outer frame depicts the frame of a painting, an inner frame suggests an architectural arch, an enlarged 'Q' refers to jewelled metalwork and medallion frames imply miniature icons. These elements sharply contrast with the array of formal spatial conditions set up by oscillating red and gold and black and white figure and ground relationships. The dual stance of 'pictorial surface' and 'pictorial space' abounds throughout the openwork configuration, and it is exemplified in a small

detail. Amid an essentially formal arrangement of text which conforms to the negative space around the letter 'Q', a few of the letters are rendered with black lines implying shadows cast by tri-dimensional figures, whereas most of the letters are rendered as flat forms.

In the Northumbrian "Portrait of Matthew", The Lindisfarne Gospels, (London, British Library, Cotton Nero D.IV, folio 25v. - figure 4), which is thought to have followed the same exemplar as the one used for "Ezra Transcribing The Law" in The Codex Amiatinus, (Florence, Laurentian Library, Codex Amiatinus, folio Vr. - figure 5), elements are fused by a taut compositional framework. Frame, words and representations are balanced - inter-related flat patterns and shapes occupying a common field. Design unity is achieved by: the letters and the curtain rod arranged on a common line; the tip of the curtain hem touching the footstool; the red bands through the frame, halo, footstool and robe; and the meeting of the frame and footstool in the lower left-hand corner, which juxtaposes the parallel elements in the upper-and right-hand edges of the design. A minimal three-dimensional spatial quality is suggested by overlaps, but the securely interlocked surface pattern and shallow spatial vacillations predominate. Fact, conveyed in word and images; sensation, stimulated by the juxtaposition of equal intensity colour and the manipulation of shape and pattern; and impression, achieved

by joining all of the component parts into one idea with fine and consistent lines, operate simultaneously. With an economic palette of primarily red, green and yellow, in counterpoint balance, the design shimmers and hovers uniformly over a pink ground. The point of Matthew's pen falls just below dead center of the design, whereas in the Ezra folio, where an illusion of three-dimensional space is nominally convincing, the visual impact of the writing hand is dissipated, although the book is positioned only slightly lower and to the left when compared to its location in the Lindisfarne folio. The viewer's attention is drawn to naturalistic details in the Ezra folio; the Lindisfarne Matthew presents a unified and powerful symbol - inspired writing.

On the 'Genesis' page of a Renaissance Bible, c. 1490, (Genoa, Archivio di Stato, MS General 1060, folio 4v., - figure 6), interest in three-dimensional space and naturalism is obvious. The text, ordered by punctuation, capital letters and logical spatial breaks, encourages easy access; the text is meant to be read. The image fields are irrevocably separate from the text areas. Four distinct spatial qualities are discerned in this folio: 1) the plane of the raw parchment; 2) a thin frame plane around the scenes in the lower zone; 3) a gilded plane set with depictions of interlace and jewels that extends to the upper and left-hand edges of the folio for representations of

putti etc.; and 4) a picture plane divided into ten compartments. The borders and frames appear to be in front of the parchment plane, while the scenes appear to recede from the parchment plane. It is the parchment plane - the intermediary zone between planes carrying images that appear to recede or advance - that carries the text. Aspects of nature (the left and upper band illustrations) and depictions of Biblical events (two vertical columns of illustrations) are juxtaposed. Four distinct spatial areas carry equally distinct subject matter.

In the intervening centuries between Charlemagne and Alberti, folio texts became increasingly more legible: punctuation, passage breaks, titles, small and capital letters together, and precise letter forms became standard. By the end of the Middle Ages frames clearly distinguished text and images areas; casual interplay of word and image yielded to stark divisions. As alphabetic literacy gained ascendancy, words carried the full responsibility for transmitting their own informational content. The role of images changed, but basic types of images and pictorial space continued to be used.

Folio design used four image types: 'iconic', which had conventional religious or historical meaning; 'representational' with sacred content related to 'ordinary visual experience'; 'impressionistic', which contained the artist's 'feeling-toned impression' of content; and

'ambiguous presentation', which was 'abstract, minimally designating both its sacred content and its content in experience -anti-representational.'<sup>4</sup> Studies in iconography have dealt thoroughly with 'iconic' and 'representational' imagery, but the more ambiguous forms received less interest until recently.

Now many scholars are looking at the semantic potency of impressionistic and abstract imagery. The use of perceived spatial layers, commonly associated with specific images, may be of equal significance. In relation to the viewer, the apparent distance of planes and types of images frequently follows a predictable pattern in medieval folio programs: 1) the literal space of the parchment often carried secular or whimsical images; 2) the major frame plane was normally adorned with botanical or animal forms; 3) the text plane generally contained words and potent symbols; and 4) depictions of religious events or figures. The latter, usually having implications of spatial depth, were distinctly framed; they appear to be at the greatest distance from the viewer, regardless of where they were situated. After the full merger of Classical and Insular spatial and imagery types, such arrangements appeared regularly. The framing system provided ample areas for the various elements, but their particular spatial relationship to the viewer suggests that the degrees of spatial accessibility were themselves symbolic.

The nature of symbolic thought - medieval symbolism especially - is still debated. A functional and reliable framework of analysis for visual symbolism is not secure. At present the 'fourfold' interpretation method, used in the Middle Ages for Scripture and literature, is the only known symbolic method. Although no extant medieval documentation indicates that it applied to visual art, medieval perspective was 'acoustic', and therefore visual art may have been seen as an aspect of nature or as a very close relation of words. A possible key to the mystery is to determine how visual communication was used.

Medieval perception may never be fathomed fully, but recent theories concerning the development of the modern western mind are seminal to an attempt to break the code. Illich and Sanders identify The Lindisfarne Gospels as the point at which the separation between the oral and the descriptive mind begins to be apparent:

Opposite the beginning of each Gospel...stands a wordless ornamental page, decorated in the style of Irish and Saxon sword handles, silver cups, and fibulae, that balances the lettered page to the right. The initial letter of the text appears on the ornamental page, but it also both frames and penetrates the string of uncial letters on the lettered page. It looks as if the calligraphic outpourings of one capital had the task of weaving the textures that supports the sentences...Only the portraits of the four Evangelists rise from this painted warp and written woof...5

It is significant that a codex produced less than half a century after the Celtic Church capitulated to Roman practice is considered to be a turning point in mental

attitudes. This is also a manuscript in which formal and pictorial spatial modes are manipulated to present the most possible information. Classical elements are rudimentary, but the essential content of the exemplar is grasped and conveyed in an essentially formal idiom. The program incorporates meaningful aspects from both Christian traditions (Roman and Celtic). Another attempt to assimilate imported and vernacular pictorial and spatial qualities is found in the Book of Kells.

E. H. Gombrich, who sees "The Incarnation Initial" folio in The Book of Kells (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, folio 34r. - figure 7), as 'animated' by mood, movement and direction, recognizes the importance of abstract formal elements. He acknowledges the quality of spatial tension in Insular design:

As long as we divide the field between formal analysis and iconography, the area which concerns us here will inevitably elude us. It is the merit of Focillon's approach to have pointed out the peculiar relationship between form and content in the ornamental tradition of the Middle Ages, but I believe further progress must depend on analysing a little more closely what 'game' it is these artists were playing...- it is the game of animation. Like all games it hovers between believing and pretending.<sup>6</sup>

The 'game' - energy forces set up in composition and retinal effects - did not disappear after the Celtic Church reformed to Roman rite. This would indicate that it struck a resonant chord in medieval sensibility, and probably served a religious purpose with its quality of quickening.

Just as the spoken word brings the word to life, an abstract visual configuration gives a mental concept visible form. Before words could be read for their precise meaning, elaboration of their form could convey a vague sensation that the concept was poignant. Of equal importance, however, was the sense of 'animation'. These concepts of life and death significance were mysteries, and were treated as if lit from within. Realism, even nominal realism, gave visible proof of historical fact; and formal properties, masterfully handled, set off forces and tensions from within - a perfect visual formula for divine concepts and evidence of God's will unfolding. It is little wonder that this approach to fact and concept became the hallmark of medieval Christian folia.

Because frames are the structural members that draft spatial order and they are frequently fully evolved images in medieval folio design, both aspects are of importance. Moreover, the means by which the total presentational image of folia was established relied on frameworks. The framework of the composition affected the immediate response of the viewer. Without appreciation of the abstract nature of line and its unifying power, designs incorporating many elements would have dissolved into chaos. In folia, total design unity relies on lines, frames and pauses to break and connect fields of pictorial activity. In this sense frames provide conceptual support and context for each part of a

program. They visually frame the argument, the stance and the reply of the text. Lines and spaces, as frames of reference, provide the contextual scaffold for the eye and the mind. Organization of space influences the viewer's response to a design, heightening its essential meaning.

Every formal property of a framework contributes to the overall perceptual effect of a configuration, but proportional relations between elements are particularly influential in medieval folia, and may reverberate religious conviction. A scholar in search of symbolism in proportion, M. H. Caviness, believes that "any approach to medieval art that separates the forms from their meaning seems doomed to failure."<sup>7</sup> And, although symbolic inferences are often elusive, their frequency suggests that they present a vast resource of potential meaning.

#### AN EMERGING METHOD IN HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO VISUAL ART AND ITS PERTINENCE TO MEDIEVAL FOLIO DESIGN

Contemporary criticism of visual media, like historical inquiry, is usurping the gestalt attitude toward frame and image and image and word. The idea of the frame as 'an a priori component of the image'<sup>8</sup> is gaining momentum along with the stance that perception, philosophy, historical and Biblical studies all inform visual art inquiry. But, even though this method is well suited for evaluating frame

function in medieval folia, it is difficult for a novice to handle. Nonetheless, if folio frames are to be appreciated for all their functional potential, even at a cursory and speculative level, a gestalt approach is unavoidable.

The firmly fused dual function of frames in medieval codices, compounded by the lack of documented art theory, suggests that visual literacy accommodated the relationship of forms and ideas without the need for verbal commentary. Concepts fully experienced through the sense of sight did not need to be - or could not be - communicated verbally. Because all of the senses operated simultaneously in the consciousness of pre-alphabetic societies, the mechanics of interpretation for media produced in such atmospheres are similarly 'acoustic'. In an attempt to recreate medieval visual literacy and the multi-functional nature of medieval frame forms, a kaleidoscope of issues must be addressed. Four major areas of elucidation are: 1) spatial concepts in medieval thought and how they related to the idea that Scripture and Nature were fused; 2) the perception of frames as mediums of visual order, unity, proportion and clarity (compositional syntax); 3) the perception of frames and frameworks as semantically dense images (semantic syntax); 4) the problems encountered in the attempt to interpret medieval frames and pictorial space from a modern perspective.

Iconography, dating and provenance are not issues here;

emphasis will be placed on the basic artistic spatial sensibilities that operate interchangeably in medieval folio design. In the interests of simplicity, these sensibilities will be distinguished as: Insular or Celtic and Anglo-Saxon, which is characterized by an essentially formal approach to frames ('pictorial surface'); Classical, which is identified by the predilection for realism ('pictorial space'); and Medieval, which is indicated by a combination of pictorial surface and space.

#### Oral and Alphabetic Literacy: Spatial Concepts and The Book of Nature and The Book of Scripture

The Book of Kells presents a visual parallel to sound in which "oral storytelling has been for a moment visibly frozen in the cadence of knot and link that punctuates the series of letters...The Good News becomes visible."<sup>9</sup> The rhythmic and expressive quality of the spoken text was translated into visual form where each formal element was a parallel to the character and the inflection of spoken words. This view alters the supposition that visual elements of folia were adjuncts to text. In early Celtic and Anglo-Saxon codices they were visual embodiments of sacred words.

The Celts were deeply moved by nature and saw in it reflections of Christian values. The presence of light, in all its many qualities, was likened to Godliness, goodness

and heaven; the absence of light was likened to evil, despair. The Celts had a strong aesthetic sense; they delighted in visions and the experience of nature in which they found parallels to their spiritual states.<sup>10</sup> These attitudes were supported by Roman Christian theologians.

### Frames as the Syntax of Folio Composition

The character of the frames employed in folia affects aesthetic quality regardless of where, and by whom, the codex was made. Individually frames isolated and accentuated elements; together they forged design unity. One powerful compositional image expressed the content. Dondis explains that "The collection of many units should dovetail so completely that it is viewed and considered as a single thing."<sup>11</sup> The successful scaffold structure "tends to symbolize the fundamental theme."<sup>12</sup> Perceptual dynamic, achieved by the strategic placement of frames, leads the viewer's attention from the overall configuration to the small component parts. Arnheim explains that "works of art come in layers. Even in the purely perceptual sense a visual object is organized in a hierarchy that leads from the broadest overall shapes to the smallest details."<sup>13</sup> On a folio layering is accomplished almost exclusively by frames working cooperatively as a framework. The effect can be profound. Arnheim describes the well composed work as possessing:

a dynamic quality that cannot be defined intellectually, emotionally, or mechanically by size, direction or shape or distance. These stimuli are only the static measurements, but the psychophysical forces that they set off, like those of any stimuli, modify space and arrange or derange balance. Together they create the perception of a design...The meaning inherent in abstract expression is intense; it short circuits the intellect, making contact directly with the emotions and feelings, encapsulating the essential meaning, cutting through the conscious to the unconscious.<sup>14</sup>

This perceptual quality is not easily defined, but it has a profound impact. The visual forces that direct the eye also affect the perceptual weight and meaning of images. A good design is one in which "the structure of the whole indicates which readings of a particular component are compatible with the composition, although an inspection limited to the parts may not afford such a decision."<sup>15</sup> However, the task of achieving compositional unity in folio design is not the same as it is in wall or panel painting.

Usually the framework of an autonomous painting does not incorporate actual framing members in its compositional framework, but the design unity of folia relies heavily on framing elements. Therefore, in folia, frames are among the elements considered "when the crisscross of relations between the elements is apprehended synoptically."<sup>16</sup> Unlike a painting, the folio is a dependent part of a larger medium of communication - the codex, whereas paintings are autonomous visual forms that rely on their own elements to convey meaning. The visual components of a folio interact

with each other, with textual components and, with other folia for their full meaning. Although folio visual elements do express the kernel of text meaning in their configuration, nuances of meaning are also provided by auxiliary sources.

The sole frame of a painting is usually a distinct physical presence that is made from another material. On the folio there is no outer frame except three cut edges of parchment and one bound side. Interior folio frames are not real frames; they are representations of real frames or formal elements construed as boundaries.

Because frames take many forms and have many properties, including negative space, they can operate as either figure or ground. When a frame is a ground, as it is in the margin area of a folio, it can also become a positive figure by virtue of its function as a delimiting device. This means that a folio can incorporate the usual figure/ground shifts of any compositional unit, and areas of ground normally perceived as negative spaces become active figures depending on the viewer's perception. Perceptual shifts in folio design are more complex than in a homogeneous field of a painting. In addition, folio composition is a mosaic of space, image and word unified by a framework of frames. A folio with a full pictorial, textual and framing program is more closely akin to a representation of a wall hung with many framed visual and

textual units. To fully appreciate the perceptual feast of spatial layers and diverse visual elements, each frame must be extricated and evaluated in isolation, in relation to the other frames, in relation to the elements that the frames accentuate, and finally, in relation to the framework of the configuration within the folio. Fully developed frame planes and frame bounded or connected space declare themselves to be both conscious and noteworthy.

#### Possible Alternate Functions of Frame Forms and Properties

As pure forms, frames were manipulated to their full potential and satisfy Le Goff's criteria that: "An object is symbolic if it makes reference to an underlying system of values, whether historical or ideal."<sup>17</sup> Because they were forms of order, proportion and balance, even the most rudimentary frames connote these qualities. Meyer Schapiro was among the first art historians to address the meaning potential of frames, visual fields and grounds. He provided the basic groundwork for the study of the structural mechanics, semantic possibilities and the perceptual effects of frames.<sup>18</sup> Jacques Le Goff summarizes the importance of Schapiro and Panofsky for relating formal qualities to meaning<sup>19</sup> in which they undertook the formidable task of dealing with what Susanne Langer calls "presentational symbolism"<sup>20</sup> which is a kind of semantic that is distinct from discursive symbolism. Speaking of works of art, she

says that:

What it does to us is to formulate our conceptions of feeling and our conceptions of visual, tactual, and audible reality together. It gives us forms of imagination and forms of feeling, inseparably...<sup>21</sup>

A tentative reconstruction of the probable semantic density of spatial types is within reason because it is unlikely that such lavish attention would have been invested in frame forms and frame planes inhabited by imagery if they were merely technical devices. If their exclusive function was to order space, they would have remained neutral, devoid of extensive elaboration. Their carefully wrought forms demand notice which suggests that they were true 'presentational' images charged with religious implications.

Mieczyslaw Wallis contends that a 'history of semantic structures' can supplement art historical inquiry.<sup>22</sup> It appears that all form, regardless of its technical function, was probably conceived as a 'figurative' image that allowed access to the 'spiritual' image. W. J. T. Mitchell defines the two image as the 'literal' and the 'figurative' types.<sup>23</sup> The artists' claim of picturing the 'invisible', he notes, supports his contention that, "there was always a sense, a primary sense in fact, in which images were to be understood as something inward and invisible."<sup>24</sup> Margaret Miles finds substantiation for the notion of parallels between the visually obvious and spiritual knowledge in the writing of St. Augustine.<sup>25</sup> The duality of images in the Middle Ages is

generally agreed upon. Umberto Eco considers the formulation and interpretation of symbols as "a type of aesthetic expression in which the Medievals took great pleasure in deciphering puzzles, in spotting the daring analogy, in feeling that they were involved in adventure and discovery."<sup>26</sup> The balance of form and content was not precarious in the Middle Ages.

The mechanical role of frames as employed in the classical codex tradition naturally expanded into symbolic service with the introduction of Insular attitudes. In the Celtic tradition metaphysical implications attended some shapes, patterns and configurations. The task here is to determine if some of these elements, in or on frames continued to carry potent meaning. Contemporary interpretation is not always useful, because, as Nelson Goodman points out, perception is not static; he is convinced that "there is no correct way of describing or picturing or perceiving 'the world', but rather than there are many equally right but conflicting ways - and thus, in effect, many actual worlds."<sup>27</sup> The medieval 'world' appears to have been a duality in which sensible and spiritual realities were considered to be indivisible and symbiotic.

Eco, who has contributed greatly to the present understanding of medieval perception, believes that "intelligible beauty was in the medieval experience a moral and psychological reality; if it is not treated in this

light we fail to do justice to their culture."<sup>28</sup> Frame forms and their formal properties may have been a means by which the viewer was enticed into contemplating religious values and ideals by association or implication. However, Goodman cautions: "A symbol may inform in as many different ways as there are contexts and systems of interpretation."<sup>29</sup> Over-zealous interpretation of visual materials can be avoided by adopting the method proposed for students of medieval literature:

it is evident that we risk adding to confusion if we rush to rationalise the content of medieval pictures. If as students of medieval literature we are to profit more in the future from the study of works of medieval art, we must distrust all first reactions to pictures, and unschooled reminiscences until we have established what pictures medieval art had in its repertory, where they are to be found in context, and what they mean there. That implies that we must first remind ourselves firmly where words, names, ideas and motifs have their place in textual tradition, for it is to these contextual meanings that medieval pictures refer for their meanings.<sup>30</sup>

Le Goff asserts that, "nothing could become an object of conscious reflection in the Middle Ages except by way of religion. It would almost be possible to define a medieval mentality by its inability to express itself apart from religious references."<sup>31</sup> It seems that religious associations were implanted firmly in all tangible form, proportion and placement. The problem is to ascertain an appropriate mental stance, similar to that of medieval artists and spectators by which the system can be assessed.

### Problems in the Interpretation of Medieval Folio Frames

Connections between formal properties in art and religious thought may have been consciously established but they were imprecise, not exact references given the inherent nature of the visual communication system. It is not a system of precision. Fortunately, the nature of subtle, subjective and indirect symbolism - areas of ambiguity - are being addressed.

A major concern is how to recreate a stance in which correct interpretation can be discerned. The medieval predilection was to view a mystery as "that which is everywhere revealed, but it is not understood by those who have not right judgment. That which marked those who had right judgment was freedom in the tradition of insight symbolism..."<sup>32</sup> How was this attitude aligned with visual art? This is difficult to determine because a mystery is something that 'cannot be talked about'. Lewis Hyde concludes that "It can be shown, it can be witnessed or revealed, it cannot be explained."<sup>33</sup> Visual material is now thought to have been employed "to arouse 'affective responses' and the so-called physiognomic perception."<sup>34</sup> If densely elaborated frames did not serve to stimulate religious contemplation they would have been distracting and, therefore, undesirable. The consistent presence of decoration on frames, far in excess of what was required for them to fulfill their technical role, suggests that there

was reason for this meticulously rendered material, and that the reason was intensely religious.

To evaluate medieval perception, an area to be noted is that of the imagination. Le Goff believes that "The time has come to abolish the academic barriers between 'pure' (meaning truncated) history, literary and linguistic history, and art history...In all fields imagination has a role to play."<sup>35</sup> And, referring specifically to art history, Ernst Kitzinger makes the following observation:

In some future analysis of twentieth century intellectual history a footnote might well be devoted to a minor paradox. Many of the most significant advances made in the middle decades of this century in art-historical research - and this applies to all fields, but to late antique, Early Christian and Byzantine art most particularly - have been through iconographic and iconological approaches. That is to say, scholars have focused intensively and most fruitfully on the subject content of works of art...Yet this development in scholarship has coincided with a period of the most radical formalism in art itself. Art historians were concentrating on content and messages at a time when painters and sculptors were eliminating subject matter altogether. I mention this odd disjunction merely to point out that no period more than our own has proclaimed in its art the meaningfulness of visual form as such...There is a general proposition involved here -namely, that formal aspects of art hold important clues to an understanding of the period which produced them.<sup>36</sup>

The formal properties of artworks are beginning to be viewed by many scholars (Margaret Miles is a prime example) as important sources for potential understanding of cultures in which there was little or no alphabetic literacy. In the Middle Ages reading and writing were taught in monasteries until universities were established in the Gothic period.

The role of images as surrogates for words did not vanish quickly and after it did, formal configurations remained potent for meaning. Arnheim explains that "formal patterns cannot be separated from subject matter...unless the analyst has intuitively grasped the aesthetic message of a painting, he cannot hope to deal with it intellectually as a work of art."<sup>37</sup> This involves subjective interpretation, but it can be tested against the clues in related visual programs, companion texts and generally accepted theological positions that were known and understood by the designers.

In the reading of "Imago Leonis" from the Gospels of Saint Willibrod, (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS lat. 9389, folio 75v. - figure 8), Wayne Dynes recognizes the surface linear qualities of the image, but claims that the artist, "developed a whole gamut of 'liberties' with regard to the frame that are essential preconditions for the solution reached."<sup>38</sup> He fails to notice that the perceptual system used here is Insular; it is his insistence on a Classical perception that creates a violation of convention. Dynes took 'liberties' when he assumed that the nominal appearance of St. Mark's symbol in representational form, in an otherwise surface-accepting formal composition, indicates that more representation was present. He suggests that the frame configuration is a schematic plan of Alexandria where St. Mark was the city's first bishop. This ingenious interpretation of a maze, which is a Celtic ritual form, is

not substantiated in this design or the other folia of evangelist symbols in this codex. Indeed, the frame asserts itself clearly as an abstract formal design device that holds the diagonal thrust of the lion taut against the surface. However, his assumption that there is significant suggestion of religious value in the dynamic tension of the configuration may be accurate.

Analysis of the frame reveals that a series of bands is employed: the outer band defines the extreme boundary of the image, reiterates the rectangular shape of the folio and determines a margin. The inner four corners of this frame are emphasized by squares delineated by bands. Inside this area a rectilinear maze form is described by a band that adjusts its form to the contour of the beast. Five extensions of the maze point to specific parts of the lion's body drawing attention to the front legs, the torso and the head of the lion. The significance of this configuration is problematic.

Apart from the obvious accentuation of the recognizable form of the lion, the design is 'presentational'. The lion is St. Mark's symbol, but the maze form may or may not possess any significance. If it does, it was most likely a metaphysical association because that was within the Celtic tradition. But, if this frame was meant to be read as a maze and used for the purpose of metaphysical meaning, why are the other evangelist symbols in this codex not graced with a

similarly potent form? It is more likely, and considerably less complicated, that this adaptation of the formal geometric frame was simply technically expedient for a diagonal figure on a rectangular ground. The other symbols in the codex are strictly vertical or horizontal in orientation, and therefore did not require that their vice-like frames take such twists and turns. What remains is a completely formal, presentational configuration which, although considerably less dense, stimulates a sensation in the viewer much like that which Goethe described when he stood in the interior of a Gothic cathedral. He wrote, "My soul was filled with one whole, great impression, which consisted of a thousand harmonious details and therefore could be savored and enjoyed although in no way recognized and explained."<sup>39</sup> This is the 'presentational' effect.

It may be that enigmatic configurations were meant to arouse sensation and stimulate contemplation; but, their abstract geometric form implies subjective, not objective (historical), reference. In his enthusiasm to establish Greco-Roman iconographical prototypes, Dynes overlooks the potential in this formal arrangement for sense impressions. Furthermore, Celtic perception often glossed over details of physical likeness to concentrate on inner qualities such as the rhythm of time and qualities of light which both their folio design and literature demonstrates. In addition to the sense of motion created by the diagonal placement of the

lion's form, its coloration sets it off from the parchment and the effect is reiterated by the bounce caused by red bands framed in thin light-coloured ribbons defined by fine dark lines. The folio is optically electrified, which may allude to divine inspiration, enlightenment, saintly status or other exalted, but imprecise qualities. It cannot be interpreted as a classical frame type, nor can it be seen to convey factual information. This frame is abstract, as such it invites subjective interpretation.

Regardless of the religious content that the artists sought to present, they were at all times confronted with straightforward technical problems of presentation. Without clear and strong design no meaning could be transmitted and no focus established. In evaluating the formal qualities of any folio, the innate sensibilities of the artists must be considered. Even when using an exemplar, the task of the artist was to determine a perceptual stance. It then becomes the viewer's responsibility to follow the clues provided and, hopefully arrive at the correct perception.

Since medieval thought is largely understood through written history, the need for a tentative reconstruction of visual literacy is paramount if medieval images are to be granted their full credit as communication vehicles. The research findings and insights of scholars in many fields of inquiry are informative, and even misguided interpretations demonstrate a tenacity that may eventually break the

medieval visual code. If the risk of interpretation is not taken, the now stilled meaning of medieval folio space and frames shall remain forever relegated to the position of a compromise of two powerful artistic traditions and an inferior painting form. Instead it may be valued as a unique form of religious communication, bridging oral and alphabetic literacy.

## CHAPTER TWO

## BASIC FRAME AND SPATIAL TYPES IN FOLIO DESIGN

## THE SURFACE ORDER OF THE FOLIO FORMAT

When the codex was adopted by the early Church, its format and a number of surface spatial conventions were assumed automatically. Codices were normally rectangular and the left-hand, long side was bound. Each folio had three exposed and raw cut sides, which, whether stained, gilded, tooled or unworked, cooperated with the bound side to define the outer limits, shape and area. The habit of leaving a uniform even blank area between the edges of the folio and the program served as a frame (a margin) to facilitate physical handling of the folio. Similar areas were often included in the body of the visual and textual program to create visually distinct sections (an example is the even space left between lines, columns or blocks of text). Although these spaces were unworked raw ground, they were frames in the strict sense: "an enclosing case or border into which something is fitted..."<sup>1</sup> It is essentially the regularity and predictability of fully, or partially, enclosing areas which grants them the status of true framing elements.

