

# GOING BACK IN LINE FROM MODERN TO MEDIEVAL

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## LINE TRAVEL

If you are an artist, experienced or otherwise, your perspective is modern. Your experience, environment, and training are modern in influence. You and I see with modern eyes.

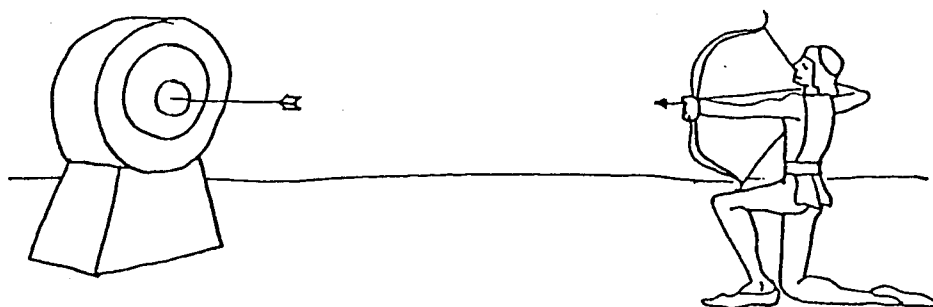
When I first attempted to illuminate a scroll, I found it difficult to translate my modern style into a style that looked medieval. I tried putting my figures into obvious period garb; however, they still looked like modern drawings of people in medieval garb.

Having recognized the problem, I set off to go back in line. I began a process of really looking at medieval drawings and illuminations. The more time I spent, the more obvious it became that period drawings have several common denominators regardless of period or country. Using those common elements and following a few guidelines will enable you to achieve a period style.

## THEME

If you volunteer to complete an award scroll for a person who has excelled in archery, the obvious drawing would be of a figure engaged in some act of archery. A person standing at the bottom of some text with empty hands will not do anything to illustrate the story. It tells no one anything about what the words relay. Which brings us rather neatly to the observation that:

*The illumination tells the story of the text.*

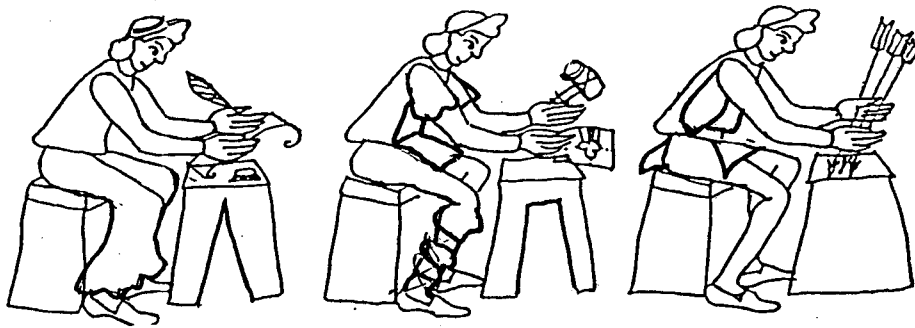


## SETTING THE STAGE

Think of your illumination as a small stage set, peopled with tiny actors who must act out the story in mime.

Draw your figures in the “act” of performing their occupation and using the tools of their trade. You can even use the same figure over again by changing his garb and tools and setting. Each one becomes a different person, or the same person doing many different things.

Generic garb will work to portray most individuals as long as the other elements are used.



However, some figures beg for more specific definition.



Pauper or prince?

Remember that you cannot draw a merchant type in serf's garb and have him recognized as a merchant, or:

***Clothing and objects should match the class and occupation of the person portrayed.***

## FEATURES

Most of the faces of people are portrayed by a few simple lines. If you are a good cartoonist, you will be able to achieve a likeness of the person portrayed. Remember that most line drawings of that sort rely on the exaggeration of some feature to achieve that likeness and most people are not terribly flattered by having their noses drawn out to heroic proportions.



12th Century French

It is infinitely safer to identify them by the methods described previously.

A lot of detail will be impossible because most of the time your figures will be very small, however:

***The small details in line drawings carry a lot of information.***

Drawings for male and female features are very similar. Beards and moustaches are obvious gender flags; however, hairstyle and length can be confusing.

On the other hand, women's eyes appear to be drawn larger with a slant or a triangular appearance. Men's eyes are generally drawn smaller and rounder.



### EXPRESSION

As features are made up of simple lines, it would appear at first glance that benignly pleasant expression is the one most commonly portrayed. With such tiny faces, tiny smiles and a bland expression would appear to be the rule.

