

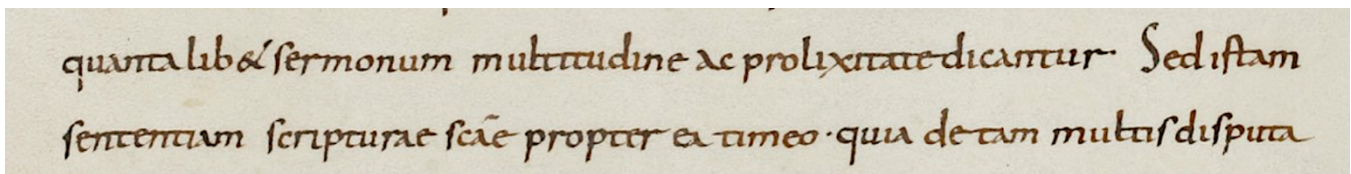
Week 6 Handout: The Transformation of Caroline into Gothic

During the 12th century, socioeconomic and cultural conditions transformed the context for the production of books, which increased hugely beginning in this century and continuing through the rest of the Middle Ages. We'll discuss those processes at the beginning of class.

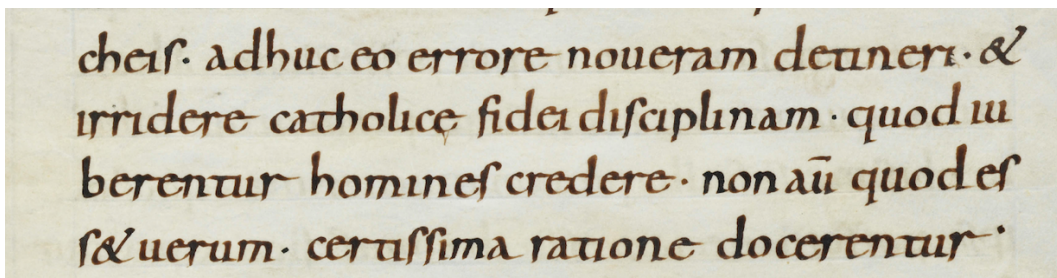
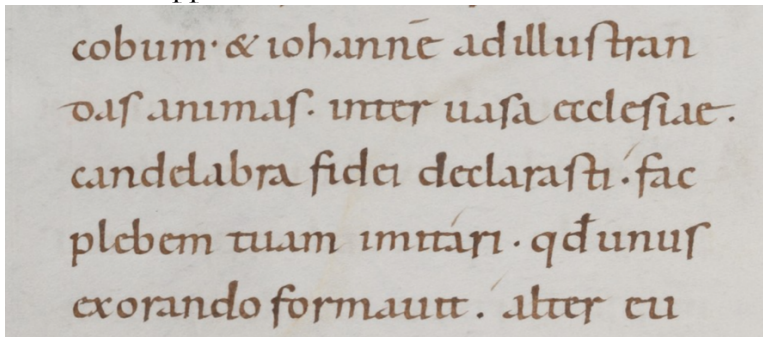
Protogothic Script

Also during the 12th century, Caroline Minuscle gradually transformed, for reasons we cannot know, until by the 13th century it had become the most famous of the Gothic scripts, Textualis. (The terminology of Gothic scripts is a contentious area, for reasons I'll explain.)

In the 11th century, we begin to see hints of the proportions of Caroline Minuscle changing, becoming somewhat larger in minim-height and a little more laterally compressed. As a reminder, here's what 9th-century Caroline looks like:

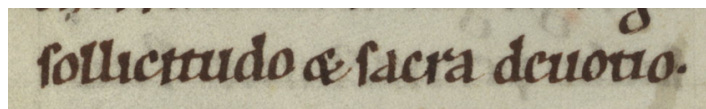
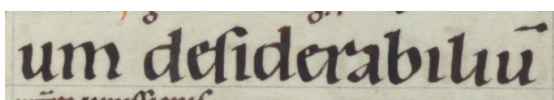


In the 11th century, many places were still writing pretty much exactly this way, but you do start to see some MSS appear that look more like this:

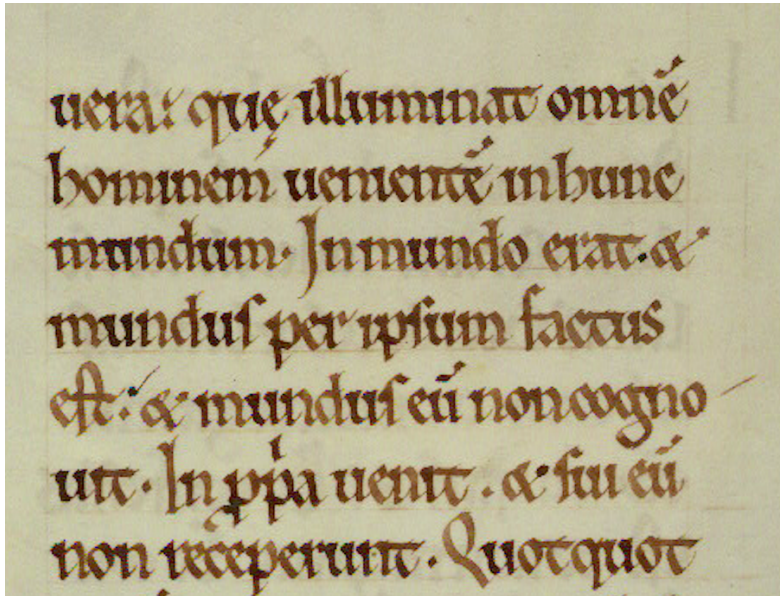


The inventory of letterforms is still essentially the same, but the proportions are changing.

In the 12th century, this change in proportion becomes normal and is accompanied by the use of a broader pen, which lends a heavier look to the whole and can be used to produce a contrast between broad and narrow strokes.



You begin to see scripts in which the lateral compression is much more pronounced; letters that had been round become angular, and the feet of every minim begin to get the same treatment, an upward diagonal hairstroke. In this English MS from the first half of the 12th century, the first word in the second line is **hominem**: you can see round forms becoming angular in the **o** and **e**, and you can see in the **m**, **i**, and **n**, how the compression plus the treatment of the feet of letters could lead us in the direction of minim confusion. Notice also how the compression and the wider penstrokes make the block of text denser than would be typical of a Carolingian manuscript.



Gothic Script: Textualis

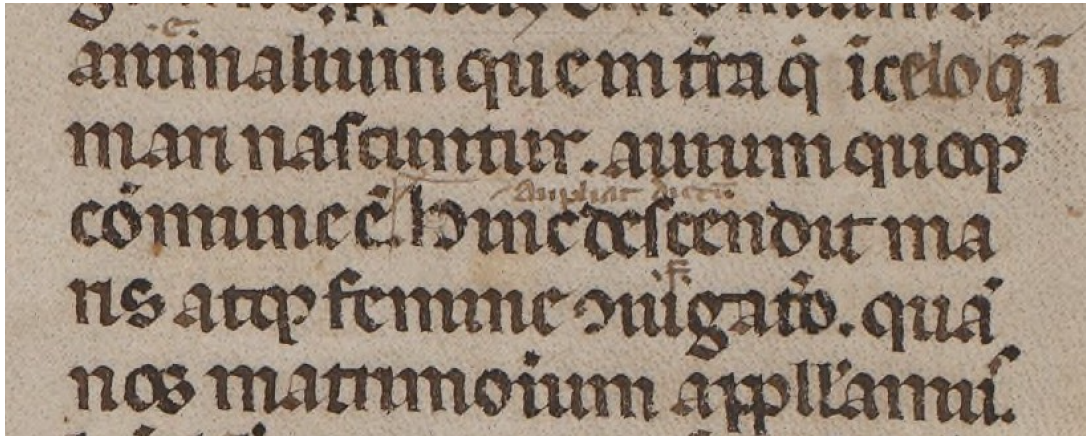
By the 13th century, these tendencies had resulted in a complete transformation of the normal minuscule of Europe into the script scholars now call "Textualis," which is more or less what you may have seen described as "blackletter" (for obvious reasons). (Blackletter is not a term paleographers use.) There were variations in style between northern and southern Europe and for different grades of book, but once established, this style remained in use until the invention of printing and beyond.

In addition to the heavy pen, marked contrast between thick strokes and hairline strokes, and proportionally large minim height, the transition to Gothic is marked by several changes in letterforms:

- "Uncial" **d**, with the stem curving over to the left
- "Round" **s** — our normal form — at word-end, while "tall **s**" remains elsewhere
- **a** becomes "two-storey" **a**, with the top curve becoming larger and curving over to form an upper compartment.
- Following **o**, **r** assumes the shape of a **2**.
- A 7-shaped symbol for "et" instead of the ampersand
- "Biting": A rule comes to be observed in which when the curved sides of two letters meet, they are written so that they share a stroke. (In fact, "curved" letters have almost all become angular at this point, so the idea of curves meeting is a bit notional.) Two successive **pps** also get mashed together.
- Minims are so regular in shape and spacing that minim confusion becomes rampant.
- The script in general becomes much more abbreviated.

