



# Book of Kells

Virtual version of  
Irish cultural  
treasure available

**T**his time of year, we are inundated with images of leprechauns, rainbows, pots of gold and shamrocks. And the color green is everywhere. These visual Irish clichés are meant to evoke the spirit of Ireland in honor of St. Patrick's Day. I confess to the wearing of the green on Scranton St. Patrick's Parade Day and have even sported a shamrock pin or two while out celebrating.



**KEVIN O'NEILL**

*InSites*

The stereotyping of all things Irish in March is mostly done in good fun, and as a person of Irish descent, it doesn't bother me too much. But there is much more to the Irish than shamrocks and leprechauns. We have a long history and rich cultural traditions of music, art and writing.

In fact, one of the most famous cultural treasures in the world, the Book of Kells, is at Trinity College Dublin. The book is a rare example of the illustrated manuscripts created by monks

in the Middle Ages. It is written in Latin and contains the four Gospels and various other religious texts from the early days of Christianity.

Thanks to the college's website, you don't have to travel to Ireland to see this magnificent work of art. Actually, as nice as a trip to Ireland would be, you wouldn't be able to see as much of the book in person as you can online. The college library has digitized much of its collection at **digitalcollections.tcd.ie**. If you enter Book of Kells in the search field on the Digital Collections page, it will take you to high-resolution images of all the surviving pages of the manuscript. There also is an app available at the App Store that lets you view the pages in high resolution on an iPad or iPhone.

Most scholars believe that the book was made around 800 A.D., so there is obvious wear and tear on the pages. But the hand lettering and illustrations that survived are still very impressive. You can zoom in extremely close and examine the incredible detail on the pages.

The expert hand lettering, done in a script known as insular majuscule, is a

work of art in itself. But the embellishments and illustrations that accompany the text are what really make the Book of Kells special.

Some of the pages feature large illustrations of religious iconography combined with decorative Celtic knot borders and emblems. Even the pages that are mostly text feature lavishly illustrated initial capital letters.

The screen viewer used to look at the pages has a column of thumbnail images down the left side. Clicking on one brings up a larger version of the page. You also can make the image full-screen. The larger views allow you to pan around and zoom in on the image. A link above the image opens a small window with information about the page you're looking at.

Enjoy the festivities of St. Patrick's Day along with all the leprechauns and shamrocks. But spend a little time with the Book of Kells to see what real Irish culture is.

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