

1. Before Printed Books

The first books in Scotland were probably scrolls introduced by the Roman military who briefly occupied the region south of the Antonine Wall in the middle of the 2nd century AD. Roman reading matter of the time included historical and biographical works, and poetry and drama, in Greek as well as Latin, all laboriously copied out by slaves. Gradually, the scroll was replaced by the codex (plural, codices), originally a set of writing tablets or leaves of papyrus or wood, hinged together like the pages of a book.

Later, priests, monks, and educated scribes kept religious and secular literature alive by copying manuscripts and embellishing them. Codices were now made of sheets usually of vellum, folded and bound together in volumes. Possibly the oldest surviving manuscript book produced in Scotland is the pocket-size Book of Deer, a 10th-century gospel book which was in the possession of the Columban monastery of Old Deer in Aberdeenshire in the 11th century.



Above Right: The tradition of decorating books involved a considerable amount of time and effort. The Iona Psalter was written and illuminated in Oxford between about 1180 and 1220, it is believed for Beatrix, first prioress of Iona.

Below: The Murthly Hours, a prayer book for lay people, was created in Paris in the 1280s, and has been in Scotland since at least 1421, when it belonged to the Lord of Lorne. **(Left)** Miniature of the Journey of the Magi by one of three English artists who, between them, illustrated the 23 devotional scenes at the beginning of the book. **(Right)** Within the decorated initial, which opens the section of Gradual Psalms, is an image of the owner reading her book of hours, while Jesus looks down on her. At the bottom of the page, a youth shoots at two flying birds.