There are of course exceptions.



11th C. German



Early 10th C. Anglo-Frankish



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Early 10th C. Anglo-Frankish



Early 10th C. Anglo-Frankish

### FACES

Faces seem to almost always appear in profile or 3/4 view.



scribe



old soldier



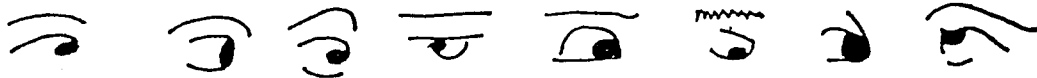
monk

*Even the smallest faces can be expressive and lifelike.*



### EYES

It is noted that eyes, even in profile, still seem to have the orientation of a full-face view. This may be a way to make the eye more expressive.



### EYEBROWS

A great deal of the expression of a face comes from the placement and shape of the eyebrows in relation to the eyes.



### EARS

Ears are very easy. They can be drawn with just two lines like this:



Or you can cover them with hair.



Very easy.

### NOSES

Most noses are drawn as a line that is a continuation of the eyebrow.



Noses don't have to be connected to the eyebrow; they can be drawn with even simpler lines.



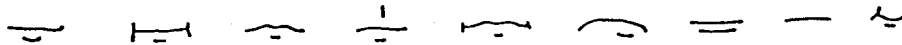
Once again, simple lines don't have to mean limited expression.



12th C. Anglo-French

### MOUTHS

Mouths are also drawn as simple lines. These lines can also depict a broad variety of moods. They may or may not be connected to the nose.



### HANDS

Hands, especially fingers, appear elongated. As gestures are so important to communication, this appears to be a way to add expression to the portrayal. The position and activity of hands in small drawings may be made more apparent by the elongation of the fingers. Their actions become "louder."



9th C. English



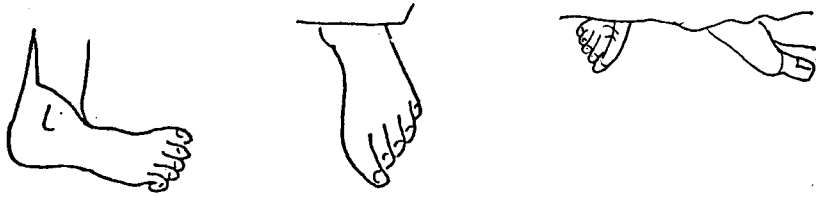
12th C. English



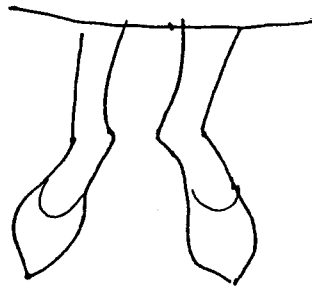
9th C. Carolingian

## FEET

Feet are drawn as simply as the other elements described. Toes appear to be curled or tucked under.



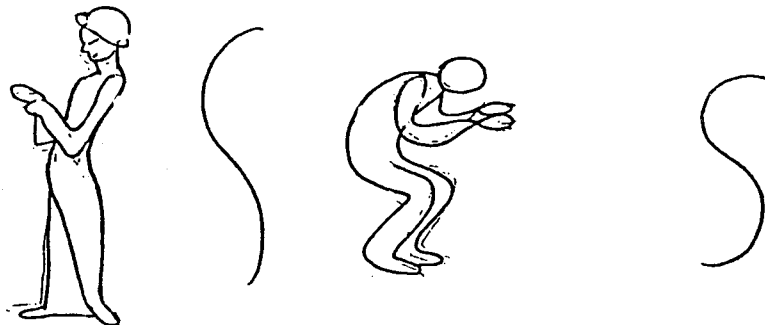
Or they can be hidden in shoes.



12th C. German

## FIGURES

Figures appear graceful with most having the suggestion of an “S” curve.



The careful modeling and draping of garments can add a lot of expression to a figure.



Figures are not necessarily perfectly correct in proportion to themselves or other figures or objects in their surroundings.

Children, for instance, are sometimes drawn with the same proportions as adults, only smaller.

Although medieval style may not read as perfect in the execution of proportion or anatomy, it is not an excuse for sloppy drawings or poorly planned compositions.

Simple lines, drawn well, can beautifully portray activities or everyday life or momentous occasions.

Following here are drawings of assorted subjects from medieval texts. Note the simple lines used to depict people and animals. The same simple lines can be used to define plants, buildings, and other objects.

I hope the discussion and drawings will encourage you to pursue drawing for the purpose of illumination.

