

**CHRYSOPHORON FOR
ILLUMINATION: A
SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GILDING
SIZE OF THE MIDDLE AGES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649247622

Chrysophoron for illumination: a substitute for the gilding size of the Middle ages by Frederick Mamo

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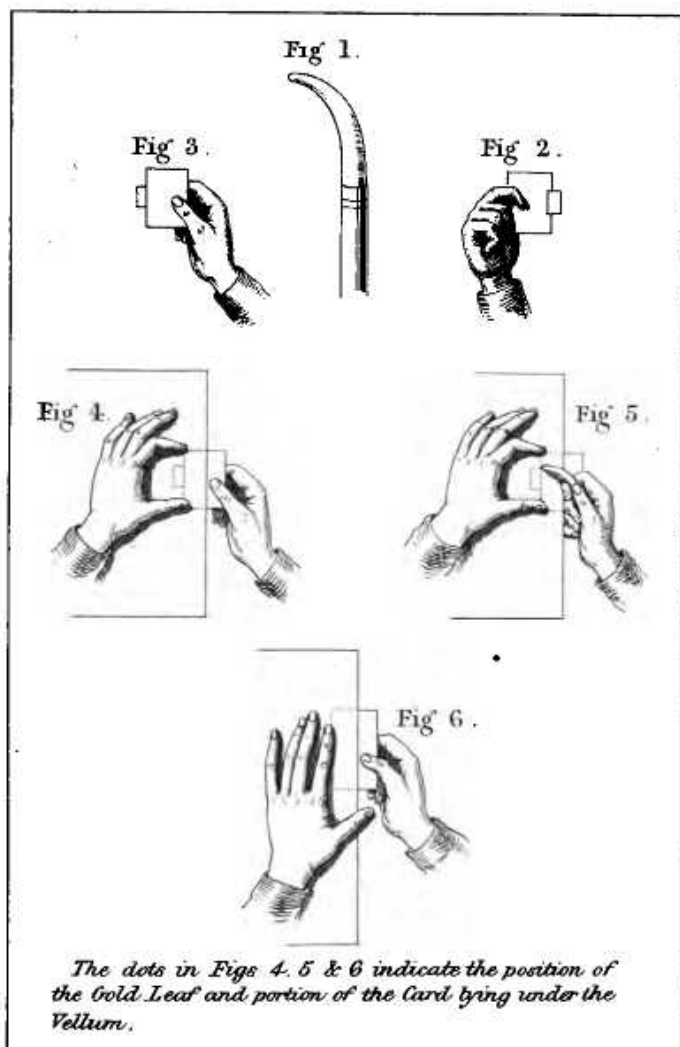
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FREDERICK MAMO

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SIZE OF THE MIDDLE AGES**



CHRYSOPHORON

For Illumination.



A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GILDING SIZE
OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

THE MODE OF APPLICATION FULLY DESCRIBED; AND PRACTICAL
HINTS GIVEN AS TO GILDING, &c.

BY FREDERICK MAMO.



Arms probat artificem.

LONDON:
WINSOR AND NEWTON, 38, RATHBONE PLACE,

Artists' Colour Makers, by Special Appointment, to Her Majesty,
and to R.H.H. the Prince of Wales.

1864

170. m. 12.

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MAMO'S CHRYSOPHON.

A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GILDING SIZE
OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

On a close and careful examination of the gilding so profusely used in illuminated pages of the Mediæval MSS., and especially of those which display in *burnished* gold, small initials, text, and intricate ornaments, we cannot but conclude that the illuminators of these works must have been in possession of a peculiar preparation by which they were able to obtain the above-mentioned results in a sure and easy manner, just as we produce our hand-writing by one simple application of ink to paper.

The neat outlines of these letters and ornaments, their beautiful smoothness, the easy way in which they seem to have been produced, and, above all, their profuseness, strengthen us in the belief that in such, and no other

manner, must the gilding composition of those times, have been used.

The genuine art which was, in all probability, taught orally, has been, unfortunately, lost to us; for notwithstanding the many recipes extracted from old treatises describing the processes of illumination, connoisseurs freely confess that none of them seem likely to give results equal to the old specimens, and in spite of the many discoveries made since those days in the sciences and arts, we have not hitherto succeeded in finding the ingredients which were then used, or even in supplying a substitute.

The prevailing and increasing taste for the beautiful art of "illumination" is greatly in need of some preparation for adequately imitating these brilliant layers of gold, and the many preparations which have from time to time been supplied are all deficient in many desirable qualities.

In the directions given us for using them we are told, firstly, that the surface of the paper should be moderately rough to hold the gold body firmly, and in the case of hot-pressed paper, that the surface to be coated should first be roughened with a knife or an ink-eraser. Secondly, that the coats should be crossed in different directions over each other, taking care that each coat is dry before another is applied; and that two or three coats should be laid over each other for flat ornaments, and for raised ones as many as will elevate the work sufficiently.

Thirdly, that the coats are not to be laid on thick, for the surface will honeycomb, and the gold body will be liable to scale off. Fourthly, that to get a very true raised surface, the gold body when dry is to be rubbed with emery paper, and to have rapidly applied to it another thin coat. Fifthly, that the prepared ground is to be treated with water, applied by means of a brush, for the purpose of causing the leaf-gold to adhere firmly to the surface.

The objections to the above process are, that, in the first instance, it is very objectional to scrape a surface on which it is intended to lay any colour, for the surface so abraded will present a downy texture difficult to work upon, and in such ornaments as are of an intricate nature, it will be found very difficult to scrape the portions to be covered with the gilding preparation, without, at the same time, abrading those to be coloured. Secondly, however easy it may appear in theory to lay six or eight coats over each other, in practice it is very different, if any but simple flat layers of gold have to be produced. It is a task of great difficulty, involving a great expenditure of time, and, in fact, it is almost an impossibility to place six or eight coats on small initials, delicately framed arabesques, and especially small text requiring to appear in raised gold. Even admitting that, with infinite trouble, these coats could be laid one over the other in a satisfactory manner, another difficult and tiresome pro-

cess remains to be done, namely, that of treating the prepared ground with water. The difficulty of this arises from the circumstance, that if any portion of the paper beyond the prepared ground be wetted, the leaf-gold will adhere to it so firmly as not to be easily removed, and consequently the whole work runs a chance of being disfigured. The whole process requires such nicety of handling, involves so much loss of time, and its ultimate success is attended by such uncertainty, that it must candidly be admitted that the gilding preparations now in use are far from perfect. Considering, moreover, the profusion of the burnished gold in mediæval works, we cannot but conclude that the unknown art in question must have been much easier in practice than here represented.

After many years of experiments and repeated failures, I have succeeded in producing a preparation possessing the desirable qualities, which seem to be wanting in the gold grounds at present in use.

The testimonials* which have been given me by the best judges in this matter viz., Mr. Digby Wyatt, Mr. Owen Jones, and Mr. A. H. Warren (Instructor to the Royal Family), all of whom, with great kindness, attended in person to witness my method of working, (which method they at once succeeded in imitating,) are sufficient guarantee that my preparation possesses all the advantages to which it lays claim.

* See page 21.