Of the many frame forms that are established by the positive action of marking the surface with pigment, gilding or scoring, line is the basic element, although it can swell

into ribbons, bands and planes or be created by a series of marks repeated in a regular sequence. When two parallel lines are drawn around any relatively uniform shape, they not only determine an inner field, they cause the interim space between them to be perceived as a plane. A single line around the same geometric configuration appears to be only the edge of a field. In other words any line or plane that encloses, partially or completely, creates a distinct area within those bounds, and parallel lines also create an area between the lines. In both cases field forces are established automatically in the process of framing. This principle describes all figures and fields in medieval folia that were line drawn.

#### RUDIMENTARY PICTORIAL SPATIAL QUALITY AND ORDER IN FOLIA

The seemingly insurmountable task of incorporating a variety of diverse pictorial and textual units into limited folio space was conquered through the mastery of compositional space. Astute observational skill and inventiveness in adapting existing spatial systems led to the formulation of an elegant and unique medieval solution to the problem. Frames with planar areas provided accessory pictorial space in addition to the field established within the frame, but even those fields were expanded in number by further divisions by frames. These surface divisions determined a number of autonomous fields. However, when the

idea of the 'picture plane' and the illusion of figure and ground shifts combine with surface delineation, the planes are read to be at relative distances to the primary ground plane. Simply by drawing a series of parallel lines around a shape, planes are perceived in spatial order. When the illusion of tri-dimensional space, created by overlaps, naturalistic depictions and size relationships, is combined with formal illusion, created by colour, pattern and figure-ground shifts, the result is multi-dimensional spatial illusion. The equivalent of many planes is created.

A full range of spatial implications depends on liberal attitudes toward spatial perception that precludes absolute adherence to Classical or Insular systems. The genius of medieval draftsmen was that they used the potential inherent in both systems simultaneously. Strict observance of visual conventions was transgressed to dissolve spatial limits.

Almost unending variation and complexity of pictorial content on folia was possible by the combination of four spatial modes: 1) the picture plane with implications of deep, receding space (Classical spatial perspective); 2) the strict surface; 3) planes created by colour, pattern and figure and ground shifts (Insular formal spatial effects); and 4) the literal surface divided into areas (hierarchical surface order).

### The Illusion of Spatial Depth

The Codex Amiatinus "Portrait of Ezra", (figure 5), is an example of a picture plane enclosed within a relatively undistinguished painted frame. The field of the painting is treated to represent the figure and objects in deep, tri-dimensional space, which appears to recede behind the picture plane. For the appearance of depth to work most effectively, the frame is a simple boundary that signifies the area of the picture plane. The frame's elaboration is relatively austere in order that the function of the frame is not obscured. Consequently, the frames around planes that were treated to appear to have depth behind them are often represented to look like frames of wall or panel paintings. Whenever the planes of these frames were expanded to incorporate secondary pictorial elements, the strict geometric shape of the frame was forcibly asserted.

### Planes in Figure/Ground Relationships and Layered Planes

There is nothing to suggest the appearance of depth behind the picture plane of "The Carpet Page with Animal Interlace" in The Book of Durrow, (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 57, folio 192v., - figure 9). The frame is the dominant visual element in this design, there is no evidence of any attempt to represent tri-dimensional space. The surface has been stratified into five horizontal bands, the center of which is approximately two and a half times as

wide as the two pairs of flanking bands. In addition, the central panel is framed on either side by a vertical band, which creates an almost perfect square field in the center of the folio for the central disc. Although there is a distinct absence of implied spatial depth, directional surface motion is intense. A series of parallel lines, which create four planes on the frame, circumscribes a circular medallion vibrant with activity generated by two rows of interlacing spirals and three fretwork patterned discs on the outer row that barely touch the inner pattern. Within the center disc is a simple cross, like the fretwork discs, rendered in black and white. The coloured interlace, set against a dark ground, activates a slight surface bounce that accentuates both the static quality of the four monochromatic discs and the white ground upon which the medallion is placed. In addition, there is a perceptible sense of surface rotation created by the many framing lines and planes around the circle and the curvilinear interlace. But, like any figure/ground reversal situation, the longer the design is viewed the more it changes back and forth. At one time, the yellow medallion frame appears to be slightly forward of the white ground, and in the next moment the white ground appears to be the figure of a framing mat in front of the medallion. To further complicate the illusion, the white area reacts with the outer framing bands in a similar figure/ground reversal situation. Many more

illusions are at work on this folio, but it is sufficient to note only a few to demonstrate that surface balance and motion counterpoint shallow colour and figure/ground spatial shifts to stimulate distinct responses in the viewer. It could be said that the classical tri-dimensional illusionism evoked perceptual reality, whereas the Insular system evoked spiritual reality through retinal stimulation. The former represents what is seen; the latter presents what is felt.

The effect produced by shapes, patterns, colours and textures in apposition is an actual, experienced sensory phenomenon. On the other hand, overlaps, progressions in size and location and all other devices that allude to spatial depth are learned by experience. Christian codex illuminators employed both of these modes simultaneously once the systems were known and the mechanics mastered.

In Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folia, lines and frames were a priori pictorial elements that moved around freely, through and on all available areas, including those occupied by the text and the planes of other frames. The framework was overtly established by framing elements. However, because of the equal intensity colours employed and the use of many parallel lines, which created many bands and planes if they were spaced widely, the surface was almost never static. The illusion of plane upon plane - built up from the parchment ground - allows a reading of many planes, which appear to progress gradually, consistently and subtly

toward the viewer, which is in itself a personal appeal to the senses of the viewer. This quality is easily identified in "The Account of the Crucifixion" folio in The Book of Kells, (Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 58, A.I.6., folio 124r., - figure 10). The parchment surface, which is the primary plane, is activated by lines formed by a series of red dots. The frame that appears to be directly on top of that plane has the illusion of three major planes stacked in progression of width. This effect is achieved by the combination of black lines and pairs of coloured bands. The outer blue bands are perceived to belong together since they are parallel and are positioned on the inner and outer edges of the frame. They appear to indicate a plane upon which the yellow parallel bands create another plane which is inset with interlacing and fretwork panels. The effect is further established by the apparent advance of the colour yellow and recession of the colour blue. The large 'X' in the lower zone on the text plane is pulled forward visually by a yellow frame band which follows along the inside of the frame's inner edges and overlaps it in four places. A similar device is used in the upper zone where the opening word is framed by a red band that appears to advance and bounce against the blue interior plane and the edge of the band in the primary frame. The entire effect of layered planes is enhanced by a row of evenly spaced red dots along the outer edges of the text bands and

the initial letter configuration in the upper zone.

### Retinal Effects: Shallow Spatial Movement

Although perceived as one complete openwork design, the Kells folio surface is active with perceptual trickery which culminates in the form of the initial letter. The beast/letter form is secured to the frame plane by two clawed paws and stretches across the ground to meet the other side of the frame, which establishes its spatial relationship with the plane of the frame. The use of the complementary pairs of red/green and purple/yellow cause it to bounce forward, as also occurs in the white areas of the faces. What, if any, purpose did these effects play in the presentation of Scripture? They stir a sense of wonder in the observer for optical phenomena, a small but potent mysterious corner of the physical world.

### Hierarchical Surface Order

A hierarchical system of space was also used extensively. It was useful for establishing the status of elements and the order in which they were to be considered. The field of force of the folio is most powerful in the central area, and for this reason the most potent material usually occupied this position. However, the upper zone, and particularly the upper left area, was also favoured for densely elaborated and enlarged initial letters. A common

situation was "A semantic field ...described as the field 'Center-Flanks'", in which, "the person placed in the center of a picture stands higher in cosmic or social order than persons placed in the flanks."<sup>2</sup> Although there were many subtle inferences related to location and spatial relations, the most pronounced are noted by Le Goff: "In medieval Christian ideology positive value was ascribed to high and inside. Ascent and internalization constituted an ideal."<sup>3</sup> Hierarchical value was also expressed in direction and scale. This means that "we must consider as an expressive factor the format of the image-sign. By format I mean the shape of the field, its proportions and dominant axis, as well as its size."<sup>4</sup> He also observes that the very small format had connotations of "the intimate, the delicate and precious."<sup>5</sup> However, the evaluation of the total configuration of the folio and all of its parts and their relationships to each other will usually indicate the meaning suggested by location and size, which changed as new programs developed.

#### THE BASIC FRAME TYPES IN THE MEDIEVAL REPERTORY

Judging from the continued innovations in subtle spatial nuances, the demand for ever increasing complexity and variation of visual space was unrelenting. Framing conventions were by no means static; however, by the eighth century the rudiments of a medieval framing system were in

place.

The first order of business in putting textual and pictorial materials on a folio was to determine the format. In part this was determined by the parchment area itself, but decisions as to the divisions and style of material and frames remained. Frames and frameworks provided the visual coherence and stability required by human biology. There is an "observable bias in our perception for simple configurations, straight lines, circles and other simple orders...", which must be considered because "we tend to see such regularities rather than random shape in our encounter with the chaotic world."<sup>6</sup> With the usually great amount of information and sensational stimulation presented on folia came the need to guide the viewer systematically through the composition.

Simple visual arrangements, which were frequently used in certain contexts, often acquired the status of rituals related to specific concepts and events. Initial letters of poignant passages became cornerstones of faith in the same way that the Church used rituals in the mass and devotion. An often repeated shape, configuration, or ordering system could become associated with, and trigger the memory of, certain significant ideas. However, meaning by association was probably not the impetus for the initial employment of specific devices. Originally, a device was chosen because it best suited the order and style of the material to be

presented. Through sagacious understanding and handling of frame structures and stylistic logic, the nucleus of medieval folio design was established.

The range of spatial implications was achieved through the use of four simple frame types: the 'absent' with its clearly defined area; the 'overt' with aggressive formal properties and form; the 'inconspicuous' with unassuming visual presence; and the 'concealed' with the form of a pictorial or letter element. The 'absent' frame is a very definite shape but it is devoid of pigment or decoration. An example of this type of frame is the mat or margin. The 'overt' type is immediately recognized by its obvious and expansive planal area which is usually heavily adorned. An example of the 'overt' frame is the border that became the hallmark of medieval folio design. An 'inconspicuous' frame, generally a line, band or series of shapes, delimits area but is otherwise undistinguished. Its technical function works without artistic bravado, and it retains a neutral abstract quality at all times. A 'concealed' frame establishes the spaces, direction and proportion of a composition while assuming the presentational and/or representational attributes of pictorial and textual elements. It is frequently disguised in architectural- or letter-forms. Examples of letter-form frames are: 'inhabited' and 'historiated' initials. Often this frame type comprises the structural scaffold of the total design.

Distinctions between frame types are often obscured by extensive combinations. Yet, even when frame types are mixed, the initial technical function of each frame remains clear. An example is when an 'overt' border is maneuvered into the form of an architectural arch which is a 'concealed' form. An arrangement of this nature could also include 'inconspicuous' frames and sections which are 'absent'. The variations are almost endless, and medieval draftsmen seem to have experimented joyously with these rudiments and improvised ever surprising combinations.

There does not appear to have been any hesitancy or mis-interpretation of surface or pictorial spatial variables, nor did juxtaposition of illusionistic and abstract spatial qualities seem to offend medieval sensibility. On the contrary, any combination of frame and spatial type that achieved the technical goal of accommodating the most material was embraced. However, this very practical concern is occasionally overlooked. David M. Robb discloses his distaste for this medieval proclivity when he quotes C. R. Morey, "'The first effect...was to neutralize the good points of both; the classic naturalism became grotesque; the barbarian ornament coarse.'"<sup>7</sup> This type of condemnation, which judges the synthesis by the values of the sources, is unjust to the success of medieval folio design as an effective and comprehensive system of communication and stimulation. If either artistic canon had

been followed rigidly, the density of expression and information would have suffered.

#### THE COMBINATION OF FRAMING SYSTEMS AND MODES OF SPATIAL PERCEPTION FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN AND GERMANIC TRADITIONS

Some sixth century manuscripts demonstrate that existing practices in classical roll and codex order were adopted, but often the representations on 'picture planes' were treated in a relatively flat schematic way. Volume and weight, previously suggested by modelling, yielded to the predominance of contour lines and the application of flat, solid colour within the lines. The subtle play of light on form was not a medieval issue; the concern was for the most clearly read informational material possible on limited folio space. The only details that were relevant were those that conveyed religiously pertinent facts or induced religious experience. Initially, the more classically inclined and trained artists concentrated on illustrations, whereas in Celtic and Germanic scriptoria abstract formal illuminations were dominant.

The folia in the Italian Gospel Book (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286, folio 125r and 129v., - figure 11 and 12 respectively), demonstrate how copious material began to be arranged on small areas and how this demanded fewer details and less focus on optical naturalism. Many scenes are compressed and divided by 'inconspicuous' frames. On

folio 129v, (figure 12), the major 'overt' frame takes on the form of an architectural arch, transforming it into a 'concealed' frame which operates as the primary element of the folio's framework. Had this architectural form been rendered to depict its three-dimensional character the surface of its plane could not have been stratified by many horizontal bands to create 'picture planes' for the scenes. The shape of an arch was useful here; tri-dimensionality was irrelevant.

Folio 125r from the same codex, (figure 11), is free of 'concealed' framing. The outer frame is a representation of the frame of a panel painting and the inner divisions on the 'picture plane' are convenient, but visually unobtrusive 'inconspicuous' frames. This treatment, apart from clearly presenting twelve scenes rendered in schematic fashion where only one fully illusionistic representation would have been possible if modelling and tri-dimensional spatial techniques had been used, usually limits the intricacy of execution. Words have been inscribed on the 'inconspicuous' frames, but the visual effect is uninteresting. It is the author portrait of St. Luke, folio 129v., (figure 12), which is visually more exciting with more variety in form. The full complement of frame types in one folio design became a standard practice.

Apart from the depictions of columns and St. Luke enthroned within an architectural structure which

schematically adheres to Classical painting techniques for the representation of real space, a mix of frames from metalwork, floor mosaics and other practical forms is used. An interplay of various framing and pictorial types is fully integrated into one design unit. Abundant information is provided on all available space: scenes fill the 'overt' frame plane; an inscription runs along the lintel of the arch; the tympanum area accommodates the symbol of St. Luke and pattern fills the archivolt shape. Every pictorial element is treated schematically with line performing the vital role of describing shape, pattern and texture. The importance of line cannot be stressed enough; it describes purely ornamental pattern on the throne, outer edges of the archivolt and throne platform and the tesserae with ribbon decoration on the columns, in addition to outlining the figural and architectural representations, the words, frames and internal frameworks of the scenes. The only suggestion of brushwork is flat colour washes. The total folio area is well planned and considered in terms of a clean, unified and easily read amalgam of individual parts.

Whenever a tri-dimensional portrait miniature was required the frame had to revert to a relatively secondary pictorial role if perceptual clashes were to be avoided. "Ezra Rewriting the Sacred Books" from The Codex Amiatinus, (figure 5), is an example of the frame operating as an essential signal for a 'picture plane' in which deep space

was implied, but without setting up visual competition between the frame and that which is framed. Three possible solutions to the problem occurred in medieval folio design: treat it like the plane on an actual painting frame, deal with it as a purely abstract conceptual member, or treat it in a similarly illusionistic manner to the content in and on the 'picture plane'. The Ezra frame is clearly of the first order. It is decorated in much the same way as a standard wooden frame of a panel painting might have been. The frame of the author portrait of St. Matthew in The Lindisfarne Gospels, (figure 4), is an example of a simple frame which functions almost exclusively in only that capacity. Corner brackets and cursory pigmentation of the band are the only visual enhancements, and they are nominal. They do not suggest an actual frame of a painting; they only decorate a flat, geometric frame form. The illusionistically painted border frame on the "Genesis page" of the Genoa Bible, (figure 6), employs interlace, berries and pearls, which are rendered to appear to be three-dimensional, to advance from the ground, toward the viewer, to balance the illusion of recessional space in the painted scenes. This framing band also defines two text column areas and there is no perceptual clash. The plane of the text appears to be between the frame, which appears to advance, and the scenes, which appear to be set in deep receding space.

Later manuscripts show the advantage of professionally trained artists and centuries of technical innovation. By 1490, when the Genoa Bible was decorated, the interest in realism was dominant. Yet frames still controlled and balanced elements in compositional unity and four dimensions of pictorial space continued to be used. Here three obvious planar qualities are established with other subtle planes and frame forms. Along the upper and left side of the folio, a decorated panel illustrates some subtle spatial nuances. The interlace overlaps the putti and fountains slightly making it appear to advance in contrast to the text plane. A simple and slender red band inset between the text and the interlace heightens the apparent distance between the gold border and the text. This is accomplished by the overlap of the green interlace on the red band. Shrewd spatial shifts of this type were often combined with frames that divided space concealed as letterforms. As noted in The Glory of the Page, the column frame that separates the two columns of text is the initial 'I' of 'In principio' and the "two columns of text appear to be on a sheet suspended from the architrave in the upper margin...".<sup>8</sup> This illusion is the consequence of the red bands on the lower and outer sides of the text columns, but because they do not continue on all sides, the effect is not consistent. On either side of the 'I' pictorial panel frame the text sheet appears to be closer than it is on the sides with red bands. This

contradiction was avoided in the 'Christ in Majesty' panel by the inclusion of tiny white lines between the picture plane and the red bands. This page exemplifies the mature manipulation of surface and pictorial space as inherited from medieval codices. The systems used in the 'Genesis Page' had been known and used for centuries. Here trompe l'oeil heightens the effect of a typically medieval distribution of formal spatial and framing elements.

In a composition of predominantly naturalistic and illusionistic imagery expansive areas of geometric or otherwise abstract or two-dimensional elements can be perceptually jarring, although these imagery types do work well with very strong geometrically shaped frames. The deft handling of design was made considerably easier by the use of frames because they are usually assertive geometric shapes that, because of their mechanical function, could be placed anywhere on a folio. Nonetheless, stylistic and spatial implications still demanded careful balancing regardless of how effective frames were as intermediaries. Occasionally, framing elements were worked directly into the pictorial elements, accentuating both pattern and outlines, which is the case in the author portrait of St. Matthew in the Lindisfarne codex, (figure 4). Here the elements do not clash because they are systematically minimized into a formal, flat, linear scheme.

The tendency toward strict informational observance

without unnecessary details that detract from the kernel message was a major advance for the communication potential of pictorial programs. A classically biased reading of the symbol and words above the figure of the evangelist would be that they were floating in space. To the Lindisfarne painter, who clearly did not possess such a bias, these elements are merely positioned on blank surface areas that were conveniently left after the schematic representation of the sitting figure was determined. Nor was this artist interested in merely illustrating the text; his concern was to integrate text and image to stimulate a sensational response.

The beginning of St. John's Gospel folio, also from the Lindisfarne codex, (figure 13), features an armature, comprised of two framing sections and an enlarged geometric letter-form, to hold the design. Frame and initial operate as a restraining device that holds the text plane taut, but there is also an illusion in which the text plane appears to be slightly behind the frame and the initial configuration. This effect is triggered by the strength of the pronounced initial's pattern and colour, and it is reinforced by the compact elaboration in the negative spaces of the letter. The subtle spatial shifting of these positive and negative forms are peripherally perceived and lead to the assumption that the text plane is to be read as the ground for the negative fill, which in turn is the ground of the positive

letter-form. Formal spatial effects of this type require a reasonable length of time to be activated. What appears at first glance is altered, gradually and almost imperceptibly. The 'game of animation' described by E. H. Gombrich is fully engaged in designs of this nature.

The clamp device appears again on the Incarnation Initial folio<sup>9</sup> of the same codex, (figure 14), but in this case the static severity of rectilinear power yields to a curvilinear organic motion. The movement in the upper zone is accentuated by the blank ground margin around it and the heavily patterned negative spaces within its shapes, but the whole configuration is checked by a lean linear frame that begins with a vice form around the right-hand side of the Rho and continues, with only one brief break to indicate that the continuation of text on the overleaf, until it almost touches the tail of the Chi on the left-hand side of the folio. The entire composition is a balance of opposites. Shapes, colours, patterns and linear qualities are set in counterpoint on the shifting planes of the surface, but the perception depends to a great extent on the framework comprised of the integration of letter- and frame-forms. The frame is the stabilizer, the contrast, the finishing element that heralds the commanding presence of the Chi-Rho.

## THE VALUE OF ABSTRACT SPACE, FRAMES AND FRAMEWORKS

The technical function of frames for dividing area for diverse elements and establishing different spatial modes is complex, but can be identified. It is far more difficult to ascertain the value of formal abstract qualities when they expanded into full programs. Nonetheless, there are a significant number of folia in which decorated frames became the primary images in the composition. They amaze and delight the viewer. They may also be charged with metaphysical meaning.

In the Lindisfarne Incarnation folio, (figure 14), the appearance of an otherwise commonplace text is transformed into a visual celebration of the sacred Word. The straightforward presentation of letters cannot achieve this alone, and such feasts of visual wonder depend on well ordered structure just as much as illustration imagery. The formal elements of colour, texture and pattern need line scaffolds to create shapes for them to fill, regardless of whether the shapes are representational or frankly geometrical. When dealing with purely conceptual content, abstract elements are both effective and efficient. Simple geometric shapes are easy to remember, often triggering strong associations. For this reason, a sizable repertoire of simple shapes was used by the early Church. Familiar shapes were repeated extensively in all visual media.

It is unlikely that the artist of The Codex Ussherianus

Primus, (figure 1), would have known the seventh century Coptic tombstone, (figure 15), but these works share similar symbolic forms and decorative devices. In both the cross is a modified Chi-Rho form with lines accentuating the interior of the shaft and the arms. On the folio the cross is outlined in small squares, which are the nib equivalents of dots, and one cross on the carving is set within a circular band that contains bosses. Another example of the pen-work equivalent for carved pattern is the guilloche. On the folio it appears as a vertical slash with a pen nib 'dot' on either side which constitutes a visual arrangement that parallels the one in the carving. A further similarity here is the way in which the ground is divided into fields for the images. What is not demonstrated here is the later Celtic and Anglo-Saxon use of parallel lines to indicate a ridge, but it is clear to see how the play of light on either side of the relief bars could be translated into two-dimensions with double lines.

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon artists relied on imagery from stone carvings and metalwork. Their spatial and technical effects may have also derived from these sources. The issue of influence is not of concern here; it is of primary significance that folio design may have appropriated much more from three-dimensional artifacts than imagery. Image appropriation may have been accompanied by the transfer of spatial and rendering techniques. Media may

have influenced other media. There may have been a conscious attempt made to approximate the style or form of other media on folia, especially when the original form had implications of power and status. The problem remains, what were the religious references inherent in the forms? The answer may lie in the attitude toward the interconnectedness of parts to the whole. Recent studies in brain function and spatial perception reinforce the notion that space and time, God and Nature, word and image were inextricably fused in the minds of people in oral societies. This might explain the elastic scale and spatial relationships of folio images.

The beginning of St. Mark's Gospel in The Book of Kells, (figure 16), aptly illustrates how images of the Word and the world are interwoven within a complex but tightly structured framework. There is no way of knowing whether the configuration in its entirety was intended to be a message itself, but, since these artists were so adept with abstract formal devices, they probably recognized the power of formal compositional forces. One thing is certain; the formal concern of the Kells artist overcame the task of simply arranging the text. In fact, two sets of letters are outside the frame but are held within the program by projecting decorative clusters. Clearly, the words on this page were not meant to be read in the conventional manner. Letters are contorted and barely perceptible in a web of decoration. It is difficult to determine what is letter,

what is frame, what is image, although there is no doubt that the design is all three simultaneously. Most folia are not as forceful as this one in expressing such equality of elements. Nonetheless, this quality, although taken to the extreme, is present to some degree in the early folia made by people with oral literacy, who had not yet been wholly converted to an alphabetic system.

Because of the fundamentally abstract nature of a frame in the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon system, it integrated freely with other pictorial elements. Apart from those instances in which a frame delimits a picture plane, its shape and properties were dictated only by the artistic predilection of the designer. The somber depiction of a frame in the Codex Amiatinus 'Ezra' folio, (figure 5), compared with the surprising reclinear frame spiced with irregularly placed notches that accommodate depictions of men's heads in Kells folia, (figure 10 and figure 17), demonstrates the exciting possibilities of a formal system. The inserts, in which the men are depicted, are nominal 'picture planes', but because the margin edges are not framed they appear to belong to the physical realm - parchment margins were actually handled. They belong more to the sensible world than to pictorial reality.

The 'Virgin and Child' folio, (figure 17), and the Ezra folio, (figure 5), succinctly illustrate the difference between Northern and Mediterranean pictorial spatial

perception. In the latter the frame is inconsequential as a visual element; it functions solely as a signal for the 'picture plane'. The Kells frame, which is close in proportion and also signals a pictorial plane, actually breaks into that plane by means of a yellow band that encloses three half-circles, the throne and the halo. Frame and picture are integrated on one planar level. A presentational openwork pattern secures the surface. The Ezra portrait technique and spatial perception are aligned with Late Antique naturalism: the frame and the 'picture plane' are perceived as spaces of different orders. Even nominally overlapping shapes in the the Kells folio cannot dislodge the spatial union of frame and picture. Taut informational cells are arranged in hierarchical order.

In all the folia examined thus far, except the Genoa Bible folio, the primary emphasis has been on line to establish shape, space and order, and these lines were all of the even width that are made by pens. This constitutes a major difference in medieval folio painting from the Late Antique painting techniques revived during periodic Classical revivals. An example is the portrait of St. Matthew from the Coronation Gospels of the Holy Roman Empire, Vienna, folio 15r., -figure 18), in which brushwork models form; line is used sparingly. Even with the recurring revivals of this method during the Middle Ages, it never completely dislodged linear methods because the latter

was ever useful for the presentation of formal effects and could accommodate a large range of diverse elements.

Linear techniques, from which frameworks evolved, follow a process outlined by Gombrich: "Any hierarchical arrangement presupposes two distinct steps, that of framing and that of filling. The one delimits the field or fields, the other organizes the resultant space."<sup>10</sup> This very useful system could not have been retained if scriptoria had embraced a volumetric style of painting which excluded a conceptual mode of linear definition. It is curious that line and the many spatial modes it establishes have generated so little scholarly interest. Frequent acknowledgment is granted to compositional frameworks which attempt to revive a classical system of pictorial space, but the other orders of pictorial space are generally overlooked. This is puzzling given the intense interest historians have shown for the mechanics of linear perspective, rediscovered in the Renaissance, and its forerunners. The intriguing variations in medieval linearity and spatial systems have sparked little enthusiasm. A sense that they constitute a vague shadow of ineptitude and coarseness lingers, despite the recent research concerned with semantics in formal art. Considering the long accepted and minutely studied, not to mention copiously praised, spatial qualities in Byzantine and Egyptian art, they obviously carry the stigma of being outside the mainstream

classical tendencies of western artistic tradition. But, they cannot be ignored indefinitely because of their insistent presence even in folia produced in scriptoria where classicism was aggressively fostered.

