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Optic Play of The Roundels: A Carpet Page in the Book of Durrow

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Introduction

The Book of Durrow (Dublin, Trinity College Library, Ms. A. IV. 5, 57) is an illuminated evangeliarium or Gospel-book which is known to have been kept in the Monastery of Durrow, near Tullamore, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. It has been kept in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, since 1661 when Henry Jones, then Vice-Chancellor of Trinity College, came into possession of the book and gave it to the college.¹ Formerly known as the Book of Colum Cille, scholars also call it *Codex Durmachensis*.

The codex, its leaves numbering two hundred and forty-eight, is almost completely preserved. The leaves have been trimmed irregularly and size of the writing area varies. The last binding was done by Roger Powell in 1954² and the present measurements of the leaves are approximately 228-247mm x 160mm (Figs. 1-5). While the thickness of the leaves varies considerably, their surfaces are very smooth. The arrangement of flesh-side and hair-side was, in general, indiscriminate, although the flesh-side was chosen for the full-page ornament, except in the case of the Man, the Eagle, the Calf, and for the opening words of the gospels. The Vulgate version of the text includes some Old Latin readings. The script is Insular majuscule. The book has two successive colophons on folio 247v; the first was probably copied from an older manuscript because it has traces of erasures and rewritings, but the second colophon, "Ora pro me frater mi dns tecum sit," seems to be the real colophon of the book.³ General consensus dates the production of the book to around

1 Patrick McGurk, *Latin Gospel Books from A.D.400 to A.D.800*, Les Publications de Scriptorium, V (Paris and Brussels, 1961), 79-81.

2 Roger Powell, "The Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow, comments on the vellum, the make-up, and other aspects," *Scriptorium* X (1945): 12-21.

3 On the colophons, see A. Luce, G. Simms, P. Meyer, and L. Bieler, *Evangelium Quattuor Codex*

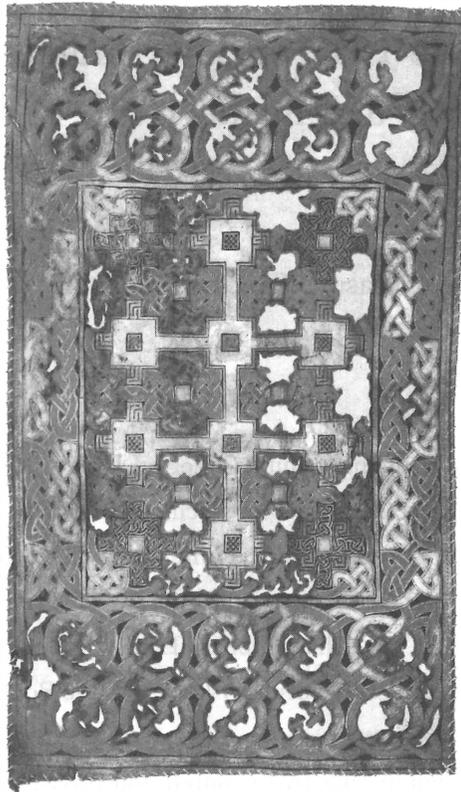


Fig. 1. The Book of Durrow, fol. 1v, Carpet Page with the Eight Square Cross.

680, although there are three commonly held theories regarding its provenance: the Irish theory, the Northumbrian theory, and the Iona theory.⁴

The Book of Durrow has long attracted the attention of scholars because it is the earliest extant Insular manuscript with full-page ornaments and because of its high artistic quality. The manuscript has eleven pages entirely devoted to ornament. Five of these eleven pages are evangelist symbol pages; each of the symbols is given a full page in folios 21v, 84v, 124v, and 191v, with all four appearing together in folio 2v.⁵ The other six

Durmachensis (Oiten, 1960), II, 17-24; T.K. Abbott, "On the Colophon of the Book of Durrow," *Hermathena* VIII (1892): 199-202.

4 A. A. Luce, et al., *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 45-55; Martin Werner, "The Cross-Carpet Page in the Book of Durrow: The Cult of the True Cross, Adomnan, and Iona," *Art Bulletin* LXXII, No.2 (June, 1990): 174-223. Werner concludes that Durrow master's reliance on the *De locis sanctis* text strengthens an Iona provenance of ca. 685.

5 On folio 2r, see M. Werner, "The Four Evangelist Symbols Page in the Book of Durrow," *Gesta* VIII (1969): 3-17.



Fig. 2. The Book of Durrow, fol. 3v, Carpet Page with the Trumpet and Spirals.

ornament pages are carpet pages: folios 1v, 3v, 85v, 125v, 192v, and 248r (Figs. 1-2, 4-5). Each gospel begins with a set of three ornamented pages, a symbol page, a carpet page, followed by an opening page with enlarged letters and groups of letters.⁶ If one places these opening pages side by side according to the order of the gospels, he can observe stages in the development of the illuminated initials. For example, the ornaments of the *Liber* and *Chi Rho* of the first gospel occupy only several lines of the page, while in the next, the Gospel of St. Mark, the *Initium* group takes up nearly half the page (Fig. 3), and in the last gospel, the *In Principio* group occupies almost the whole page. In addition to their expansion in size, the initial letters exhibit an increasingly decorative execution. In later MSS such as the Book of Kells, there is no such internal “development.”

