

Developing Your Period Eye

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How can you give your scrolls a more period look? By looking at numerous side-by-side examples, we will cover materials, script choice, layout, proportions, color, and outlining.

Note: This class focuses on the medieval European manuscript illumination tradition. These ideas translate to other cultures, but the examples in this class will all be from this tradition.

Materials

Period	Acceptable substitute	Not acceptable (check your kingdom's scribal handbook)
Parchment (animal skin)	Pergamenata Bristol board >100 lb watercolor paper	Printer paper
Iron gall ink	Any black ink Walnut ink Colored inks, thinned gouache	Glitter ink
Feather quill Reed pen	Metal dip pen Fountain pen	Felt tip pen
Period pigments	Gouache paints Watercolor paints	Crayons Markers
Real gold leaf Shell gold	Gold gouache Finetec gold (or other mica paints)	Gold Sharpies

Best bang for the buck: gouache, pergamenata, metal dip pen, Finetec gold, any black ink.

Matching Calligraphy to Illumination

Get a calligraphy book (like *Medieval Calligraphy* by Marc Drogin), and learn what the different scripts are called. At a minimum, use a script that is roughly the same time period as the illumination.

Basic scripts that will serve you well:

Insular majuscule: Script from the Book of Kells. Used in Northern Europe about 600-850 AD. Matches many early period European illumination styles (“Viking” or Anglo-Saxon).

Carolingian minuscule: Used in Europe about 800-1200 AD, before Gothic became dominant.

Gothic textura: Used extremely widely in Europe before the printing press. Matches anything after about 1100.

Humanist: Late period Italian, matches well with Renaissance illumination.

Next steps for ambitious calligraphers. Try matching a specific exemplar more closely.

- How tall is each line (in calligraphy terms, what is the x-height?)
- How far do the ascenders and descenders extend between lines? How are they shaped for each letter?
- How much space is there between the lines?
- Are there letters this scribe made differently? Special flourishes?
- Are there ligatures? These are combined letters, e.g. “ae” and “or” are commonly combined.
- How are majuscules handled?

Layout and Proportions

Pay attention to how pages in the exemplar are laid out. Try to follow a similar pattern, even though you don't have to match it exactly. Questions to ask:

- What size is the exemplar? 4"x6" or 12"x17"? This can be hard to tell on a computer screen, but will make a difference!
- How wide are the borders? Are they all the same width, or are they different?
- How large is the calligraphy space compared to the illumination?
- How much whitespace is there?
- How will this translate to a standard frame size (if using one, which I do recommend if possible, for ease of the recipient framing your beautiful work!).

Color

- What colors are used in the exemplar? Use period pigments to get as close as you can, or use modern gouache. You do not have to use the paint straight out of the tube! Feel free to mix it with other colors to get closer to the original.
- Does the illumination use shading, or not? Does it shade to black, or another color?
- Does it use any techniques to portray perspective? Do things get smaller in the background, or less saturated/more blue (known as atmospheric perspective)?
- Is there whitework? Does it use white on everything, or other colors (e.g. yellow or gold on green, for instance)?

Outlining

- Is there outlining in this style?
- Is the outlining black, or another color?
- Was the outlining done with a brush or a pen?
- Was it done before or after the colors were painted?