Early Medieval Europe

5ᵗʰ – (first quarter of the) 11ᵗʰ century
Historical Timeline

- **Late Antiquity/Early Christian** (3rd - 7th c AD)
- **Byzantine Empire (East)** (330 – 1453 AD)
- **Medieval Europe (West)** (400-1400 AD)

- **250 AD**
- **600**
- **1500 AD**
Early Medieval Europe

Byzantine Empire

Constantinople
"Barbarian" or nomadic tribes

- **Visigoths** (western) and **Ostrogoths** – (eastern) branches of Germanic peoples who invaded Italy
- **Franks & Lombards** - of Germanic people, invaded Italy and established a kingdom there
- **Normans** - descended from Norse Viking conquerors
- **Vikings** - members of a Scandinavian (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) people who carried out seaborne raids of northwestern Europe
- **Celts** – group of people who were driven to the western fringes of the continent by the Romans and some Germanic peoples, mainly to England, Scotland & Ireland.
- **Saxon** – (aka Anglo-Saxon) West Germanic people, settling in southern Britain

- **Merovingians** - belonging or relating to a dynasty of Frankish kings that was founded by Clovis I and reigned in Gaul and Germany from about AD 500 to 751.
  - United the Frankish tribes under one ruler, changing the leadership from a group of royal chieftains, to rule by kings, ensuring that the kingship was held by his heirs.
  - Clovis converted to Catholicism in 496. His conversion to Catholicism resulted in a many of his people converting to Catholicism as well. It also gained him a powerful political ally against surrounding tribes.
Medieval Art

• Between 400 and 1400 AD
• Also known as the Middle Ages (between Classical & Renaissance periods) or the “Dark Ages”

• Celtic Art, aka migration art, introduced elaborate swirling motifs to western decoration during the Middle Ages.
  – Germanic & Insular art
  – After Christianization of Europe, it developed further into various schools of EMA
Pair of *Merovingian looped fibulae*, from Jouy-le-Comte, France, mid-sixth century. Silver gilt worked in filigree, with inlays of garnets and other stones.

The **fibula** is a garment pin that goes back to the Romans and Etruscans. This one has red gems and blue enamel. Aside from the fish, all the designs are abstract ones.

Similar fibulae are found on the figures next to Justinian in the San Vitale mosaic.
Its surface is filled in with an interlace of lines. These are the standard elements of this warrior art: *animal forms* and *interlace patterns*.
By the 11th century, much of Scandinavia had become Christian. So here the *barbarian interlace adapted to the decoration of the church.*
Medieval Christian Monks

• Monasticism is literally the act of dwelling alone. It involves withdrawing from the world in order to pursue a life of worship & contemplation.

• A community that follows monastic practices lives in a monastery (or in the case of women, in a nunnery).
  – governed by religious vows and monastic rules

• Christian monasticism developed in Egypt in the 3rd century when some Christians chose poverty and isolation as a way of getting closer to God.
  – Communities copying the strict way of life of these holy men quickly spread across Europe and became an important part of medieval European society.
  – By the mid-12th century, there were around 500 monasteries in England alone.

• Everyday life would have differed depending on what order a monk belonged to, but there were also similarities across many houses.
Medieval Monasticism

• As monastic communities developed so did the need for principles to guide those living within the monastery. In the 6th century, St. Benedict (480–550) created his famous Rule as a guide to running a monastic community.
  – It covered every aspect of life, from worship to everyday practical issues

• *The Rule of St Benedict* became the most influential of the Christian monastic rules. It is still used by a number of orders, including the Benedictines.

• The earliest Benedictine monasteries were independent and autonomous but were united by the observance of the same Rule.
The Montecassino Monastery was founded by St. Benedict about 529 A.D. on the remnants of a pre-existing Roman fortification. Montecassino became famous for the remarkable life and the tomb of its founder. Through the ages, the abbey was looked upon as a place of holiness, culture and art.

Around 577, the monastery was destroyed by the Lombards (Germanic tribe); in 883, the abbey was invaded and sacked and the Monastery was burnt down, resulting in surviving monks fleeing to Capua (returning mid 10th c); in 1349 it was destroyed again by an earthquake. Nothing but a few walls remained standing; in 1944 came under attack during WW2 and in a matter of 3 hours was reduced to heap of debris.
Schematic plan for a monastery at Saint Gall, Switzerland, ca. 819. Red ink on parchment

Most monasteries were self sufficient and included a **scriptorium** – a room dedicated to creating manuscripts.
Abbey of Saint-Riquier, Centula, France, 790–799, in an engraving of 1612 after a lost 11th-century manuscript illumination
Scriptorium

- A scriptorium is a room devoted to the hand-lettered copying of manuscripts.