6 The only exception is the Gospel of St. Matthew which does not have a carpet page. A.A. Luce surmises the carpet page of St. Matthew was lost, *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 71; R. Powell prefers an arrangement that has the first carpet page, folio 1v, belonging to the Gospel of St. Matthew, “The Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow,” 15.



Fig. 3. The Book of Durrow, fol. 86r,
Opening Page of the Gospel
of Saint Mark

Can a similar “development” be observed throughout the carpet pages that face the opening pages? While it cannot be seen as clearly in the carpet pages as in the opening pages, some of their compositional and ornamental elements do show a limited “development.” For instance, one of the dominant compositional elements in later MSS, the corner ornaments of the frame, can not be seen on the first two carpet pages (Figs. 1-2), but the third carpet page displays them for the first time, although they are of a very simple and modest design (Fig. 5); on the fifth carpet page facing the last Gospel, the corner ornaments are more articulated and decorative (Fig. 4). As another example of “development,” the ornamental motifs for the interior of the second carpet page (Fig. 2), which once may have been the first carpet page,⁷ are spirals and trumpet patterns in

the Celtic La Tène style, the oldest ornamental elements in Irish art.⁸ The fourth carpet page (folio 125v) introduces the first panel system in *Durrow*; the zoomorphic interlace (Fig. 4), supposedly not introduced into Ireland until between the end of the sixth century and the half of the seventh century, is used only in the carpet page of the last gospel.⁹

However, the distinctive characteristics of *Durrow*’s carpet pages lies not in such “development,” but in the selection of ornamental elements for each page. The illuminator(s) of *Durrow* made a limited selection of two or three elements for the interior of the carpet pages to be used in combination with interlacing ribbon, and composed each carpet page in such a way that it has its own individuality. In fact, each carpet page may

7 See note 6.

8 On the origin of the scroll ornamentation from the Celtic La Tène style, see Nils Åberg, *The Occident and the Orient in the Art of the Seventh Century* (Stockholm, 1943), 22ff; *Treasures of Early Irish Art 1500 B.C. to 1500 A.D.* (New York, 1977), 55-60, pls. 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26.

9 I am tempted to date the Book of Durrow slightly earlier than 680 A.D. because the same treatment of the biting animal motif in C-curves may be seen in both *Durrow* and in the frame of a gold and garnet shoulder clasp buried at Sutton Hoo, 650 A.D. *Treasure of Early Irish Art*, fig. 18: On the origin of the ornamented animal motif in the Insular style, see N.Åberg, *The Occident and Orient*, 110-122.

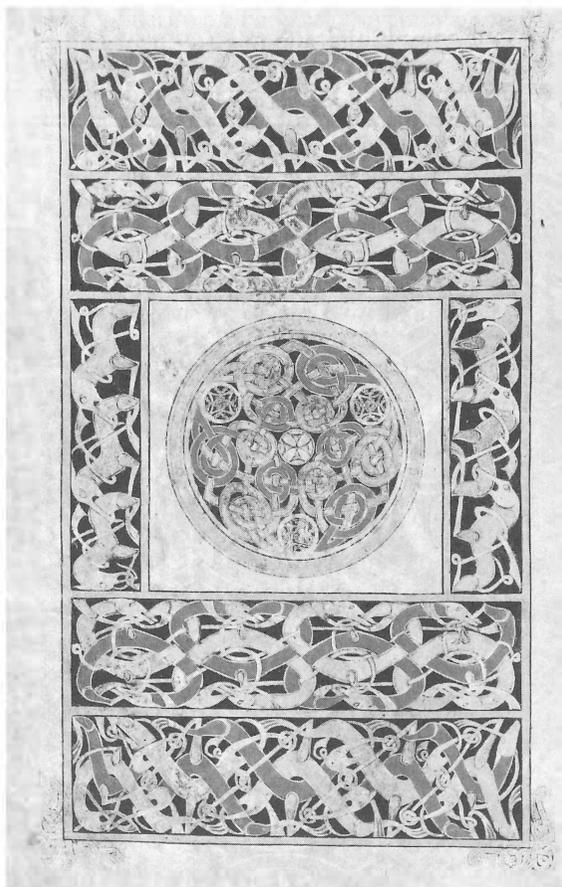


Fig. 4. The Book of Durrow, fol. 192v, Carpet Page with the Biting Animals

be designated by its own name, as for example: folio 1v, The Eight-square Cross (Fig. 1); folio 3v, The Trumpet and Spirals (Fig. 2); folio 192v, The Biting Animals (Fig. 4). One cannot individually name each carpet page in later Insular MSS such as the Lindisfarne Gospels because all the possible ornamental elements are now crowded into each page.

The first purpose of this paper is to examine the third carpet page, The Roundels, folio 85v (Fig. 5), belonging to the Gospel of St. Mark. This page has seldom been mentioned or reproduced in spite of its interesting correspondences with stone carving and metal work, and its ambiguous spatial play of a very Celtic nature. True, compared with other *Durrow* carpet pages, The Roundels is unpretentious. It shares no marked resemblance with other manuscripts as does folio 1v;¹⁰ neither does it have an impressive panel system

