

Illuminations

A lesson in the art of Illuminated Letters

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Where do we begin?

Right now your all probably wondering.....

What is an illumination?

When were they made?

Who made them and how were they made?

Why is it important to learn about them?

How can I make one?

Lets find out!

What is an Illumination?

An illumination is an EMBELLISHMENT, or additional decoration that enhances the pages of a written, or manuscript page.

The term, Illumination comes from the term Illuminate, or to fill with light. This effect is achieved with the application of gold leaf to the letters and images, which reflect light and appear to glow.



An illuminated letter was usually the first letter of a page or paragraph. It was always enlarged and in color with gold applied in areas, while the rest of the text remained black. The images used to enhance the letters include animals, plants, and mythological creatures. These images were modified to fit into or around the letter, or in some cases took on the shape of the letter itself.



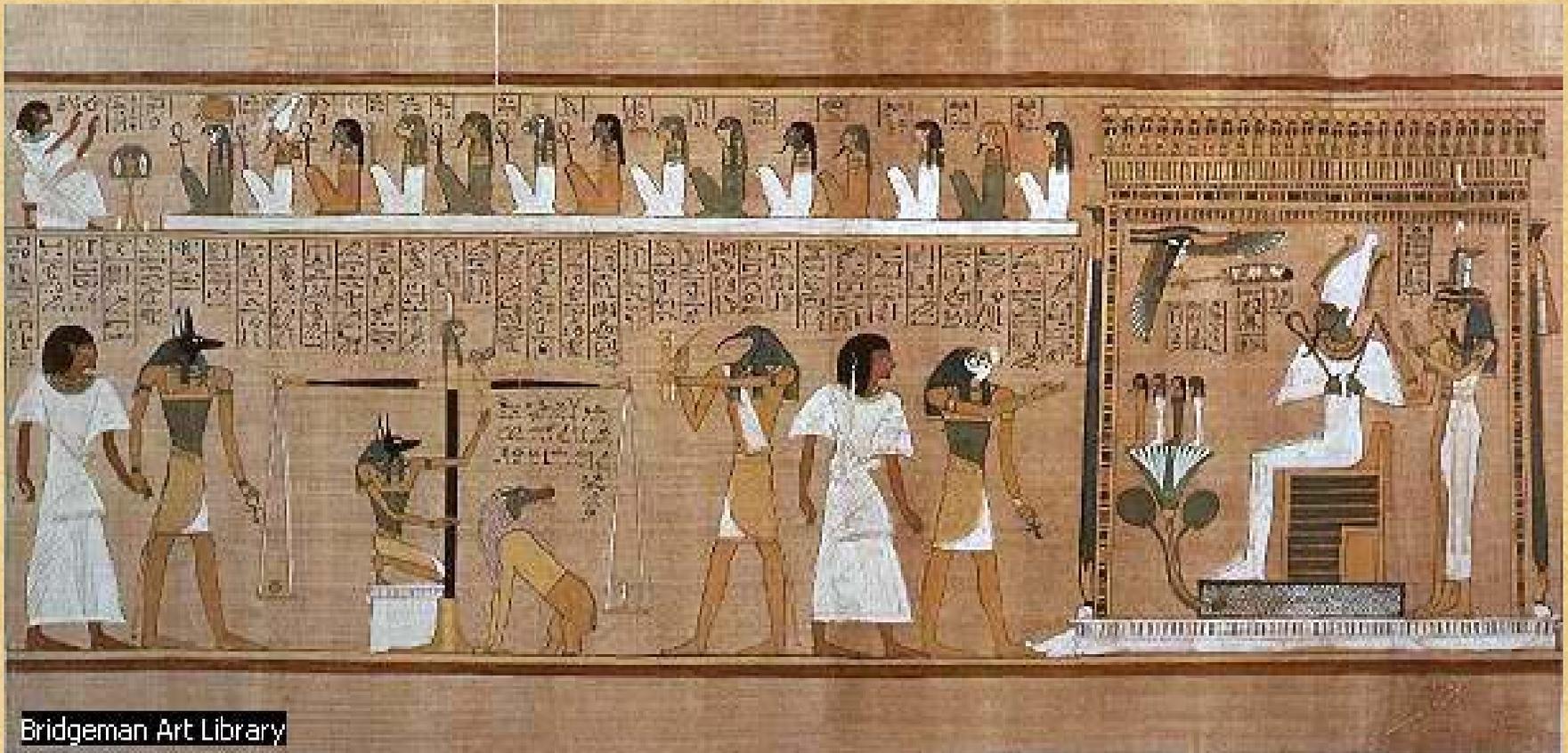
Because the recording of historical events was such an important task, illuminations were ordered by Kings and religious leaders to be added to various pages in order to add interest and importance to their appearance.