- In the monasteries, the scriptorium was a room, rarely a building, set apart for the professional copying of manuscripts.
  - A scriptorium was a normal adjunct to a library
  - The scriptorium was also a source of revenue for the monastic community.

- During the 7th - 9th centuries, many earlier parchment manuscripts were scrubbed and scoured to be ready for rewriting. Such overwritten parchment manuscripts, where the original text has begun faintly to show through, are called palimpsests.
  - Many of the works of Antiquity often said to have been preserved in the monasteries were only preserved as palimpsests.
Man (symbol of Saint Matthew), folio 21 verso of the Book of Durrow, possibly from Iona, Scotland, ca. 660–680. Ink and tempera on parchment

**Parchment** - lambskin
Carpet pages
Book of Durrow, 7th c

Carpet page – manuscript page so named because it resembles the intricate textiles

**Vellum** - calfskin

Combination of Christian imagery and the animal-interlace style of the North

Luke 1:1 -
The first initial and words of Luke "Quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem" (Many have undertaken to draw up an account)
Chi-rho-iota (XPI) page, folio 34 recto of the Book of Kells, probably from Iona, Scotland, late eighth or early ninth century. Tempera on vellum

XPI = chi-rho-iota
= the initials/letters of Christ in Greek
Celtic Crosses

The halo-like circle identifies the work as Celtic.

Earlier ones were filled in with interlace.

Later ones and those to follow were filled in with figurative scenes from the life of Christ (or Celtic saints), though patterning remains a strong element.

Sometimes a fantastic animal is included

South Cross, Ahenny, Ireland, late 8th century. Sandstone

High Cross of Muiredach (east face), Monasterboice, Ireland, 923
Spain

San Juan Bautista, Baños de Cerrato, Spain, 661

Visigoths converted to Christianity in the early 5th century. Many churches still stand today.

Follows the basilica form; built over the site of a miraculous healing, horseshoe arch (which will later be associated with Islamic architecture in the West)
One of the *earliest known depictions of a scriptorium.*

To the left is the bell tower with a monk ringing the bell. The walls of the tower resemble Islamic tiles; the interior ladders & horseshoe arches are Visigothic.

To the right is the scriptorium. Three monks are shown and each is doing his respective duty. The two seated together are the senior scribe and the artist (Emeterius); to the right the monk is cutting parchment

**Mozarabic** – Christians living in Arab territories (Muslim armies arrived in Spain, via N.Africa, in 711.)

**Colophon** - an inscription at the end of a book or manuscript, giving the title or subject of the work, its author, the name of the printer or publisher, and the date and place of publication.
Emeterius, the tower and scriptorium of San Salvador de Tabara, colophon (folio 168) of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by Beatus, from Tabara, Spain, 970. Tempera on parchment

Bihzad, *Seduction of Yusef*, folio 52 verso of the *Bustan* of Sultan Husayn Mayqara, from Herat, Afghanistan, 1488. Ink and color on paper
Charlemagne

Rex Francorum (King of the Franks)
Rex Longobardorum (King of the Lombards)
Imperator Romanorum (Emperor of the Romans)

*KAROLVS IMP AVG* (Carolus Imperator Augustus)
Carolingerian Art in the 9th century (present day France & Germany)

- Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was the most important name linked to Medieval art and culture. Established Frankish Empire.

- His reign spans more than 40 years (768-814) and it was during this time that modern day European civilization came into existence.
  - He was interested in preserving 3 things: the Roman past, the Germanic way of life, and Christianity.

- Carolingian Renaissance, a revival of art, religion, and culture is closely associated with Catholic Church
  - Charlemagne encouraged the spread of uniform religious practices as well as a culture

- By the end of his career, Charlemagne had unified his empire, elevated education, standardized coins, handwriting and Latin. Religious texts were created in the everyday vernacular.
Equestrian portrait of Charlemagne or Charles the Bald, from Metz, France, 9th century. Bronze, originally gilt.

**Gilding** – a technique for applying fine gold leaf or powder to solid surfaces such as wood, stone, or metal to give a thin coating of gold.