10 For a full discussion of *Durrow*'s folio 1v and its relation to other manuscripts, see Werner, "The

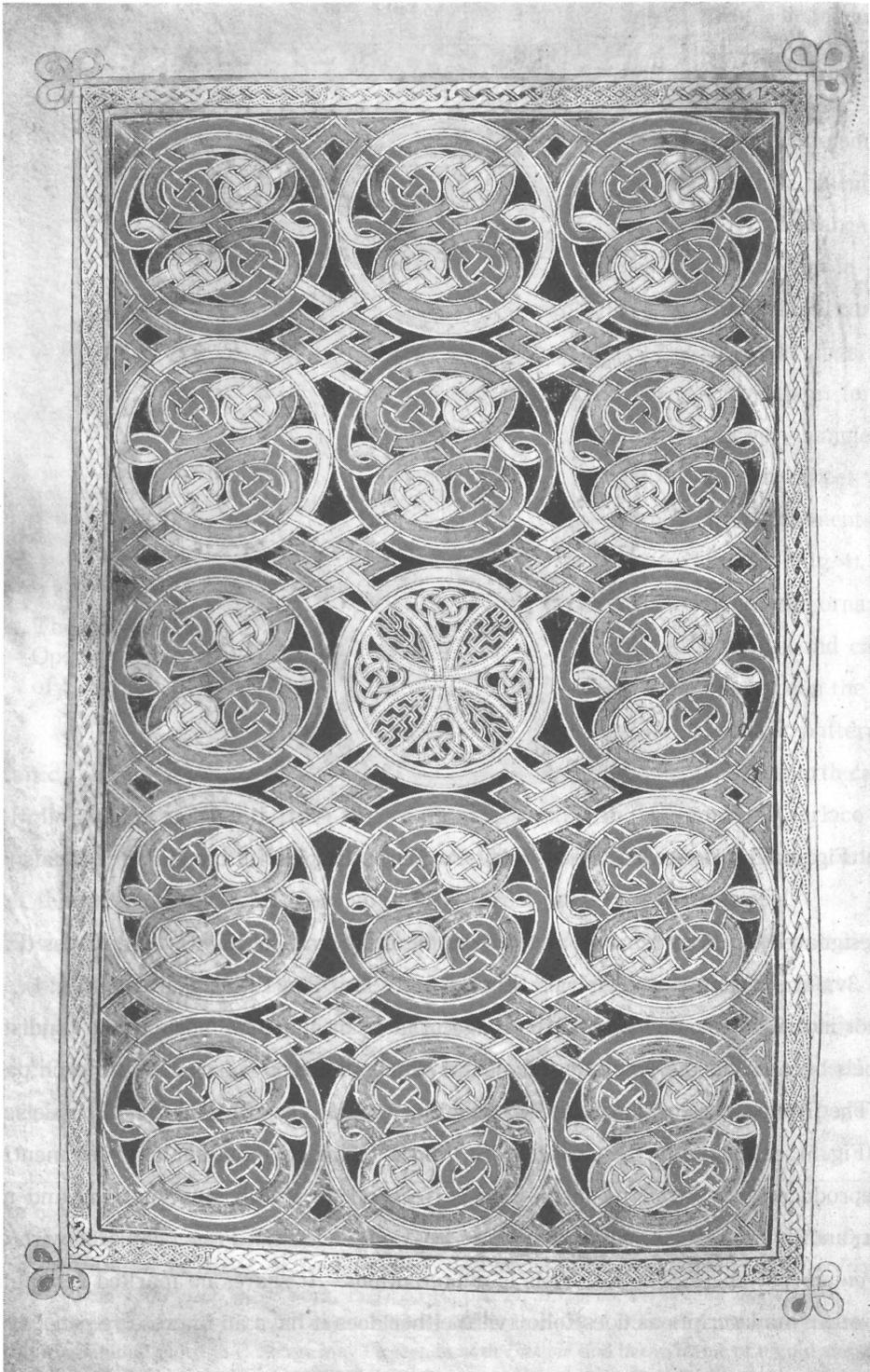


Fig. 5. The Book of Durrow, fol. 85v, Carpet Page with the Roundels.

like folio 125v, nor the kinetic energy of The Biting Animals, folio 192v. The Roundels is rather quiet and intellectual.

Secondly, the spatial play of The Roundels will be compared to that displayed by a carpet page, folio 26v (Fig. 7), in the Lindisfarne Gospels in order to clarify the differences in spatial and ornamental conceptions exhibited by these two MSS.

I. Description of The Roundels (Fig. 5)

The basic design scheme of “The Roundels” folio 85v consists of five registers of three circles each, each circle touching the ones around it, within the large panel (187mm x 108mm) surrounded by a narrow frame. The central circle, in the middle of the third register from both the top and the bottom is treated in a completely different manner from the rest of the circles which consist of yellow, red, and green interlacing ribbons. All the circles were drawn with a compass.¹¹

a) Central Circle

The central circle is enframed by yellow ribbons in four parts which come from the four yellow circles set diagonally off from the central one. Within the yellow ribbons enframing the central circle, there is a narrow white circle. Inside this circle, a single white ribbon is interlaced to form a maltese cross. At each terminal of the four arms of the maltese cross the white ribbon becomes slightly narrower and is loosely knotted to fill the spaces of the arms. Except on these parts, the white ribbon forming a maltese cross is surmounted by minute red dots (ca. 17dots per 10mm) along both edges of the white ribbon-like edging lines.