Do you think they used a typewriter?

When were they made?

The Egyptians were the first culture known to document events by use of Illuminated Manuscripts. One of the most famous being the Book Of The Dead that dates back to 1310 B.C..



As written languages developed, various countries adopted the idea of illuminating their manuscripts and carried on the tradition for hundreds of years into Medieval Europe during the Middle Ages.

By the 7th century, Illuminations became a highly respected Art form. At this time some of the most beautiful and famous illuminations were now being created in Ireland and England.



Who created them?

There were 3 people involved in the creation of illuminations:

The Parchmenter who prepared the drawing and writing surface.



The Scribe, who copied information onto each page



The Illuminator who actually created the Illuminated letters and other decorations on each page.



During the Middle Ages most of this kind of work was done in monasteries, so all of these jobs were performed by monks.

The Parchmenter

The parchmenter prepared animal skins to be used as writing surfaces. During the early Middle Ages paper from wood pulp was not available yet. Thus the use of animal skins as a writing surface was typical practice all over the world.

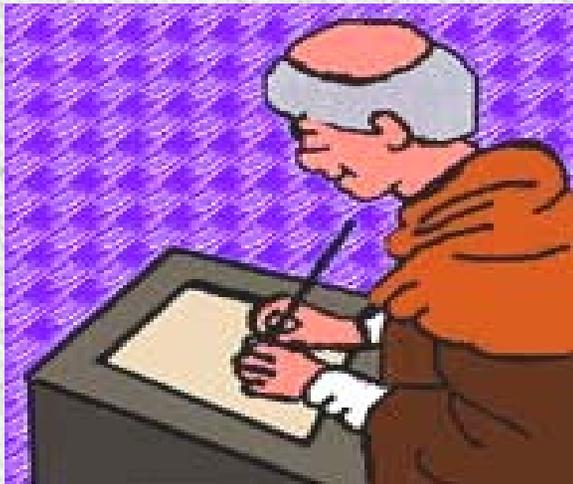
The word PARCHMENT usually refers to a surface made of sheepskin, while VELLUM refers to a surface made of calfskin. Both of these were made by stretching the skin in the sun, and burnishing it with a rounded stone repeatedly to create a smooth surface.



The Scribe

The scribe was the person in charge of copying words and stories onto pages of parchment to be made into a book.

Upon receiving the parchment and checking it for flaws, the scribe would then have several tools to prepare before sitting down to write.



He would have to sharpen his quill pen made from a bird's feather. Then he'd have to prepare his inks made from ashes, plant material, and egg whites. It was then that he'd be ready to start writing.

The Illuminator

Once all of the text was in place, the scribe would pass the pages to be done onto the Illuminator who would begin to add the decorative images we call ILLUMINATIONS.

He would first make a rough sketch, then outline that with pen. The gold leaf would then go on first, followed by all the other colors made from ground up stones and plants.



Importance of Illuminations

Illuminations defined a time in history when the ability to read was sacred and reserved for religious leaders or those born of royal blood.

Because it took great skill to create such items of beauty and because these creations were so important, it was a great time in history for artists! For without their skills and talents such beautiful images might not have ever existed!

Do you ever see illuminated letters anywhere?

Think about this question the next time you go to a gift shop or a book store!

How can you make one, you ask?

Using the materials your teacher provides for you, you can make an Illuminated letter using simple steps similar to those used by artists from the past. Here's what you'll need:

- A square piece of drawing paper, 7" by 7"
- A pencil and eraser
- A ruler
- An idea of what letter you want to create, perhaps your initial.
- A theme you are going to base your letter around, for example a mythological creature, or a variety of plants.
- A black felt tip marker
- Colored pencils for color and gold crayon for gold leaf



