

## Combat Scrolls with Quality: You \*CAN\* have it Fast and Good.

One of the most unnerving challenges that a scribe can face in their artistic career is having their Baron or Baroness, or even their Royal Majesties, ask them to create a scroll for an upcoming court on short notice. The higher the level of the award, the more stressful it can be. This class is designed to discuss what scribes can do to gird themselves for battle in the ranks of the combat scribes, while maintaining their artistic enjoyment.

**What's a Combat Scribe?** – You may have heard the term, and wondered what it meant. Combat scribing is a joke referring to when scribes are handed court business and asked to accomplish miracles of artistry in very short time periods. In doing battle with the clock, arm cramps, the demon Titivillus, and various other environmental disasters, the scribe is engaging in combat that can be as mentally and physically exhausting as stepping onto the battlefield. Just with more ink.

**Can They do that? Give you court business on such short notice?** - Yep! And they will too, once you say that you are a scribe within earshot of the pointy hats or retainers. One of my first pieces was a Pearl scroll that I had 2 days and nights to create. It was for my best friend, who has a Viking persona. That was entertaining.

**What do you mean by short notice?** I mean anywhere from a week to the day of the event.

**Well, what do I do about it?!** Aren't you glad you're in this class?

**First Things First:** If you are not comfortable with your artistic speed, your quality in a hurry, or your skill level, you do not have to be a combat scribe. It is a service that – if you wish to provide it – is on a strictly voluntary basis. It is a very valuable one, and often a necessary one, but it should not be one that becomes a chore and something that makes you avoid going to events because you don't want to spend all day scribing.

Learn to make the polite refusal. If you are asked if you can fill out promissories or make a scroll in what you consider is unfeasible for your personal level as a scribe or your personal time, then just say, "I'm sorry, but I don't think I would feel comfortable doing \_\_\_ in such a short amount of time." Or an even simpler, "No, I'm sorry, I just don't have time." Don't make excuses, just politely say no. It is OK to do so.

## Is the request Reasonable?

Consider the feasibility of the request, and take into account all the factors such as:

\**materials available* - The physical requirements to make a scroll

\**time available* - How short, is your short notice?

\**level of award* - Can you do justice to the level of award with the time given? This is mostly a consideration with grant, and peerage awards.

\**your personal availability* - Take realistic estimates of your free time.

\**information available* - Do you have all the information needed to create the scroll?

## Materials Available :

If you want to enter the ranks of the combat scribes, you should be prepared. Carry a little jar of ink, your nibs, penholder, an exacto blade, a kneaded eraser, mechanical pencil, (I can not describe how much it sucks when your only pencil breaks and you have to go beg a Tuchux to sharpen it for you), and a mini ruler (preferably marked in cm's, at a minimum, with you to events. If you're feeling really gung-ho, take along a tube of cadmium red, ultramarine blue, zinc white, and gold (I prefer W&N gouache for the colors, and W&N Gold acrylic for the gold.) as well as a couple of paint brushes, a tiny water holder, and a palette. A pad of Bristol Board Vellum surface is also probably the most travel-friendly media, since pergaminata can dent with a dirty look, and vellum is way too humidity sensitive to haul around to events unless you're made of money. Cardstock works, too.

I find that a vinyl bank bag (a money pouch) is perfect to carry all of my supplies in a single entity. Some people prefer tackle boxes, but I think they're far too bulky, personally. I also found that a dental retainer box is the perfect nib/razor blade container, to keep the sharp metal bits in one spot.

Do not expect that the Royals/Baronage will have a calligraphy pen available. I've had them ask to borrow mine on several occasions. They will be very unlikely to have anything as regards calligraphy supplies.

### *Suggested Combat Scribe Gear: (Minimum)*

Pen nibs, pen holder, ink, ruler (marked in cm's), exacto blade, kneaded eraser, mechanical pencil or two, Bristol board Vellum surface.