The 'Fountain of Life' folio from the Godescalc Gospels, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS. n.a. lat. 1203, folia 3v and 4r., -figure 19), exemplifies the continuation of so-called "barbarian" elements and how effective they were. In tandem, the frame alternates between illusionistic columns and flat bands. The interior of folio 3v is rendered in the same way with naturalistic light and dark contrasts on the bird and column forms and a flat schematic treatment of the frieze. The dual knowledge of, and expertise in, the Insular and the Classical traditional tactics for pictorial space is clear. Here, the high degree of technical facility knocks out the supposition that formal abstract elements were used for lack of ability with perspective systems. There was good reason for the choices made here, and they deserve serious scrutiny if the full implications of these folia are to be recognized and given full value.

Evidently stylistic and spatial composites were accepted, and desired. For a subject of fundamental importance to faith, which the Fountain of Life was, it can be suggested that this unique spatial merger provided contrasting perceptual modes for variety, impact, symbolic implication or better communication potential. Given that

most of the visual material on folio 3v is representational, an enormous body of objective information is provided and the constraints of spatial limitation were overcome with an innovative approach which relies on formalist theory.

In abstract formal programs, even those that include significant amounts of representational imagery, complex visual configurations inevitably depended on multi-layered spaces similar to those in topographical maps. This spatial order is dependent upon appearance; all planes are perceived to occupy specific space and when combined they vie for position. The only real divisions in designs are on the surface: the appearance of pictorial spatial divisions, which fall behind, or in front of, the primary plane, are all illusions. The phenomenon of compound planes, stacked and progressing in space according to their size, is simple visual logic. Any plane, which discloses its full area without obstruction and is surrounded by a line that follows the original shape at some equal distance, will appear to be the closer of the two. The 'Chi-Rho' folio from the Book of Kells, (figure 7), demonstrates this phenomenon. Certain colours appear closer than others and colours of equal intensity have the appearance of sparring for position when they are set in close proximity to each other. Perception teaches that overlapping shapes suggest objects in spatial relationships. The inner Chi form, embellished with yellow inset patterns and framed by a

yellow band, does not appear to be next to the purple band: it appears to rest directly on top of its planal area. A plane is assumed because the purple flanks the yellow Chi, implying that its area is continuous. This is not so with the thin black lines that surround the outer edges of the form because they are thin.

An example of the neutralizing effect of colour in spatial relationships is illustrated in the Rho and the Iota configuration in which the two warm colours of red and yellow appear to come forward further than the yellow forms on the purple planes of the Chi and the frame. These and many other formal devices not only expanded the apparent space of folia by creating the illusion of many planes in front of, and behind, the surface, they provided visual stimulation far in excess of that possible with a strict grid matrix or 'picture plane' system.

Four spatial modes, four basic frame types, and a wealth of pictorial and textual styles operated most efficiently and aesthetically to convey the most possible information on the confines of folio surfaces. This unique medieval system may well be unsuccessful when judged by classical or formal criteria exclusively, but when considered in light of the needs of the Church and a practical communication medium, its success cannot be questioned.

## CHAPTER THREE

## SPATIAL ILLUSION AND MEANING

Because illuminated medieval manuscripts amalgamated a range of frames, spatial types, images and text, they involve both perceptual and retinal effects. The choice and ratio of elements varies in every codex, and since only a small group of folia will be considered, only the most pronounced spatial effects exploited for medieval folio design will be identified. It will be tentatively suggested that these qualities were intentionally exploited to expand religious experience.

Although perceptual psychology and visual art are now mutually informative in the work of Gombrich and Arnheim, the influences that condition perception are debated. The role of biological and cultural factors has yet to be determined. Of equal importance to visual art is intuition. Artistic decisions are made frequently because they 'feel right'. The same feeling may attend interpretation. Arnheim legitimizes intuition by saying that it "is not a freakish specialty of clairvoyants and artists but one of the two fundamental and indispensable branches of cognition."<sup>1</sup> Many early folio designers probably relied on intuitive response to evaluate their efforts and solve the problems of the new medium.

For a long time art historians were reticent to deal with formal properties and abstract artforms. However, the field of inquiry is now open. Insight into human perception

and medieval thinking and thought processes indicates that formal compositions were saturated with religious meaning. Pictorial space and retinal stimulation were fertile grounds for symbolism. Art historians are joining scholars in many fields in search of the meaning of forms. The forms of space in medieval folio design have yet to be discussed in depth.

The religious associations in pictorial space are not susceptible to exact analysis, but the medieval propensity to imbue all sensible experience with religious undercurrents may have prompted the preference for formal modes. Formal elements and abstract images are prime for subjective interpretation. They also elicit actual physical reactions when they are skillfully handled. In the case of retinal illusions, the result can be dramatic.

Folia required spatial structure for technical reasons initially, and focused religious minds may have seen the potential in formal spatial elements and abstract images for gaining access to deep truth. Non-representational elements embody concepts, stimulate sensation, simulate experience and induce contemplative states. Exploitation of the range of human experience was a natural consequence of pre-literate consciousness initially, and highly motivated in later folia. Potential for expanded religious implications exists in the spatial qualities of folia.

## FRAMES AND SPACE: SENSATION AND EXPERIENCE

The plane frame was afforded free migration anywhere on folia. Apart from enclosing a 'picture plane', its configuration was dictated only by the forms it used for concealment or the artist's discretion. Since frames could be placed anywhere and arranged in any number of ways with other elements, they could be manipulated to achieve sensory effects and create apparent spatial progressions to guide the viewer. Location, scale and balance initiated a sense of planes in various spatial relationships.

A progression of elements located on the extreme outer edges, the margins, the planes of frames and the center of a folio leads the viewer to the center. A progression that begins in the lower zone and proceeds vertically culminates in the upper zone of the folio. Either directional path is heightened by the precision and detail of the rendering. An example is when the central zone is finely worked and the periphery is roughly drawn, causing the eye to move to the center which is perceived as more important because of location and rendering.

Subject matter also affects perception. Familiar objects depicted in peripheral areas are perceived to be more informal than depictions of historical scenes, holy figures or luxurious patterns and materials. If not part of the normal visual vocabulary, images evoke a sense of awe. An experience of moving out of the ordinary, into the

extraordinary, is also activated by an unusual visual arrangement. On folia with sequential spatial order, a transcendental effect is exaggerated.

A sense of distance between the physical (humble) and the spiritual (exalted) is expressed hierarchically in two directions: 1) on the literal surface, and 2) through the perceived progressions of planes in pictorial space. The former has received much attention. The latter has been granted only the most cursory mention. This is due to the inherent problem of interpreting formal order and the 'barbarian' quality, often dismissed as inconsequential in mainstream western art. It was a system that was never abandoned in manuscript art. This visual paradox was pursued for its semantic potential. Any such phenomenon was useful, especially if it appeared unnatural or magical. The medieval period is well known as a time when miracles, visions and magical occurrences were popular and plentiful.

A sense of humility is expressed in the 'Virgin and Child' folio from the Book of Kells, (figure 17). Depictions of ordinary humans, fantastic intertwined figures, heavenly bodies and the holy couple are segregated by frame barriers and placement. A portrait of a group of men, placed within a notch in the frame, is enclosed on only three sides. It is peripheral to the composition. The unframed side of the portrait meets the margin which reiterates the secondary importance of the little group of men. Immediately inside

the major frame, in the same colour and width, a band defines three, half-circle areas. These inserts are filled with fantastic interlaced figures which relate to the space of the frame plane, not the 'picture plane'. On the inside corners of the frames are angels which are not framed. They are perceived as within the 'picture plane'. The angels in the upper zone have halos and are larger than the attendants; they appear to hover over the heads of the men in the grouping. A strict canon of hierarchical surface order is followed, but when translated into the Celtic spatial idiom, new nuances of space were created.

Frame and 'picture plane' are not as rigidly distinct as they are in a Classical representational system of space. Both areas interact here. Figures are not fixed in deep space; they occupy degrees of shallow space, according to their importance. Subtle formal space determined the status of the images. A line breaks the frame for the portrait of six men, but the yellow ground of this area makes it appear to be immediately in front of the parchment. By contrast, the primary frame is comprised of wide bands which stimulate an illusion that it is a purple band with inserts resting on a gold tooled ground. This brings the frame plane forward from the parchment. The illusion of a 'picture plane' is diminished because the back of the throne meets the inner band of the frame. The distinction between the planes (in a classical reading) is dissolved further by the network of

yellow bands around the inside of the frame, the appended half-circles, the Virgin's throne and its back, her halo and her headdress. The depiction of the couple is taut on the plane which also carries the inner frame band. The propensity to see the surface as an open field dispels the illusion any depth behind the 'picture plane'. The viewer is guided in two directions simultaneously: through spatial planar levels and along the flat surface.

The habit of finely rendering the interior fields and major frame planes but loosely rendering marginal images became more pronounced with time. An example of degrees in formality is the later double-page in the Devotional and Philosophical Writings manuscript (Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 231, pp. 82-83., -figure 20). An enlarged initial letter on folio 82 extends into marginal flourishes and is balanced by a full-page miniature on folio 83. The decoration on the margin area is of secondary importance, following the pattern of placing extraneous imagery on the hierarchically insignificant areas to the sides or lower zones of folia.

In later devotional books the practice of including 'bas-de-page' compositions and marginal drolleries was a common and extreme example of hierarchical order. In the 'Marriage at Cana' folio from the Queen Mary Psalter, (British Museum, MS Royal 2B VII, folio 168 v., - figure 21), the system is well illustrated. In the center of the

upper half of the folio, a full colour with gold illustration is predominantly presented. It is flanked by a 'concealed' frame which provides niches for angelic musicians rendered in grisaille on gold grounds. The text is illuminated with an enlarged 'historiated' initial, the frame of which extends into tendrils on the left margin and the 'bas-de-page' area at the bottom of the page. The relative importance of the flanking figures and the initial letter is asserted by meticulous details, rendering and materials. Of lesser importance, a beast and a mounted knight are drawn loosely with only cursory coloration. Although all the figures are stylized, the 'bas-de-page' drawing is in caricature style. Images from the physical realm are placed in peripheral areas of raw ground. Religious scenes and figures occupy prepared grounds in closed, framed spaces.

The formality established by a fully enclosed, 'closed' image area, was also used in "The Virgin and Child" folio from the Book of Kells, (figure 17), some five hundred years earlier. The use of these devices was not accidental; they were carefully and thoughtfully exploited to maximize the visual effect of the programs.

In later medieval manuscripts, and some produced during classical revivals, brush work modelling of form is employed. However, most medieval folia are endowed with a predominance of line. Line usually took the form of outlines that delineated shapes. Lines also worked as geometric patterns

which decorated broad expanses of background. Line was used to create innumerable pictorial cells and establish intricate networks. The urge to break shapes into a multitude of tiny facets fashioned homogeneous pictorial arrays. The basis for this propensity was not necessarily theological, but it demonstrates a sensitivity for orders which were composed of many minute parts. The compulsion to decompose shapes or build structures out of myriad small parts, coupled with a formalist attitude toward space, led to innovative leaps in visual composites. One such creation is the 'historiated initial'. An example may be seen in the Devotional and Philosophical Writings codex, (figure 22). A letter and a frame merge into one form.

When colour, pattern and imagery are added to line networks, relations between planes become apparent. This was yet another situation in which there was potential for perceptual game-playing. In the above mentioned 'historiated initial' the 'M' is a 'concealed' frame for an illustration, and is perceived to be in front of the 'picture plane', but the placement of the figures inside the plane and extending over the frame contradicts that initial perception. Similar perceptual jostling occurs on the companion folio (figure 22) where the reality of the 'picture plane' is disturbed primarily by the figure of a monk, which is at one point within that plane, behind the scroll frame, on the frame plane, and extending over

the outer molding frame. His feet are actually touching the parchment margin, suggesting a gradual progression from the physical world, through the pictorial and into the realm of the sacred (Christ crowning Mary). His hand is squarely placed on the inscribed banner, which runs from the inscribed frame around the illustration, and continues up, to the Virgin's cheek. This may imply a connection between the suppliant monk and Christ's mother, perhaps a plea of intercession or a devotional gesture. Again a hierarchical system works on the surface and in perceived spatial layers.

Correlations may exist between modes of imagery, spatial types and compositional location and types of human experience. Representational imagery reiterates what is known through the experience of sight: abstract presentational imagery relies on insight, which is based on belief but is impossible to prove through physical sight - the invisible. The range of imagery, from abstract to illusionistic, may have been saturated with hierarchical significance in the same way that religious imagery occupied the central core of a folio while secular images were placed on the periphery. The religious imagery was objectively presented and its reading was clearly established, whereas secular imagery was often loosely composed and open to more subjective interpretation.

Most folio arrangements adhere to a predictable order: the periphery informally arranged with whimsical or secular

subject matter; the mid zone (the frame plane) occupied by plant and animal forms interacting in a semi-abstract configurations; and the tightly organized inner core occupied by dense religious images. Playfulness or imagination in the outer zone; small wonders from the natural world on the median; sacred Truths in the powerful central core.

The convention of positioning extraneous visual imagery at the extreme edges of programs meant that this material acted as a protective barrier for poignant inner core elements. In addition, the outer edge imagery, either lying on the parchment ground or on the border plane, almost always is interpreted to be closer than that which is positioned inside the frame. This causes peripheral imagery to serve as a transitional phase between the physical and the spiritual realms. It is not surprising to find that when naturalism and tri-dimensional illusion was re-established subject matter in the outer area was rendered to appear to be even closer to the viewer. In the "Saint Barbara" folio from the Hours of Engelbert of Nassau, (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 219-220, folio 41r., -figure 23) insects and flowers appear to hover on a gold ground in front of the surface. The depiction of St. Barbara appears to be far behind the text plane. The notion of treating a frame as a full pictorial plane is likely an off-shoot of Insular perception and conventions in manuscript design.

The "Cross Carpet" folio from The Book of Durrow,

(Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS A.IV.5, folio 125v., -figure 24), is an extreme, and early, Celtic example of how poignant the relative size of images, the center of the pictorial field and unified surface are. This densely elaborated surface, devoid of representational elements, relies solely on formal elements for spatial orientation. Outer bands of interlace continue into the interior, branch out and fill the central rectangular area. The viewer is provided with a sense that everything here is equal. There is no beginning, no end; line, strap and band weave a unified surface.

Prolonged viewing of the Durrow folio reveals four pairs of connected rectangles which constitute a frame for the central interlaced area. Adopting this perception, the interlace appears to escape between the pairs of framing sections to re-form into a full band outside the frame. A small detail makes this interpretation possible: a fine light coloured ribbon, enhanced by a line of dark dots that are repeated in the four corners of the central interlace pattern, makes the interlace appear to be a continuous field that squeezes out through breaks in the inner frame from the middle of all sides. The effect is feasible only because of contrast. The interlacing is coloured; the ribbons and insert patterns are monochromatic. Without employing any pictorial illusionism, a sense of center, proportional relationships and unity are fixed.

A later grisaille example with colour contrasts is the 'Marriage at Cana' folio, (figure 21), which also uses the technique of colour complements in equal proportion to activate a pattern area (the background in the 'picture plane'). It appears that when pictorial illusionism made its ultimate comeback in manuscript decoration the power of formal elements was recognized and retained with only minor adjustments.

The return to classical perception did not necessitate abandoning abstract modes on folia. Frames allowed both systems to co-exist. The "Genesis" page from the Genoa Bible, (figure 6), is an example of how frames continued to be stretched into wide bands, becoming planes for pictorial inserts (the lower and right-hand side frame) and for natural, fantastic and secular imagery (the upper and left-hand side frame). Medieval draftsmen used expanded frame planes for serious representational imagery. Neither the Classical nor the Insular artists had considered this area to be viable for important imagery. In the "Genesis" folia, produced when alphabetic literacy was established more firmly in the West, the visual material has been relegated to a secondary position. The text is the center of focus. Frames allowed for plenty of pictorial information and visual stimulation to augment clean, clear text.

Medieval draftsmen knew, or sensed intuitively, that multiple frames permitted a visual range that enticed and

stimulated the viewer. The imprecise nature of visual elements was a boon to furthering the Church's campaign to influence individuals to its stance. The compelling characteristic of visual elements was that they elicited personal interpretation, association, sentiment and contemplation. Formal properties stimulate specific physiological effects. The reverberations can be astounding. These sensations are significantly more dramatic, direct and intimate than the intellectual experience of objective information conveyed in words.

The moment a folio comes into view there is an immediate response induced in the viewer. Before words can be read, the visual configuration of the folio has established a sense impression. The immediacy, potency and persistence in memory of visual experience made the visual programs of manuscripts the quintessential element of the codex medium.

#### CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS IN THE READING OF MEDIEVAL PROGRAMS

The abstract formal components of folia have only been considered descriptively in the last few decades. Rudolf Arnheim explains that works of art are "nightmares to the scientist. Faced with their bewildering complexity, the scientist tends to limit his investigations to elementary aspects extricated from their context."<sup>2</sup> Despite the difficulties involved, Arnheim pursued this area of inquiry before many art historians took up the cause. Even after

the fourfold sense of Scripture became widely influential in the study of medieval literature, drama and hermeneutics, it only led to examinations of representational visual material.

Now the relatively new science, Semiology, has inspired many art historians to examine order, proportion and balance in visual compositions. Intensive study by Gombrich and Arnheim, working in the disciplines of art and psychology to the benefit of both, has inspired more scholars. Pure sensation and sensory experience - as a means of conveying concepts - cannot always be accomplished in representational material. Primary concepts, such as the Incarnation, God, eternal life, the Immaculate Conception, the Eucharist, to name a few, could be conveyed only in the most abstract terms, for which purely formal visual elements were indispensable. Scholars from all areas of the humanities are now looking to the visual arts to expand their understanding of medieval perspective and perception.

The notion that visual material may possess levels of meaning received little scholarly attention until recently. The examination of modern advertising art, which also uses word and image, has determined that the image employed is "frank , or at least emphatic."<sup>3</sup> This quality of directness was certainly present in medieval folio but imprecision and vagueness were also highly valued. The vast combinations of formal elements in folio design are elusive. They are complex and ambiguous; they defy precise meaning and

scrutiny. Nonetheless, indistinct elements work, acting subliminally on the viewer. The great resource of image/word (logos) is, that by repetition and visually strong presentation, it produces an indelible impression. Its potency resides in its ambiguity and imprecision. The exact concept is unimportant at the intuitive level; sensation and sense memory are paramount. Imagery appears to have been consciously and consistently employed in medieval religious folia for the same reason it is now exploited in advertising campaigns: it appeals immediately to the eye. It also persists in the memory of the viewer.

The combination of sensory stimulus and precise mental concepts (image and word) covered all bases. Sensation was provoked by images; intellectual precision was provided by words. The power of imagery is immense:

It even seems that certain classes of religious and allegorical imagery derive their appeal from the very fact that their 'degree of iconicity' remains indeterminate. They are neither regarded as mere ideograms of rational concepts nor as iconic representations of a visible reality but rather as the visual embodiments of a supra-sensible entity.<sup>4</sup>

Gombrich continues to say that "what has been called the history of 'seeing' is really the history of a learning process through which a socially coherent public was trained by the artist to respond in a given manner to certain abbreviated signs."<sup>5</sup> It follows that frames and spatial realities were among the 'signs' in medieval visual literacy. If so, the only problem is to re-learn the

responses. This is possible only through rigorous 'seeing'.

Comprehension of subtle spatial meanings does not require any formal training. Our perceptual apparatus tells us that lines, walls, fences, and all geometric lines that enclose areas demand focus. This does not require consensus. The influences of colour, shape, texture, and pattern are felt intuitively and immediately. Gombrich claims a strong biological source for human perception while other scholars argue for stronger cultural influences. Nelson Goodman concurs with Marx W. Wartofsky "that there is no one correct way of describing or picturing or perceiving 'the world', but rather that there are many equally right but conflicting ways - and thus, in effect, many actual worlds."<sup>6</sup> This means that a viewer must assume a religious prejudice, a religious imagination, to comprehend the visual perception that is at work in medieval folia. Medieval theological writing and contemporary research allow a tentative reconstruction of medieval perception.

#### CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF FRAMES AND PICTORIAL SPACE

An outstanding early example of a text presented in a formal program is the "Incarnation" folio in the Codex Aureus, (Stockholm, Royal Library, MS A.135, folio 11r., -figure 25). It is unthinkable to assume that this elaborate treatment was superimposed on the text to obscure its meaning. Therefore, it must enhance the content in some way.

Visual complexity forces a viewer to scan, to focus, to evaluate and to contemplate the significance of words, lavished with gold, colour, pattern and frame. The profound nature of the enlarged and elaborate Chi is immediately grasped by its aura of the extraordinary. The configuration is frankly presentational. Secure references to the natural environment have been severed; the viewer is catapulted into a majestic realm inhabited by sacred words and fantastic beasts and patterns. To complement the shimmer of gilding, which was rarely used in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon scriptoria, figure-ground shifts abound. The angle of the Chi sets the carefully modulated horizontal orientation of the composition in a similar rhythm to those perceived in spatial depth. Surface space and pictorial space work in tandem.

The range of framing devices and spatial qualities was extensive, neither fixed nor immutable. This meant that each folio design presented a challenge for the designer to experiment and invent new combinations. Perhaps because the frame was so versatile, the medium of the codex so dense in potential meaning, and the need for diverse elements so great, all available spatial systems were exploited at once, regardless of the cultural disposition of the individual scriptorium. Whatever the specific circumstances may have been, many modes of framed space were employed extensively.

A frame always carries perceptual implication of

privileged access to a new spatial dimension. It is not known exactly when the organization of the image field was first established. Schapiro speculates that it came into use in the late 2nd millennium B.C. as a "continuous isolating frame around an image, a homogeneous enclosure.." and that "the frame belongs ... to the space of the observer rather than of the illusory, three-dimensional world disclosed within and behind it. It is a finding and focusing device placed between the observer and the image."<sup>7</sup> Schapiro neglects to mention how the frame works for pictorial material that does not possess an illusion of the 'three-dimensional world', but the dictionary accommodates this function by defining a frame as "a system of geometrical axes for defining position..." and the "underlying or surrounding support or essential substructure of anything."<sup>8</sup> However, it is not necessary that a frame completely enclose an area to be perceived as a true frame. As long as enough of a basic and predictable shape is indicated, perception will assume that it continues on to complete closure. Perception will also assume the presence of a frame where none exists in certain circumstances. This occurs when a stable and predictable shape is placed in the center of a field that is determined by some outer boundary such as cut edges. The space between the cuts and the shape is perceived to be a frame (the margin or the mat). Once a frame is drawn in this area, it becomes a field or reverts

to the neutral state of ground. Arnheim explains that "Any array of visible things is a field, in the sense of an all pervasive interaction of forces...no space can remain 'empty', that is unstructured..."<sup>9</sup> On every 'field', every space assumes the position of either figure (positive) or ground (negative), and they are experienced as equal forces that vie for supremacy. Arnheim explains the field forces with the example of a red disk on a blue square:

The disk, acting as 'figure', comes alive perceptually and aesthetically only when its stable boundary is seen as the balance of antagonistic forces. The visual forces inside the disk are expansive. They press outward. This tendency is counteracted by the forces inherent in the surrounding square, which seeks to 'contain the intruder', ie., to restrict its presence to a minimum of space.<sup>10</sup>

It was this figure-ground phenomenon, which is present on all fields with one or more figures, that the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon illuminators deftly manipulated. They exploited figure and ground tension to its full potential.

Arnheim notes that compositional rules 'codify', they do not replace 'perceptual' evaluation.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of whether an artist used devices for realism or abstraction, formal compositional forces are present. Either as an exoskeleton or concealed within the picture, a compositional framework is unavoidable.

In addition to forging a compositional framework in folia, frames retain a quality of belonging to a distinct order of space from other visual elements. Boris Uspensky relates that a pictorial unit defined by a frame establishes

"the external point of view..." and "draws its significance from its affiliation with the phenomenon of ostanenie, or estrangement." <sup>12</sup> In addition to creating one pictorial unit within its boundaries, frames were pictorial units themselves and they could be sub-divided into smaller units. Each unit was the carrier of symbolic meaning. Like garden border plants, frames are themselves visual elements that divide space, even their own planar spaces, into unique compartments for other visual varieties.

Probably because Celtic and Anglo-Saxon artists were not preoccupied by the observation of nature required by pictorial realism, they freely explored formal (retinal) effects without the pressure of relating them to the natural world. The difference between the two stances is succinctly noted by Gombrich. Representational art involves 'making' and 'matching', whereas abstract art involves 'groping' and 'grasping'.<sup>13</sup> In the former, success is measured according to the standard of realism; in the latter, success relies on intuitive or perceptual response to proportion, unity, spatial dynamics and clear order. In artistic terms they deserve to be evaluated equally. The perceptions involved in the Codex Aureus folio, (figure 25), are as effective for religious purposes as the program on the Genoa Bible folio, (figure 6). One evokes a spiritual experience of sacred text; the other provides an intellectual experience of sacred text content.

Once the apparent levels of planes advancing or receding from the parchment ground had been observed, and the mechanics understood, shifting planes became standard practice. In the Codex Aureus "Incarnation" folio, (figure 25), an illusion of interchange lifts the design out of the mundane. The text area is defined by a flat, colour band decorated with a row of continuous dots along the center, flanked by lines of the same colour. The inner field, set slightly inside the outer frame, is divided by seven horizontal band frames, similar to the outer frame but in different colours. The lower two thirds of the field is ordered by five equal bands, while the sixth band, in the upper zone, dissolves into a decorated field with the Chi - Rho - Iota in the upper left-hand area. And to the right, the uppermost band, which is wider than the others, emerges. The upper section commands the folio; the initial letters spill over the decorated field, over the frame, and onto the margin, while the fully decorated Chi, and the gold letters on the first line are distinguished by elaborated ground decoration. The letters in the seven bands alternate from gold on pattern to pattern on gold, and the gold letters are supported, from the back, by horizontal bars. Only the patterns in the upper two bands are completely executed, giving that area increased status. The composition expresses a pure, formal attitude throughout. The upper area has weight, stability and concrete presence, which contrasts

with the openwork treatment of the lower section. The letters are legible, but their presentation suggests that the folio was meant, not to be read, but to impress upon a viewer the power and status of the words.

Another page from this codex, (figure 26), aptly demonstrates how frames were used as intermediaries between abstract and representational imagery. St. John is depicted in the space defined by a frame concealed in the nominally tri-dimensional form of a columned arch. However, in the upper area, the tympanum, frieze and archivolt are without any tri-dimensional qualities. There is no perceptual clash because the symbol of St. John, the figure of the saint and the spaces they occupy are separated by frames.

The neutral and transitional quality of frames, even the simplest frames, was known and employed in Late Classical codices. In the "Rebekah Welcoming Eliezir" from The Vienna Genesis, (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. theol. gr. 31, folio 14r., - figure 27), scenes are divided by 'concealed' frames in the guise of a roof, a ground line and a three-quarter view of a dwelling facade. Regardless of their concealed forms, they are frames. They are frames creating a framework for the composition, unifying and supporting a number of pictorial elements.