With all the sources available, I believe you will find it easy and fun to . . . go back in line.



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8th C. English



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10th C. - English



9th C. English



12th C. English



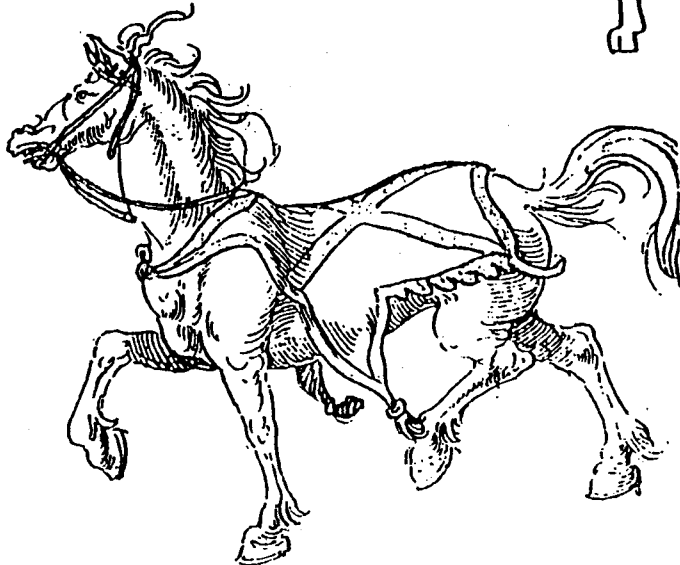
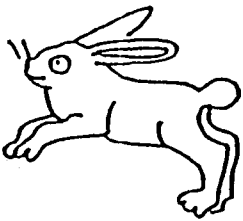
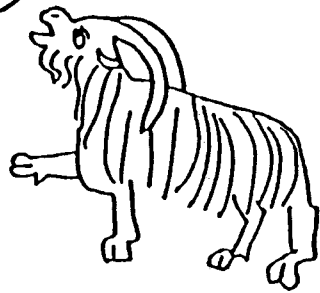
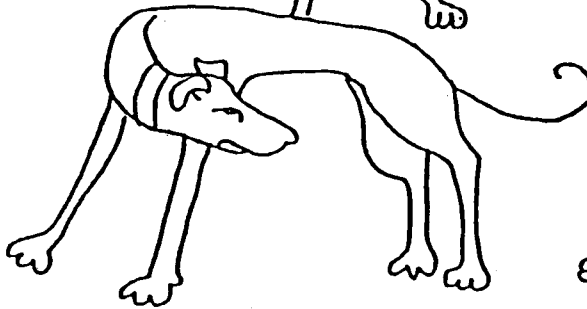
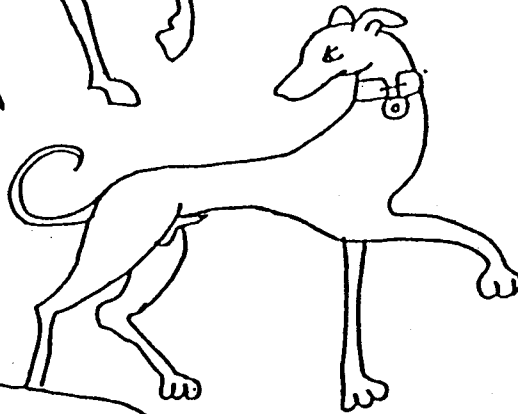
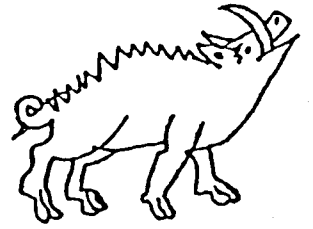
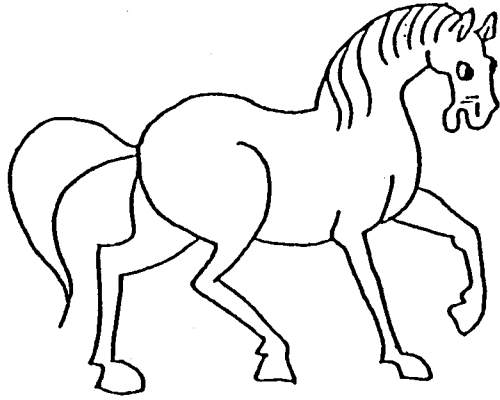
9th C. Carolingian



13th C. French



8th C. English



15<sup>th</sup> C. German



13th C. English



15th C. French



13th C. Irish

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