

## Developing Your Historical Eye

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Simply put, the medieval aesthetic is different from the modern aesthetic, and one of the best ways you can improve your scribal work is to learn to see illumination the way a medieval person might have. By gaining a sense of what medieval scribes valued when they composed artwork, what steps they followed when painting, and how their tools and materials impacted the finished piece, you can take your charters and scrolls to the next level. In this class we will:

- Look at a survey of Western European artwork representing key time periods / styles in medieval and renaissance illumination and discuss research materials available
- Walk through the typical materials and methods used historically for illumination, and talk about how to apply this knowledge toward scribal arts today

### Art Historical Survey

Illumination styles varied across time periods and places historically. Each style has recognizable features, and maintaining a consistent look within a finished piece is important. Broadly, some styles commonly seen in SCA charters are:

Name / Time period / Place	Examples (links to pictures)	Characteristics
<b>Insular</b> ~600 to 850 AD British isles (England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland)	<a href="#">Lindisfarne Gospels</a> <a href="#">Book of Durrow</a> <a href="#">Durham Gospels</a> <a href="#">Book of Kells</a> (search for it in Trinity's digital archives-- I can't get this to give me a direct link that works)	-Interlacing / knotwork / twisty beasts -Carpet pages and borders -Decorated initials -Abstract patterns or zoomorphic forms -Religious images / iconography
<b>Carolingian</b> ~780 to 900 AD Frankish empire (modernly portions of France and Germany)	<a href="#">Online exhibition</a> <a href="#">Wikipedia page (lots of images) on Carolingian art</a> <a href="#">Lorsch Gospels</a> <a href="#">Drogo Sacramentary</a> <a href="#">Utrecht Psalter</a>	-Borders, decorated initials -Full page miniatures of religious figures or Biblical scenes -Classical/Roman influence - naturalistic figures -Exquisite bindings, colored parchment, gold ink
<b>Romanesque</b> 11th and 12th centuries Western Europe, with different regional styles developing (There's a lot of overlap between Carolingian and Romanesque)	<a href="#">Longer description and more information</a> <a href="#">Hunterian psalter</a> <a href="#">Winchester Bible</a> <a href="#">St Albans Psalter</a> <a href="#">An 11th century herbal</a> <a href="#">And another</a>	-Borders, decorated initials -- often vinework, architectural elements -Scenes appearing in cycles, often across multiple pages and with compartments on each page

	<a href="#">Augustine, 12th century Medical treatise</a> (12th c.)	-Heavily stylized -Represents the last time that manuscripts were only held by religious orders or royalty
<b>Gothic</b> 13th and 14th centuries Western Europe, with different regional styles developing This developed into / overlaps with International Gothic	<a href="#">Manesse codex</a> <a href="#">Taymouth hours</a> <a href="#">Luttrell psalter</a> <a href="#">Decretals</a> <a href="#">Morgan Bible</a> <a href="#">A missal</a> <a href="#">Sermons</a> <a href="#">Hours of Jeanne d'Evreaux</a>	-Vinework, geometric, and architectural borders -Vibrant primary colors, use of gold leaf -Marginalia, scenes of everyday life -Complex religious scenes -Books for students/scholars with relatively little decoration (simple borders, colorful initials) -First books of hours
<b>International Gothic -- later</b> 15th century Much of western Europe, again with regional styles developing	Many! The quintessential examples are <a href="#">the works of the Limbourg brothers</a> .	-Lavish books produced by professionals for wealthy patrons -Books of hours -Realistic daily life and religious scenes

See also <http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/arts/humss/art317/manuscripts/manstyles.htm>

Other styles that don't tend to show up in SCA artwork as often but are valuable to be aware of:

<b>Humanist</b> 15th century (mostly) Italy	<a href="http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/cambridgeilluminations/themes/7.html">http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/cambridgeilluminations/themes/7.html</a>	Classical influences, decorated text, foliated initials / acanthus borders
<b>Professionally produced books -- French school</b> Mid 15th through mid 16th centuries France	France had a huge thriving book production industry. A typical manuscript is the <a href="#">processional from Poissy held at Reed College</a> . <a href="#">Another example</a> .	Vinework frames around text pages, decorated initials Ornate gilded frames around religious scenes
<b>Ultra-realism / trompe l'oeil</b> Roughly mid 15th through mid 16th centuries Mostly France, Burgundy, Flanders, Netherlands	Many! <a href="#">Some examples here</a>	-Elaborate borders with flowers, gems, bugs, etc. -Tension between realistic artwork and the medium of a book
<b>Printed books</b>	<a href="#">Examples here</a>	

## **Brief Notes on Historical Methods**

As far as I have been able to determine, the process of creating an illuminated page followed roughly the same set of steps from at least the 12th through early 16th centuries:

1. The page was measured, pricked, and ruled with red lines for the text and to outline areas for the illustrations or initials
2. The text, if applicable, was written in ink
3. Illustrations were sketched using the equivalent of pencil (typically a lead stylus)
4. Each illustration was inked with black / brown ink (iron gall ink was most commonly used)
5. All the gilding (if using gold leaf) was completed before any painting started
6. Washes of color were applied to the drawings, often somewhat crudely
7. Progressively finer iterations of detail were painted in, typically finishing with highlights and whitework
8. In some later manuscripts (see Poissy processional for an example), gold paint was used as a finishing step, both for borders/frames and as highlights within scenes.
9. Final touch-ups with ink may have been done sometimes to make facial features or other details more distinct

You can see how this both differs from and has parallels to charter painting -- you get a charter with essentially the first four steps done for you already, then paint it, add detail, and might re-ink parts of it.

Period materials had a significant impact on the look of the finished illuminations. A complete explanation of the pigments and inks available to medieval scribes is beyond the scope of this class, however, two points are particularly salient:

- The medieval palette was limited, and often highly regional. For example, gothic vines were nearly always painted red, blue, or green, or a combination of those. Color layering or mixing did occur, but most large blocks of color were rendered using a single pigment.
- Not all colors were compatible. One of the simplest examples is that medieval mineral greens and medieval lead white would corrode or discolor when mixed or layered. If you look closely, most “whitework” over green is actually done in yellow paint.

## **Take Home Message: Five Tips to Make Your Scribal Work Look more Historical**

1. Pick a style and stick to it. Look at multiple examples from the same time period and place as the finished piece that you are basing your work off of or what you are aiming for. Choose similar colors and use the same types of decorative elements.
2. Use historical or at least historically plausible colors. Avoid layering white over green, and spend enough time studying manuscripts and pigments that you have a sense of what colors were actually available. More importantly, spend time really looking at medieval artwork to determine what colors and combinations they found appealing.
3. Use gold paint or gold leaf, not both. I have found almost no examples where gold paint and gold leaf were both used in the same page, although I'm sure they exist. Leaf was more commonly used prior to the 15th century, after which gold paint seems to be more common. (I'm still researching this and welcome corrections.)

4. Go through the process of creating an illumination from start to finish, including planning and ruling out the page, at least once. This will help you see how medieval artists conceptualized the page: manuscript art is unique in that it blends both textual and visual elements. Your painting on a charter needs to reflect the artistic style of the design and be somehow united with the text itself.
5. Keep in mind the purpose of this art form. Illuminated manuscripts were used devotionally both within public spaces of worship and by private individuals. The aesthetic of illumination grew out of this context. Arguably, this is why manuscript illumination was more stylized than realistic. The artwork that we produce within the SCA is wholly secular; however, it does follow the same stylistic conventions.

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