### *Optionally additional Scribal Gear:*

Windsor & Newton Gold acrylic, W&N cadmium red gouache, ultramarine gouache, zinc white gouache, Viridian (gouache or water color), Yellow ochre, purple (watercolor), black gouache (any black. I use Jet black myself.), paint brushes of suitable size, paint tray palette, ramekin for water, paper towel or napkin, handi-wipes, lap-desk of some variety, calligraphy ductus/guide, illuminated manuscripts reference book.

## Time Available:

Here is where you seriously need to consider your real time constraints, and personal skill level. There are some people who are super fast at illumination, and can whip out vinework in an hour, or are natural calligraphers and can just write scroll text in one straight shot. If you are not a fast worker, then decide what is a minimum acceptable time limit for you based on the level of the award. Peerage scrolls, no matter the reason, should never be done the day of the event, unless you are capable of doing Peerage quality work in a single day. In which case, why are you taking this class? It is not fair to someone receiving the most meaningful achievement in the SCA to get something that was done in a hurry, and looks like it.

**The Clerk Signet's policy is that if someone received a REAL SCROLL during court, (and the only qualifier for real is that it's not a pre-printed promissory) then they do not go on the backlog, regardless of the quality of the scroll.**

AoA level awards are more reasonable to do in a few hours, as are writs or Baronial level scrolls. I'm not comfortable doing anything Grant level or above day of the event, and I would prefer the scroll go on the backlog than to have the recipient get a crappy piece they won't want to put on their wall.

For me personally, 1 days' notice (if I'm not busy otherwise with real life), is a minimum for AoA level awards. Two or more for Grant level awards, (And two days only applies if I know the person, and am already familiar with the time period and style.) A week absolute bare minimum (and this had better be a week that I have NO other projects) for a Peerage, and that's if I have the text, heraldry, personal information, materials, and everything absolutely ready to go, that I can start sitting at my desk on day one, for six hours a night, till day seven.

And those time limits are only because I am reasonably good at calligraphy and am able to sit down and write out text in certain hands without having to practice it beforehand. I am not a particularly quick illuminator, and that is the part that takes me the most time.

Baroness Julianna Fiorentini, when she served as Scrivener Royal, spent her ENTIRE Pennsic vacation, sitting in a tent, and scribing, day in and day out, because she is insanely dedicated. She created over 100 REAL SCROLLS for their Majesties. But she had no time left over at all for socializing, shopping or otherwise enjoying her vacation. She was only able to accomplish that prodigious feat because she employed several tactics we'll discuss later, is an superb calligrapher, and extremely experienced scribe. But it cost her her entire vacation, and her time was completely swallowed up.

## **The Level of the Award:**

We've already discussed this briefly, but something else to keep in mind is the level of the award.

It isn't worth it to you to spend hours over a piece – that isn't high quality because it was rushed – that the recipient won't display or keep, just for a few moments in court when they can be handed a pretty piece of paper. A promissory will serve just as well for that purpose.

It's also not fair to the recipient to receive something that is unworthy of their achievement, that cheats them of receiving anything that ever is. They may never receive a higher award. Work appropriately to your skill level.

The saddest thing I've seen in the SCA was the disappointed expression on a very sweet lady's face, upon seeing a Pelican scroll that was done by someone who should never have been allowed to do it. It was very poor quality work, inappropriate subject material, and while she immediately tried to smile, as someone who'd been playing in the SCA for some twenty years, and had seen Peerage quality pieces, and had a reasonable expectation, it was heartbreaking. If you're unsure about the quality of your work, ask the Clerk Signet their opinion. It is their responsibility to pair scribes with scrolls, and in this particular case, they had been bypassed.

## **Personal Availability:**

Just what it says. If you have prior commitments, plans for the day, responsibilities to children or other adults, then make an intelligent decision. Do not let the helium hand ruin your event, or other people's event if it is completely inconvenient. No one likes an angry scribe, or unattended children playing near the firepit.

## **Information Available:**

Sometimes, if you offer yourself as a combat scribe, you'll be asked to fill out scroll blanks or promissories, and be handed something that looks like a used Kleenex with names hand-written on it. I have been brought a napkin with a name on it to add to court business. Sometimes you might know that the name is spelled incorrectly, or the heraldry is unavailable, and you don't know if the award is armigerous or not.

