

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Teaching, like gardening, is a hopeful pursuit. A teacher spreads knowledge to the wind, or finds a likely spot to plant a few seeds from what was saved up. Over time, if some of the seeds have sprouted, grown and proven useful to others, the effort is justified and the teacher satisfied and grateful. I find myself especially grateful that students of medieval crafts like myself, artisans and artists, and other readers who collect odd bits of learning have apparently found this book helpful. You are the collective reason that I have been able to revise and expand *The Gilded Page* to a second edition. Thank you all. I hope you will use the knowledge that you gather from this text to plant your own seeds, and find enduring satisfaction from the results.

In the second edition, I have corrected a number of errors that I overlooked in the initial version, with thanks to an astute editor who pushed me to clarify and rewrite some sections. I have included additional material about the history of manuscript gilding, with evidence for a much earlier use of gold leaf in book decoration than I had previously realized, dating back to at least 3500 years ago. Perhaps it should not be surprising that once ancient artisans developed gold-beating techniques, scribes would think of pasting gold leaf onto their scroll illustrations. How widespread the practice of gilding was in the fourteenth century BCE cannot be accurately estimated; we have only one surviving example to study. However, where one scribe tried his hand at gilding in a manuscript, it

is possible that many others did as well. Someone had to be the first to figure it out. Others would, and eventually did, follow over time.

In the process of writing and revising this book, I have often wondered where the craft of manuscript gilding is going in our culture of electronic media. There have been episodic revivals of interest in medieval calligraphy and illumination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the old materials and techniques were rediscovered, reproduced and sometimes improved. Calligraphy was again studied and taught in schools by such skillful practitioners as Edward Johnston and his student, William Graily Hewitt. Throughout the twentieth century, visual artists and craftspeople continued to learn to use gold leaf to create their own works of beauty and utility. Yet despite the continuity of the craft, manuscript gilding remains an essentially romantic and anachronistic pursuit, a unique handicraft in our age of mass production. Those who love it (or who practice it despite the inherent frustrations in the process) feel a redolent pleasure in the link to ancient traditions and to craftspeople who used these identical skills in a very different world. Perhaps we hope to reclaim some of the careful ways and simpler passions that we believe our ancestors pursued. We may find that learning a skill, however specialized and outdated, satisfies our need to work physically with our hands. Perhaps we simply want to lose ourselves for a while in something that creates beauty. May the pursuit of the craft continue, no matter the reason.

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