The Northern and Mediterranean styles did not dilute or repel each other when combined, largely because frames served as buffer zones. Without frames, the merger might not

have occurred. Even discounting the importance of frames for combining pictorial surface and pictorial space, frames were vital for visual clarity:

we can neither perceive nor understand nor act without carving limited areas out of the world's continuity. Not only does the range of the endless whole and the place of each part in it surpass our comprehension, but the character, function, and weight of each object changes with the particular context in which we see it...To keep an object constant, one has to put a frame around it - and keep the frame unchanged.<sup>14</sup>

The key phrase in this passage is 'the range of the endless whole and the place of each part in it surpass our comprehension...'. Were frames more than literal positioning devices? Making sense out of, or finding the underlying order of, the perceived world is precisely what Margaret Miles defines as a task of religion: "Religion is first and foremost a way of managing this world, the only world we know, which presses us continuously for response, for adjustments, and for decisions."<sup>15</sup> Obviously, it was important for the medieval church to appeal to individuals on all levels and to appease fear and insecurity. Frames provided the literal stability, superstructure, and order on folia, but they also expressed those qualities in the Church. As these codices were the sacred symbols of the religion, their programs stood as visible proof of a powerful, secure and comprehensive belief system.

Miles notes that the comprehension of religious concepts initially relies on forms that are accessible and

easily grasped. Difficult concepts, especially if couched in personal terms that apply to commonplace experience, are understood and remembered. She explains that, "Figurative 'seeing' is dependent upon literal seeing, and the religious life must be conceived and articulated by the use of metaphors based on natural objects if its concepts are not to remain lifeless."<sup>16</sup> Both modes, classical realism and Insular formal illusionism, gave visible proof of Christianity. Historical fact appeared in representations; mysterious physical forces appeared in optical illusion.

Medieval codices are characterized by the combination of two modes: 1) abstract presentation that stimulated sensation and perhaps, emotion and 2) representations of figures in convincing tri-dimensional spatial setting that convincingly described historical fact and objective information (the Last Judgment). All of this, and the framing systems that structured it, were crafted for one purpose - Christian purpose. Sister Charles Murray stresses this connection:

What has happened is that the materials of church history have been mistaken for the history of the Church itself; because church history...has been regarded primarily as based on written documents...Yet the purpose of all this art was religious and therefore it is the theological dimension which in the end is paramount...<sup>17</sup>

Monastic scriptoria were established to produce religious codices.

Whatever the Church needed to communicate would

automatically became the responsibility of the scriptoria. The monumental task of putting concepts and sensations into visual form is not recorded or discussed in writing, but many Church Fathers expressed the fundamental need for visual assistance for spiritual vision. Miles explains:

The transcendence, the majesty, and the silence of God, Gregory of Nyssa said, are more readily presented in images. Because these qualities of God are, rightly understood, not intellectual concepts but primarily sensory experiences, the mind must boggle; a person grasps God's transcendence by the perception of an image that dizzies and before which her or his breath is taken. God's majesty is more easily and accurately expressed by the gold leaf and rich strong colors, the unapproachable gaze...God's impenetrable silence becomes an event and an experience in the contemplation of an image.<sup>18</sup>

The conviction that religious experience, physical vision and sensation were connected began early in Christian thought. Miles summarizes St. Augustine's idea of religious vision, which she calls 'insight', in this way: "for the untrained eye, eyesight is not insight, just as, for the unprepared mind, religious concepts make no sense."<sup>19</sup> The first stage for seeing to some degree, for Augustine, is faith, and the cleansing and training of the mind's eye. The second phase of preparation for spiritual sight is to cleanse the 'eye of the mind', which is followed by the third stage of preparation for the sight of God, namely practice to strengthen the mind's eye.<sup>20</sup> This process involved enormous discipline, culminating in a deep state of contemplation. There are many possible sensations that accompany intense or prolonged viewing: hypnotic states,

hallucinations and extreme physiological discomfort. The effects which result from intense concentrate on colours are after-images and the appearance of motion. Many other effects have now been scientifically recorded, but for medieval programs, what is significant is that theories pertaining specifically to vision did circulate. They originated in the mind of one of the most revered Christian theologians, St. Augustine. His idea that physical vision, trained and concentrated, culminated in spiritual 'sight' never waned in the Middle Ages.

Yet another deep spiritual layer is thought to have persisted in medieval programs, and it involved order:

A method of expressing divine order through abstract structures is traced back to early neo-Platonic and north European pagan images in a variety of genres, including perfect geometric forms, symmetrical palindromes, and monograms. These are seen to provide the syntax, or underlying structure for images of heavenly beings... Schemata were adapted, by the addition of representational elements, to pictographs and figured diagrams, and they provided the hidden structure for fuller renderings of visionary subjects.<sup>21</sup>

The underlying structures would not necessarily be obvious, but they would be perceived subconsciously and evoke certain sensations in the viewer. However, the metaphysical implications of such underpinnings is highly speculative; the traces of metalpoint scoring on folia, which usually is in strict geometric configurations, may be simply the guidelines used to facilitate careful plotting of the composition to avoid errors later. This technical

preparation was particularly needed where more than one hand worked on a folio. This was not unusual because scribes and artists had separate tasks. When a program was elaborate, particularly precise preparation was mandatory. Nonetheless, the qualities that Caviness mentions do have significant sensational ramifications.

Miles expresses regret that in modern society stress is on "the greater skill and training of historians in the interpretation of language than in the interpretation of images", suggesting that "If this imbalance between verbal and visual training were redressed, we could begin to learn the language of images, a language that compensates in effective richness for what it lacks in intellectual exactness."<sup>22</sup> More emphasis in decoding medieval formal programs may lead to a firmer grasp of Christian world perception which is not discussed in literature. An example is superstition.

In the Book of Durrow "Carpet" page, (figure 9), a line cross, on a light ground, in the center medallion, is tucked deep within elaborate, vividly coloured bands of interlaced animals. Although it occupies the significant central core, it is not visually commanding. The question immediately arises: was it designed so that it had to be sought out? And, if so, why? Pagan belief in the 'Evil eye' may have prompted this arrangement. The dense, high keyed, decoration may have been protective - an antidote to evil. Jacqueline

Simpson describes the formal properties of objects designed for this purpose:

glitter and redness are significant; they are meant to catch the attention of the person with the Evil Eye, since it is thought that his power is concentrated in his first glance, and that this will be neutralized if it falls on something as powerful as itself.<sup>23</sup>

The Celts believed that certain objects and flowers also counteracted evil, which may explain many seemingly incongruous images that appear in sacred folia.

Regardless of many indigenous cultural habits, and their influence in artistic design, the major consideration was the attitude and perception of Christianity. Miles explains why visual programs, as ambiguous as they were, were important:

The coordination of intellect and senses in verbal and visual expressions results from a worship and devotional practice that engages the whole human being, in which the senses as well as the intellect are engaged and affirmed.<sup>24</sup>

For rapid and complete conversion, an appeal to all levels of human awareness was prudent, especially where language was undeveloped and cultural traditions were strong. The masterful weaving of text and image provided manifold seduction:

Visual images...are primarily addressed to comprehending physical existence, the great, lonely, yet universal pre-verbal experiences of birth, growth, maturation, pain, illness, ecstasy, weakness, age, sex, death.<sup>25</sup>

The codex was the medium where text and image assimilated

completely; it was the sublime religious vehicle. Bibles and Gospel Books, and the programs they contained, were the vital organs of Christianity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## MEDIEVAL PERSPECTIVES

The accumulation of spatial and framing types in medieval codex design may be baffling if it is evaluated by Greco-Roman and Renaissance pictorial perspective rules. Viewed from the perspective of medieval Christianity, it has a fine logic. Arnheim's observation that "The hunter's world looks different from that of a botanist or poet."<sup>1</sup> sums up why medieval framing and spatial systems require a medieval perspective to be understood. To establish what constituted medieval outlook, religious and mental influences must be examined.

Medieval pictorial perspective systems have been studied. Frames and space exclusive to folio design have not been studied. An area of particular neglect is that of compositional space and frameworks which relied on Celtic and Anglo-Saxon technical innovations. For Insular artists, their patently formal artistic attitude toward folio space provided a framework for all types of pictorial space in later medieval manuscripts. The stance required by the system is mental and religious perspectives in tandem.

Religious ideology was the pervasive medieval perspective. Scripture and Nature were interpreted by the same method of exegesis. The fourfold symbolic sense of Scripture also applied to literature. Since both word and image derive from a common source and were interchangeable

in medieval thought, images would have been subject to the interpretation method used for literature. Four spatial modes consistently used in folia conveniently accommodate four symbolic image types. Moreover, four distinct spatial progressions parallel the stages of religious growth from physical experience to enlightenment. The formal framework that supported these symbols in folio design was itself a potential symbol of cosmic order, balance and proportion.

Since frames were commanding images and images areas, their symbolic potential was equal to that of other images. Had they retained the representational role they had in Late Antique painting, their potential as symbolic images would have been severely restricted. Insular formal aspects introduced a range of ambiguity which was prime for symbolic expression. It has been observed that "many features of medieval art, whether stylised and heraldic or hallucinatory and deformed, originated in the demands of form rather than expression. And this was no accident...for medieval theories of art are invariably theories of formal composition, not of feeling and expression."<sup>2</sup> Medieval folio composition was a conglomeration of elements composed by means of a framework of frames.

Interwoven frame- and letter-forms in many Celtic and Anglo-Saxon 'Incarnation' folia present potent religious concepts. The designation 'icon' is applicable for framed words because, "As the word became a means of instruction

through hearing, so did the icon through vision."<sup>3</sup> Elaborated letters represent the Word, and in their formal presentation fulfill the requirements of an icon: "The icon is not a form of visual and aesthetic art as such; it is, primarily, an expression of the theological experience and faith of the Church, and a statement of it."<sup>4</sup> According to strict definition, frames are not icons because they constitute the form of a sign (word), and the word itself does not resemble in tangible form that which it stands for. However, the visual configuration, frames and letters, are true Christian symbols 'on the basis of analogy.'<sup>5</sup> They are analogies for the spoken rhythm and metre of sacred signs (words).

Parallels for the divine abound in medieval folia:

Attributing allegorical meanings to art meant regarding it in the same light as nature, as a living storehouse of image...Art was seen as an organism, a Gestalt, in an age when nature also was thought of as something evolutionary, or at least as Gestaltung, as exhibiting an organic growth and development of forms. Nature was seen as a vast allegorical representation of the supernatural, and art was put on the same level.<sup>6</sup>

Eco does not explain why art was granted the same status as nature. Possibly retinal stimulation from art was valued as the equivalent of light on surfaces in nature. Certainly the inherent imprecision of meaning in abstract forms and the apparent directional movements in formal compositions were recognized for their magical (mystical) qualities. Natural substance (pigment, animal skin, metal etc.) did not compete

with nature - it was an aspect of nature. It could be arranged to embody 'order and measure'. These qualities were symbols of divinity in medieval theological perspective.

Layered meanings and functions were commonplace in medieval thought. The same attitude toward symbolism may have saturated visual forms. If this was true, many aspects of human experience may have been appealed to simultaneously in visual compositions. Art historians might benefit from the advice given to students of medieval Bible Study: "one must live there long enough to slip into their ways and appreciate the logic of their strict, elaborately fantastic conventions...Allegory is 'a wise architect who directs the superstructure built upon a literal foundation.' Every syllable of the inspired text may serve in laying this basis."<sup>7</sup> Because abstract forms are susceptible to personal interpretation, they provided an ideal superstructure to support symbolic meaning. They were the 'literal foundation' for image and text in folia.

In the 1930s Beryl Smalley announced what became of great significance to medieval study. She observed that "If we would understand their thought, we can scarcely neglect what they held to be of fundamental importance, a reflection which leads us to a study of medieval exegesis. The multiple interpretation; its technique, and its value to those who used it, are just beginning to be discussed."<sup>8</sup> The

established patterns of symbolic thought were well known in the circulated writings of influential church thinkers.

The paradox of symbolic thought is that now, despite the advances in scientific exploration, some scholars remain hesitant to assign symbolic meaning to medieval formal art:

Although it is in the sciences that today is to be found the closest approximation to the medieval symbolic spirit, through the belief in such elements as unity, reconciliation of opposites, and meaningfulness of total environment, yet it was the growth of the scientific method which made impossible further hold on the symbolic method among the people.<sup>9</sup>

On the whole, semantic systems in the West have been ignored.<sup>10</sup> This is now changing following the lead of scriptural hermeneutics. Recent collaboration in specialized fields within the Humanities hastens the emerging conviction that "In the use of the insight symbol lies the secret of the intellectual tradition of the Middle Ages."<sup>11</sup> In a spirit of co-operation, the Middle Ages begins to resemble the cohesive unit of intention and thought that it probably was. This brings with it the need to continuously re-examine the assumptions tentatively held until now.

The view that medieval thought was well ordered and pervasively religious is presenting new priorities for scholarship. An important area is liturgy, especially the role and place of biblical texts in liturgical practice. It is thought that the "Christian connection between the liturgical (biblical) word and a Christian image may be

authoritative; it may even be official."<sup>12</sup> Liturgy provides a valuable source of information concerning the poignant issues of the people, the time and the development of Christian thinking. The perspective of ritual is of vital significance because rituals appear in art and literature as well as in personal and communal devotions.<sup>13</sup> The liturgical cycle unfolded in time, gradually, predictably, and repeatedly. It was both a secure cornerstone for daily life and a symbol of continuity. Liturgical ritual created a perspective of cyclic time. The events of life were marked by sacramental ritual. It was a symbol of progression in time.

Just as human experience and activity was bound in religious ritual, the sensible world and Christian dogma were fused. The Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture were inseparable from medieval Christian perspective. In perfect balance, Scripture and Nature "formed an acoustically structured double-plot; like wave and particle, each served as ground for the other."<sup>14</sup> McLuhan continues to note that this interplay ended with the invention of mechanical printing.

Religion and science were viewed as mutually informing. Literature, like nature, was subject to the fourfold symbolic method. Literal meaning was compounded by allegorical meaning, tropological (moral) meaning and anagogical (spiritual) meaning. On this subject, McLuhan

notes that "there was an allegorical significance, as Bede and Hugh of St. Victor tell us, in things as well as in words."<sup>15</sup> Nothing escaped the comprehensive weave of the religious fabric.

From the stance of 'acoustic' thinking, the interconnectedness of all things was natural. As McLuhan points out, 'visual space', the by-product of centuries of alphabetic indoctrination, did not replace the 'acoustic' mode until after the Medieval period. According to McLuhan, the process of transformation from the natural 'acoustic' to the alphabetically produced 'visual' state took "several thousand years to complete" and "has taken several decades to reverse..."<sup>16</sup> through the inventions of electronic media. However, it cannot be considered as a true reversal. The modern situation is unlike that of the Middle Ages because religious ideology no longer permeates all experience and endeavor. Understanding the present helps to identify why twentieth century scholars and artists have not shared the same passion for formal art. It explains why the interpretation of medieval art is problematic from a modern scholastic perspective. McLuhan explains the predicament created by 'structurally right-hemisphere...and oral' media:

This situation began with the telegraph more than a century ago. Still, the overwhelming pattern of procedures in the Western world remains lineal, sequential and connected in political and legal institutions, and also in education and commerce, but not in entertainment or art. A formula for complete chaos!<sup>17</sup>

No such chaos existed in the Middle Ages.

Medieval monastic scriptoria were in the forefront of the literacy campaign. Yet, it was not until secular education, commercial book production, and commercial and ruling systems were firmly established that the results of visual thinking appeared in science, literature, philosophy and visual art. During the Middle Ages the Church propagated the conviction that religion was the ground of human existence. The codices produced by her patronage reflect that stance. This is the perspective that modern interpretation requires.

The Celtic and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts discussed here display the characteristics of natural, 'acoustic' space. In this spatial mode the sense of sight is not isolated from, but forcefully interacts with, other senses. Medieval folio designs, saturated by formal elements of equal weight and density, comply with the McLuhan description of simultaneous field composition:

In the iconic and mosaic form there is no attempt to reduce space to a single, uniform and connected character such as was done with perspective: it is a simultaneous field of relations...the 'two-dimensional' mosaic or painting is the mode in which there is muting of the visual as such, in order that there may be maximal interplay among all the senses. Such was the painterly strategy 'since Cezanne', to paint as if you held, rather than as if you saw objects...Cubism (multi-locationalism) is one of the painterly forms of acoustic space.<sup>18</sup>

After the Late Antique and early Insular traditions merged into the new, medieval system, qualities of both the 'seen'

and the 'held' were juxtaposed. Frames facilitated the union of fundamentally disparate artistic traditions.

The design of a 'Carpet' page does not impose a fixed vantage point for the viewer. The only sense of distance between the spectator and the design is that of real, physical distance. Every image, placement and property is on the pictorial plane. Distance and movement are retinal effects, not intellectual constructions. The stance of knowing, seeing and feeling simultaneously, coupled with the perspective of Scripture and Nature as complementary, may have encouraged a multi-leveled method of interpretation for visual forms.

Gilson's description of how St. Bonaventure exemplified the medieval tradition used for Scripture and Nature may be extended to apply to visual forms:

Since the universe was offered to his eyes as a book to be read and he saw in nature a sensible revelation analogous to that of the Scriptures, the traditional methods of interpretation which had always been applied to the sacred books could equally be applied to the book of creation. Just as there is an immediate and literal sense of the profane text, but also an allegorical sense by which we discover the truths of faith that the letter signifies, a tropological sense by which we discover a moral precept behind the passage in the form of an historical narrative, and an anagogical sense by which our souls are raised to the love and desire of God, so we must not attend to the literal and immediate sense of the book of creation but look for its inner meaning in theological, moral and mystical lesson that it contains. The passage from one of these two spheres to the other is the more easily affected in that they are in reality inseparable.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately the 'Incarnation initial' folia seen earlier, (figures 7, 14, 25), come to mind. The concept of aspects,

separate, yet interdependent, is visually presented. At one time a shape is perceived as a letter (sign). In almost the same instant it is transformed into an image (symbol). Form and concept are interchangeable; formal properties (nature) and Scriptural truth are perceived as figure and ground alternately.

Another aspect is important here. An elaborated Chi-Rho is a ritual symbol, and therefore poignant in that it met basic human needs:

If the ritual urge is such a common factor in human life, then liturgy as an outlet should have a specific value in this sense, quite apart from its effectiveness in salvation history. As a canonically regulating agency it is markedly communal in its action, and obliterates to some extent social differences. And it creates, like any form of ritual, situations of almost complete predictability, which apparently answer deep-rooted needs in men and animals. The communal and predictable elements are reinforced by a third one, also imminently ritual, that of 'escape from the subjective self into a world of objective values.'<sup>20</sup>

The treatment of that which the ritual letters symbolize was central to liturgical practice. These forms were required to surpass all others. In the visual quickening, the designs 'make the concept happen'. They do not describe it. they demonstrate it. In formal presentational form, these 'objective values' transcend cultural barriers. Throughout Christendom, this symbol was known.

Such presentations involve mimesis; they evoke instantaneous sensations. McLuhan follows the change from 'mimesis' to 'being' that accompanied the transformation

from oral to alphabetic literacy:

with mimesis, 'being' had been immersed in the metaphoric and Protean flux of everyone's daily experience. With the new ground of alphabetic awareness, objectivity and detachment became the rule. Mimesis was turned from a making process into representational matching...<sup>21</sup>

The 'Incarnation' letter forms are not presented to be read as letter-signs that are immediately related to mental concepts by convention and agreement. These letters are forms to be experienced visually. The concept is made real for the sense of sight. If the viewer can read, a further dimension is available, but it is not dominant.

The 'Incarnation' configuration is accessible in space. It is not 'closed' within an outer frame zone. The viewer is not forced into a fixed, and distant, position. The image of the Chi-Rho is immediately in front of the viewer, apparently hovering on an undulating sea of disks. This spatial quality, in terms of accessibility to the viewer, is opposite to the receding distance behind a picture plane in classical art. An example is the Genoa Bible folio, (figure 6), in which the frames, and their images come forward into the viewer's space. The scenes are spatially remote from the spectator. This phenomenon effects objectivity: "the pictorial composition in the particular arrangement of interior space in any image to some extent affects the onlooker's feeling of relation..."<sup>22</sup> In the 'Incarnation' folio the viewer is not kept at a distance. In Incarnation context, intimacy conforms to the idea

since "Christ the Mediator bridges 'the enormous distance separating man from God.'"<sup>23</sup> The frames assure the intimacy between the concept and the viewer, weaving the picture space and the actual space of the viewer together.

Miles proposes a new way of assessing the role of images in relation to words for people of the past, one that is not "Grounded in self-identification with a classical hegemonikon, soul, reason, ego, or subjective consciousness, but on the primary connectedness of human beings to the natural world by fragile and transitory bodies."<sup>24</sup> She considers the proper perspective to be one that recognizes:

a world of relationships that receive their origin, their structure, and their energy from physical existence - kinship and social relationships, the 'body politic'... 'body of Christ'... human life itself is understood as given in physical existence - creation - and fulfilled only in physical existence - resurrection of the body.<sup>25</sup>

The Church has always employed familiar objects to explain difficult concepts, but that is not to suggest that the designs or their structures were simple or single in aspect. Quite the contrary, they are wonders of complexity that required full viewer participation. In taking up this role, the viewer was, and still is, rewarded richly by often entertaining - but always religious - experience.

Medieval folia abound with 'perceptual surprises', in the words of Gombrich, who goes on to discuss "the licence enjoyed by medieval draughtsmen. His exploitation of the unexpected helps to create and maintain visual interest -

what could be more unexpected than the whimsical creations which play hide and seek in the 'inhabited scrolls' of medieval art?"<sup>26</sup> When these images are seen in religious perspective they provide the viewer with an intimate, and personally involving, experience. The Kells "Incarnation folio", (figure 7), presents a bountiful world of majesty and humility - the divine and the meek occupy the same intricately wrought field - a field of interchanging spaces of force and rest.

Amid pulsating eddies and fluent line, an opening reveals a scene with two cats and four mice (figure 28). In the center, two mice, in profile, face each other and hold the opposite sides of a white disk in their mouths. The disk is decorated with barely discernible fine lines that define a central cross-form that is set in a scalloped line frame. The six small creatures pose against a red ground - the only area of this kind within the lush elaboration. A tail of the massive Chi and the cross-form base that supports the Rho-Iota frame the scene. The vignette is perceived to be behind the plane that carries the solid mass of complex planes and geometric shapes. The Rho-Iota configuration, which is framed by the two purple forms, the Chi and the lower left-hand corner frame section, appears as a figure on a ground of ornament. The formal structure with its perceptual nuances, brings the imagery, in progressive stages, up and into the viewer's

space. The design is like a precious jewel-encrusted, fibula that rests on parchment; it has no frame.

Gombrich is not disturbed by an arrangement of seemingly disparate subjects with a sacred symbol, because "All great works of art gather up a rich variety of human experience. Homer and Shakespeare have given ample proof that humour and laughter will enrich rather than impair the universal significance of their creations."<sup>27</sup> The unobtrusive vignette, which is now enigmatic, demonstrates the distance between medieval and contemporary perspectives. The meaning is lost.

In medieval perspective there were essentially two types of symbolism which:

expressed an aesthetic conception of the world. There were, however, two forms of it. Firstly there was **metaphysical symbolism**, related to the philosophical habit of discerning the hand of God in the beauty of the world. Secondly there was **universal allegory**; that is, perceiving the world as a divine work of art, of such a kind that everything in it possesses a moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings in addition to its literal meaning.<sup>28</sup>

Virtually every image, mark, colour and space could be construed as having allegorical significance. Once the process of investigating allegorical symbolism is initiated, the possibilities are infinite. What now appears to be enigmatic was probably clear to those who possessed 'right judgment', especially the 'insight-symbol'. It depends on subjective interpretation:

the image offers a 'floating chain of signified', a wide but finite range of possible meanings...Theological texts

and religious images have a similar structure for interpretation. Both have legitimate claims to different kinds of universality; both are inevitably interpreted on the basis of the perspective, values, and interests of the interpreter.<sup>29</sup>

There is no means by which to recapture the meanings of these folia, except through interpretation grounded in medieval perspective.

The technical mastery of order, proportion and unity was unshakable despite the folio's relatively small size (33cm x 24cm), complicated program, variety of pattern and the limits of the materials and the medium. Gombrich states that "Contemplating the page one realizes that the distinction I have proposed between the constraints of the material and those of geometry cannot always be upheld."<sup>30</sup> The Book of Kells "Incarnation" folio, in formal compositional structure, fuses visual form with religious perspective. Through an appeal to sight, the viewer is drawn into 'contemplation' - concentrated focus on spiritual concepts. Considering the design as a symbol, it shows how "The use of one symbol in many senses was natural to the medieval mind, ever conscious as it was of the unity underlying all things."<sup>31</sup> Frames (lines, bands, borders, and planes) fuse sundry ideas into one unified form.

The longer the folio is studied, the more it reveals. But the revelations only yield to prolonged concentration -contemplation. This is an example of what St. Augustine referred to and which Miles defines as "Theoria:

...contemplation in which one is lifted out of one's familiar world and into the living presences of the spiritual world..." and it "begins with physical vision, with a trained and concentrated seeing that overcomes conceptual barriers between the visible and the spiritual worlds."<sup>32</sup> This suggests an anagogical experience. It is the situation that occurs when a difficult idea is grasped - a form of enlightenment - a glimpse of truth, a sudden understanding of something evasive, deep and vast.

This design has, in its formal spatial character, the quality of mimesis, which the McLuhans describe as: "The 'thing known' ceases to be an object of attention and becomes instead a ground for the knower to put on. It violates all the properties of visual order, allowing neither objectivity, nor detachment, nor any rational uniformity of experience..."<sup>33</sup> The observer is pulled into the image space (the observer becomes the figure) and actively participates in its unfolding. There is a very real sense of intimacy in a visually kinetic environment. The configuration, and its formal character, reaches the viewer directly, which is the nature of 'acoustic' space. There is no escape except turning away. This opportunity vanished after alphabetic literacy became firmly established. M. D. Faber notes that words become impediments to direct experience after alphabetization: "Words in this regard become a mentalistic filter which impedes direct contact,

clarity of vision, awareness. The incessant inward babble that comprises our ordinary consciousness..."<sup>34</sup> Given the medieval belief that The Word became Man, and that the Word presented in Gospel folia was tangible proof, the animated quality suggests that the process is taking place before the viewer's eyes. The barriers that attend alphabetization were as yet to form in the ninth century Celtic mind.

Physiognomic perception of this folio relies on the juxtaposition of opposites: complementary colours; rectilinear and curvilinear shapes and patterns; smooth and rough textures; and advancing and receding spatial effects, all of which depend on frames and the framework. At this level, the design is purely formal and initiates immediate and intimate involvement. The notion that the spectator has been personally drawn into the process by which the Word took human form - enacted by formal properties and abstract forms in dynamic spatial relationship - is supported by another layer of meaning.

Within a field of pulsating, fluid space a letter-form terminates in the head of a man (figure 29). The sense of the Word quickening is supported by representational imagery, and the verbal meaning of the passage. In contrast to the turbulence of the field and the rakish angle of the Chi, the Rho-Iota is solidly vertical. At the point where the Rho ends and the Iota is broken by red bands, a man's head terminates the form - at the center. The body-less head

is distinguished by a circle of yellow that is formed by the negative spaces of the Rho and the Iota forms. The man's yellow hair and the circle, which frame the face, are decorated with fine red lines. A further frame, on three sides of the head, is the same red band that frames the letters. In one place, below the head, the two letters fuse together, and in another, above the head, the Iota overlaps the Rho. The shifting positions created by these spatial contradictions are reiterated in the base where both letters develop out of the arms of a cross with a central step-patterned insert framed in yellow. Contrasted with a regal purple and gold initial letter, the Rho and the Iota are banded in a vivid red that is offset by yellow bands. Although the letters spring from a common source, the Rho ends within the configuration and the Iota extends upward suggesting a column shaft with its capital supporting the elegantly curved right-hand side of the monumental Chi. The Rho-Iota is dominant. Colour illuminates it; it is the only major area of the surface that is framed. It is anchored firmly by the regal purple and yellow Chi. The sharply angular, similarly treated, corner frame, re-enforces the vertical orientation of the great Chi by bracing it. This highly irregular frame arrangement illustrates the dexterity of both the framing system and the designer. It also demonstrates the perfect balance of image and word in medieval thinking.