It can take time for investigation, for example, chasing people down at events to ask for proper spellings without letting the recipient know. If you're handed minimal information, it might be a waste of your time to fill something out incorrectly.

## Types of Combat Scribing:

- 1) **Filling out promissories or scroll blanks.** This is just calligraphy intensive, and requires someone with good penmanship and legibility. This is the most common type of combat scribing, since the Royalty prefer to have a promissory than nothing. If you're a good calligrapher, it's great practice.
- 2) **Doing Illumination for scroll blanks.** If a scribe is a particularly quick artist/illuminator, they can sometimes get together with a fast calligrapher to coordinate on creating a scroll for the event.
- 3) **Creating Entire scrolls on a short amount of time.** This would be the email you get two days or a week before an event, requesting you to do some scrolls for the upcoming event.

## Tips and Tricks from the Trenches for each Type:

Something that can help you manage your time is to pull the promissories in order of your court list, so that you can simply go from one page to the next, without having to stop and look for a promissory each time. Some Royals do not sign their own scrolls. Ask them.

Don't start your work in a poor location. A day shade on a windy day is a bad choice of work spot. Any place particularly public will have you stressing out as curious people come up to see what you're doing. Ideally a protected private location with a sturdy table and good light is what you'd like to have. At the very least, you need a place out of the wind to work. Having your paper blowing away out from under you, and your inkpot tipping over, is extremely irritating, and having to pick up and move is a waste of precious time.

If you're at a Baronial event, check name spellings with the local herald or the Baron and Baroness. Chances are they know their people, or can point you to someone who can spell it for you. They also may know of precedence regarding awards.

Carrying a bottle of water saves you from cooler hunting for water to paint with. I have used Deer Park water to paint with at events.

Don't leave your court business lying around. If you have to get up, and can't put a piece away because it's still wet, ask a trustworthy gentle (whose name does not appear on the court business) to watch over the area for you, so that some well-meaning Type A doesn't clear it all away and put it somewhere else, causing you to immediately panic because you can't find your entire basket with your scribal kit.

When you first draw your design, do so on tracing paper. This allows you to erase, adjust, re-center, and more importantly, re-use. If you've got an excellent pattern of vine-work that you drew, use it again, change the colors, move the orientation. Add minor elements. Julianna would draw a couple of designs for shark's teeth, and then use different colors or placement to make them all unique during her scribal marathon at Pennsic.

Get to know other scribes and make friends. If you need help at an event that you're combat scribing, drag a friend over, tape a pen to their hand and chain them to the table. Many hands make light work. Respect other scribes, and their work. Everyone is at different levels.

## Tips and Tricks from the Trenches for each Type: (cont.)

Learn the minimal ubiquitous text form for all awards. It's much easier to fill out scroll blanks with proper text when you don't have to go hunt up a "proper" text. Keep in mind that the scroll texts only have to meet certain criteria, they do not have to be exactly the suggested texts on the Clerk Signet website.

*<Greeting> from <King and Queen names>, Rex et Regina Atlantiae.  
We have had many great reports of <reason for award> done by <recipient>.  
Thus are we minded to induct this worthy gentle into our <Order/Award>,  
In honor of their good works. (Possible armigerous statement here.) Done this  
<date>, A.S. <year>, by Our hand.*

This is a very minimal example, but it meets the basic criteria, and you can add description, or poetic license as you see fit. Feel free to mix and match for subtle differences .

Look at Illumination styles, and make a "quick reference" book with simple illumination styles that you can use when you need to make a piece in a hurry. An excellent one that is a quick technique is 14th century French vine work, or 15th century Italian filigree vine work. Both are extremely quick illumination processes. Also quick are geometric Arabic texts, (a good place to find geometric Arabic patterns are the woodwork and masonry of the period). Some people find Celtic knotwork a quick technique, but personally it makes my eyes cross, and I avoid it. Standard versals and vine work are ALWAYS quick and easy, and findable in all periods. Another good technique that looks impressively complicated, but is quick if you have decent brush control, is whitework.

