

pages found in certain early Christian manuscripts may be intended to recall such prayer mats, marking the entry points onto the holy ground of sacred text—part of a shared devotional heritage within the early medieval Near East and which still feature in the observances of the churches of the Christian Orient and within Islam.

The use of a page of ornament, often with a cross design embedded within it, to introduce major texts, was of ultimately Coptic derivation. The page has traditionally been termed a ‘carpet page’ by art historians because it bears a superficial resemblance to an oriental rug, but the liturgical practice outlined above may indicate a greater significance to the term than previously suspected. Coptic and other near eastern manuscripts from traditions that still use prayer mats sometimes feature such pages of decoration, including crosses formed of, or set against, interlace, as in the MS in Pierpoint Morgan Library and a later Persian copy of an early Diatessaron, now in Florence. They are quite widely represented in Coptic and Christian Arabic manuscripts of the 9th century onwards, and may also have played a role in the development of the great decorated pages of Islamic Qur’ans.

Later occurrences of carpet pages are also to be found in medieval Hebrew biblical manuscripts (especially those from Iberia exhibiting Islamic influence) where the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms are marked by groups of carpet pages with geometric, abstract and foliate designs resembling textiles, acting like the curtains which were lifted in the Temple to reveal sacred text.

An early example of a cross with interlace infill serving as a major text divider is to be seen in a Gnostic papyrus of the 5th to 6th century, now in Oxford. Similar sources are likely to have inspired the phenomenon in early Irish and Anglo-Saxon (or ‘Insular’) manuscripts. *The Book of Durrow* (perhaps from late 7th-century Iona, off the western coast of Scotland) features six carpet pages, mostly with crosses embedded within their ornament (one of several features paralleled in the Persian Diatessaron). An earlier occurrence of a carpet page is to be found as the frontispiece to the *Milan Orosius*, made in the Irish foundation of Bobbio in northern Italy probably during the early 7th century. This features a rosette or marigold, an antique symbol of life and rebirth, flanked by four smaller rosettes. Transmission of the concept of carpet pages to an Insular milieu may therefore have occurred via Italy and Ireland,

or from more direct importation of manuscripts from the eastern and southern Mediterranean.

The most developed instance of cross-carpet pages occurs in *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (made on Holy Island, Northumbria, c. 710–20), each of its five such pages featuring a cross from different church traditions (Latin, Greek, Celtic, Coptic or Ethiopic). The designs of these seem intended to recall those of textiles (especially the prefatory ‘Jerome’ carpet page, which resembles Coptic textiles) and of metalwork—the *crux gemmata* which was an Early Christian symbol of resurrection. The adoration of the cross was followed by the Eucharist and it is therefore appropriate that the zoomorphic decoration that also enlivens several of the Lindisfarne cross-carpet pages summoned up the Tree of Life, celebrating the Eucharistic communion of Creation.

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Purple

A prestigious dye-stuff in the Ancient and Classical worlds and a prestigious colour in medieval and modern times.

Prized since biblical times, the colour purple was the prerogative of royalty in ancient Egypt, Persia and Rome. Members of the Byzantine royal family were literally 'born to the purple' (*Porphyrogenitos*) in a chamber in the imperial palace walled with porphyry. The most costly and famous ingredient of 'royal purple' cloth was the dyestuff Tyrian Purple (Greek name *Βλαττα* 'congealed blood'), a mixture of the fresh glandular mucus of two molluscs of the whelk family, *Murex brandaris* and *Purpura haemastoma*, commercial production of which first took place in Phoenicia ('land of the purple') about 1439 B.C. It took many thousand shell-fish to extract even a gram of dye, and accordingly the price of cloth dyed in Tyrian purple was very high: in Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices (A.D. 301), one Roman pound (327.5 grams) of → wool dyed in varieties of Tyrian purple ranged in price from 50,000 denarii—the same price as a pound of gold—to 16,000 denarii. Both the production and use of 'royal purple' dyes became a Roman and then an even more carefully guarded Byzantine state monopoly, which denied this product to all foreign lands. Areas of production were limited since the raw material could only be extracted from fresh shell-fish. (Born states that in the 6th century it became possible to transport dead molluscs and produce dye far from the coast, but this claim is unsupported, and rather implausible.) In the 12th century an industry was developed in Norman Sicily, using Saracen workshops. The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 effectively ended the Byzantine industry.

Western Europe was not dependent on the Mediterranean industry for purple dye-stuffs. Bede mentions that the Anglo-Saxons extracted dye from whelks or cockles, and the site of a 'factory' extracting dye from the shell-fish *Purpura lapillus* has been identified in Ireland, one hut in particular dated to the 7th century. However, there are to date no examples of British-made textiles dyed with shellfish purple from the early or late medieval periods. (It is possible that some early medieval British manuscript pages were coloured with Irish/Scottish whelks; and some imported textiles, especially → silks may have been dyed with Mediterranean shellfish.) Purple and violet shades could also be created using vegetable dyes, especially lichen purple, and from combinations including → woad and madder. The expensive insect dye → kermes could also produce a purple shade.

Purple-coloured cloth was evidently appreciated in the medieval British Isles. In the early days of English Christianity, it may have been imported for religious use. Purple-dyed → flax was found in a 7th-century Anglo-Saxon relic box, and purple silks, including a reliquary pouch which had been dyed with kermes, are among textiles from Anglo-Viking → York. Silks from Central Asia, 8th- to 9th-century, which had been used as binding and facings of a vestment eventually deposited among the → Relics of St Cuthbert, included a purple, and purple was among the colours of a soumak-brocaded braid, possibly Anglo-Saxon work, which decorated it. *Purpura*, literally 'purple', was a Latin term used in England for a luxury, silk fabric, sometimes but not necessarily, of purple colour: Anglo-Saxon churches are documented as owning *purpura* of red, white, green and black. The fact that the English term for *purpura* was *godweb*, 'excellent-' or possibly 'godly' or 'divine cloth' testifies to its luxury and prestige. *Purpura* continued in use as a name for expensive cloth at least into the early 14th century.

Ecclesiastics deplored the use of bright colours in inappropriate contexts, → Aldhelm particularly condemning people vowed to the religious life wearing '*tunica coccinea sive iacintina*' ('scarlet or violet tunics'). These colours were certainly enjoyed by seculars: purple textiles dyed with lichen have been identified in both late Saxon → London and Viking → Dublin. Marie de France's Anglo-Norman version of *Sir Launfal* mentions two fashionably-dressed maidens who wear '*blians de pupre bis*' ('bliauts of purple linen [or silk]').

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Purser

A specialist maker or seller of purses.

From the 14th century ‘purser’ bore the meaning of a maker or seller of bags or purses. (→ Haberdashers could also be sellers, though not makers, of purses). Pursers were absorbed into the → Leathersellers Guild. (See → guilds: London.) By extension of meaning a purser could be a ship’s purser or a treasurer: someone who controlled the money in the purse.

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Purses

See → pouches and purses