The Book of Kells 'Chi-Rho' folio presents the central concept of Christian dogma and liturgy in three distinct forms: verbal (the letter-forms), sensational (the formal configuration), and experiential (representations of known figures and objects). It can be understood by anyone.

Every space in this design is critical and used to heighten the overall effect. The wide range of modulation in scale and shape takes it beyond the standard horror vacui principle. Compared to the restraint and simplicity of Classical composition, Insular design is the epitome of meaningful content and visual complexity. It is permeated with jewel-like radiance, lush undergrowths of delicacy and many restful pauses which counterpoint the density of other passages. Gombrich believes that "The urge which drives the decorator to go on filling any resultant void is generally described as horror vacui, which is supposedly characteristic of many non-classical styles. Maybe the term Amor infiniti, the love of the infinite, would be a more fitting description." <sup>35</sup> In the case of early medieval folio design, Gombrich's term is ideal. The medieval religious perspective dictated that sensibility. Eco explains: "Their aesthetics, like all their thinking, expressed an optimum synthesis. They saw the world with the eyes of God."<sup>36</sup>

It is especially pertinent to any consideration of perceptual effects to understand that they only take on meaning through association. Gombrich explains that "Only

when these 'sense impressions' became associated in the mind could we build up a picture of the world outside. There are no 'innate ideas', man has no teacher except experience."<sup>37</sup> It follows that the medieval draftsman looked to nature for guidance in determining proper order and balance. What he saw was a vast, continuous field of elements in relationships and dynamic interactions. The idea was not to reproduce the natural world in pictorial form. To imitate natural order, proportion and balance was the ideal. Medieval artists did not have any pictorial spatial perspective to speak of. They comprehended the perspective of God's order and the place of the sensible in relation to the divine. The well known Treatise by the monk/artist, Theophilus, stresses 'order and measure'.<sup>38</sup> This brings to mind St. Augustine's statement that "All created things...show unity, species, and order. From this we can see that God is triune. So all created things teach us something of the Creator: they are vestigia trinitatis."<sup>39</sup>

The great advantage of line is that it is an abstract building system. The natural world does not possess such convenient demarcations, nor are its elements connected by a visible network. Through the use of line, the idea of the underlying structure of things could be presented. To recreate nature was unthinkable: to learn God's design principles was within the bounds of reason in the religious sense.

A conceptual approach in which frames delineated everything was beneficial. Many elements could co-exist in relatively small spaces and different types, or styles, of imagery did not clash. Only in the periodic renaissances of classical methods were painterly techniques used in western European codices until the Late Gothic period. An example is 'The Four Evangelists Writing Their Gospels' from the Aachen Gospels, (Aachen, Cathedral Treasury, folio 13r. -figure 30). It is clear why this technique was not well suited to codices in which a great deal of material had to be organized in a limited area. The Evangelists miniature dominates the folio, the frame is the severe type that signals a 'picture plane', but is not a plane for imagery.

When a desire for realism increased, three solutions for the problem of accommodating a great amount of diverse imagery in small areas were used: 1) compounded 'picture planes' (a variation on the Hiberno-Saxon compound frame planes); 2) a formal network that restricted depictions in vignettes or inserts; and 3) use of paintings to frame the text and formal material. An example of the first solution is a decorated page from a Breviary (Glasgow, Hunterian Museum, MS Bf 1.18, folio 14r., -figure 31). The illusion of two pages, the upper one torn to reveal the other below, accommodates representational imagery, text and decorative motifs. The formal effect is that the 'picture planes' frame the text on the right-hand, and lower margin areas,

but that perception is neutralized because the picture in the lower zone is perceived to continue behind the illusionary torn page. The 'Genesis' page from the Genoa Bible, (figure 6) employs a similar system whereby the bands of scenes appear to frame the text. The remaining solution did not rely on illusionism. In the opening page of a Bible Historiale (London, British Library, Royal MS 17. E. VII, folio 1r., - figure 32), the outer frame is drafted with openwork made up of tendrils of ivy entwined around a simple bar frame. Employment of a stylized cross within a square solves the problem of dividing the 'picture plane' into five sections. In essence, the design is formal with semi-naturalistic inserts. The variations were almost endless. To present a large amount of material on folio space, the early attitude toward surface was retained or translated into 'fool the eye' illusion. Underlying the illusion are Celtic and Anglo-Saxon formal compositional principles.

The surprising lack of modern scholarly attention given to medieval folia frames may be a clue to how they were originally conceived. They are usually unobtrusive, unless they become active image areas or images. Generally, frames tend to go unnoticed compared to other visual elements. Only rarely will a decorative pattern in a frame lure the viewer to the extent of a naturalistic depiction in a 'picture plane'. The nature of frame structures is so

versatile that all of their potential could be pressed into service, or they could be made to function structurally without drawing attention away from more significant forms.

Predictability played a role in determining how visually commanding the frame would be. The St. Barbara folio (figure 23) is an example of a frame that insists on notice. This is achieved by the frame occupying a significant area, but also because it is wider on the right-hand side and bottom than the other two sides. Meticulously rendered insects and flowers strewn on a gold ground draw the viewer's attention immediately. This intensifies the atmospheric effect of great distance behind the room in which St. Barbara awaits her future. The imagery is also significant. The saint is strategically positioned in a middle zone - between the small wonders of the physical world and the terrible fate that will sever her from it. Her plight is dramatized by illusions of space - time. She is depicted on a plane behind the frame. The visual delights on the frame plane are in the viewer's space, hidden from the isolated saint. This device of presenting events in time related to the spectator was not an invention of the late Middle Ages. Many examples from early medieval manuscripts employ this tunnel effect created by compound planes.

The effect of compound planes in a formal system is intense: the viewer begins with material that appears to

be close and is gradually drawn deeper, through successive planes, into imagery that has the appearance of not being as immediately accessible as the images on the foremost plane. This arrangement constitutes a hierarchical system of spatial distance. In the 'St. Barbara' folio the use of realism heightens and compounds the hierarchical order of space in advance, recession and on the main parchment plane. The back wall of the small room occupied by the saint has an opening through which the space beyond is visible. This device, the 'window aspect',<sup>40</sup> employs a plane concealed as a representational figure to reveal more planes. The progression from the large objects on the initial plane to the apparent great depth of distance between St. Barbara and the tower, gives the sensation of intense focus. Confined views in tautly organized planal openings contribute to a sense of privileged glimpses through time.

In a description of the St. Barbara folio, David M. Robb states that, "Yet another attempted resolution of the aesthetic contradiction between the two-dimensional book page and script, and its three-dimensional pictorial embellishment is seen..."<sup>41</sup> This author misses the subtlety and ingenuity with which a fundamental spatial principle was exploited to depict dramatic events in space that implies time. The idea of moving in both directions from the parchment plane was a masterful adaptation of the device used in early Hiberno-Saxon formal programs. It is also a

device that relies completely on frames and framework. The 'contradiction' is a matter of perspective. If the classical perspective is adopted, the solution is less successful. If the medieval perspective of accommodating a panoramic glimpse of a series of events, personal suffering and a text on a tiny folio is assumed, the result is eminently successful. It is a matter of perspective.

The great impact that words and images had in shaping the West is generally accepted.<sup>42</sup> The importance of images in the Middle Ages is agreed upon, but finding their exact importance remains problematic. Fully aware of the inherent risks involved in evaluating visual ambiguity, Miles suggests that "We must reconstruct on the evidence of the images themselves the spectrum of messages that were likely to be received by the worshippers who lived with them in vitally interested contemplation on a daily basis throughout their lives...we must be content with working hypotheses, suggestions, and the description of a range of probable interpretations rather than 'proof' for a single meaning identical for all persons who had access to the image."<sup>43</sup> The relationship of word and image in the shaping of world perspective in the Middle Ages was formidable. The role of images in medieval manuscripts was far greater than historical study has traditionally acknowledged. What appears to be decoration may be of enormous religious significance.

Philosophers now assert that both words and images stem from the same root and are not as different as previously assumed:

The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relation of warp and woof...language or imagery looks into its own heart and finds lurking there its opposite number...The modern pictorial image, like the ancient notion of 'likeness', is at last revealed to be linguistic in its inner workings.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship of words and images was that of a framing system, or more accurately, the 'framing and filling' process described by Gombrich. It has been observed that, "From the 8th to the 14th centuries the Bibliae Pauperum interweave texts and illustrations in which the writing decorates and reveals the image, just as the images illustrate the text; they frame one another."<sup>45</sup> We see this literally on folia, which suggests that the two systems were of equal intensity and were not considered to involve entirely different mental processes. Both communicated vital information. In this sense, words and images were figures and ground simultaneously.

Texts and images formed the nucleus of religious communication. The medium was a monopoly of the Church in the Middle Ages. It was a part of a campaign that was charged with life and death significance. Active viewer participation was needed to unravel a mesh of manifold meaning. As Eco points out, medieval Europeans

enjoyed the challenge of puzzles, mazes and riddles. Visual programs containing mind testers were presented in the intimate medium of the codex. They were hand held, viewed at close range, and imposed no time limits on the spectator. Layers of symbolism (literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical) were hidden deep within visual configurations. They are to be found if the viewer is predisposed to the possibility that symbolic levels exist.

Science now documents illusions and perceptual tricks which people in the Middle Ages also would have experienced. Yet no extant medieval literature discusses such occurrences. There are copious references to visions and dreams which may have been misinterpretations of retinal and perceptual illusions. Mystical theories and experiences were recorded throughout the Middle Ages, and the strange area in Biblical symbolism - anagogical experience - has connotations of unusual occurrences. Thus far anagogical symbolism has been ignored by art historians with but the outstanding exception of Panofsky's discussion of Abbot Suger's record of the rebuilding of St. Denis.<sup>46</sup> Miles broaches the topic when she refers to St. Augustine's views about the vision of God that relied on "a coordination of physics and metaphysics which grounded his 'vision' of the process and goal of human life."<sup>47</sup> Contemplation of the sensations evoked in formal programs can lead to an understanding of the things that matter.

Francoise Henry describes her experience, and insights, of the Kells 'Chi-Rho' folio (figure 7):

Imperceptibly, we have come down from the dizzy heights of symbol and mystery to the most familiar of everyday realities, from transcendental theology to genre scenes. But caution is still necessary. The cats and kittens in the Chi-Rho are not engaged in homely comedy. Whatever their exact meaning, they are gathered around a cross-bearing disc which brings them into line with the other symbols of the page.<sup>48</sup>

This description, and the design itself, illustrates the enormous impact of folia on human sensibility. With meager technology, modest materials and the probable absence of guidebooks or formal training, the most extraordinary visual feats were accomplished.

Underscoring the fabric of words and images, bound and separated by line and its variations, was a world vision in which all things are connected and mutually informing. Miles stresses the theoretical basis for imagery: "Historically in western christian societies, images provided representations of the nature of reality and the range of human possibilities that intimately informed the emotional, spiritual, and individual lives of individuals."<sup>49</sup> Medieval perspective must be seen as St. Bonaventure expressed it: "All created things symbolize God."<sup>50</sup> The marvels of colour, shapes, patterns and proportional order and balance are, by their essence, aspects of God's creation - the natural world.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## FOLIO FRAMES AND SPACE AND MEDIEVAL AESTHETICS

The frames in folio designs are usually abstract elements of compositional order. At the same time, they are often compositional fields. Frames appear in, around and under folio compositions. They are integral aspects of the aesthetic significance of folia. Panofsky claims that "a work of art always has aesthetic significance (not to be confused with aesthetic value): whether or not it serves some practical purpose, and whether it is good or bad, it demands to be experienced aesthetically..." and he continues to say that "It is possible to experience every object, natural or man-made aesthetically. We do this, to express it as simply as possible, when we just look at it...without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside of itself."<sup>1</sup> Folio frames, in their basic form as simply devices of spatial organization, are without emotional and intellectual associations. They are concepts, not elements found in nature.

Although frames are often reminiscent of architectural constructions, the spaces they delimit are completely abstract. Schapiro notes that "such a field corresponds to nothing in nature or mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up in a vague and unbounded void."<sup>2</sup> The idea of the frame is a manifestation of imagination. It has no emotional or intellectual implications.

Despite this basic neutrality of frames and the space they define, frame forms and planes in medieval folio design were frequently fashioned to be related to many things outside of themselves. Moreover, medieval aesthetics, like medieval mental perspective, was gestalt.

The only physical frame on a folio is the 'scar'<sup>3</sup> that cuts and determines the outer edges of the parchment. Otherwise folio frames are representations of frames or abstract boundaries. As conceptual boundaries, they are usually so well integrated into the composition that they are barely perceptible. At other times, they are obvious. Frames function as compositional members and as figures and grounds depending on how they are placed and rendered.

Frames are always subject to the human need to find order. This sets up certain expectations whenever the regularity and geometry of frames is recognized. An example of how expectations influence what is assumed to be a frame (figure) or a frame's field (ground) is the 'Carpet Page with Inlaid Panels', (figure 24). The frames fluctuate between operating as figure and ground. The field of folio designs often incorporates normal figure/ground situations. Figures and grounds can be fixed as frames and fields or as frames and fields that alternate functions.

Negative space (ground) was frequently used as an active positive element. This is demonstrated in the raw parchment area in the 'Imago Leonis', (figure 8), where the

spaces between the red bands are interpreted as figure or ground (the frame can be seen as a plane flanked by red bands, or an extension of the parchment ground outside the red moldings).

The need for, and the needs of, Christian codices gave rise to a unique aesthetic attitude. The evolution of the frame is described as, "initially the frame was a simple ornament appended to the work of art. Then it began to play a role in one's perception of the art, finally becoming an autonomous sign."<sup>4</sup> The transformation can be seen in 'Lot Defending his House', (figure 2), and the Incarnation Initial, (figure 7).

It is frequently noted that "medieval art achieved a sense of order and beauty and colour..."<sup>5</sup> In codices this often depended on frameworks. A completely abstract framework permitted almost endless variations and scope for balancing formal design elements. Even with the limitation of a restricted palette, dynamic effects were possible through judicious shape and colour manipulation. Eco identifies the technical method used to achieve the aesthetic of colour and light: "it depended on a reciprocal coupling of hues that generated its own brilliance."<sup>6</sup> He continues to note how "Apart from single colours, however, philosophers and mystics alike were enthralled by luminosity in general, and by the sun's light. Medieval literature is filled with joyous acclaim of the effulgence of daylight and

fire."<sup>7</sup>

Descriptions of colour and light abound in medieval literature, but the Celts constantly used "distinctive colour words" and often they had "minor varieties of a colour."<sup>8</sup> Luminosity, or the lack of it, was significant in descriptions of heaven and hell. In St. Brendan's "Vision of Hell" 'black' is used seven times and 'dark' is repeated five times, and images of fire are repeated:

in the prisons of fire, in streams of waves of everlasting fire, in a cup of eternal sorrow, in black dark sloughs, in chairs of mighty flame...A place in which there are frosty, bitter, everlastingly fetid, widespread, wide-stretched, agitated, grievous, putrid, deliquescent, burning, bare, rapid, full-fiery streams...rough thorny moors; black fiery forests...<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the vision of God is described as:

If human eyes should see it, they would be instantly melted...he will find on every side of Him a peerless face, seven times as bright as the sun; but he will not see the shape of man on Him, with head or foot, but a fiery mass burning throughout the world, and everyone trembling in terror before Him. Heaven and earth are filled with His brilliance...<sup>10</sup>

A linear system that framed many cells of colour was ideal to give light and colour full rein. It is indeed rare not to find a spectrum of colour balances and contrasts in folio design. The spatial distinctions between, and in, frames possibly related to the natural world and how man experiences it. Gombrich argues that the withdrawal of artforms from naturalism is not a withdrawal from the world, and he asserts that the style chosen by artists is not accidental.<sup>11</sup> The continuation of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon

formalism in medieval art was partially based on the belief that "ornament represented everything that was rich, splendid and beautiful, and where the artist related it to holy scripture it was his own way of glorifying God."<sup>12</sup> Kitzinger also recognizes that, even before the medieval period, artists had begun to be concerned with "the abstract relationship between things rather than the things themselves."<sup>13</sup> The natural world and all its wonders were important - they were manifestations of God - but it was more the essence of those things that artists presented.

A great deal of Christian practice centers around celebrations - celebrations involving all the senses and the entire community. Every individual participated in the sacraments. Liturgical rites were designed to include each individual. Jungmann describes how "not only was the prayer spoken in the plural, but it had also to be explicitly co-executed by the people...Before the invitation [to join in] the priest turned toward the faithful and conveyed to them a formal greeting, one which they in turn had to answer, thereby expressing their union with the celebrant."<sup>14</sup> The scope of sensory stimulation included in celebrations was well established by Gregory the Great's time. Splendid vestments, vessels and manuscripts, illuminated by candle light, pleased the eye; incense and beeswax candles delighted the sense of smell; chanted prayers and songs appealed to the sense of hearing. The

experience was communal and aesthetic. Within this context, Gospel Books and Bibles displayed glorious illuminations. Light and colour were fundamental. Order, proportion and balance were natural companions to prismatic luminosity.

A number of studies<sup>15</sup> have been conducted in the hopes of determining a canon of proportion and order in medieval folio design. The outcome usually suggests that the author is in search of a predetermined scheme. Frequently they fail to account for the creative act - intuitive recognition of valuable qualities as they emerge during the process of forming a configuration. Metaphysical references may attend certain numbers and numerical sequences, but composing according to strict mathematical formulae is lifeless. The energy of design in the making is organic and intuitive. Eco explains that in medieval sensibility it is "the theory that beauty resides in the proportion which reveals and is produced by the splendor of form, where form means quidditas, the essence of things."<sup>16</sup> The desire of modern scholars to tap into medieval aesthetic philosophy is constantly frustrated when a mathematical matrix is sought. But, whenever, a broad conceptual approach is taken, the results are more fruitful.<sup>17</sup>

It seems, despite stock hierarchical arrangements of certain images, it was the search for balance, order and proportion that was the major concern of designers. This is supported by the continual innovations in structural devices

and the constant employment of different compositional arrangements. If the answer to cosmic order had been discovered, it would have become rigid canon. There is no evidence that this happened. Instead, the great variations in design suggest that the game of discovering proportional approximations in each folio was a challenge.

The medieval view of proportion was one in which "Microcosm and macrocosm are tied by the same knot, simultaneously mathematical and aesthetic. Man conforms to the measure of the world and takes pleasure in every manifestation of this conformity."<sup>18</sup> Eco also points out that St. Augustine's "discussion of the geometrical figures is in fact part of a discussion of the 'centrality' of the soul."<sup>19</sup> It was not the precise arrangement or quantitative proportions of elements that was paramount. Of greatest value was the strength of the center. The forces of compositional ratio were aesthetic forms.

Medieval artists used field forces deftly in design, however they did not talk about it in treatises. This suggests that visual experience and visual literacy were too well understood to need verbal elaboration. It was not necessary to defend an aesthetic stance; only one stance was possible. Some arrangements were considered ideal and inevitably they had profound religious references. Medieval artisans often identified important parts of their work with geometrical marks "based upon common master keys of 'grids'.

The underlying belief was that locating the centre of symmetry meant locating the way, the truth, and the light. Aesthetic custom and theological doctrine went hand in hand. The aesthetics of proportion was the medieval aesthetic par excellence."<sup>20</sup> Eco uses the phrase 'aesthetic principle or ideal', which is far broader than the term 'canon'.

The medieval aesthetic of proportion in visual programs may have derived from the proportion in sound -literature and music. In this case, the use of formal elements, especially lines and frames, was expedient. Eco ascribes to a theory that "The aesthetics of proportion began with the musical theories of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and as it developed it assumed ever more complex forms. It also drew closer to everyday artistic practices."<sup>21</sup> Artists may have been influenced by many written theories of proportion in language which were no doubt discussed by monastic scholars in scriptoria. The Venerable Bede "formulated a distinction between metre and rhythm, a distinction as it happens been quantitative and syllabic verse. He declared that each of these poetic modes possessed its own distinctive type of proportion."<sup>22</sup> For visual beauty the same principles apply as St. Augustine noted when asking "'What is beauty of the body? A harmony of its parts with certain pleasing colours.'"<sup>23</sup> If folio design had adhered to a strict mathematical canon of proportion, it would have been lifeless and sterile. It was

neither, which attests to the ingrained design sense of the artists. They were adventurers in quest of solutions to the problems of design: order, balance and proportion. Within the stock of iconographical exemplars they worked from, there were no answers. Each folio composition presented its own, and ever new, problem of composing an array of elements into pleasing unity.

The problems of folio proportion fell to the artist's intuitive sense. Gombrich describes this sense as "our sense of balance, which tells us what is up and down in relation to gravitation and therefore to our perceived environment." and that "we are only conscious of this achievement when it goes wrong."<sup>24</sup> The process of determining proper visual balance is also strewn with disasters that lead the artist, by a process of elimination, to the answer. Hence, Gombrich defines the process as 'groping and grasping' which takes place at a preliminary stage in the formulation of a design. Plotting lines (outlines and frames) are the rudiments of this process. The rhythm of nature, the artist's discovery of it and subsequent translation of it into visual form, depend on astute observation skill. This was not necessarily observation of how things look. It involved all the senses (smell, touch and sight) which is in harmony with 'mosaic' field ('acoustic space') in which all the senses are mutually informing and engaged simultaneously.

In formal composition, which includes every folio that

uses frames to order diverse elements, basic human spatial orientation is the primary teacher. Gombrich claims that "We live more in the horizontal dimension than in the vertical."<sup>26</sup> By recognizing the position of man in the world, the placement of subject matter pertaining to the natural world in bas-de-page inserts was logical. It was also logical that spiritual things would be placed in vertical and higher dimensions, figuratively and literally. The history of framing follows the pattern of first extending the 'ground line' and the horizon line, then expanding on the potential of vertically positioned natural or architectural structures to meet the initial horizontal boundaries. The square, or rectangular, frame was the obvious result. As soon as the figures were afforded connection and stability by "establishing more firmly the axes of the field as coordinates of stability and movement in the image "<sup>27</sup> a new situation arose.

The figure, regardless of whether it is abstract or representational, requires that some limits be established around it to give it visual presence and focus:

The completely enclosed representation announces the immediate values of unity, harmony, finality: nothing more is needed to complete the narrative image. For when the structure of a particular representation echoes and respects a dominant external element (the border or frame) it is not only contained, it is also coherent.<sup>28</sup>

Every aspect of a folio program depends on framing for its particular emphasis and status. The frame "delimits the

field of force."<sup>29</sup>, and "every frame must be thought of as a center of energy, whose particular effects depend on its shape and spatial orientation."<sup>30</sup> There is neither a field of force nor the possibility of a center of force without some form of boundary. Consequently, in folia, where the need for both was inescapable, the first priority of the designer was to establish framing limits.

The strong demarcation of a field made it relatively easy to accommodate balances of opposites: circles and squares, complementary colours, contrasting patterns, diverse textures, image and text, and figure and ground, all of which would reverse into, and intensify, the other since they were positioned within a field of force. This would not have been as successful without frames to give ground the new context of field.

The opposition of elements is essentially the only means the visual artist has for emphasizing the inherent qualities of properties. By setting up contrasts, rhythm and emphasis is established. It is little wonder, then, to find few folio designs that do not use frames. To achieve aesthetic success, frames are essential compositional devices, either as overt frames or concealed frames. As "Life appeared to them as something wholly integrated"<sup>31</sup>, frames were the means to integrate elements in design.

The close relation of sound and sight, which is indicated in the distinction of 'acoustic' space that

characterized pre-alphabetic culture, is further emphasized by the practice of reading aloud. In The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind the authors stress that texts were read aloud until the twelfth century.<sup>32</sup> This accounts for the free translation of pacing techniques that can be almost heard in many formal programs. An example is the Lindisfarne 'Chi-Rho' folio (figure 14) in which a crescendo (the Chi) is fixed and emphasized by its relationship to passages of quiet, repetition, coloration, and barely perceptible forms. Underlying rhythmic proportion is the ever present sense of these qualities celebrating a realm beyond the ordinary. Aesthetic experience was religious experience. Experience of beautiful images," which "through participation (methexis) in the absolute beauty of the divine, translate into a sensible medium the ubiquitous presence of divinity continuously accessible through visible objects."<sup>33</sup>

#### THE TECHNICAL APPARATUS THAT MADE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Panofsky translates Abbot Suger's account of the effect of his visual program at St. Denis as "I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner."<sup>34</sup> Concerning this Eco says that "Medieval taste... was concerned neither with the autonomy of art nor the autonomy of nature. It involved rather an apprehension of all the relations, imaginative and supernatural, subsisting

between the contemplated object and a cosmos which opened on to the transcendental."<sup>35</sup> Gombrich recognizes the power of frames, "the framing shapes transform the meaning of the objects they enclose."<sup>36</sup> The principles were well known by Greek craftsmen, and although no direct connection may exist between their work and the products of medieval folio designers, the same five framing modes were used: the 'closed form' in which "its values of stability and order are achieved by the subordination of the image to the frame" and four 'open form' frames. The latter "express varieties of motion, change and even violence"<sup>37</sup> achieved by the "desire of the illustrator to increase the importance of the miniature expressed itself in still other forms. He started to draw a simple borderline around a miniature..."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the three framing methods Hurlitt describes, Weitzmann identifies three basic illustration types that were inherited with the codex format: 'monoscenic', 'cyclic' and 'continuous'.<sup>39</sup> These frame and illustration types were all applicable to representational imagery. Abstract imagery, such as the marginal 'book marks', were a form of image-sign, "which Grabar considers characteristic of the very beginnings of Christian art."<sup>40</sup> Each type required entirely different framing resolutions.

There was no option for folio designers but to innovate. They did this by looking to other artforms for solutions and to their intuitive sense and imagination.

Exemplars were employed extensively, but changes were made to adjust to local artistic tastes and idioms. There is no evidence to suggest that the act of creating a new configuration was not highly valued. To be sure, there were bounds, but within the limits of religious decorum many things were possible. The search for perfect order may have been a primary reason for constantly changing existing configurations.

Iconographical programs and hierarchical orders seldom changed in the Middle Ages. But within that framework, there was ample scope for innovations ('historiated and inhabited initials' and marginal drolleries ). It is unwise to state categorically that "A classical, and for that matter also a medieval, artist invents only where he has to do so because of a lack of models, while he will try to copy earlier models wherever they are available."<sup>41</sup> Folio artists were actually formulating an art. Models were used; they were essential as guides for conventions in iconography, historical accuracy, figure posture, and even classical architecture for many remote scriptoria. They were training texts for young monks with a desire and flair for design. If they had been slavishly copied by decree or inclination, all medieval codices would look much the same. The folia selected here indicate that this is far from true. It is more accurate to say that innovative solutions were embraced in the same spirit that revelled in in the

abundant varieties of nature. The visual programs were aesthetic experiences. Such experience is solitary, quiet and personal. Hence, draftsmen drew, and drew upon, what they knew, felt and believed.