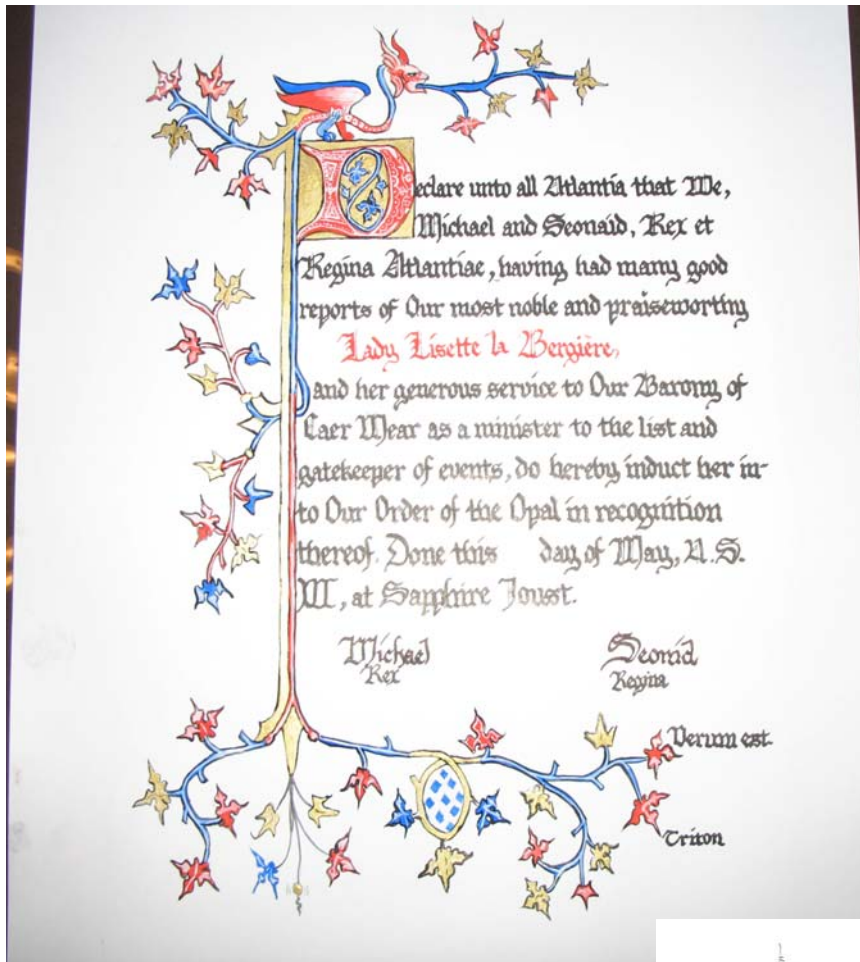
When you find a picture that you think would be quick and easy for a scroll, print it out, and put it in your portfolio, so that if you need a quick reference for a scroll, you'll have the research part done! This also spares you from lugging books around.

Figure out how much mat room plus visual border you want to leave on a standard sized 9 x 12, and only measure the sum so that you only rule one line. Also, if you have a favorite hand, figure out what size line spacing you need – that way you don't have to do a test text to figure out what measurement to use. Or keep a standard lined-out piece of tracing paper.

If you're really crazy, make some illuminated blanks, just to have with you, and you'll be superlatively prepared for combat scribing, since Illumination usually takes much longer than the calligraphy. Whatever you make, will be used. Especially the more common awards.

You can turn blanks for one award into something else, with just a little carefully applied paint. I have turned a Coral Branch into a Nonpareil, though I hate changing the artist's original work. (There are no promissories for the NP, and there shouldn't be.)

Be creative in where you find source material. When I was given 2 days to do a Pearl scroll for a Viking persona (who happened to be my best friend), I was at a bit of a loss, considering the Vikings weren't big on manuscripts. I eventually used a 9th C. Thor's hammer as my source. Architecture and woodworking also are good places to find patterns.



