

The Book of Dimma



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(Left: the Image at the start of St. John's Gospel)

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(Right: the Image of St Mark from the book)

Legend says that Dimma wrote the book in forty days and forty nights without rest, food or water and because he did it like this Dimma thought he had done it in one day. Studies however by Dr R.I. Best show that the book was written by many hands. The Book is now housed in the library of Trinity College. The 19th century historian George Petrie wrote of the Book of Dimma...

"The manuscript and box were preserved in the Abbey of Roscrea till the dissolution of monasteries, when it disappeared. It was found, in the year 1789, among the rocks of the Devil's Bit Mountain, in the Co. Tipperary, carefully concealed and perfectly preserved. ... It then came into the possession of Dr. Harrison of Nenagh, from whom it was purchased by Mr. Monk Mason, who afterwards sold it to Sir William Betham. Then it was

purchased by the Rev. Dr. Todd, for Trinity College, in the library of which it is now deposited."

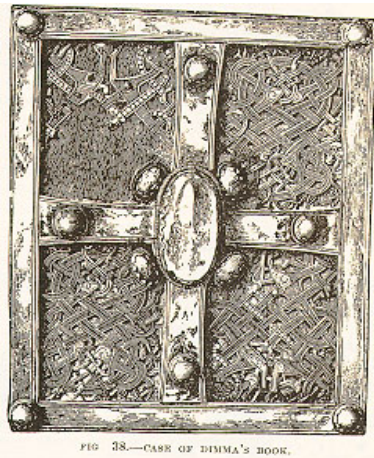


FIG 38.—CASE OF DIMMA'S BOOK.

In the 12th century the manuscript was encased in a richly worked cumdach or reliquary case (left), which remains with it at Trinity. On one face it has panels of openwork decoration in Viking Ringerike style over the wood case. There is a good 1908 reproduction of in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which is not on display there but good quality images are available online.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/170002986>

Note click on image and zoom using the scroll wheel.

In 1879 Edmond Johnson, one of Dublin's foremost goldsmiths, started restoration work on the Ardagh Chalice and was later given permission to make copies of it and other objects. The replicas were much sought after with Johnson's own catalogue listing the Chicago (1893), Paris (1900) and Glasgow (1901) expositions as well as 'the principle museums of America, Great Britain and the Continent' among his clients. One of his facsimiles of the book of Dimma Shrine is now at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.



(Right: Symbol of St. Matthew)



"Book of Dimma" Shrine (Details from Met Museum)

Date: early 20th century (original dated 11th century)

Culture: Irish

Medium: Bronze gilt, jewels

Dimensions: Overall: 7 7/8 x 2 1/2 x 6 3/4in. (20 x 6.4 x 17.1cm)

Classification: Reproductions-Metalwork

Credit Line: Rogers Fund, 1908

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