

# SCRIBE EQUIPMENT LIST

by Duchess Alethea Charle, O.L.

## PENS AND INKS

1. **Speedball dip pens.** The handles fit most nibs and are cheap. The nibs are cheap and tend to work very well for new and experienced calligraphers. I recommend **C-5 and C-4 nibs.** Avoid slanted or rounded nibs. The nibs should be straight across at the tip. The only thing less than optimal about these nibs is that they are one piece (they cannot be taken apart to be cleaned). Therefore, if you intend to use colored inks in your calligraphy you will need to designate a different nib for each color.
2. **Mitchell dip pens.** These pens can be dismantled for ease of cleaning, however the nibs are small and special care needs to be taken not to lose the reservoir portion of the nib.
3. **Cartridge pens.** I am fond of the **Osmoroid** cartridge pen. It has a nice flow of ink and a sharp edge. I don't recommend its use for the more intricate calligraphic hands (or any other cartridge pen for that matter). It is difficult to do the necessary flourishes with a cartridge pen because it doesn't have the same flow as a dip pen. But it *is* easier to tote around for emergency or "at event" usage.
4. **Inks.** I recommend a non waterproof brand. Waterproof ink may be nice for not bleeding when rained, sneezed or perspired on, but it is terrible for a fine delicate hand and murder on your pen nibs. It is difficult to clean out of nibs, even with the appropriate solvents, especially those that don't break down into smaller parts for cleaning (like the speedball), and it will ruin your cartridge pen. The colored inks are most often waterproof, and difficult to use for fine work, however, if you want to have a different color of ink in your manuscript, and don't want to hand paint each individual letter, you're stuck with them. The inks I *do* recommend are: **Higgins Permanent Ink** (it comes in a square plastic bottle which has a tendency to leak after it's opened—I recommend transferring some of it to a glass bottle for traveling, or putting it in a ziplock bag); and **Quink Ink** (which is made to use in cartridge pens). I *don't* recommend Osmoroid Ink because, although it flows nicely and is not waterproof, it has a tendency not to dry completely and will smear easily.

## PAPER

1. **Watercolor Paper.** (not the kind on a pad) Watercolor paper is heavy enough, and has a tight enough bond, to take both ink and paint well. I recommend using the back side of the paper because it is smoother/has less texture. Texture is not a good thing when you are trying to do calligraphy. If you can, aim for a paper with a slight buff tint to it—it looks more natural. It is a little more difficult to do gold leafing with this kind of paper because the size (glue) soaks into the paper, and the gold takes on the texture of the paper instead of remaining smooth.
2. **Bristol Board.** (this comes in a pad) Bristol board is an extremely tight paper, with practically no texture. It is wonderful for ink, paint and gold leafing. It behaves the most like vellum, which is what was used in the Middle Ages. Be careful, though, it does pick up every little smudge. When using this paper it is best to cover any part of it

you are not working with directly, to avoid smudges, drips and perspiration from messing up your work.

5. **Card Stock.** This is what most scrolls for AOA's are done on these days. Many colors are available, but parchment colored is recommended. It takes ink and paint relatively well, and if doing a smaller GOA or above scroll would be suitable to use and cheap to acquire.
6. **Vellum.** While this is not paper, it is technically the best surface to write, and paint on, if you are going to be recreating the middle ages. It needs to be prepared for usage before you can do anything to it (but that's another class). Once you have actually used vellum it is difficult to go back to using paper, except for a couple of things: First, it's expensive and does need to be prepped to use; and Second, it warps like crazy in the Midwest humidity. In the Middle Ages vellum was not used for pictures to be framed on the wall. It was in a book, with solid covers and a latch. This was to minimize warping and protect the document. I highly recommend each scribe use it at least once, it's an experience you shouldn't miss out on. And, if you plan to do a book someday, definitely use vellum and do it right.

## PAINTS AND BRUSHES

1. **Paints.** I recommend **gouache paints**. They have the same opacity as period pigments, are water-soluble and can be mixed and blended much easier than latex or egg tempera paints. There are vast ranges of potential colors, all of which can be mixed by the scribe at the time of need and saved for another time. Once dried they can be reconstituted as needed by simply adding water. And, they won't poison you if you say, accidentally, licked your brush to bring it to a nice point. The best colors to start with are **White, Black, Spectrum Yellow, Spectrum Red, and Indigo Blue**. With these colors you can mix almost any color you like. I don't recommend getting carried away when buying paints, as these paints are not particularly cheap. They will, however, last a long, long time. You will also need several plastic palates to keep your mixed paints on. Be sure to store them in an enclosed space when you are not using them, because they are great dust magnets.
2. **Brushes.** You should use whatever you feel comfortable with. I prefer **natural fibers**. For scrolls, the smaller brushes are what you need. I rarely use anything larger than a **1 or 00 round**, for use in covering larger spaces. My favorite brushes for fine detailing are **10/0 spotters**. A special mention should be made that if you start doing Gold leafing on your scrolls (which, like vellum preparation, is an entire class of it's own) make sure that you NEVER use your painting brush to put the size (glue) on your paper or vellum. It will be totally ruined for anything other than applying size. I always set aside a special brush just for applying size.

This list and commentary are for the new scribe to use as a reference. It is not the be all and end all, only that which I would recommend to a new scribe, for *starters*. If you talk to other, experienced, scribes you may find that they have discovered some tools and techniques of their own, which work very well. My advice is to just get started and find out what works best for you. Remember, there are very few people who were exceptionally good at this craft when they first started doing it. It will take a lot of time and practice before you will perform at the level of an experienced scribe. When you do reach that level, however, the feeling is wonderful. Good luck and above all, have fun.