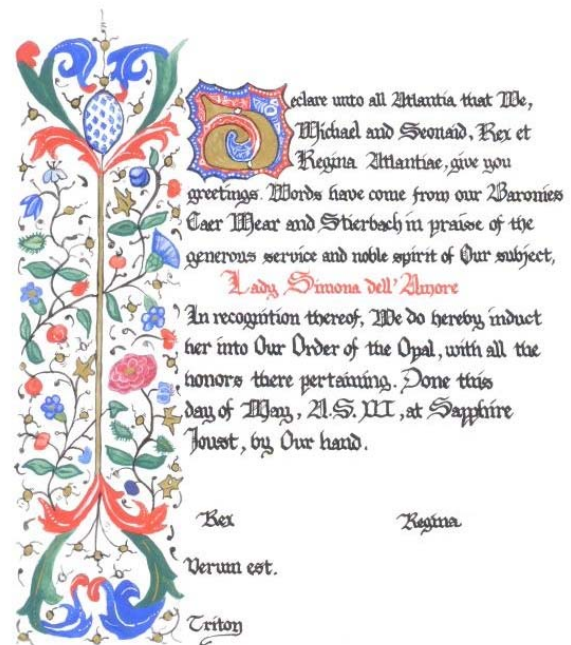
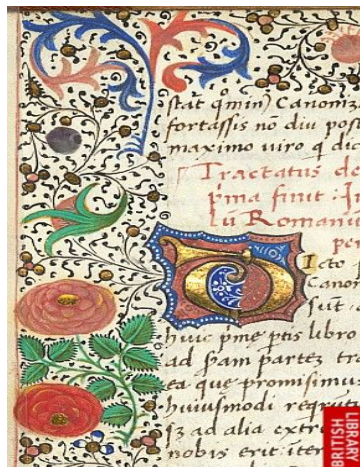
This scroll took 1 night to do, with very simple vinework, the 1 line French leaves, and a white-work versal. The calligraphy was a little uneven, but I didn't have time to practice it, and this is the straight first attempt at the calligraphy.

This is an example of 14th century French vinework, which can be a very quick technique with a little bit of attention and practice.

Real size 9 x 12 Bristol board vellum surface, gouache & gold acrylic, oak gall ink, Brause nib.

This piece also took a single evening, and is an example of 15th century Italian filigree style vinework, though it needs more filler lines. Again, the versal is whiteworked, and the calligraphy is the same hand used above for Lady Lisette's piece. The calligraphy came out much better on this one, but again, this was a first shot only calligraphy. This style is deceptively simple, and only requires a little bit of attention to maintain visual correctness as to the period style.

Also 9 x 12 Bristol Board, gouache, gold acrylic, oak gall ink, and Brause nibs.



Declare unto all Atlantia that We, Michael and Seonaid, Rex et Regina Atlantiae, give you greetings. Words have come from our Baronies Caer Wear and Stierbach in praise of the generous service and noble spirit of Our subject, Lady Simona dell' Amore. In recognition thereof, We do hereby induct her into Our Order of the Opal, with all the honors there pertaining. Done this day of May, A.S. III, at Sapphire Joust, by Our hand.

Bex  
Regina  
Verum est.  
Triton



**The 1 Night Pearl scroll** - Jehannette de Provins is a friend of mine, and she was getting her Pearl at Ymir. The yellow is actually gold acrylic (so it was shinier).

I chose the French vinework with whitework bars and versal, because it's a very quick style, but to me this piece always looks like it was hurried. Given more time, I'd have done more work in the versal, and more detail on the figures in the bottom. This scroll looks very much "SCA" and less period to me. Mostly because of the figures, which are a personal touch for the recipient, but are incorrectly sized for this style. 9 x 12 pergamena, gouache, gold acrylic, oak gall ink, Brause nib.

**The 2 night Pearl Scroll** - This was for a Viking blacksmith friend of mine, so the hammer was appropriate. I took the text, translated it into runes and replaced the score marks on the outside with the text. I also added a snake and a wolf for mythos.