The diagonal interstices are filled with a cloisonne step-pattern which is the first appearance of this motif in *Durrow*. This pattern is repeated as one of the main motifs filling the panels of the next carpet page, folio 125v, and also for the three small discs in black and white along the periphery of the central medallion of the last Gospel’s carpet

Cross-Carpet Page in the Book of Durrow,” 174-223; C. Nordenfalk, “An Illustrated Diatessaron,” *The Art Bulletin* L (1968): 119-140; also C. Nordenfalk, “The Diatessaron Miniatures Once More,” *The Art Bulletin* LV (1973): 532-546. Nordenfalk’s theory is refuted by M. Schapiro, “The Miniatures of the Florence Diatessaron (Laurentian ms Or. 81): Their Place in Late Medieval Art and Supposed Connection with Early Christian and Insular Art,” *The Art Bulletin* LV (1973): 494-531.

11 For discussions regarding use of a compass, see Brown and R. Mitford, *Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Lindisfarnensis* (Olten, 1956), II, 222; A. Luce, et. al., *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 168, n. 46.

page, folio 192v.¹² In the top right and bottom left sections of folio 85v, this pattern is rectilinear and meander-like; in the other two sections, curved branches issued from a central stem.

Supported by this impressive use of cloisonné pattern, and the continuity of two edging lines of red dots along the diagonal curves, these diagonal interstices are no longer merely interstices but they manifest the definite shape as a unity resembling a diagonal quatrefoil or an X-shaped *Chi-Rho* monogram. In fact, the viewer notices this quatrefoil even before he recognizes the maltese cross formed by interlacing ribbons. The coincident orientation of the quatrefoil to the direction of the yellow ribbon joining the central circle to the other four yellow circles set diagonally off from the central circle also emphasizes this quatrefoil as an X-shaped cross.

The center of the maltese cross is colored vivid yellow. Thus one more cross, small but symbolic, is defined. This yellow cross will reappear, independently, as a symbolic center motif of the small central disc in the center medallion on folio 192v (Fig. 4).

The central circle of the Roundels is carefully organized in an elegant and sophisticated manner to include three different crosses within one circle. If one resolves this complex of crosses into an interlaced maltese cross, a small yellow cross, and a quatrefoil, each shape has close correspondences to reliefs on stone slabs found in Ireland and dating between 650 and 700 A.D. Moreover the same kind of ambiguity between a maltese cross and its quatrefoil shape of interstices can also be found in these stone crosses.

The Fahan Mura slab (Donegal) has two interlaced maltese crosses, one on each side, whose designs are close to that in the central circle of our carpet page, although the treatment of *Durrow's* maltese cross is much more delicate.¹³ Two figures standing besides the cross of Fahan Mura also belong to the same idiom as the symbol of Man of *Durrow*, folio 21v.

The small yellow cross in the center may be compared to carved maltese crosses set within a circle on a stone slab, such as the reverse side of the Duvillaum slab¹⁴ and the slab

12 A. Luce, et. al., *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, I, folios 125v and 192v; C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting* (New York, 1977), pls. 6 and 8.

13 F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to 800 A.D.)* (Ithaca, 1965), 123-128, esp. 126, n. 4. pls. 52, 54; R. A. S. M. Macalister, "The inscription on the slab at Fahan Mura," *Journal of the Royal Society of the Antiquaries of Ireland* (1924): 89; C. Nordenfalk, "Before the Book of Durrow," *Acta Archaeologica* XVIII (1947): 170-171, fig. 25.

14 F. Henry, *Irish Art*, I, pl. III.

at Ballyvourney.¹⁵ However, the small cross in the center circle on the Biting Animals folio 192v. of *Durrow* is closer to these stone slab examples. A quatrefoil finds correspondences, for example, on a slab near Whithorn¹⁶ and especially on the Carndonagh slab.¹⁷

The tradition of creating an ambiguity between the shape of a maltese cross and its quatrefoil interstices in stone pillars may be traced back even earlier to Irish stone slabs dating from the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century. Examples are seen in a stone pillar from AGLISH,¹⁸ and on the Reask pillar (Kerry).¹⁹

In these stone carvings, the process of incising a cross on the surface of stone leaves, at the same time, a projecting quatrefoil. Consequently, the four interstices between the arms of the maltese cross look brighter than the main motif, the maltese cross itself.

Preference for this ambiguous effect continues even in the eighth century, as for example on the front ornament of the famous Ardagh Chalice.²⁰

b) Interlacing Circles

All the rest of the circles of folio 85v are made up of yellow, red, and green interlacing ribbons and are arranged in five registers of three circles each, all within the large panel. Each circle touches its neighbors. The circumferences of the circles are alternately red and yellow; each roundel also has a green ribbon in the shape of a modified S-form whose upper and lower curves each encircle two knots, alternately red and yellow.²¹ These red and yellow ribbons within each of the curves are slightly narrower than those used for the

15 *Ibid*, 122, pl. 50; also F. Henry, "The Decorated stone at Ballyvourney, Co. Cork," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* (1956-8): 41.

16 For Irish stone slab, see the following informative home page (as of 25 September 2006), <http://www.work-interactive.com:81/historicscotland/home.php?mode=catalogue> ; F. Henry, *Irish Art*, I, pl. III.

17 *Ibid*, pl. 59.

18 *Ibid*, 56, pl. 14.

19 *Ibid*, 57, pl. 15.