????????, 161-180 CE
Saint Matthew, folio 15 recto of the *Coronation Gospels* (*Gospel Book of Charlemagne*), from Aachen, Germany, ca. 800–810. Ink and tempera on vellum

A number of medieval illuminated manuscript Gospel books are called the *Coronation Gospels*, meaning they have, at least by tradition, had a coronation oath sworn upon them at some point.
Christ enthroned, folio 3 recto of the *Godescalc Lectionary*, 781–783. Ink, gold, and colors on vellum

**Lectionary** - a book or listing that contains a collection of scripture readings appointed for Christian worship on a given day or occasion
Art of Charlemagne’s Court

- a youthful, beardless, Christ is nailed to the cross.
- He stairs open-eyed in gold repoussé (hammered out from behind).
- Mary and Saint John and two other figures crouch below; angels plus personifications of the moon and sun flit above.

Crucifixion, front cover of the *Lindau Gospels*, from Saint Gall, Switzerland, ca. 870. Gold, precious stones, and pearls
Dome - Palatine Chapel.
The term “palatine” means chapel for the royal palace; it is a chapel usually attached to the palace structure itself.
Ottonian Art
(10th century Germany)

• Following Charlemagne’s death, there was disorder in the Holy Roman Empire

• The most significant successive rulers of the period were 3 Germanic (Saxon) emperors, all named Otto.
  – Otto I (912-973, the Great) had himself crowned in Rome by the Pope in 962 with Charlemagne’s title of Holy Roman Emperor
  – Otto II (955-983, the Red), married to Theophanu – a Byzantine princess; Holy Roman Emperor
  – Otto III (980-1002) was Holy Roman Emperor 996-1002

• Their reign symbolized an extension of Charlemagne’s ideals with attention to the arts and architecture.
Christ blessing Otto II and Theophanu, 972–973. Ivory
Saint Michael’s, Hildesheim, Germany, 1001–1031

Hildesheim was a center of learning and the arts in the early 11th century.
Longitudinal section (top) and plan (bottom) of the abbey church of Saint Michael's, Hildesheim, Germany, 1001–1031

The Abbey Church of St. Michael’s at Hildesheim was the most important architectural achievement of the Ottonian era.
- used a modified Roman basilica plan
COMPARE + CONTRAST

Saint Michael’s, Hildesheim, 1001–1031

Hosios Loukas, Greece, 11th c
Ottonian Sculpture

- The panels show a similarity to manuscript illumination of this period.

Doors with relief panels (Genesis, left door; life of Christ, right door), commissioned by Bishop Bernward for Saint Michael’s, Hildesheim, Germany, 1015. Bronze
All of the images were meant to be emotional, therefore, they are not considered Classical figures.

Doors with relief panels
   (Genesis, left door;
    life of Christ, right door),
    St. Michael's. 1015

Adam & Eve Reproached by the Lord.
   detail of bronze doors
The column includes 24 scenes, from Christ’s Baptism to his entry into Jerusalem.

Column with reliefs illustrating the life of Christ, commissioned by Bishop Bernward for Saint Michael’s, Hildesheim, Germany, ca. 1015–1022. Bronze

Likely sources for this column are the Trajan or Marcus Aurelius columns in Rome.
Abbess Uta dedicating her codex to the Virgin, folio 2 recto of the *Uta Codex*, from Regensburg, Germany, ca. 1025. Tempera on parchment

Crucifix commissioned by Archbishop Gero for Cologne Cathedral, Germany, ca. 970. Painted wood
Annunciation to the Shepherds, folio in the *Lectionary of Henry II*, from Reichenau, Germany, 1002–1014. Tempera on vellum

Notice the golden backgrounds and linear figural styles in *Ottonian illuminated manuscripts* --- Ottonian leaders developed significant contacts with the Byzantine empire.
Otto III, seen here in his own gospel book, was obsessively interested in the revival of a Christian Roman Empire. His mother’s Byzantine parentage indicates his grandfather’s moving in this direction.

He moved the court to Rome, to be near the center of church power, and to display and demonstrate his interest in reviving imperial power.
Justinian, Bishop Maximianus, and attendants, mosaic on the north wall of the apse, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 547

Otto III is depicted as an enthroned emperor, with a scepter and cross-inscribed orb to represent his universal authority; he is flanked by the clergy & the barons (Church & State).

Has a clear political resemblance to Justinian’s mosaic in Ravenna.
Jesus washing the feet of Saint Peter, folio 237 recto of the Gospel Book of Otto III, 997–1000. Tempera on vellum
Romanesque Art
Dates: 1050-1200

- The use brightly colored stained glass windows
- Illuminated manuscripts
- The colors in the art of this period were generally muted (except those used in manuscripts and stained glass windows)
- Religious shrines and caskets were decorated with fine metals, gilt work and enamel
- Large, stone, figurative sculptures
- Small Ivory Carvings
- Murals

Saint James, Santiago de Compostela ca. 1075