This is a detail from a later 13th-century glossed law manuscript from the University of Bologna. (A thumbnail of the whole page is on the last page of this handout and I'll put a link to the whole thing on our web page.) The text reads:

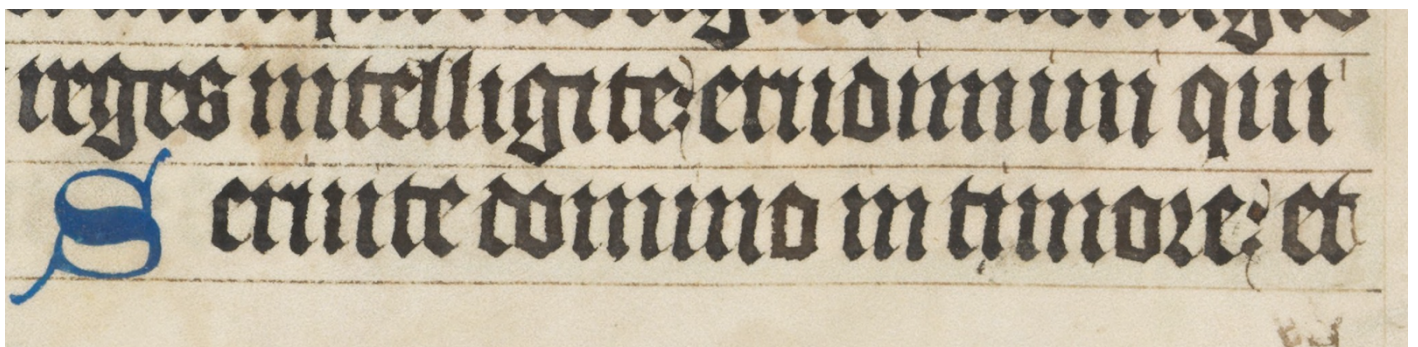
animalium que in t(er)ra q(ue) i(n) celo q(ue) i(n)
mari nascuntur. auium quoq(ue)
co(m)mune e(st). hinc descendit ma
ris atq(ue) femine (con)iugat(i)o. qua(m)
nos matrimo(n)ium app(ell)amu(s)



Things to note: round s is used at the end of **nos** in the last line, but s is still tall mid-word in **nascuntur** and **descendit**. **descendit** shows the new **d**, and the first **d** in the word is “biting” with the **e** that follows it. In the last word, we see **pp** squashed together. And note the changing proportions of **a** (compare to the Caroline and Protogothic examples on earlier pages in this handout).

The detail below from a 15th-century German Psalter is even more angular and exaggerated than the earlier Italian manuscript above. The text reads:

reges intelligite: erudimini qui
Seruite domino in timore: et



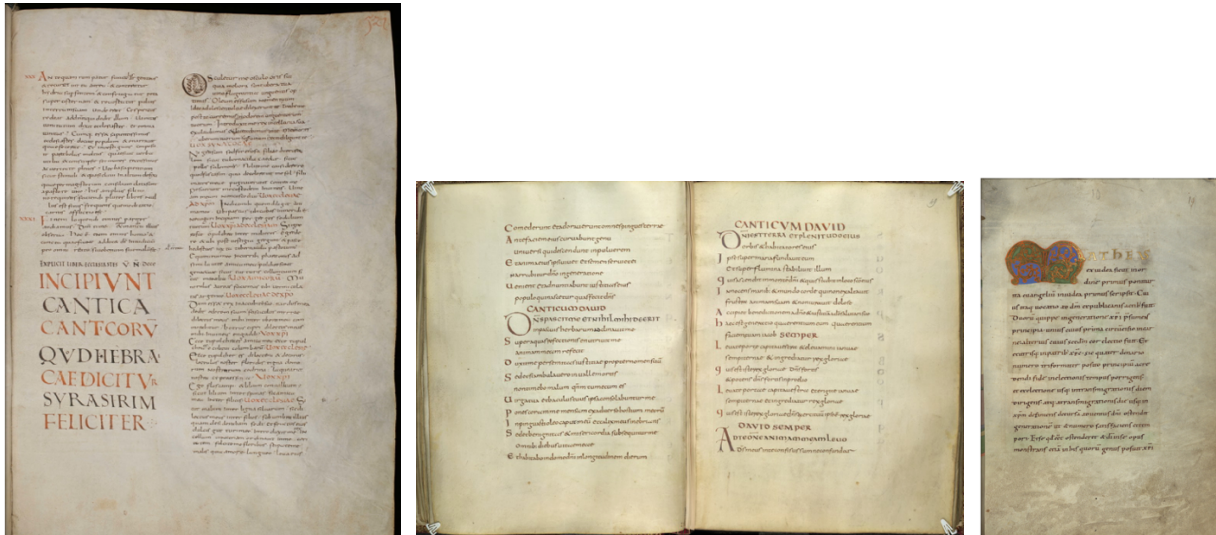
Things to note: the extreme difference in weight between thick and thin strokes; the scribe is now using little strokes above each **i** in words where minim confusion threatens (see especially **erudimini**); the **do** in **domini** shows “biting”; and a 2-shaped **r** appears in **timore**.

