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FRONT COVER DESCRIPTION

Our thanks to *Eli Lilly* for supporting the front cover.

The arrest of Christ from St Matthew's Gospel

From the Book of Kells, Kells, Co Meath. 8-9th Century AD. Reproduced courtesy of the Board of Trinity College Dublin.^{1,2}

The Book of Kells is considered the greatest work of Irish art to survive from the Middle Ages. The book consists of the four Gospels of the New Testament, St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John, with preliminaries, summaries (*breves causae*), tables of reference numbers (Eusebian Canons) and part of a Glossary which gives the interpretations of Hebrew proper names.

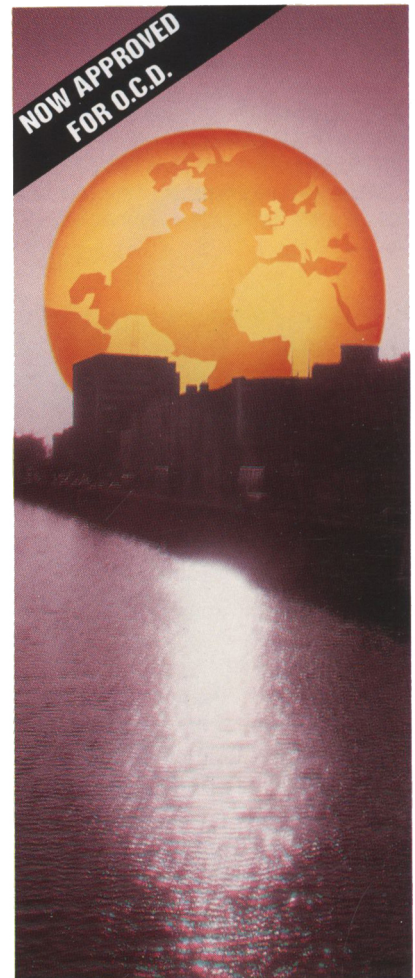
It has been suggested that there were least four possible artists involved in the production of the Book of Kells. The one referred to as 'The Illustrator' has been ascribed a variety of work within the book ranging from The Virgin and Child, The Temptation and, this issue's front cover, The Arrest. His task within the manuscript seems to have been the illustration of well-known scenes in Christ's life. The stiff and conventional drawing of The Virgin and Child, together with the presence of the Devil in The Temptation find a resonance in the intensity and somewhat grotesque depiction of The Arrest. The coiling patterns of trefoil in the illustration indicate a divine presence, which is tragically framed by a pair of snarling dogs.

The three other identifiable artists involved in the production of the manuscript have been referred to as 'The Goldsmith', who is principally responsible for the elaborate and delicate gold tracery, and 'The Portraitist' to whom (among other drawings) is ascribed the three full page illustrations of the Evangelists. The final illustrator's principal work concerned the illustration of everyday life, his forte seems to have been the reproduction of animals, birds, fishes, humans and a variety of lizard-like creatures which all lend a special charm and fascination to the Book of Kells.

The designs which the above illustrators used in their art have been classified as geometric (circular patterns, spirals and so on), zoomorphic (animal-shaped illustrations), phyllomorphic (leaf-like patterns) and figure representations. The dominant colours of the Book of Kells include bright red, reddish purple, emerald green, deep blue and yellow. The use of these colours and styles are considered to be the result of Egyptian influences in their art, especially in relation to the colouring and treatment of hair. The extensive use of animals is believed to result from contact with artists in Gaul.

1. The Book of Kells. GO Simms. Dublin: Colin Smythe (in association with TCD), 1992.
2. The Book of Kells [brochure]. Trinity College Dublin. Dublin: TCD, 1994.

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