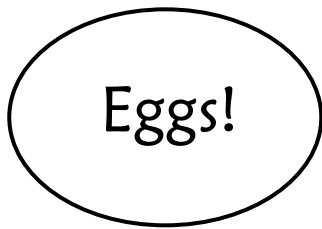


“Carpet Page” from the Lindisfarne Gospels

ca. AD 698

The overall geometric design of this Anglo-Saxon illumination looks like a Persian rug, so this type of ornament is called a “carpet page.” Surrounding a central cross, interwoven ribbons of color are bitten by the beaks of birds and serpents that writhe in the corners. Indigo blue, vermilion red, verdant green, and yellow ochre are inlaid like cloisonné enamels.



The sticky properties of egg whites provided a consistent medium to “glue” the pigments to parchment.

The “Göttingen Model Book”

ca. 1450

Reproduced in the exact size of the original, this model book focused solely on ornamental embellishments. The sequence of steps in the illumination was detailed with illustrations by the author, and instructions in German describe the preparation and application of various colors.

Acanthus leaf

The model shows the successive stages of applying color, shading, and highlights to the ornamental leaf. Pairs of colors are recommended to contrast the two sides of a curling leaf: red and green, orange and purple, and gold and blue.

Chessboard background

These examples show how to make checkered patterns for the backgrounds of miniatures. First, the gold is laid down; then red, blue, and green are added with an ink pen. The squares are outlined in black and accented with white florettes.

King René's "Book of Love"

ca. 1457

King of Sicily and Duke of Anjou, Good King René (1409-1480) fought wars against Italy, as well as wrote poetry and allegorical romances about love. In this midnight scene cast in dark shades, the God of Love takes the heart of the Poet and gives it to the page, Desire. His heart then must find favor with the lady of his dreams, called Sweet Grace. The flowers and acanthus leaves in the borders evoke springtime, the season of love.

David and Goliath, in the "Book of Kings"

ca. 1250

This Old Testament "Picture Book" was made for King Louis IX of France, aka Saint Louis (1226-1270), after the Seventh Crusade. The giant Goliath wears the medieval military armor of Crusader knights, while other figures wear the colorful robes of the court. Eventually, this sumptuous book, full of gold leaf and lapis lazuli, landed in the Court of Shah 'Abbas in Iran by the 17th century, which is why Arabic text is written in the margins.

Red

Red was the most common color in medieval manuscripts. Organic dyes were made with tea from **brazil wood** or **madder root**, the dried shells of the **kermes insect**, and **dragon's blood** from the sap of a shrub. **Cinnabar** occurs naturally as mercuric sulphide, while heating mercury with sulphur makes **vermilion**.

Blue

Blue was the second most common color in manuscript illumination. **Lapis lazuli**, called **ultramarine**, was more precious than gold because it was imported from Afghanistan. A closer source was **azurite**, a blue stone rich in copper, found in many countries of Europe. Violet blue was made from the seeds of the **turnsole** plant, and **indigo** from the tea of a pesky weed called **woad**.

Yellow

The petals of the **saffron** flower or the **pollen** of poppies could be soaked in egg white to extract their yellow color. **Volcanic earth** also provided a source for the pigment, as did **arsenic**, which is extremely poisonous.

Gold

Thin sheets of **gold leaf** were laid onto the areas of illumination before other colors were painted. The glue, or “size,” was made from animal bones. Once dry, the gold was “**burnished**” with the tooth of a hound. “**Brushed**” gold was ground into dust and mixed with the sizing for more accurate painting.

Green

“**Verdigris**” is made from the chemical reaction of copper to the fumes of vinegar, and the resulting powder (copper acetate) was scraped off. Other recipes produce green by squeezing the juice of plants, including **parsley** and **cilantro**. A mineral source can also be found in **malachite**.

"Gold leaf"

"Madder root"

"Lapis lazuli"

Cilantro

Saffron

Walnut

Books of Hours

The “bestseller” of the Middle Ages, Books of Hours contained prayers and psalms for different days and times of the year. The preface of the manuscripts usually included a “calendar” of saints’ feast days, which featured images of the labors of the months and signs from the zodiac.

July

Labor: Haymaking

Sign: Leo

From: The “Spinola Hours,” J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, c. 1515-20

September

Labor: Plowing and Sowing

Sign: Scorpio

From: The “Spinola Hours,” J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, c. 1515-20

April

Labor: Picking flowers

Sign: Aries and Taurus

From: The *Très Riches Heures* of Jean, Duke of Berry, Musée Condé, Chantilly, c. 1410

January

Labor: Feasting by the fire

Sign: Aquarius

From: Circle of the Coëtivy Master, 15th c.
Museum of Art and Archaeology
University of Missouri, Columbia

The Medieval Craft of
Manuscript
Illumination

Basic materials:

Sheep skin,

Goose feathers,

Chicken eggs,

Pong's tooth,

Rabbit glue,

Oyster shells

Hillinus Gospel, Book of Matthew c. 1000 A.D.

The “incipit,” or first, initial of books in the Bible themselves served as the glorified entrance to the Word of God within. This “Q” contains classical acanthus leaves and gilded interlace, which connect it to a regal frame with birds and lions.

Hildegard von Bingen, “Divine Creation of Universe and Cosmic Man” c. 1230

The petite figure of the nun in the lower corner is the famous medieval author, composer, artist, and mystic, Hildegard von Bingen, recording her vision on tablets. Gold leaf traditionally stands for the heavenly realm, where her abstract vision of man and the universe embodied in a divine red fire from God’s head.

Moralia in Job, Cîteaux
Early 12th c.

Exodus initial, Winchester Bible
c. 1150-80

Gospels of Otto III, Luke initial
Late 10th c.

“C” is for “Color”

The encyclopedia of James de Palmer illustrates the palette of an illuminator, who mixed and held his pigments in oyster shells.