In the Book of Kells 'Chi-Rho' folio (figure 28) the cat and mice with the 'cross bearing disc' is an enigma today, but was it easily understood in its time? Perhaps it was always a puzzle or riddle that is there to stimulate active spectator participation. Each time the folio is viewed new details are noticed and different contrasts and relationships become apparent. Perhaps there was no fixed meaning, and one isolated example could be irrelevant. However, on the other side of the cross base from which the Rho and the Iota ascend, a sleek black animal appears to be bending over and holding a fish in its mouth. This is not a fantastic cat, like most of the animals in this codex. Like the cats and mice in the other vignette on the same folio, the cat is depicted in a nominally naturalistic manner. The cat and the fish are immediately framed by small red dots all around their outline, but, unlike the cats and mice, they are on plain parchment ground and are only partially framed by a yellow band that runs along the underside of the great folio image. Just as red is heightened by green, and white becomes more luminous in the presence of black, the contrast between the two animal compositions and the head in the center of the Rho-Iota configuration gives the latter

greater impact. How this juxtaposition of man and animals was intended to be seen is unknown. But, if this was intended to be a riddle with a religious meaning, the meaning would probably relate to the text content. If this was so, the cross bearing disc could be interpreted as a host which the two mice are devouring; the fish was also a symbol for Christ. The animals eating the body of Christ, in two symbolic forms, may symbolize man in his most base form, an animal, receiving communion - salvation. The man emerging from the Rho-Iota, is then the most distinguished of men - Christ - taking form from the Word, or Man raised up from animal status to eternal life through Christ's sacrifice (figure 29).

Faced with this bizarre assortment amidst the poignant symbols of the Incarnation itself, Eco's theory is clearly illustrated. He holds that "the formulation of symbols was artistic. To decipher them was to experience them aesthetically. It was the type of aesthetic expression in which the Medievals took great pleasure in deciphering puzzles, in spotting the daring analogy, in feeling that they were involved in adventure and discovery."<sup>42</sup> He continues by saying that "allegory, according to Bede, excites the spirit, animates the expression, and ornaments the style."<sup>43</sup> Literary theory is pertinent for this folio because a definite idea has been presented visually and the images themselves were used to frame that argument. The

great Chi-Rho configuration, presented in the form of a Celtic fibula (a symbol of power and status), frames the two small vignettes of animals and symbols of Christ. Here the frame is the image. This serves as an excellent example of how contexts and contrasts were used to intensify the impact of imagery.

The Kells 'Chi Rho' folio (figure 7) also demonstrates the essential three levels of man's journey toward God. The idea of a three phase progression toward enlightenment is described by Hugh of St. Victor. He outlines how the devotee 'would start with the cogitatio, an exploration of matter and the perceptible world, on which abstract thought was necessarily based." Then "the inner man ...must rise higher until he reached meditatio, the point at which the soul gazed introspectively into itself, and ultimately contemplatio, which was the intuition of truth."<sup>44</sup> Celtic Christians held a similar view in which "elements sound and show forth the knowledge of God through the work that they do and the alteration that is on them.' This is a sacramental universe, birds, beasts and natural phenomenon being the signs of a supernatural grace."<sup>45</sup> The idea of being raised from this world into another through our senses, meditation and contemplation is present in the Kells 'Chi-Rho'.

The lower left-hand corner of the folio - the place that would be held to turn the folio - has a margin and a

finely ornamented rectilinear corner brace-like frame. This form reiterates the viewer's vertical orientation and connection to the horizontal dimension. It also signals the formal beginning of the program. For all its stability, it cannot contain the magnificent energy of the Chi which swells below that line in the left-hand corner, and overwhelms its precise rectangular form in the upper right-hand corner. Depictions of animals are placed slightly below the line suggested by the corner brace, and the stately Rho-Iota cross base shares the same bottom edge. In effect, this is the ground line and determines the viewer's spatial orientation. But, in the upper zone the galaxy of swirling discs and spirals, and the dramatic reach of the arms of the Chi form relate to the sky, not the earth. There are no strict horizontal or vertical markers in the upper third of the composition to give bearings to the viewer. As a result, the lower portion remains fixed and stable (the solid earth), whereas the upper area is a turbulent, disorienting and overwhelming field of forces (divine energy). Above the firm and weighted ground suggested by the corner frame, gyrating disks fill every available space. There is opportunity here to recognize natural elements (the animals), meditate on Truth (the Incarnation), and contemplate the divine (heavenly splendor).

Looking once more at the distribution of formal

elements, the frames, colours, patterns of line and the unity of configuration in the 'Chi-Rho' folio, it becomes clear that it cannot be seen as Panofsky suggests. If this folio is looked at 'without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside itself', it is not looked at from a medieval aesthetic vantage point. It demands to be considered for all its implications. Panofsky himself admits that "Anyone confronted with a work of art, whether aesthetically re-creating or rationally investigating it, is affected by its three constituents: materialized form, idea (that is, in the plastic arts, subject matter) and content."<sup>46</sup> Unity of all elements is the characteristic quality of medieval folia programs.

The unity found in folio design surpasses Panofsky's criteria. The idea of beauty (perceptible beauty) was fused with the belief in God (unimaginable beauty). Even the simple frame was transformed into a fully functioning image (an example is the Chi of the Kells 'Chi-Rho' folio in which the structure is fashioned by multiple lines which create frames). The image is framed within its own structure. And it is these kinds of "variations of the medium" that "constitute the poetry of the image..."<sup>47</sup>, and spell the idea of what aesthetic meant to the makers and viewers of these folia.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

Human beings can't imagine that the stream of time could ever come to a halt. It seems to us that time will continue to flow on eternally, even though the earth will cease to revolve around its axis and the sun, even though there will then be no more days and no nights, no summers and no winters. Neither can we conceive that somewhere behind the farthest stars in the night sky there exists the end of space and a boundary behind which there is 'nothing'. The concept of 'empty' still means something to us because space can be empty, at least in our thinking. However, our imagination is inaccessible to the idea of 'nothing' in the sense of 'spaceless'. That is why we clutch at a chimera, an afterlife, a purgatory, a heaven, a hell, a rebirth, or a nirvana, all of which would then be eternal in time and endless in space.<sup>1</sup>

A definitive conclusion concerning the theoretical stance of medieval folio artists is not possible. No written theory of art survives from the Middle Ages, if indeed one was formulated. The relationship between art and Christian ideology is similarly problematic. The intention of folio designers and their patrons is stilled by their refusal to document the artistic process. All that remains are the visual statements themselves - illuminated codex folia. They invite interpretation.

Interpretation is idle unless it is supported by a superstructure of knowledge. Fortunately this armature was available through piecing together the insightful research of a number of scholars from many fields of inquiry. With this support system, medieval folio design reveals the passionate religious perspective, the world perception and

the artistic predilections of their makers and patrons. Restrictions of time and place are transcended once the appropriate mental stance is assumed.

By means of a cross-disciplinary framework, an approximation of medieval attitudes toward words, images, nature and God is feasible. Similarly, recent theories pertaining to medieval mental processes provide a further dimension of knowledge. The concept of space in the Middle Ages is thought to have been 'acoustic'. That natural condition was altered gradually by centuries of alphabetic use. These factors are significant. In the same way that they influenced the formulation of framing and spatial systems for folia, they help to establish a method for interpreting folio space and frames.

Interpretation is always subjective. Yet, it is this subjective quality - the unique contribution of every interpreter to the meaning of art - that ensures the living presence of what is, after all, merely pigment distributed on animal skin.

The original meaning of these folia survives with them; it is only the ability to read their significance that is lost. Centuries of visual indoctrination in pictorial perspective systems in western European art is partially responsible, along with radical changes in ideology, for the gulf between contemporary interpretation and medieval intention. Therefore, clues from other media are

invaluable to a reconstruction of medieval visual literacy, especially as they apply to spatial order. But this faltering approximation of the meaning of space in folia is possible only because medieval artists and contemporary viewers share common ground. The experience of space in the physical world and the experience of space in two-dimensional compositions remains the same.

Although these folia are no longer viewed from a rigidly prescribed religious perspective of art and nature, contemporary scholars are attempting to adopt a medieval stance. The challenge of deciphering the properties of formal art is being met, especially in relation to historical art. This is timely considering Marshall McLuhan's theory that modern society has been catapulted back into 'acoustic' space. As the barriers between scholastic disciplines are dissolved by the media explosion, the answers to medieval spatial riddles may be forthcoming.

The study of two-dimensional composition by psychologists has been a boon to establishing that certain spatial types communicate specific ideals or sensations. Rudolf Arnheim observes that "Far from making a mistake, the artist has made his subject most visible by conforming to a principal property of his medium; and this solution has been selected by him to make the viewers of the picture see what they are meant to see."<sup>2</sup> The spatial dynamic in formal design is now taking its deserved place alongside the

greatly respected linear perspective systems.

In medieval Gospel and Bible folia, the formal properties of frames were indispensable for technical order. Presenting both word and image in a single format required skillful spatial manipulation which was facilitated by an expansive vocabulary of framing and spatial devices. The devices alone did not provide solutions to spatial problems. It took a particular mental attitude to manipulate the devices to their full potential. The extent to which frames were exploited beyond their primary mechanical function in folia was the result of a perspective. This was determined by two factors in equal proportion: 1) the religious saturation of human endeavor and thought; and 2) medieval 'acoustic' mental apparatus. The spatial armature that well placed frames provided created a visual description of the world as viewed through the religious imaginations of medieval Christians.

The overall perceptual effect of folio configurations was too vital for stimulating powerful sensations, if not actual symbolic implications, to have been abandoned during the Middle Ages for a strict or exclusive pictorial perspective system that could only imitate three-dimensional space. The great and deep underlying forces of the natural world, spatial energy and tension, were valued and framed compositional space embodied these physical laws. This constituted a unique medieval spatial perspective - one in

which the rhythmic pulse of natural creation reverberated in formal balance, measure and order in two-dimensional pictorial space.

Medieval draftsmen did not look to the external world for spatial relationships as they appear to the eye; they were introspective in their search. In their compositions, formal elements elicit physical experience of spatial energy. By incorporating elements from Celtic and Anglo-Saxon formal pictorial surface composition and Classical pictorial spatial arrangements, the profound introspection of medieval artistic and spiritual expression was satisfied. Nonrepresentational space provided scope for subjective interpretation. This fit with the teaching of Jesus which stressed that individuals should "be independent, separated from external care and responsible for their own feelings and sensations."<sup>3</sup> Interpretation was a form of active participation - a relationship between the viewer and the Word and image. Intuitive and speculative responses were in keeping with the demand that Christians look inward to realize spiritual growth. Abstract formal elements provided scope for personal involvement. Wholesale adoption of pictorial perspective would have sacrificed this quality, replacing it with an objective device that distanced the viewer from essential themes. Appearances of the external world would detract from the inner orientation desired for spiritual development;

abstract presentational material encouraged individual response.


In systems where realism is paramount, frames provide an outer barrier that signals the limits of pictorial reality as an order distinct from three-dimensional physical reality. Although providing the appearance of extending the viewer's space behind the picture plane, the frames in this system create physical and psychological distance between the design and the spectator. In abstract systems the viewer is drawn into folio space in which image, frame and word are reconciled fully into design unity by interior frames. The folio and the spectator share the same space; they are connected in space since the codex is hand held. The only physical frames in codices are those made by the outer cut or bound edge of parchment. Otherwise, the frames and other linear divisions, although they are real material substance, are as abstract and formal as any other pictorial element; they refer to nothing apart from pictorial reality. These Compositional forces evoke strong physical sensations.

Since line was the technique of scribes, it follows that this element evolved into the means by which frameworks of composition were established. The linear framework was eminently successful. Even after folio artists began to paint detailed representational miniatures in codices, formal framing structure was retained for compositional unity. Except in folia with only one pictorial element,

frames continued to be essential elements in composition.

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon systems of framed space are 'presentational': Classical systems of framed space are 'representational'. Combined in medieval folio compositions, these systems became a uniquely medieval scheme that stimulated the senses, informed the intellect and led the viewer, by way of linear and planar pictorial frameworks, to meditate or contemplate spiritual values.

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folio designs incorporated many Christian elements as inherited from Classical antiquity: iconography, the codex format, the language of the texts, but Classical modes of pictorial space were not adopted. Instead, the indigenous idiom of linear surface pattern and dense compositional energy fields, which frames established and infiltrated, were adapted to the new frontier of two-dimensional codex design. This has been demonstrated to have been sound judgment, a decision that held fast throughout the Middle Ages in western Christendom even after Renaissance artists discovered the means by which pictorial perspective and compositional forces could be married in perfect harmony in two-dimensional design. Later Italian painters unified pictorial surface energy forces with the appearance of deep spatial recession behind the pictorial plane. Medieval folio artists used abstract linear and planar frameworks to establish energy vectors and vortices in the fields of two-dimensional composition. The only



spatial suggestion was that of shallow movement in front of, behind, or on the pictorial surface which was a retinal phenomenon. Illusions of motion and compositional energy both relied on the effects of the formal elements of colour, pattern, texture and shape in apposition. The result was not a pictorial window with an implied extension of the viewer's space beyond. It was an emphatically real flat plane upon which spatial forces were capitalized in line and colour.

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon artists manipulated natural power, power recognized by M.C. Escher as a fundamental and inescapable law of nature:

As soon as man builds himself a dwelling, a ...phenomenon appears. Not only does he surround himself with a complicated network of innumerable straight and parallel lines but he usually restricts himself to just two directions for those lines. Out of an infinite variety of directions at his disposal, he chooses almost exclusively the vertical and the horizontal! 4

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon design was seldom enslaved to strict horizontal and vertical orientation; instead, it utilized the force of rectilinear frames in a number of spatial orientations to intensify the effect of lines and planes that appeared in every contortion imaginable. Nonetheless, they did profit by their deft manipulation of juxtapositions of curvilinear and rectilinear lines, planes and shapes. Like the twentieth century artist Escher, Insular artists seem to have known "what pitiful slaves we apparently are to the power of gravity that dominates everything on earth."<sup>5</sup>

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon reverence for physical phenomena is well documented in literature. Their visual compositions were built on formal spatial dynamics. Insular artists were not restricted by spatial forces; they exploited spatial constraints to produce taut energy fields.

The use of frames as practical elements of composition, initially introduced by Insular artists into the vocabulary of folio design, became the hallmark of two-dimensional design in the Middle Ages. Of even greater importance is how this technically expedient scheme established correlations between space and religious ideals. Spatial location, quality and tension were related in meaning to medieval aesthetic and theological attitudes toward Nature and Scripture. Deciphering the design of folia in the centrally important books of Christianity is an exciting and challenging task which is beginning to interest scholars in every area of medieval and art historical study. The use of space in folio designs is a particularly fertile area of inquiry because it establishes zones and properties that yield to the same interpretation method that medieval scholars used for Scripture and Nature. Clearly, and without unreasonable reaches of imagination and logic, many medieval manuscript folia have been seen to contain literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical spatial potential in the same way that the images in those spaces fall into these four symbolic types.

If medieval aesthetic theory was, as Umberto Eco and medieval theologians suggest, an all encompassing view of parallels between human experience in the phenomenal world and the ultimate spiritual experience in the divine realm, optical illusions were potent. The powerful energy fields experienced in the external world and in skillfully constructed two-dimensional pictorial compositions may have been construed as symbols of cosmic force.

Some of the outstanding problems of symbolism and folio space are enumerated in this thesis. However, detailed analysis and conclusions remain for more comprehensive and intensive study. If the same issues that are raised and discussed in a cursory manner here attract more detailed interest by scholars in perceptual psychology, cognitive philosophy, semiotics, aesthetics, medieval and art historical studies, eventually conclusions may be formulated. The pictorial energy fields in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folio design may be man-made apparitions of natural and supernatural forces by intention. Further study may also determine that the frequency with which the spatial framework in medieval folio design yields to the framework of the Fourfold symbolic sense of Scripture is not coincidental.

In the marked absence of written theory of art in the Middle Ages, it would be presumptuous to propose conscious intention on the part of Insular draftsmen. However,

interpretation is invited by extant Insular folia. By acknowledging the reciprocal alliance of Nature and Scripture, physical sight and spiritual enlightenment and words and images in medieval aesthetic and theological thought, medieval perspective can be reconstructed. In turn, restored medieval perspective provides a tentative framework for medieval visual literacy with which interpretations can be constructed.

This interpretation is not intended to be definitive. It is simply an attempt to demonstrate the enormous scope for interpretation in the framing and spatial system used in medieval codices. By recognizing that certain images consistently appear in predictable locations on folia, a correlation to medieval theories of spiritual progression is proposed. To ignore that Christian ideals underscored visual experience would be tantamount to denying the reciprocal bond of Scripture and Christianity or image and word in the Middle Ages.

What can be stated with absolute certainty is that the unique medieval scheme of pictorial space in codices owed its fundamentally linear, abstract and formal qualities to Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folio design. It was this formal attitude toward pictorial space that permitted a spectrum of framing and spatial choices that led to the orientation of visual and textual elements in hierarchical surface and spatial positions. When formal spatial qualities combined

with abstract and representational imagery, a spectrum of possible interpretations became possible. Regardless of symbolic meaning, the spatial frameworks of medieval folia are commanding in their presence. They invite active viewer participation - interpretation.

## INTRODUCTION FOOTNOTES

1 Umberto Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages (New Haven and London 1986), p.54.

2 The methods used in modern advertising are remarkably similar to those used in medieval codices - both are mediums of conviction. The continuation of the system attests to its power to convince.

3 Miriam Schild Bunim, Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective (New York 1940).

4 Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media (Toronto 1988). The term 'acoustic' is used to characterize the consciousness that precedes 'visual' which is the result of continued use of a phonetic alphabet.

5 A.L. Rees and T. Borzello, (editors), The New Art History (Atlantic Highlands 1988). Of particular pertinence is the Introduction, pp.2-10. Leavis and his Cambridge associates effected the change from historical to critical for the discipline of English. The authors note that Art History has not yet adopted a critical stance.

6 W. Eugene Kleinbauer, (editor), Modern Perspectives in Art History (Toronto 1989). The various traditional approaches to the discipline are examined.

7 Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco 1988), pp.34-35. Despite a prohibition in Matthew (5:33-36) oaths were made and the legal reforms of the Emperor Justinian required that they be taken with one hand on the Gospels.

8 Peter Heath, The Philosopher's Alice (New York 1974), p.13. The author notes that many modern philosophers consider pictorial definition and conversations are the 'twin fountains of verbal meaning'.

9 E. H. Gombrich, The Sense of Order (Oxford 1984), p.125.

10 Ibid., p.125.

11 Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs." Semiotica I(The Hague 1969), pp.223-242, esp. 238.

12 See Illich and Sanders, The Alphabetization of the

Popular Mind, p.31.

13 Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media (Toronto 1988), p.33.

14 Ibid., pp.74-75: "It is no accident that the Christian church, dedicated to propaganda and propagation, adopted Graeco-Roman phonetic literacy from the earliest days. The impact of alphabetic literacy is strong enough not only to break the tribal bond, but to create individualized (left-hemisphere) consciousness as well. Phonetic literacy - our alphabet - alone has this power. The spread of Graeco-Roman literacy and civilization became inseparable from Christian missionary and educational activity. Paradoxically, people are not only unable to receive, but are unable to retain doctrinal teaching without a minimum of phonetic or western culture."

15 Jacques Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination (Chicago and London 1988), p.10: "The Middle Ages, defined in terms of a set of slowly evolving structures, endured from the third century until the middle of the nineteenth century."; and p.21: "This was an age dominated by Christianity, by a Christianity that was at once a religion and an ideology and that therefore enjoyed a very complex relation to the feudal world, which it both contested and justified. By this I do not mean to suggest that Christianity today is dead or moribund, only that since 1850 it has not played the same key role that it played between the fourth and nineteenth centuries. It has lost the near monopoly that it once held in the realm of ideology."

16 John Steer, "Art History and Direct Perception: A General View," Art History Vol.12 #1 (1989), pp.93-107 esp. p.105: "The 'semantics' and 'grammar' of any mode of communication must surely lie within its own realm and in painting we must derive from our own visual and kinaesthetic experience. This paper, then, is a plea for a more systematic exploration of how paintings work in relation to the workings of the visual experience as a whole."

17 See Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media, jacket: continues to note how the authors explore "how the invention of the alphabet led to the dominance of visual-space conceptualizations over those of acoustic space...They consider the differences between the left- and right-hand sides of our brains, and use Gestalt theories of figure and ground to explore the underlying principles that define media."

18 Ibid., p.3. The premise is elaborated further pp.3-4: here they suggest that a 'New Science' must take the place of the "current Old Science of media and artefacts, which is too narrow and too rigid, having drawn its techniques from the abstract Method used since the Renaissance...It is a science of content and messages only. The study of human media and technologies must begin with their humanity and remain steeped in the study of the senses."

19 Beryl Smalley, Historians in the Middle Ages (London 1974), p.29.

20 John Chydenius, "The Theory of Medieval Symbolism" Commentationes Humanarium Litterarum Tomus XXVII #1-3 (Helsingfors 1961), #2, pp.5-38 esp. p.11.

21 See Marshall and Eric McLuhan Laws of Media, p. 217.

22 Ibid., pp.89-90: "Figure-ground resonance and the interplay of levels and causes were illuminated, with the further advantage, from the standpoint of the moderni, of cutting all bondage and allegiance to the traditions."

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1 Miriam Schild Bunim, Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective (New York 1970), p.5.

2 Michael Gough The Origins of Christian Art (London 1973), pp.6-7: "Between representational and formal art there is an aesthetic distinction which has been likened to that existing in literature between prose and poetry...The art of the Christian Church, never the monopoly of a single people or area, has in different times and circumstances expressed itself in both 'prose' and 'poetry', though neither is totally appropriate to the Christian religion. Better suited to the theme of God's relationship with mankind through human as well as supernatural agencies was the compromise whereby some formal principles were applied to subjects in which other circumstances would have called for naturalistic treatment. Such a compromise produced the transcendental art of Byzantium and of medieval Europe..."

3 Carol L. Neuman de Vegvar, The Northumbrian Renaissance (Selinsgrove 1987) and Ernst Kitzinger, Early Medieval Art (London 1983).

4 Margaret Miles, Image as Insight (Boston 1985), p.34.

5 Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco 1988), p.29.

6 E. H. Gombrich, The Sense of Order (Ithaca 1984), p.273.

7 Madeline H. Caviness, "Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing." Gesta XXII/2 (New York 1983), pp.99-114 esp. 114.

8 Reesa Greenberg, "Unframing the Canadian Frame." Vanguard (1984), pp.34-36 esp. 35.

9 See Illich and Sanders, The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco 1988), p.30.

10 William Parker Marsh and Christopher Bamford, Celtic Christianity (West Stockbridge 1987), pp.18-19: "When these questioned him as to who the New God was, and where he dwelt, Patrick replied: 'Our God is the God of all men, the God of Heaven and Earth, of sea and river, of sun and moon and stars, of the lofty mountain and the

lowly valley, the God above Heaven, the God in Heaven, the God under Heaven; He has dwelling round Heaven and Earth and sea and all that in them is. He inspires all, he quickens all, he dominates all, he sustains all. He lights the light of the sun; he furnishes the light of the light; he has put springs in the dry land and has set stars to minister to the great lights..."

11 Donis A. Dondis, A Primer of Visual Literacy (Cambridge and London 1973), p.114.

12 Rudolf Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1986), p.7: in a description of Giovanni di Paolo's 'Adoration of the Magi' he says that "all the descriptive detail...is subsumed in a highly abstract, simple pattern...it achieves complete correspondence and interrelation of content and form...", which he calls the "guiding pattern".

13 Rudolf Arnheim, The Power of the Center (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1982), p. 179.

14 See Dondis, A Primer of Visual Literacy, p.22.

15 See Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art, p.300.

16 Ibid., p.70.

17 Jacques Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination (Chicago and London 1988), p.1.

18 Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of the Visual Arts: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs." Semiotica I (the Hague 1969), pp.223-242.

19 See Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination, p.4. He notes how Panofsky and Schapiro "succeeded in defining the relation between iconology and art history; they also introduced semiology into the study of images and used images to shed light on the intellectual and cultural environment", for the future, "Analysis will eventually concern the totality of an image: not merely themes and structures but also such aspects as color, location in the manuscript, situation on the page..."p.4.

20 Susanne K. Langer, "Discursive and Presentational Forms." Semiotics (Bloomington 1985), pp.87-107 esp. 99: "Visual forms -lines, colors, proportions, etc. - are just

as capable of articulation, i.e. of complex combination as words. But the laws that govern this sort of articulation are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language. The most radical difference is that visual forms are not discursive. They do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously, so the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision...An idea that contains too many minute yet closely related parts, too many relations within relations, cannot be 'projected' into discursive form; it is too subtle for speech.

21 Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York 1953), p.397.

22 Mieczystaw Wallis, "The History of Art as the History of Semantic Structures." Signs Language Culture (the Hague and Paris 1970), pp.524-535 esp. 532.

23 W. J. T. Mitchell, Iconology (Chicago and London 1986), p.31. "The true, literal image is the mental or spiritual one; the improper, derivative, figurative image is the material shape perceived by our senses, especially the eye."p. 32.

24 Ibid., p.39.

25 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.125.

26 Umberto Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages (New Haven and London 1986), p.55. "intelligible beauty was in medieval experience a moral and psychological reality....medieval discussions of non-sensible beauty give rise to theories of sensible beauty...the realm of aesthetic was much larger than it is nowadays...beauty in a purely metaphysical sense often stimulated an interest in the beauty of objects." p.5.

27 Nelson Goodman, Of Mind and Other Matters (Cambridge and London 1984), p.14.

28 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.5.

29 See Goodman, Of Mind and Other Matters, p. 12.

30 F. P. Pickering, Literature and Art in the Middle Ages (Coral Gables ), p.116.

31 Jacques Le Goff, Time, Work & Culture in the

Middle Ages (Chicago and London 1980), p.109.

32 H. Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought (New York 1961), p. 158.

33 Lewis Hyde, The Gift (New York 1983), p.280.

34 Jiri Veltrusky, "Some Aspects of the Pictorial Sign." Semiotics of Art (Cambridge 1976), pp.245-264 esp. 245.

35 See Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination, p.15.

36 Ernst Kitzinger, The Making of Byzantine Art (Cambridge 1977), pp.4-5.

37 See Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art, pp.3-4 and 6-7.

38 Wayne Dynes, "Imago Leonis." Gesta XX/I (1981), pp. 35-41 esp. 38 where the author makes this comment after he has followed the image of a lion through Greco-Roman art.

39 See Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art, p. 297.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1 Collins Dictionary of the English Language (London and Glasgow 1986), p.601.

2 Mieczystaw Wallis, "The History of Art as the History of Semantic Structures." Sign Language Culture (the Hague and Paria 1970), p.526.

3 Jacques Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination (Chicago and London 1988), p.91.

4 Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art." Semiotica I (the Hague 1969), pp.223-242 esp.234.

5 Ibid., pp.234-35.

6 E. H. Gombrich, The Sense of Order (Ithaca 1984), p.4.

7 David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript (South Brunswick and New York 1973), p.82.

8 Nigel Thorp, The Glory of the Page (London 1987), p. 167.

9 Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting (New York 1977), p.68: he identifies this 'Incarnation' folio as "the first to devote an entire page to it."

