

The Irish seemed unlikely saviours of academic knowledge, living as they did in their rural environments, however, scholarship could flourish in Ireland because there existed a learned class of poets, druids and lawyers, who were effectively thought of as being intellectuals.

These folk memorised poetry and mythical stories, they believed that knowledge should be transmitted as widely as possible or souls would be damned. When St Patrick came to Ireland so too came Latin. Because of the Latin alphabet Irish Celts could write. This was now one of the major duties of the Irish monks. The monks copied Church writings and helped preserve Latin literature and Celtic Myths. They even produced new writings, like the "Voyages of Brendan". The most famous tale told of copyright was the case against St Columba by his teacher St Finnian. St Finnian stemmed from the old druidical tradition where everything should be kept secret. As a young student, St Columba was so eager to have his own copy of a book that he used to sneak into his teachers study at night to copy the manuscript. Some versions of the story suggest that light emerged from St Columba's finger tips so he could copy the book under the guise of nightfall. St Finnian successfully sued his student on the grounds "that as every cow owns his calf so too does every book owns its copy".

The Irish monks made beautiful books and illuminated manuscripts. They employed the earlier La Tene Celtic art style and the most famous example of this is illustrated in the Book of Kells, and 8th century work from the Irish monastery of that name. The pages are filled with interlacing patterns and stylized images of men, spirits and animals. Another book that illustrates this style of work is The Book of Durrow and is also noteworthy. Both of these magnificent books are on display in glass cases in the Long

Room of the Library at Trinity College. A page is turned in each book each day.