20 *Ibid*, pl. D; *Treasures of Early Irish Art*, pl. 33; <http://www.limerickdioceseheritage.org/Ardagh/hyArdaghChalice.htm> (as of 25 September 2006)

21 There are only three mineral pigments in the Book of Durrow. Red lead is the red pigment; verdigris is the green; orpiment is the yellow. The animal color ox-gall is used only to a limited extent. The background, which looks inky black, is actually a dark brown color. The pigments, as a general rule, have been applied in thin single layer. see *E.Q.C. Lindisfarnensis*, II, 273; *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 122. P. Meyer on the application of the pigments of folio 85v writes, "The colors, especially the extraordinary intensive carmine red, have a lacquer-like surface and stand out in relief. Both the red and the green are painted over yellow, which in the case of the green always and the case of the red for the greater part, covers also the edging. The yellow ground is probably the cause of the perfect state of preservation of this page as contrasted with such pages as folio 1v."

circumference. Ribbons inside the circles, or curves of the S, are so tightly knotted that their black background is hardly visible. Similar tightly knotted systems within circles may also be found in the frame of *The Trumpet and Spirals*, folio 3v, and in the central circle of *The Biting Animals*, folio 192v. In all these cases, the weaving of the ribbons becomes tighter and tighter as it moves towards the center of the circle. A close parallel to the interlacing ribbon of our carpet page may be seen among metal objects such as the engraved side-walls of the “Domnach Airgid” book shrine,²² although its knotting is looser and coarser. Peter Meyer, discussing the “Domnach Airgid” book shrine, noted that the peculiar shading of the interstices, almost at right angles to the bends of the ribbon, is at least indicated in *Durrow*, folio 85v.²³

A very tightly knotted interlace of broad ribbon with an “uncolored edge” is characteristic of *Durrow*. It gives *Durrow* a fresh vigorous life. In later MSS. such as the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells the vigorous ribbon interlace of *Durrow* becomes a finer, more supple interlace.

Interspersed among the fifteen roundels, the interlacing ribbons make eight rectilinear knots in yellow and green, a kind of English fret, against the background. Such a rectilinear knot is very rare in *Durrow*, being found elsewhere only in the frame of a cannon table page, folio 10r. In the four central knots, the interstices between the ribbons are shaded in light brown. The interstices between the circles and the inner edge of the frame are filled with green ribbons which form triangular knots so as to accommodate the straight lines of the frame and to bring a sense of security. Thus, the black background is more visible in the center, especially behind the eight rectilinear knots.

The contrast between the black background and the ornaments is beautiful and well calculated. A simple but pleasant interplay between background and ornaments is another characteristic of the carpet pages of *Durrow*, where ornaments are clearly set against a black background, as in folios 3v, 85v, 125v, and 192v. The role played by the background in *Durrow* is no longer seen in later carpet pages such as those in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells where the “layering” of ornament becomes more complicated.²⁴ In these MSS. a sense of interplay is created by the contrast between

22 *Treasures of Early Irish Art*, pl. 66; F. Henry, *Irish Art*, I, pl. 55. See also a slightly later interlace pattern on the Cross shaft fragment, now in the Whithorn Priory Museum (Acc. No. WHP. EC. 30)

23 *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 155.

24 According to Christine Swenson’s study, at least three layers are counted in the layering of ornament in the Lindisfarne Gospels: color ground, field compartments and their ornaments, and central

ornaments within compartments against ornaments in fields. The function of the background in *Lindisfarne* and *Kells* is so reduced that it is hardly noticed.

c) Frame

The frame of the Roundels compared to that of the other carpet and symbol pages of *Durrow* is exceptionally narrow (6.5mm). It has two single yellow borders, the exterior one branching out into three loops at each of the four corners. The inside of the loops is colored orange-yellow in some places. In the space, about 4mm in width, between the borders runs an uncolored interlacing ribbon that is dotted red in some sections. The minute dots over the uncolored ribbon appear pink both in the frame and in the central circle. To bring forth the pink effect by playing the red dots over the uncolored vellum must have been important since the palette of *Durrow* was strictly limited. The symbol page depicting calf, folio 124v, also exhibits this pink effect on the body of calf. The red dots, one of the typical insular ornamental elements,²⁵ are seen among the symbol pages, carpet pages, and Initial pages of *Durrow*. However, in later manuscripts, red dots are rarely found on symbol pages or carpet pages; they are used almost exclusively for initial pages.

Also note that the frame of our carpet page has for the first time corner ornaments, although they are still very small and simple. But in folios 125v and 192v, the carpet pages that follow The Roundels, the corner ornaments gradually become bigger as if to foretell the rich and articulated corner ornaments seen in *Lindisfarne*, *Lichfield* and *Kells*. The ensemble of the delicately treated center circle, the clear contrast of curvilinear and rectilinear knots, all set against a black background and an exceptionally narrow frame, impart to The Roundels a graceful and intellectual sense.

II. Development of optic play

Optic spatial play of the Book of Durrow

The design of our carpet page can be seen in three ways depending on the distance between the carpet page and the viewer:

cruciform motif and their ornaments. I. C. Swenson, "An Analysis of the Symmetry Potentials in the Ornamental pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels," Master Thesis, The University of Michigan, 1975, 10.

25 For Discussions on red dots in insular MSS., see N. Aberg, *The Occident and the Orient*, 29-31; F. Henry, "Les Debuts de la Miniature Irlandaises," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* XXXVII (1950): 16-17.

