

Italian Renaissance Illumination

Ice Dragon

8 April 2017

Pentathlon Entry - Scribal Ants

Illumination

Italian Renaissance Illumination

This illumination is based on one found in a medieval book entitled “Poetry of Francisco Petrarca” (1304-1374) written for Federico III de Monteflro (1444-1482), 1st Duke of Urbino. This book was a copy of the original book of about 100 years earlier. It was “Copied by the most talented calligrapher of the Court of Urbino, Manu Matthael domini Herculani de Vulterris” (BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA, 2016), and is written in a combination of Spanish and Italian.

It is inscribed, near the beginning of the book, with “I, Don Lorenzo de Figueroa y Fonseca had this book November 1580”, so we know of who had it about 100 years after it was made. This digital copy is made available by the Biblioteca Digital Hispanica (<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000023186>). See figures 1-5, retrieved from their website.



Figure 1 Page 24

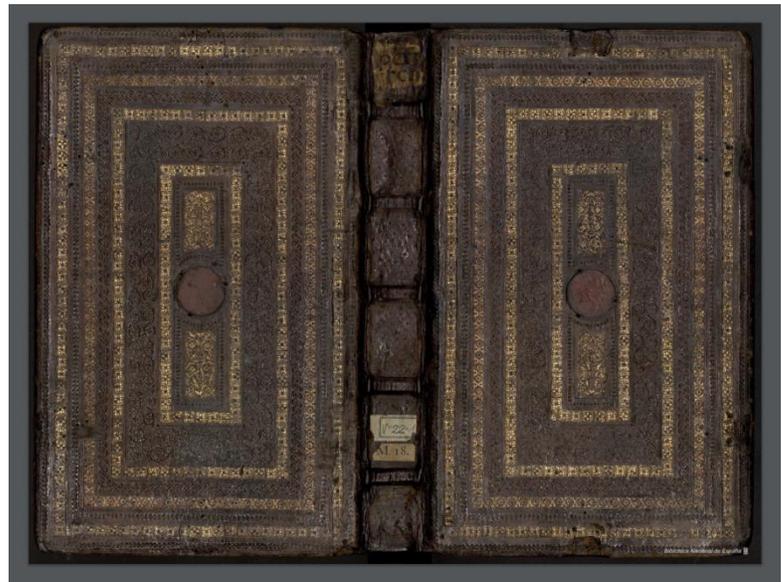


Figure 2 Book cover



Figure 3 Page 3

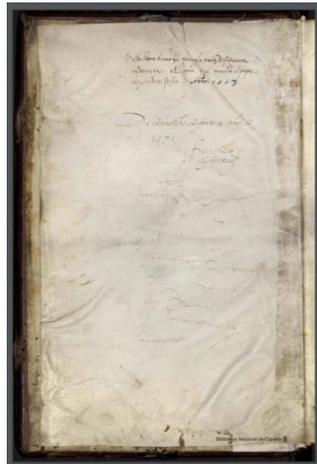


Figure 4 Page 4

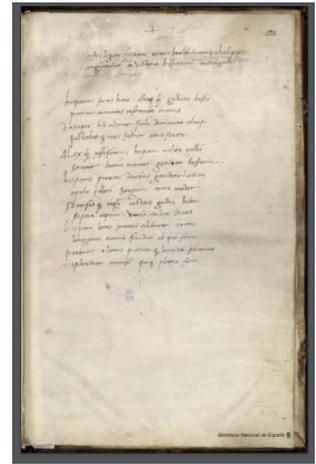


Figure 5 End of book

The Artist

Francesco di Giorgio (1439 – 1501 (2)) from Siena, Italy, of the north Italian school or art was the illuminator for this page. He apprenticed as a painter with Vecchietta (Corp, Beinecke Digital Collections, 2012). Giorgio was a multitalented man, considered a great architect and architectural theorist, an engineer, a sculptor, and a painter, and has been called the "Leonardo da Vinci of Siena" (Brown, 2003). Figure six shows some of his military machines.

