

In a simplified view, illumination can be described as “the pretty pictures in medieval documents.” It includes the full page illustrations, the borders around text and the decorated capitals. The practice of illumination spans the entire time frame covered in the SCA and can be found nearly everywhere that practiced the written word.

There are several major styles. The most widespread style is known as “bar and ivy.” This can be found in most parts of Europe at different time periods. It began earlier in southern Europe and reached northern Europe later. It traveled to other parts of the world with missionaries and can be seen in such places as Russia. It is named for its tendency toward decorated bars supporting leafy (and occasionally flowering) vines. They often contain scenes of people and/or animals to illustrate the text or decorate the margins.

The Anglo-Saxon illumination includes such things as the Book of Kells and the Lindesfarne gospels. This style tends towards fantastic beasts and knotwork and is primarily found in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries in northern Europe. Example of similar style can be found later in period, as well, but they are not as prevalent.

Later in the middle ages, artistic perspective improved and trompe-l’oeil developed. This is fondly referred to as the “squashed bug” style. It tends towards realism in style and often has architecture, insects and plants for subject matter.

Different styles developed in the Mideast, China/Japan, India and other regions. Most of the illuminated works in all the regions (including Europe) were religious texts, poetry, and less commonly secular commissions. The people producing these were usually living in monasteries. Later nobles fostered these arts by being patrons and housing and feeding artists.

The tools were very similar to what we use today, though we often use different pigments for safety reasons. As a minimum, one would need a pencil, erasure, paper, ruler, paintbrush, pen and paints. Any pencil will do, but most favor mechanical pencils. For a pen, a calligraphy pen with a fine point nib or a cut quill would have been used with waterproof ink. Many people now use fine pointed drafting pens with fade proof, waterproof ink. Smooth Bristol board is the most commonly used paper for scrolls. In period, vellum (calfskin) was used. Most people favor very small brushes for the detail work, but that is primarily an individual preference with what one can best control. There are several options for paints. The easiest and least expensive is to buy watercolor paint and use it thinned to the thickness of heavy cream. For a little more cost, gouache can be purchased. This is also water based, but includes a substance for opacity. If one is interested in more period techniques, pigments can be purchased or produced and mixed with a number of binding agents to make your own paints. Depending on the choice of period and style, gold paints or gold leaf might also have been used. There are many options for imitation gold paint and gold leaf as well as real gold available through art supply locations.

Finally, a rough, generic description of the process of illumination follows. First one would sketch the design in pencil. If calligraphy is going to be done, this might be a good time to do it, unless the piece is intended as a scroll blank. Next ink in the design and wait for the ink to dry. Then erase the pencil marks. If gold leaf is going to be used, it needs to be laid on at this point. If gold paint is the preference, that can be done either before or after the other paints. Then the images are painted in. Whitework, if appropriate to the design and period, would follow after the paint dries. Lastly, one

would re-outline the images again with pen, so that the outlines are sharp and clear. And that's all there is to it!

Glossary terms:

**Illumination:** the process of applying color or decoration to a page.

**Whitework:** the process of painting fine white lines in a decorative manner over a section which has been painted in color (usually red or blue)

**Vellum:** the processed calfskin that was used for paper in the middle ages. Not to be confused with the paper called vellum in modern times.

**Bar and Ivy illumination:** style of illumination that contains decorated bars supporting vegetative decoration, usually vines with or without flowers. Often contains scenes of people or animals.

**Trompe-l'oeil:** style of illumination that uses realism and often contains subject matter of insects and plants, tends to incorporate architecture into the design

**Anglo-Saxon illumination:** style of illumination that often uses "Celtic" knotwork and fantastical animals

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