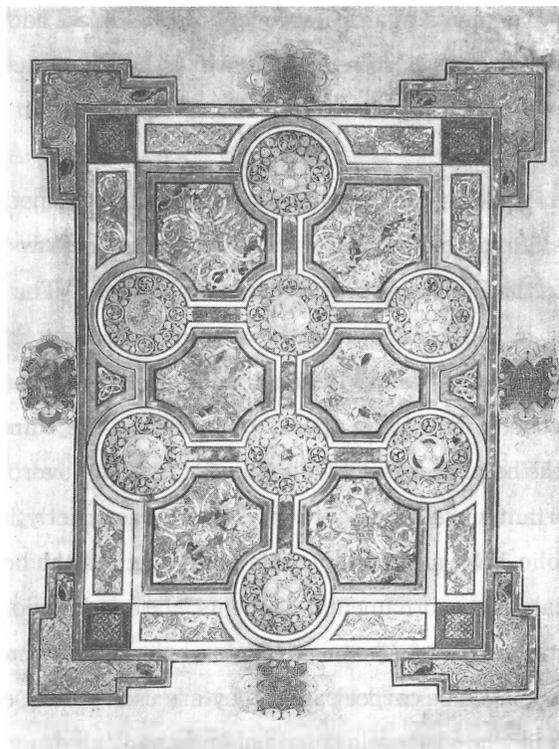


Fig. 6. The Book of Kells, fol. 33r, Carpet Page with Cross

1) from close up, this design appears as fifteen roundels, one center circle with a maltese cross and fourteen other interlaced circles, as I have discussed above; 2) viewed from slightly farther away, seven yellow bordered circles appear to come forward to suggest a figure of the double-armed cross which is related to the eight-square cross of *Durrow* folio 1v²⁶ and also to the eight-circle cross of *Kells* folio 33r (Figs. 1, 6)²⁷; 3) viewed from still farther away, this center circle and the four yellow circles, located diagonally above and below and directly connected to the center circle by the rectilinear knots, appear as a X-shaped *Chi-Rho* monogram.

This optic spatial play in *Durrow* is attained mainly by the lightness, or value in Munsell scale, of yellow and by a careful distribution of yellow by the changing color of the interlacing ribbons. Naturally, the lightness of the yellow is of a higher key than that of

26 E.Q.C. *Durmachensis*, I, folio 1v; C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, pl. 2.

27 E. H. Alton, P. Meyer, G. O. Simms, *Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Cenannensis* (Berne, 1950-1951), I, folio 33r; C. Nordenfalk, *ibid*, pl. 42.

the green and red. Moreover, in the facsimile it looks as if the lightness of the red seems to be lowered in some sections of the red circles by mixing a dark brown tint into the red. Also when red ribbons go out of the circles, their red color is always changed into green or yellow; consequently, the red circles cannot be connected with one another. This explains why the seven yellow circles appear to come forward. The third effect of optic spatial play is produced by the following: 1) the four yellow circles on the second and fourth registers are joined with the center circle because of the continuity of the yellow ribbon; 2) the diagonal orientation between these yellow circles coincides with the orientation of the quatrefoil and its cloisonné step pattern; 3) the interstices of the rectilinear knots around the central circle are colored in light brown, instead of by just letting the black background show through.

The yellow of *Durrow* is very bright and vivid, and is used more symbolically than the other colors. The illuminator of *Durrow* seems to have been well aware of the optical effect of yellow. The fact that *Durrow's* yellow is bright enough to be used as a symbolic color leads one to the assumption that the *Durrow* illuminator may not have needed gold to create the artistic effect he strived for. Also the use of gold, which creates its own spatial dimension, would have run the risk of breaking up the harmony of the carefully wrought abstract design. It certainly would have been difficult to use gold along with other colors for the interlace in which several ribbons go over and under one another within a certain space or depth.²⁸ As in the center circle of our carpet page, the *Durrow* illuminator often used yellow in combination with black and white for the main motif. For example, the inside of each yellow square of the double-armed cross in folio 1v is ornamented with a millefiori pattern in black and white. The use of black and white surrounded by vivid yellow for the main motifs in *Durrow* adds a fresh accent to the polychrome ornament. This combination of yellow with black and white for the main motif is also inherited by *Kells* for the double-armed cross in folio 33r (Fig. 6). The illuminator of *Durrow* also employed yellow as a dominant color for the initial pages, folios 22r, 23r, 86r, 126r, and 193r.

28 If one analyzes functions of gold in medieval illumination, he may classify them roughly in the following three categories: first, symbolic usage such as sacred word, halos, clothes of sacred figures, sacred architectural motifs; second, for background to render an absolute space which, for example, may be seen Ottonian MSS.; third, preference for precious gold itself, as for example, a gold frame with other jewels in Carolingian MSS. None of these three is applicable to *Durrow*. The symbols of the Evangelists in *Durrow* do not wear halos, except for an eagle on the four symbols page on folio 2r.

Optic spatial play of the Lindisfarne Gospels (Fig. 7)

A comparison of our *Durrow* carpet page to the Lindisfarne carpet page with The Animal Interlace, folio 26v (Fig. 7), suggests how the optic spatial play of *Durrow* has evolved in *Lindisfarne* and indicates the differences of the ornamental concepts in the two MSS.²⁹

The basic design scheme of folio 26v consists of a central cross compartment, fields between the arms of the cross, and a frame. The cross is made up of a central circle and five bell-shaped protrusions of the arms, each part with a small circle rivet in the middle.

