Following the early examples, monastic houses throughout the Middle Ages characteristically had libraries and scriptoria where monks copied books to add to their collections. Arrangements for this activity varied from place to place. Occasionally the scriptorium was a single large room. Sometimes the copying was done in carrels, individual cells built in the cloister or library. The monks did not follow the practice of the Roman commercial scriptorium where a reader dictated a book while several scribes made simultaneous copies of it. Instead, after the scribe’s work was finished it was proofread and titles and notes were inserted. Books in the Greek language were found only in Byzantine monasteries; in western Europe books were written in Latin. The ciphers were used in scriptoria - for the foliation of manuscripts, for writing year-numbers, preparing indexes and concordances, numbering sermons and the like, and outside the scriptoria - for marking the scales on an astronomical instrument, writing year-numbers in astronomical tables, and for incising volumes on wine-barrels. Related notations were used in medieval and Renaissance shorthands and coded scripts. This is the first comprehensive study of an ingenious number-notation from the Middle Ages that was devised by monks and mainly used in monasteries. A second, more useful version, due to Cistercian monks, is first attested in the late 13th century in

This richly-illustrated book surveys the medieval manuscripts and Renaissance books Monasteries are centres of learning and culture. We study the bible, copy manuscripts, produce great works of art through metalworking and stone-carving and welcome visitors. We live very simple lives. We follow strict rules and produce our own food. We wear long tunics with woollen cloaks, and shoes or sandals. I live in the monastery at Clonmacnoise. In the larger monasteries, including the one I live in, the buildings are surrounded by a circular bank or wall, similar to a ring- fort. Monks are buried in simple graves dug in the ground, or in stone cist graves. Round towers are stone towers between 25 and 40 metres tall. They are wide at the base and taper towards the top. The door is high above the ground and is reached by a ladder. Inside there are four wooden floors.