10 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, p.75: "Where the design is applied to a given support, being drawn or painted on a surface...the framing grid and the filling motif together constitute the ornament. Where it must be 'self-supporting', as in lace, tracery, or wrought iron, another form of joining is needed to give coherence to the structure. We may describe it as linking."

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1 Rudolf Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1986), p.13.

2 Rudolf Arnheim, The Power of the Center (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London), pp.166-67.

3 Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image." Semiotics (Bloomington 1985), pp.190-205 esp. 193: Describing a Panzani advertisement he notes that, "The image immediately yields a first message whose substance is linguistic; its supports are the caption, which is marginal, and the labels...Putting aside the linguistic message, we are left with the pure image...This image straightaway provides a series of discontinuous signs. First (the order is unimportant as these signs are not linear), the idea..."

4 E. H. Gombrich, Reflections on the History of Art (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1987), p.248.

5 Ibid.

6 Nelson Goodman, Of Mind and Other Matters (Cambridge and London 1984), p.14.

7 Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs." Semiotica I (the Hague 1969), p.227.

8 Collins Dictionary of The English Language (London and Glasgow 1986), p. 601.

9 Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1974), p. 178.

10 Ibid., p.172.

11 Ibid., p.171: "The distance or location of elements within a composition can be established as correct or incorrect only by sensitive attention to the field forces that are felt to push in the direction of a different arrangement. Composition must rely on equilibrium; and equilibrium, as any pair of scales will show by analogy, can exist only between forces. Compositional rules are not an alternative to such perceptual evaluation but merely its codification."

12 Boris Uspensky, A Poetics of Composition (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1973), p. 131 and 2: He

notes that the characteristic medieval stance was "A plurality of viewpoints...particularly in the complex phenomenon called inverse perspective."

13 E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion (New York 1969), p.116: "'making comes before matching.' Before the artist ever wanted to match the sights of the visible world he wanted to create things in their own right...the matching process itself proceeds through the stages of 'schema and correction.' Every artist has to know how to construct a schema before he can adjust it to the needs of portrayal." Since medieval artists were generally not concerned with illusionary portrayal of the visible world there was no need to pursue the challenge of naturalism which Gombrich describes as "the gradual accumulation of corrections due to the observation of reality." p.118. The same author describes the process by which compositional balance in abstract patterns is established in The Sense of Order (Ithaca 1984), p.5: "If I were asked to sum up the theory underlying this book...it would be that groping comes before grasping or seeking before seeing. In contrast to any stimulus-response theory I would wish to point to the need to regard the organism as an active agent reaching out towards the environment, not blindly and at random, but guided by its inbuilt sense of order."

14 Rudolf Arnheim, The Power of the Center (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1982), p. 42.

15 Margaret Miles, Image as Insight (Boston 1985), p.1. and 2: "By use of such concepts, ['built with and communicable by language'] religions seek to order the mind to what is intrinsically and universally valuable so that none of the richness of the texture of human life will be lost."

16 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

17 Ibid., p.46.

18 Ibid., p.33.

19 Ibid., p.7: "modern understanding of physical vision in its popular version differs significantly from the understanding of medieval people."

20 Ibid., p.4: "The function of art is to identify and articulate a range of subjective patterns of feeling and to give objective form to feeling...Religion...is a complex of concepts about the self, the world, and God; it

is also an altered perception of the meaning and value of the sensible world, a different way of seeing."

21 Madeline H. Caviness, "Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing." Gesta XXII/2 (New York 1983), p.99.

22 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.34.

23 Jacqueline Simpson, European Mythology (Twickenham 1987), p.112.

24 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.33.

25 Ibid., p.36.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

1 Rudolf Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London), p.18.

2 Umberto Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages (New Haven and London 1986), pp.40-41: Eco gives example where iconographical details are modified to meet the requirements of compositional symmetry, a law that applied to the frame as well as all other pictorial elements: "For instance, a certain figure would have to be fitted into the shape of a door column, or the lunette on a tympanum, or the trunk of a capital. Sometimes the figures acquired an added grace from their very circumscription; thus, in the medallions representing the months on the facade of St. Denis, peasants who are harvesting grain appear, due to the circular composition, to perform a kind of dance..."

3 Daniel J. Sahas, Icon and Logos (Toronto, Buffalo and London 1986), p.13.

4 Ibid., p.5.

5 Mieczystaw Wallis, "The History of Art as the History of Semantic Structures." Sign Language Culture (the Hague 1970), pp.524-535 esp. 526.

6 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.61.

7 Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (London 1952), p.5.

8 Beryl Smalley, "Stephen Langton and the Four Senses of Scripture." Speculum VI (1931), pp. 60-76, esp. 60.

9 H. Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought (New York 1961), p.454.

10 See Wallis, "The History of Art as the History of Semantic Structures.", p.24.

11 See Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought, p.15: "Everywhere the essential dualism of the cosmos claimed attention; but Greek philosophy and late pre-Christian Judaism sought further unity underlying even this dualism, while in Roman legalism, just as truly as in Oriental mystery cults, was manifested the same aspiration toward ordering of experience."

12 F.P.Pickering, Literature and Art in the Middle Ages (Coral Gables ), p.79.

13 Staale Sinding-Larsen, Iconography and Ritual (Oslo 1984), p.131.

14 Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media (Toronto, Buffalo and London 1988), p.51.

15 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.59.

16 See Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media, p.5.

17 Ibid., p.80.

18 Ibid., p.55.

19 Ibid., p.218.

20 See Staale Sinding-Larsen, Iconography and Ritual, p.132.

21 See Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media, p.19.

22 See Staale Sinding-Larsen, Iconography and Ritual, (Oslo 1984) p.95.

23 Ibid., p.96.

24 Margaret Miles, Image as Insight (Boston 1985), p.35.

25 Ibid., p.36.

26 E. H. Gombrich, The Sense of Order (Ithaca 1984), p.276.

27 Ibid., p.273.

28 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.56.

29 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.35: "The problems of interpretation are also similar; neither theological texts nor religious images can provide information about the culture in which they were formulated apart from a reconstruction of the part they played in the verbal and nonverbal discourse of their time and place, in the

totality of messages intended and received."

30 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, pp.81-82.

31 See Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought, p.273.

32 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.150.

33 See Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Laws of Media, p.16.

34 M. D. Faber, Objectivity and Human Perception (Edmonton 1985), p.2.

35 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, p.80.

36 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.118.

37 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, p.1.

38 C. R. Dodwell, De Diversis Artibus, (Chicago 1963).

39 Johan Chydenius, "The Theory of Medieval Symbolism." Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum Tomas XXVII #1-3 (Helsingfors 1961), #2, pp.5-38 esp. p.9.

40 David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript (London 1973), p.326.

41 Ibid., p.324.

42 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.20.

43 Ibid., p.7.

44 W. J. T. Mitchell, Iconology (Chicago and London 1986), p.43: "The modern pictorial image, like the ancient notion of 'likeness', is at last revealed to be linguistic in its inner workings...the relationship between words and images reflects, within the realm of representation, signification and communication, the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings."

45 Germano Celant, "Framed: Innocence or Gilt?" Artforum (New York 1982), pp.49-55 esp. 50.

46 Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Chicago 1982), "Abbot Suger of St. Denis", pp.108-145,

esp. 128: "Thus the whole material universe becomes a big 'light' composed of countless small ones as of so many lanterns...every perceptible thing, man-made or natural, becomes a symbol for that which is not perceptible, a steppingstone on the road to Heaven; the human mind, abandoning itself to the 'harmony and radiance'...which is the criterion of terrestrial beauty finds itself 'guided upward' to transcendent cause of this 'harmony and radiance' which is God. This ascent from the material to the immaterial world is the Pseudo-Areopagite and John the Scot describe - in contrast to the customary theological use for this term - as the 'anagogical approach'...more literally translated: 'the upward-leading method'..."

47 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.142.

48 Francois Henry quoted by Gombrich in The Sense of Order, p.273.

49 See Miles, Image as Insight, p.49.

50 See Chydenius, "The Theory of Medieval Symbolism.", p.19.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

1 Irwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Chicago 1982), p.11.

2 Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs." Semiotica I (the Hague 1969), pp.223-242 esp. 223: "the rectangular field is an advanced artifact pre-supposing a long development in art."

3 Germano Celant, "Framed: Innocence of Gilt?" Artforum (New York 1982), pp.49-55, considers the frame as 'scar' material that develops to protect the cut by which a pictorial unit is severed from the continuous fabric of all such material.

4 Ibid., p.49.

5 E. H. Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse (Chicago 1985), p.74: notes that "the return to 'picture writing' which went with the preoccupation with content, was a joint condition of the dominance of the 'conceptual image'. This furthermore facilitated the emancipation of formal values.", which he continues to say was not the paradox that it appears to be if "the recognizability of symbols is not compromised and the sign remains a sign, primitive predilections may be allowed full rein."

6 Umberto Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages (New Haven and London 1986), p.44.

7 Ibid., p.46.

8 Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, A Celtic Miscellany (Harmondsworth 1986), p.169.

9 Ibid., pp.188-89.

10 Ibid., pp.290-91.

11 See Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse, p.76: he also notes that, "But to see it as a supra-work of art made by a super artist is the residue of a romantic philosophy of history."

12 Ernst Kitzinger, Byzantine Art in the Making (Cambridge 1977), p.17.

13 Ibid., p.18.

14 Josef A. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite Vol. 1&2 (New York 1951-55), p.169.

15 Madeline H. Caviness, "Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing." Gesta XXII/2 (New York 1983), pp.99-114.

16 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.41.

17 Inga Christine Swenson, "The Symmetry Potentials of the Ornamental Pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels." Gesta XVII/I (New York 1978), pp.9-17 esp. 10. She notes that there are three distinct spatial layers: 1) "The frame, echoing the form of the page, provides a stable environment securing the pattern to the surface."; 2) "design compartments within the rectangle..."; and 3) "elements, developed from the prick and ruled markings for the decorative motifs within the field..." Most importantly, she concludes that: "Each layer of the structure has a logic and symmetry peculiar to it and generally not shared by another." p.12. The balance and symmetry found in these pages does not adhere to any systems of pre-determined laws; they are developed as the designs evolve, which indicates that the artist was operating intuitively within a general framework of governing principles. Ultimately, the symmetry is that of 'equivalents' not 'equals'.

18 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p. 31.

19 Ibid., p.43.

20 Ibid., p.40.

21 Ibid., p.37.

22 Ibid., p.42.

23 Ibid., p.28.

24 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, pp.1-2.

25 Ibid., p.75: "It does not need much experience to realize that a scheme of such divisions articulating the panel must have been established by the craftsman before he planned the detail...In other words there must have been a number of auxiliary lines drawn on the panel which

might be described as framing devices." And this process, which originally plots the composition within the field, is the first consideration after the field itself has been determined. It has everything to do with sensation because it either 'feels right' or it does not -there are no laws to guide an artist at this stage, except the inner sense of balance which Gombrich calls "the sense of order".

26 See Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs.", p.230: "The qualities of upper and lower are probably connected with our posture and relation to gravity and perhaps reinforced by our visual experience of earth and sky." Obviously, the human creature identifies itself with that which it is intimately connected to - the ground, whereas the sky and distance are not physically felt but perceived to be there by eyesight. Neither distance nor space can be touched, heard or even comprehended without assistance from the sense of sight.

27 Ibid., p.24.

28 Jeffrey Hurwit, "Image and Frame in Greek Art." American Journal of Archaeology Vol.81 (1977), p.5.

29 Rudolf Arnheim, The Power of the Center (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1982), p.54.

30 Ibid., p. 54.

31 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.16.

32 Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco 1988), pp.50-51.

33 Margaret Miles, Image as Insight (Boston 1985), p.142.

34 Irwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Chicago 1982), p. 129.

35 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.15.

36 See Gombrich, The Sense of Order, p.169.

37 See Hurwit, "Image and Frame in Greek Art.", p.1: "The relationship of the pictorial image to the frame that contains it is a reliable and significant guide to form

and style."

38 Kurt Weitzmann, Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration. Studies in Manuscript Illumination 2 (Princeton 1970), p.97.

39 Ibid.

40 See Hurwit, "Image and Frame in Greek Art.", p.546.

41 See Weitzmann, "Illustrations in Roll and Codex. A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration.", p. 19.

42 See Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, p.55.

43 Ibid., p.55.

44 George Duby, The Age of the Cathedrals (Chicago 1981), p. 121.

45 Christopher Bamford and William Parker Marsh, Celtic Christianity (West Stockbridge 1987), p. 21.

46 See Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts, p.16.

47 See Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs.", p.240.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER SIX

1 M.C. Escher, Escher on Escher: Exploring the Infinite (New York 1989), p.123.

2 Rudolf Arnheim, New Essays on the Psychology of Art (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1986), p.163.

3 Josef A. Jungmann, The Early Liturgy (London 1959)

4 See Escher, Escher on Escher: Exploring the Infinite, p. 129.

5 Ibid.

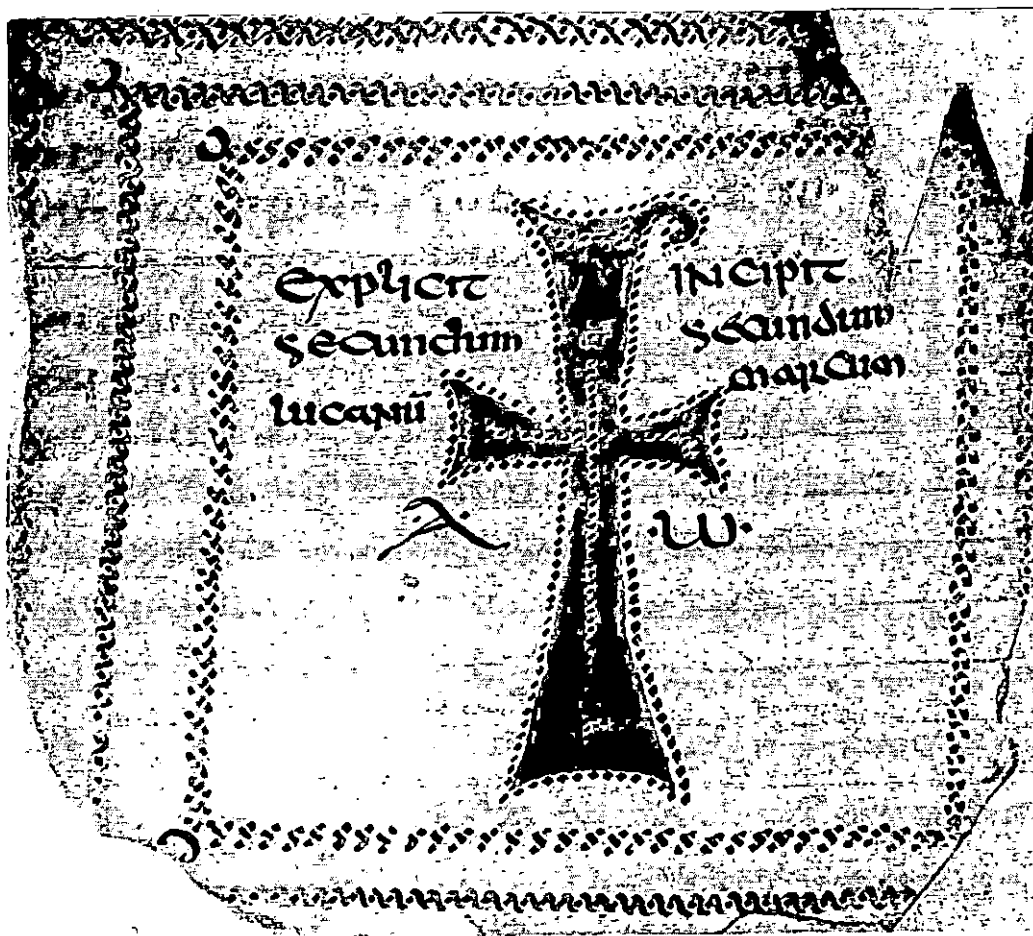


FIGURE 1 - Title Decoration, Codex Ussherianus Primus, c. 600 A.D., Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS A.4.15., folio 149v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 2 - "Lot Defending his House", The Cotton Genesis, 5th or early 6th century, London, British Library, Cotton MS Otho B.VI., fragment 4. Ernst Kitzinger, Medieval Art, London, 1983.

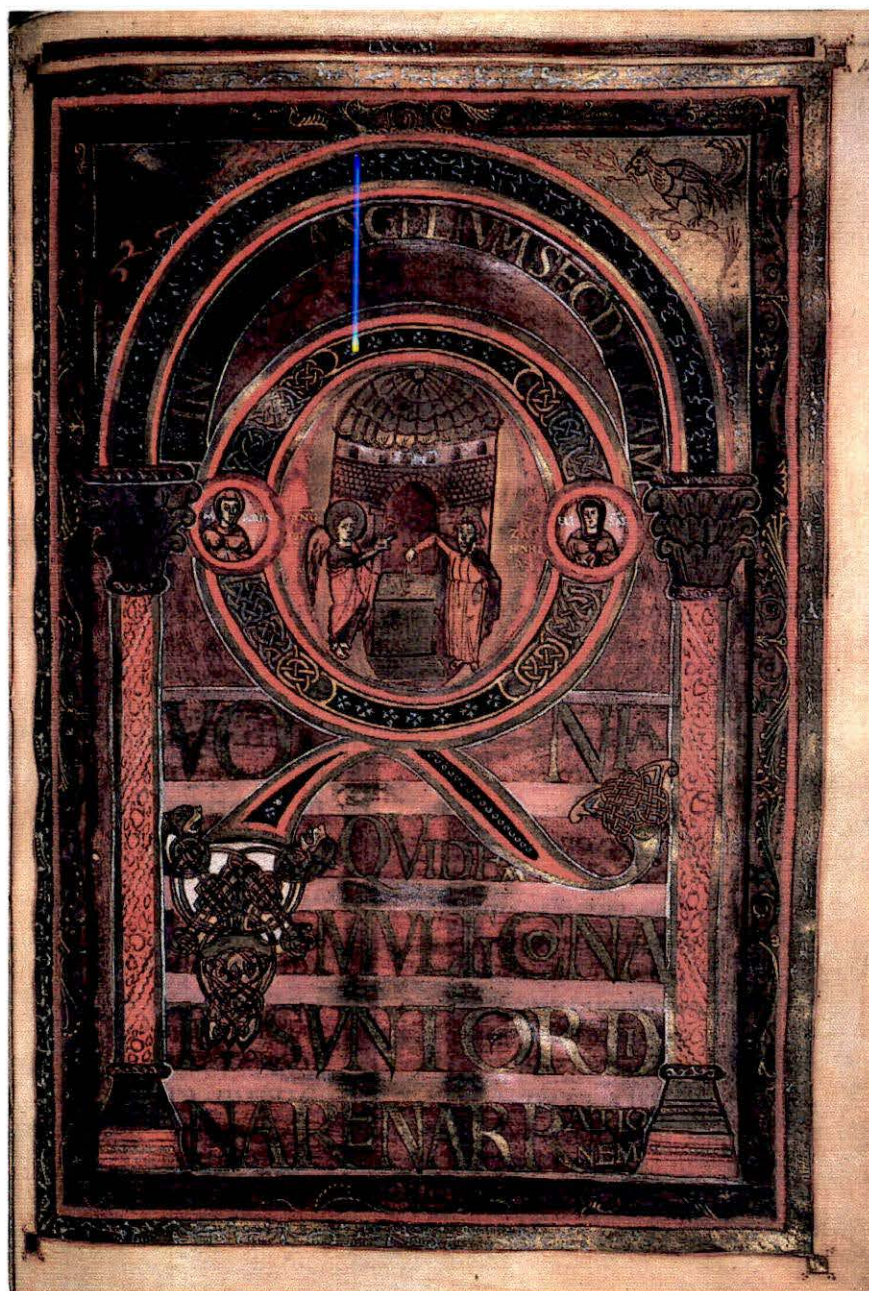


FIGURE 3 - "Incipit of St. Luke's Gospel", Harley Golden Gospels, early 9th century, London, British Library, Harley MS 2788, folio 109r. Ernst Kitzinger, Early Medieval Art, London, 1983.

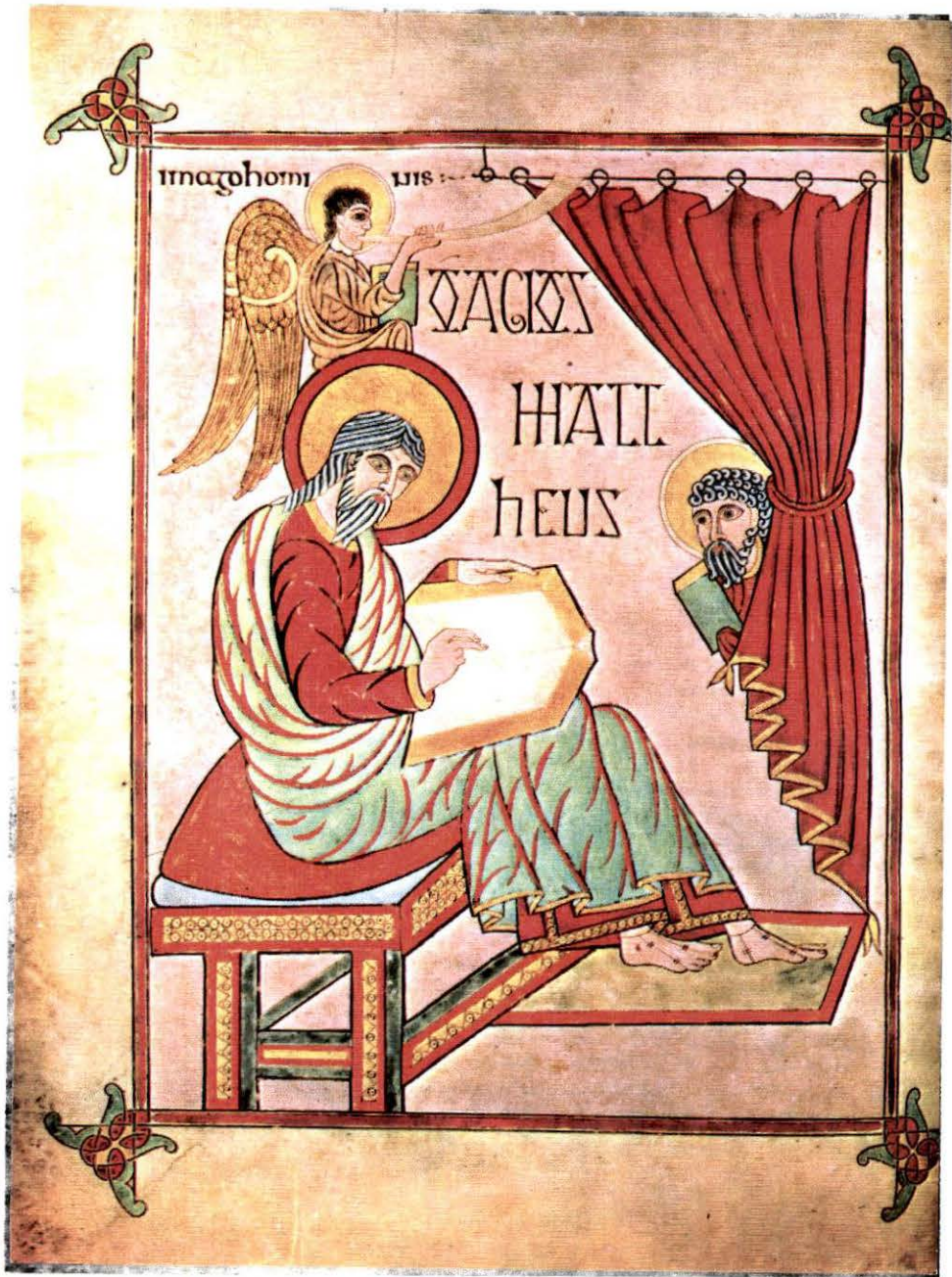


FIGURE 4 - "Portrait of Saint Matthew", The Lindisfarne Gospels, c. 700 A.D., London, British Library, Cotton Nero D.IV, folio 25v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.

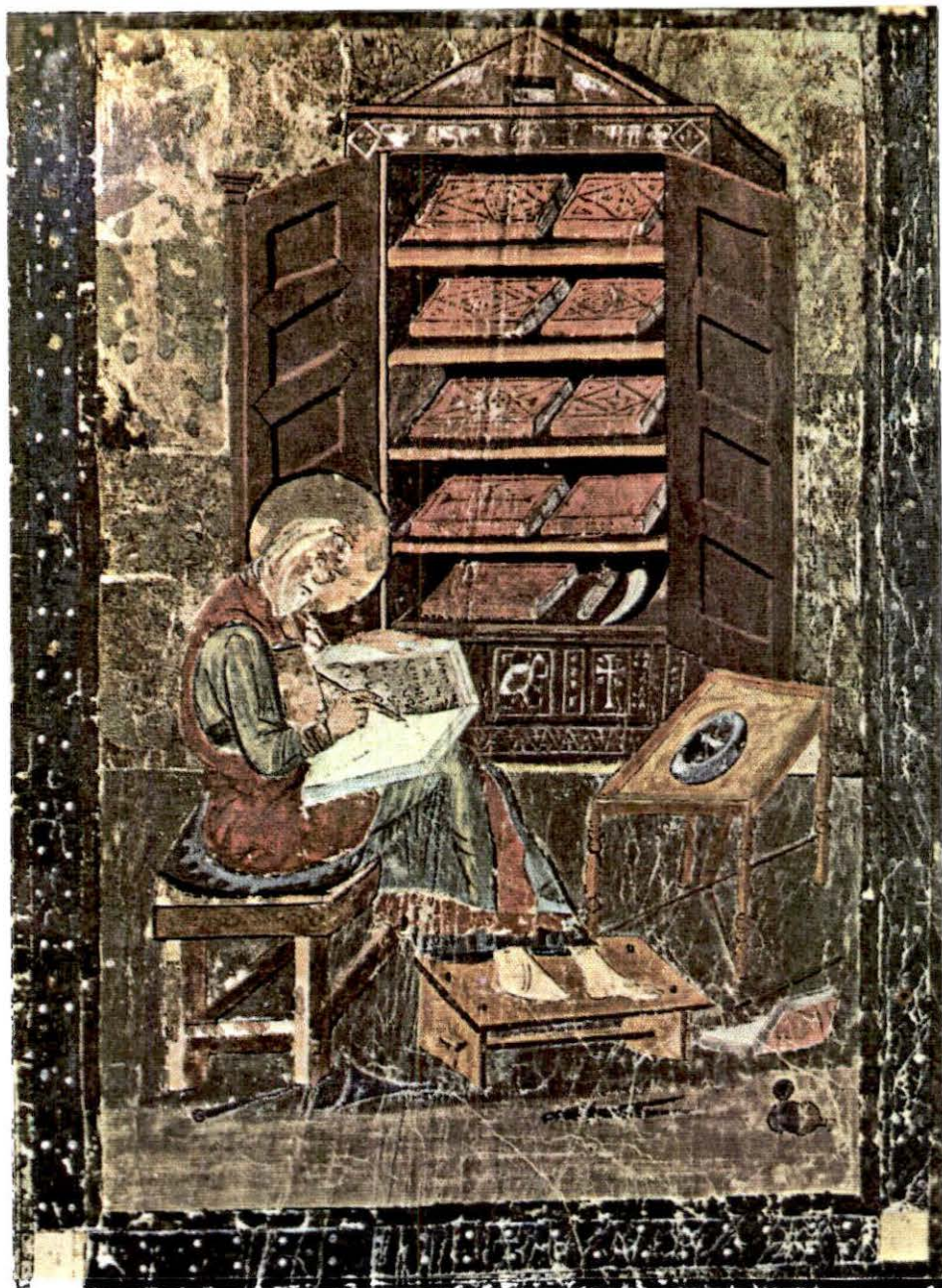


FIGURE 5 - "Ezra Transcribing the Law", The Codex Amiatinus, early 8th century. Florence, Laurentian Library, Amiatinus, folio Vr. David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript, London, 1973.