This cross spreads across the entire panel and is tangent to the frame. The frame is composed of simple green and reddish-purple ribbons with reserved edges which do not

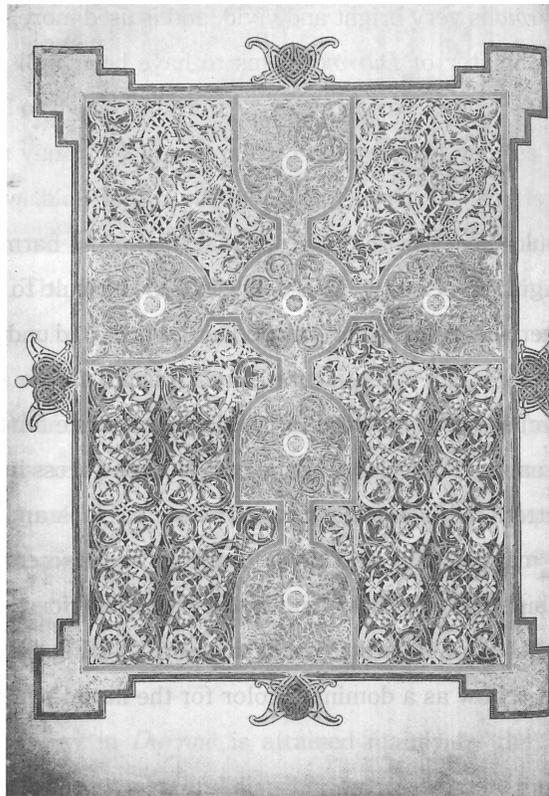


Fig. 7. The Book of Lindisfarne, fol. 26v, Carpet Page with Animal Interlace

29 The Lindisfarne Gospels, Britain Museum, Cotton ms. Nero DIV, ca. 698. Bruce-Mitford, *E.Q.C. Lindisfarnensis*, I. folio 26v, II, Part, IV Decoration and Miniatures; C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, pl.19; I. C. Swenson, "An Analysis of the Symmetry Potentials in the Ornamental pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels," 25-33.

have any interstices between them, unlike the first carpet page, folio 2v, of *Lindisfarne*. The exterior green ribbon is carried out to make a large step pattern filled with a minute interlace at the four corners. Green ribbon also projects outward at the midpoint on each side. This is the first time that ornamental projections are introduced along the sides of the frames; the first carpet page did not have any. The projections of folio 26v do not coincide with the transverse arms of the cross. In other words, the projections do not yet control the design of the interior panel with regard to the horizontal and vertical elements as they do in the following carpet pages, folios 94v, 138v, and 210v.

The reddish-purple ribbon forming the contour of the cross continues as the interior ribbon of the frame, and is the same width and color. Thus the central compartment is secured with the frame in folio 26v, while the compartment in the rest of the carpet pages of *Lindisfarne* give an impression of hanging or floating on the fields. The inside of the cruciform compartment is filled with interlaced quadrupeds that form a circle around each rivet.

The field is occupied by a zoomorphic interlace of quadrupeds and birds which form eight rectangles, four per side, below the arms and appear as fluid form above the arms. At first glance the central cruciform compartment appears to be in a stable position above the field. Then the field begins to come forward and the cruciform compartment begins to recede as if it were treated as inlay. This advancing and receding movement repeats, imparting to the viewer strong optic stimulation. Here one may admit a more sophisticated spatial ambivalence than seen in *Durrow*. The optic spatial play of *Lindisfarne* is essentially different from that of *Durrow*, where spatial play was attained mainly with the high key of yellow's lightness.

How was the sophisticated spatial play of folio 26v in *Lindisfarne* attained? The following may be suggested: first, the adoption of the same kind ornamental elements in equal density both for the cruciform compartment and for the field; second, an equal degree of color saturation used for both cruciform compartment and the field; third, the use of special techniques to apply pigments on vellum.

Although all the carpet pages of the *Lindisfarne* Gospels exhibit some degree of spatial play, that of folio 26v is especially impressive and unique. It should be noticed that folio 26v is the only carpet page in the *Lindisfarne* Gospels that adopted animal interlace for both its central compartment and its field. Moreover, zoomorphic elements in the field are interlaced in the same density as in the central compartment, with the only difference being their shapes, circular in the cruciform compartment and rectangular in the field

below the arms of the cross. But in the rest of the carpet pages following folio 26v, animal interlace is used either for the filling of panels floating in a field such as folios 94v and 138v, or for a field itself as in folio 210v. Another contribution towards creating the spatial play of folio 26v is the reddish ribbon running around the cruciform compartment and fusing it to the frame. This ribbon may be viewed as a part of the cruciform compartment or as a part of the four separated fields. In other words, one can think of two ways to make this design scheme. First, one could lay the cross with the ribbon around it over another sheet of paper, or second, one could cover a sheet of paper with two pairs of polygons with ribbons around them in such a way that they leave a cross in the center. In the rest of the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels, on the other hand, several panels or compartments are surrounded by ribbons that belong only to the panels and are not a part of the field. Thus, folio 26v exhibits a distinctive “ambiguous spatial play,” while the other carpet pages show the panels and field more clearly, and produce a “layer effect.”

The second device for creating the ambiguous spatial play of folio 26v may be explained by the color saturation. The wide color range of the Lindisfarne Gospels includes various shades for each color.³⁰ Note, however, that the saturation of each color used in both the cruciform and the field is almost equally high—light green and orange-purple for the interlacing animals inside the cross, powder blue and pink for the interlacing animals in the field, green and vermillion for the fine interlaces around the bodies of the quadrupeds and birds, and light burnt sienna for the interlacing elements both in the cross and in the field. Thus the palette of *Lindisfarne* is rich, while the colors inside and outside of the cruciform compartment have almost the same degree of saturation. They all belong to the medium tone range. True, the saturation of the green and vermillion used in the field are higher than the rest, but their high saturation are balanced by the narrowness of their ribbons against the black background.