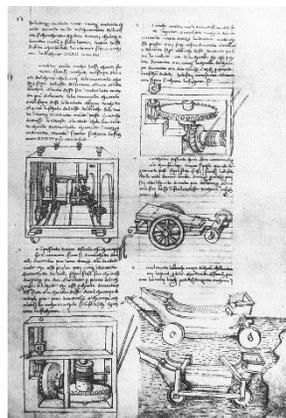


Figure 6 *Trattati di architettura ingegneria e arte militare* by Francesco di Giorgio

In the 1470's he worked for Federico da Montefeltro, Count (later Duke) of Urbino for whom he built seventy fortifications, (with early "star-shaped fortifications) besides completing artistic works and illuminations for books. One of his paintings, the "Madonna and Child with 2 Angels", is now at the Lowe Art Museum in Coral Gables, Florida. See figure 7.



Figure 7 Madonna and Child with 2 Angels. Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, Florida

The calligrapher

Manu Matthaël domini Herculani de Vulterris, a court calligrapher for the Court of Urbino produced many books for the Duke, including this one. I was able to find many references to him, but mostly in Spanish, so I could not decipher them, and I did not want to excessively bother Lady Murin Dunn who kindly did translate the original

reference I found on this painting, which in turn led me to other sources for this documentation.

The Poet, author of the book

The Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374), or Francesco Petrarca, as a poet he is best known for his collection of poems called “Canzoniere”. Today he is considered one of the greatest love poets of world literature, and many medieval poets copied his style (Gilbert, 2012). But he was far more than just a poet.

Petrarch traveled for pleasure, something that was unheard of at the time. He believed in exploring nature and once climbed Mont Ventoux (southern France), for the fun of it. As a result of his love of nature, and believing that man should experience it for its own sake (as opposed to pursuing only religious objectives in ones life) he has been considered the founder of *humanism* (Nicolson, 1997).

He was well educated, and a priest for much of his life. He was also a historian, and collected old, Latin manuscripts. He was dedicated to retrieving the writings from the ancient Greek and Romans. In 1345 he discovered a collection of Cicero's letters (the collection *ad Atticum*) that were unknown at the time. It is because of him that we have the notion of the “dark ages”; he felt that the centuries prior to his time were filled with ignorance. Because of his dedication to rediscovering the writings of the ancients he initiating the 14th-century Italian Renaissance and has been called the “first modern man” (Mommsen, 1942). He died in 1331 from the plague.

Materials

Substrate

The main substrate for illuminated manuscripts, like the one I am using as my reference, was animal skins, parchment or vellum (Carr, 2017) . Pergamanata seemed a good alternative for my painting; it is affordable and easier to use than actual animal skin parchments. It is also ideal to use with my paint choice of gouache since it has good tooth and will tolerate the wetness of the paint well.

Paint

Most illuminators used egg tempura paints, but those are not storable and must be thrown away at the end of the painting session and remade the next day (Miller, 1995) . I used Windsor and Newton gouache paints, a water based paint, similar to some of the watercolor paints used in the medieval period.

Gold watercolor paint (Finetec Micro Gold), I have tried real gold-leaf, but my results are not yet the quality I want, so I used a watercolor gold for this.

Brushes

Animal hair brushes were most often used for illumination paintings (which is basically what I am doing). Usually these were squirrel (Ward, 2008). Cennino d'Andrea *Cennini* (c. 1360 – before 1427) was an Italian painter, described in his book two ways by which paint brushes were made, the miniver brush is made by using the tip of the tail hairs of the miniver. These are bundled, shaped and tied using waxed

thread. These are then pushed through the lower, tubular end pieced of a quill until a snug fit is achieved, a stick is added to the other end of the quill and a brush is made.

The other brush is made of hog's hair, bundled and tied in much the same way, but bundles are added together and tied to sticks to make larger brushes. These large brushes were for whitewashing or other larger uses. After some use the abrasion softened the hairs and created tapered ends. They were then taken apart and reassembled into smaller, more delicate brushes (d'Andrea Cennini, 1954). (Tools of the trade part 1. Brushes, 2010).

I used Grumbacher round numbers 1 and 00 watercolor brushes instead since I have not yet mastered brush making.

The process

The design was traced onto the paper using a light box and a number 6 pencil. Areas to be left blank were masked off using blue painters paint and paper, to keep it clean and free of smudges. The areas were then outlined in black ink.

The basic colors were painted in, all around the work, from the inside area to the outer area.



Figure 8 all areas painted in



Figure 9 white and black details added

White and black paint was then used to detail the individual parts of the painting and give them a more three dimensional look. See figures 8 and 9 Gold dots were next applied, following the example in the original work. See figure 10



Figure 10 Gold dots added

The fine gold lines were then painting in using a 00 brush and the same gold paint. See figure 11.



Figure 11 finished painting

Works Cited

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