In addition to the letterforms, we can observe a couple of other details of Gothic layout: the lines are ruled in ink, not dry point, so they become a decorative feature of the page, and the text is written floating or boxed between the ruled lines, rather than sitting on the line.

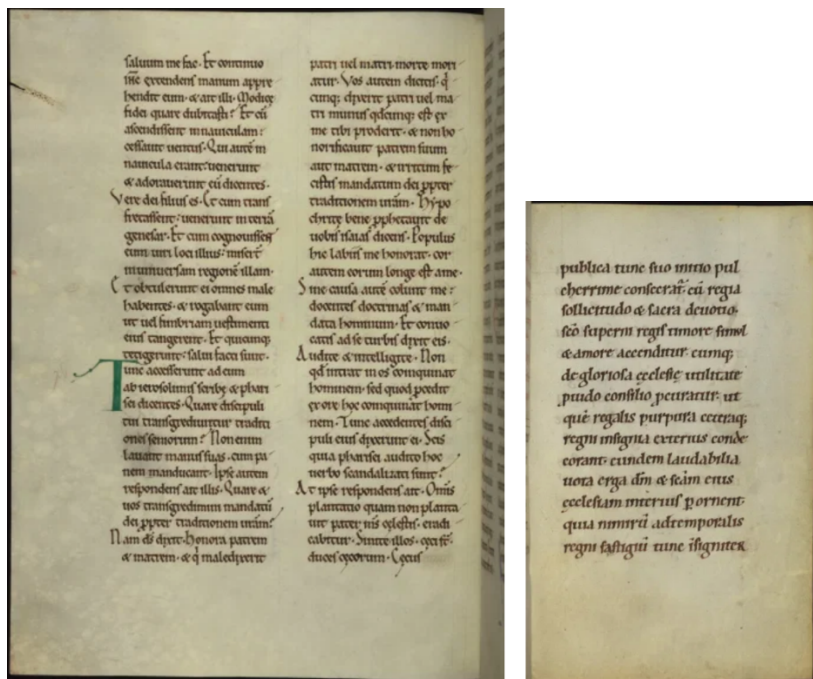
Gothic Page Layouts

The heavier script and resulting denser blocks of text go along with an emerging preference for two-column layouts and page decoration that emphasizes that dense block tightly framed by ruling and sometimes by decoration.

The Carolingian page, even when it contained a lot of information, still tended to feel spacious:



The 12th-century (Protogothic) page, even when it preserves a Caroline-style layout with a fairly plain page, has a different look because of the heaviness of the script:



Also beginning in the 12th century, in the context of the Cathedral schools and universities, new page layouts develop to accommodate the standard commentaries that accompanied the set texts for study.

Below left is a glossed copy of Proverbs from the Cathedral school of Laon, ca. 1135-40, and below right is a later 13th-century glossed law manuscript from the University of Bologna.



In the context of the universities, small-format, single-volume bibles began to be produced for students, masters, and clergy working without a monastic library at hand.



This 13th-century bible from Paris, which is the size of a Penguin paperback (but a lot thicker) shows a very typical Gothic page aesthetic, with dense, dark, long rectangular columns and decoration that emphasizes the tight layout of those columns of text. The red and blue penwork is typical of Gothic manuscripts, too.