H. Roosen-Ruage and A. E. A. Werner describe the pictorial technique of the Lindisfarne Gospels as follows:

In Lindisfarne Gospels the coloristic effects were achieved through applying the colors in a single layer...However, it should be noted that in the case of the transparent folium and indigo — occasionally also with verdigris — the colors have been

30 The varying shade of each color is a *Lindisfarne* characteristic. For instance, the shades of purple range in tone from a reddish purple through a deep plum purple. For a detailed discussion, see “The Pictorial Technique of the Lindisfarne Gospels,” in *E.Q.C. Lindisfarnensis*, Part V.

applied in such a way that they are thinner at the edge of the painted areas than in the center. The result is that these particular areas of color have a slightly convex appearance and therefore tend to have a livelier aspect so they stand out against the more uniformly applied color of their surroundings.... The fact that, in those where a translucent color has been thinly applied, the incident light shines through and is reflected back from the white parchment background with the result that it causes the layer of color to light up in a characteristic manner. This effect occurs even when the tone is rather weak, as for example, in the case of indigo....³¹

Even though, this pictorial technique was applied to all the carpet pages of *Lindisfarne*, still the ambiguous spatial play is especially effective in folio 26v. This seems to be the result of a careful combination of design and ornamental elements, and of the knowledge of color saturation and techniques of pigment application. Enhanced by the techniques used to apply the pigments on the vellum, the zoomorphic elements are animated in fluid movement.

Conclusion

Examination of folio 85v of *Durrow* and folio 26v of *Lindisfarne* leads one to conclude that conceptions of spatial play in the two MSS. are essentially different, and that the spatial play in each is attained by completely different methods. The illuminator of *Durrow* used optic spatial play to convey his messages — the double-armed cross and the X-shape of the *Chi-Rho* monogram — achieved mainly by means of the lightness of yellow. Might these crosses not reflect special Christian cult tendencies relating to worship of the cross in early Ireland?

The illuminator of *Lindisfarne*, on the other hand, seems to use ambiguous spatial play for its own sake as if he enjoyed a kind of intellectual game. And here the devices are more complex and the effect more sophisticated. Yellow, which played a symbolic role in *Durrow*, is no longer the dominant color in the Lindisfarne Gospels, where each color, such as purple, vermillion, pink, blue, green, includes various shades and performs its score like a member of an orchestra. A highly sophisticated spatial play seems to have reached its zenith in folio 26v of the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The influence of folio 26v of the Lindisfarne Gospels may, in turn, be seen in the design

31 Ibid, 273.

of a carpet page of the Lichfield Gospels, although the ambiguous spatial play of the latter is less interesting than that of the Lindisfarne Gospels.³² A double-armed cross on a carpet page of *Kells* shares several compositional and ornamental ingredients with the Lindisfarne Gospels, including heavy corner ornaments with its step pattern, interlaced projections at midpoint on each side of the frame, a system of compartments firmly outlined by ribbons, and interlaced quadrupeds and minute ribbons. Nevertheless, the spirit of the carpet page of *Kells* is much closer to *Durrow*'s. The tradition of the double-armed cross and the symbolic role of yellow in *Durrow* are still alive and breathing in *Kells* (Figs. 1, 6). Moreover, the relationship between *Durrow* and *Kells* also may be observed in the common structure of their codices.³³

Tracing the provenances of the major Insular MSS. and pursuing the development of each stream present many problems because the development of Insular MSS. seems not to lie in a single line. Rather, several streams appear to have developed at the same time at several centers under mutual influences from one another.³⁴ Comparison of the carpet pages of *Durrow* and *Lindisfarne* suggests that *Durrow* and *Lindisfarne* may belong to different stages of different illuminated manuscript streams. One may hypothesize the existence of now lost manuscripts that would have belonged to an earlier stage of the Lindisfarne Gospels stream because of its high accomplishment of the organized abstract decoration. Difficulties in placing the Lichfield Gospels in the complex developments of Insular MSS. arise because its initial and carpet pages reveal direct influences from the Lindisfarne Gospels on the one hand, while its symbol pages predict features of the figurative pages of *Kells*. And even with regard to *Kells*, neither the provenance nor the date of this justifiably framed MSS. has been conclusively proved.³⁵ Many are the

32 C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, pl. 26; F. Henry, *Irish Art*, I, pl. I.

33 *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 32-37.

34 See "Notes on some related manuscripts" in *E.Q.C. Durmachensis*, II, 162-164. As P. Meyer correctly indicates, "All insular MSS. of the seventh and eighth centuries are related to *Durrow*, but none closely enough to suggest direct affiliation." D. H. Wright gave a lecture on "New Fragments of the Turin Gospels" at the CAA meeting in January 1978. The script and canon tables of these fragments exhibit close affinities to *Durrow* but the two carpet pages represent a different ornamentation that has a panel system against a field in a less developed and refined stage of the Lindisfarne carpet style. The discovery of these fragments of the Turin Gospels suggests that many MSS. with full ornament pages must have once existed.

35 The date of the Book of Kells should be reconsidered based on a careful comparison with metal works dating around 750 A.D., such as the Tara Brooch.

problems that await future study.

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