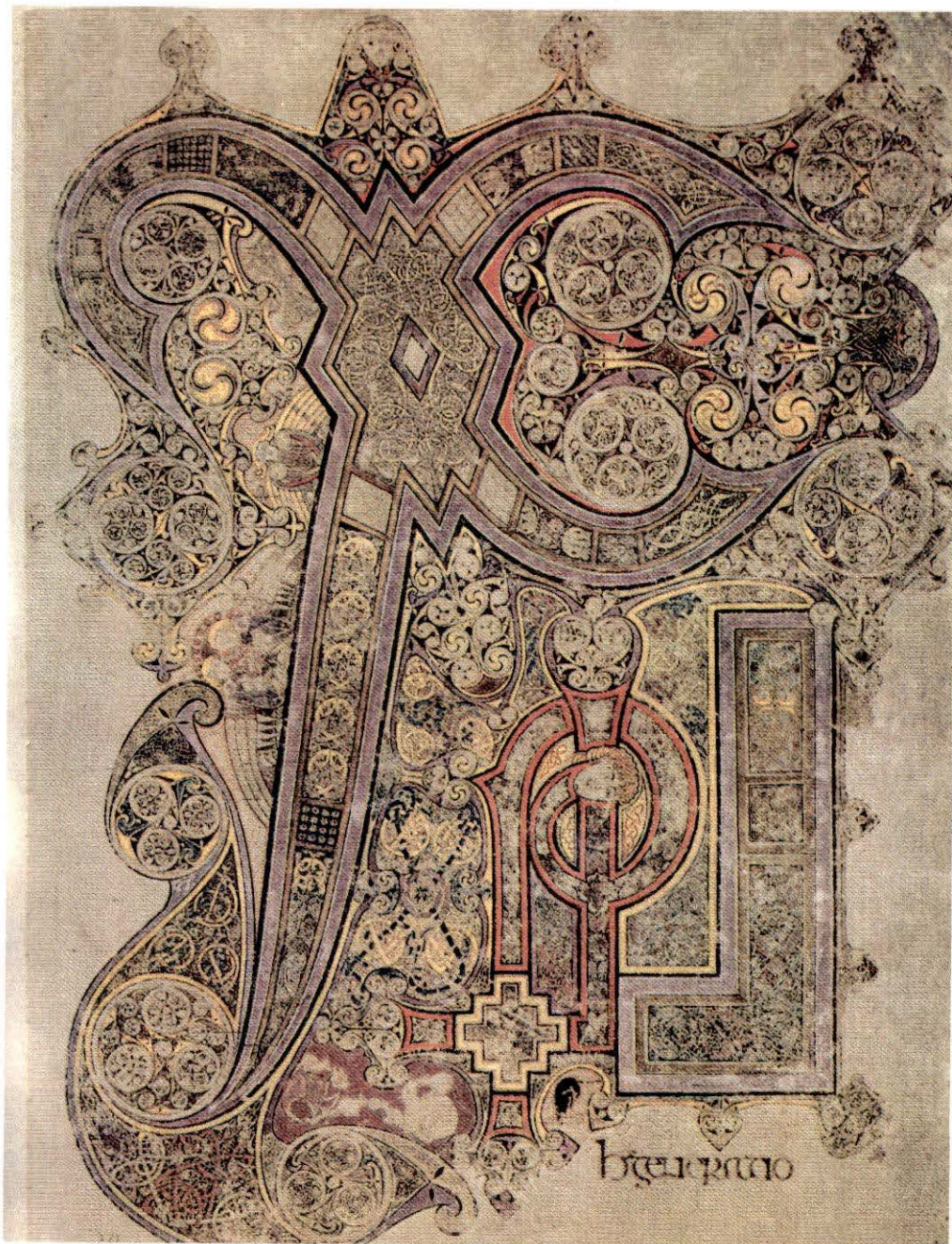


FIGURE 7 - The Incarnation Initial, The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, folio 34r. Peter Brown, The Book of Kells, London, 1980.



FIGURE 8 - "Imago Leonis", The Gospels of Saint Willibrod, (also called The Echternach Gospels), c. 700, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 9389, folio 75v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 9 - Carpet Page with Animal Interlace, The Book of Durrow, c. 680, Dublin, Trinity College Library, 57, folio 192v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 10- Ornamental Text: Ch. XXVII:38, The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, folio 183r. Peter Brown, The Book of Kells, London, 1980.

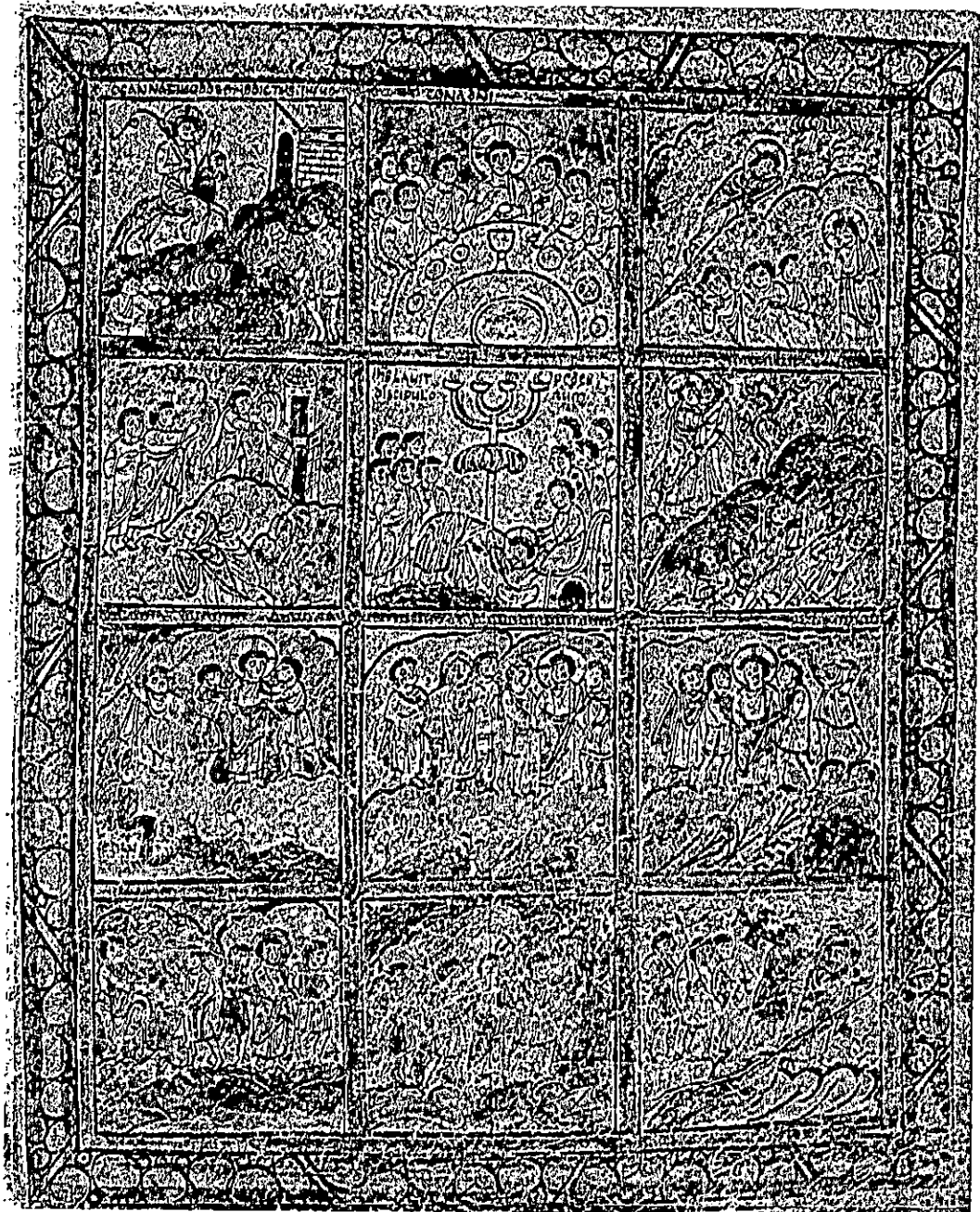


FIGURE 11- "The Passion of Christ", The Gospel Book of Saint Augustine, 6th century, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286, folio 125r. Christopher De Hamel, A History of Illuminated Manuscripts, Oxford, 1986.



FIGURE 12- Author Portrait of St. Luke, The Gospel Book of Saint Augustine, 6th century, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library, MS 286, folio 129v. David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript, London, 1973.



FIGURE 13- "In Principio", *The Book of Lindisfarne*, c. 700, London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D IV, folio 211r. Carl Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 14- The Incarnation Initial, *The Book of Lindisfarne*, c. 700, London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D IV, folio 29r. Carl Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 15- Limestone tombstone, Coptic, 7th century. London, British Museum, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, no. 1790. Ernst Kitzinger, Early Medieval Art, London, 1983.

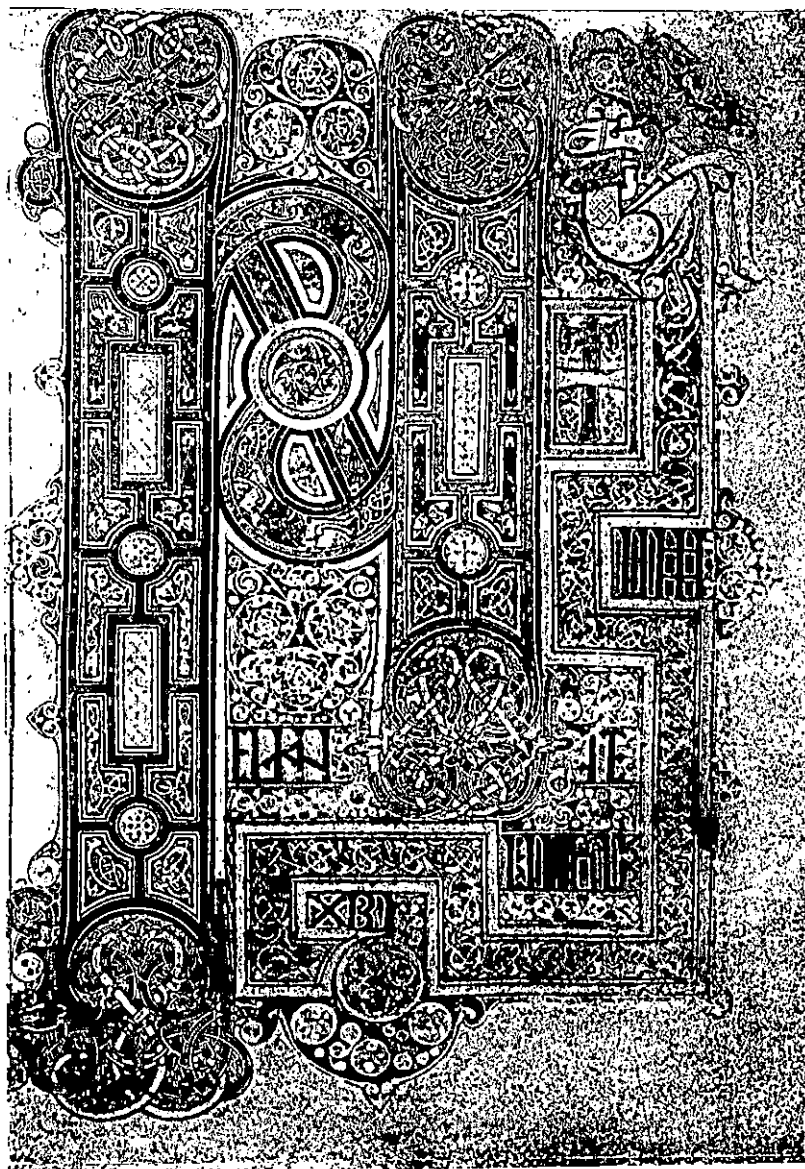


FIGURE 16- Ornamental Text: The beginning of Saint Mark's Gospel, The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, folio 130r. Peter Brown, The Book of Kells, London, 1980.



FIGURE 17- Portrait of the Virgin and Child, The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, folio 7v. Peter Brown, The Book of Kells, London, 1980.



FIGURE 18- Author Portrait of Saint Matthew, The Coronation Gospels, early 9th century, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, unnumbered MS, folio 15r. David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript, London, 1973.

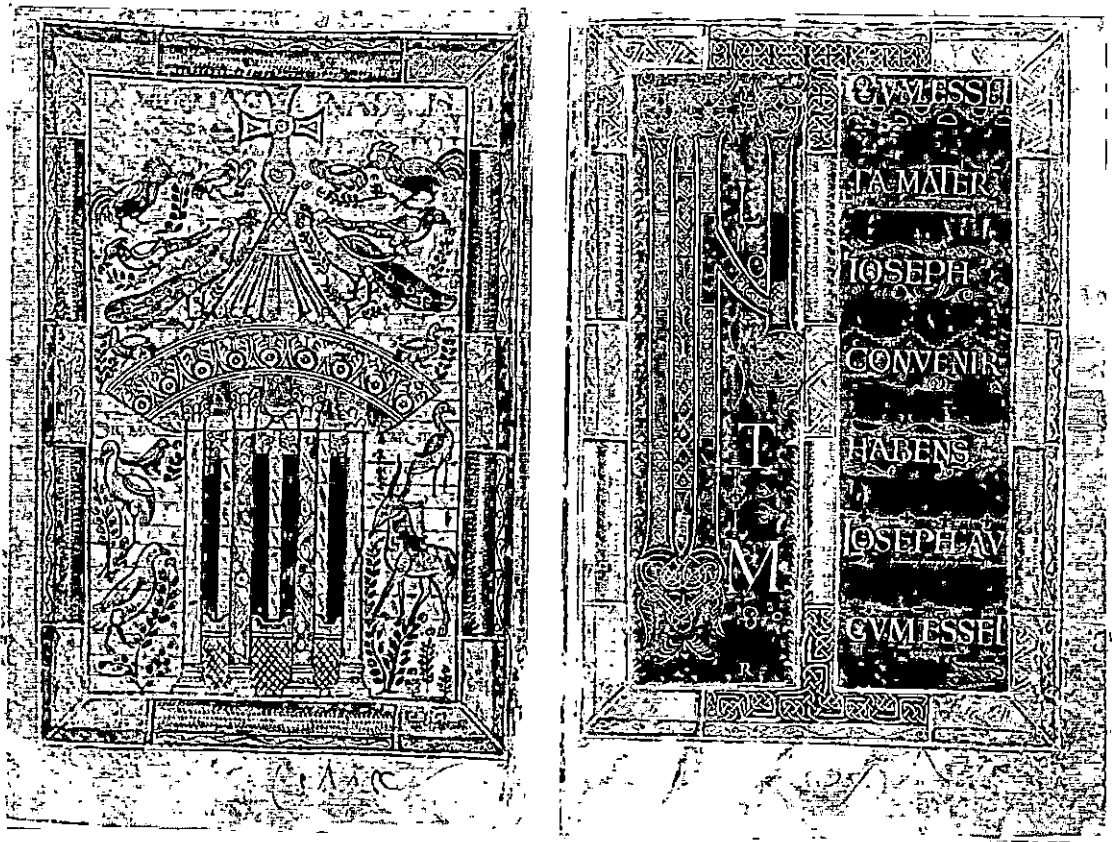


FIGURE 19- "Fons Vitae", Godescalc Gospels, 781-83, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale Lat. 1203, folia 3v and 4r. Donald Bullough, The Age of Charlemagne, New York, 1980.



FIGURE 20- "Coronation of the Virgin", Devotional and Philosophical Writings, c. 1325-35, London, British Museum, MS Hunter 231, folio 83r. Nigel Thorp (introduction and catalogue), The Glory of the Page, London, 1987.



FIGURE 21- "The Marriage at Cana", The Queen Mary Psalter, c. 1310, London, British Museum, MS Royal 2B VII, folio 168v. Andrew Martindale, Gothic Art, London, 1985.



FIGURE 22- Opening and "The Coronation of the Virgin",  
Devotional and Philosophical Writings, c.  
 1325-1335, London, British Museum, MS Hunter  
 231, folia 82v and 83r. Nigel Thorp,  
 (introduction and catalogue), The Glory of  
 the Page, London, 1987.



FIGURE 23- "Saint Barbara", *The Hours of Engelbert of Nassau*, c. 1485-90, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 219-220, folio 41r. David M. Robb, *The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript*, London, 1973.

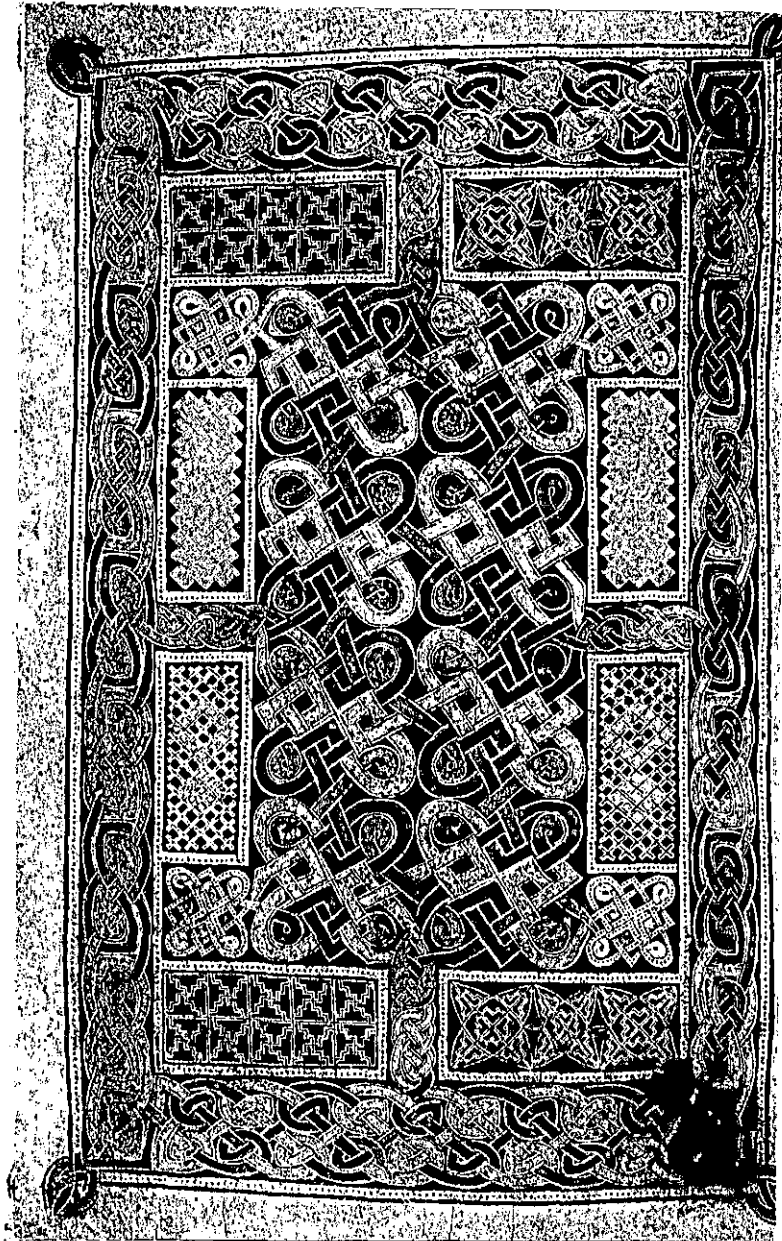


FIGURE 24- Carpet Page with Inlaid Panels, The Book of Durrow, c. 680, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 57, folio 125v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 25- The Incarnation Initial, The Canterbury Codex Aureus, c. 750, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS A. 135, folio 11r. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.



FIGURE 26- Portrait of Saint John, The Canterbury Codex Aureus, c. 750, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS A. 135, folio 150v. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting, New York, 1977.

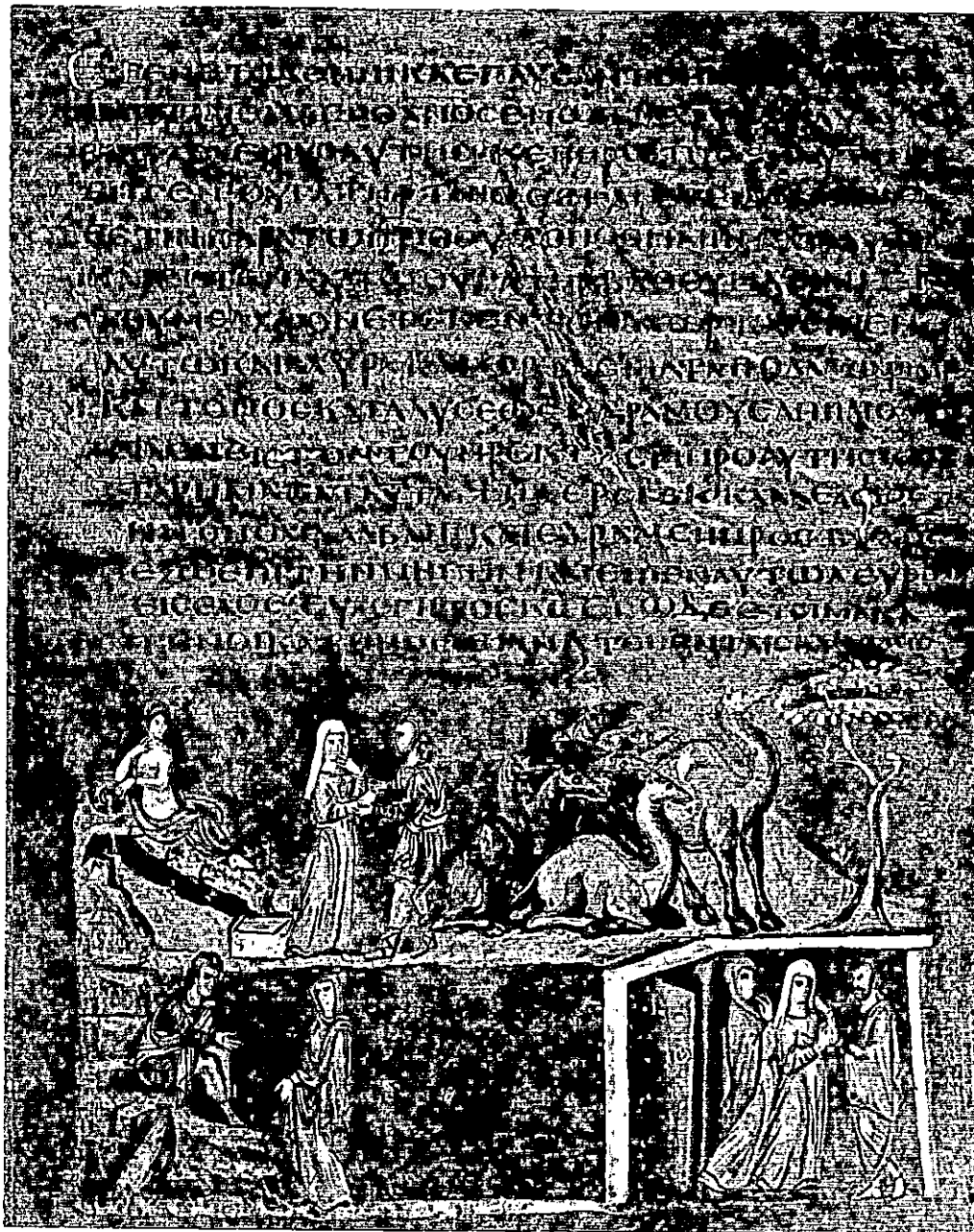


FIGURE 27- "Rebekah welcoming Eliezir", The Vienna Genesis, 6th century?, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. gr. 31, folio 14r. David M. Robb, The Art of the Illuminated Manuscript, London, 1973.

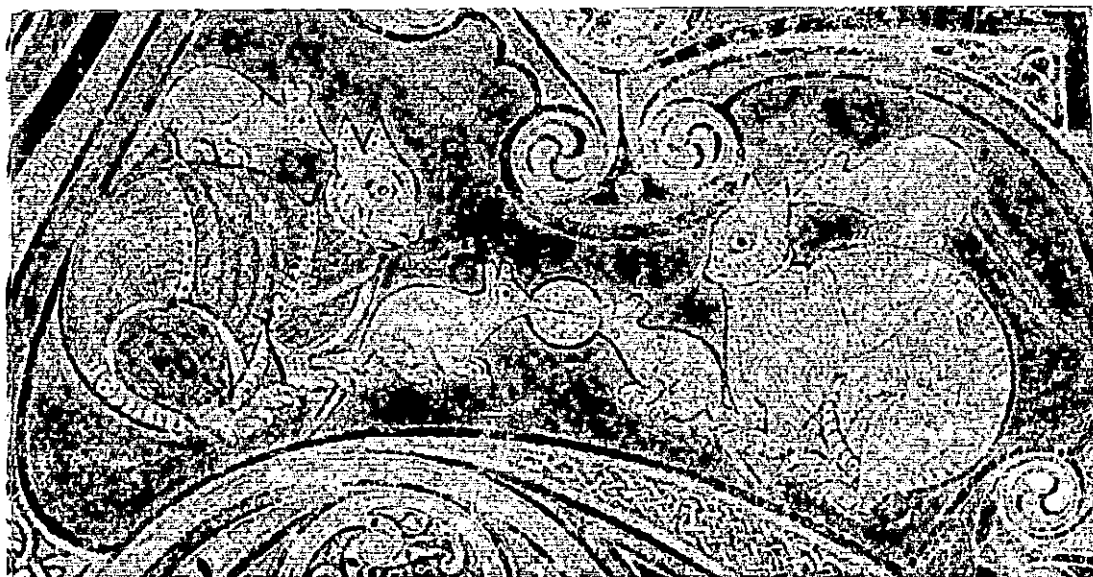


FIGURE 28- The Incarnation Initial (detail), The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, folio 34r. Blanche Cirkner (editor), The Book of Kells, New York, 1982.



FIGURE 29- The Incarnation Initial, (detail), The Book of Kells, early 9th century, Dublin, Trinity College Library, folio 34r. Blanche Cirker (editor), The Book of Kells, New York, 1982.



FIGURE 30- "The Four Evangelists Writing their Gospels", Aachen Gospels, late 8th century, Aachen, Cathedral Treasury, folio 13r. Christopher De Hamel, A History of Illuminated Manuscripts, Oxford, 1986.



FIGURE 31- Decorated Page, Breuiary, before 1478, Hunterian Collection, Bf 1.18, folio 14r. Nigel Thorp (introduction and catalogue), *The Glory of the Page*, London, 1987.



FIGURE 32- Opening Page of Manuscript, *Bible Historiale*, 1357, London, British Library, Royal MS. 17.E. VII, folio 1r. Christopher De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, Oxford, 1986.

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