

A Parchment Recipe

Schedula diversarum artium
Theophilus Presbyter - Early twelfth century
British Museum MS. Harley 3915, fol. 128r

Take goatskins (1) and stand them in water for a day and a night. Take them and wash them till the water runs clear (2). Take an entirely new bath and place therein old lime (calcem non recentem) and water mixing well together to form a thick cloudy liquor. Place the skins into this, folding them on the flesh side. Move them with a pole two or three times each day, leaving them for eight days (and twice as long in winter) (3). Next you must withdraw the skins and unhair them (4). Pour off the contents of the bath and repeat the process using the same quantities, placing the skins in the lime liquor, and moving them once each day over eight days as before (5). Then take them out and wash them well until the water runs quite clean (6). Place them in another bath with clean water and leave them for two days (7). Then take them out, attach the cords and tie them to the circular frame (8). Dry, then shave them with a sharp knife, after which, leave for two days out of the sun (9). Moisten with water and rub the flesh side with powdered pumice (10). After two days wet it again by sprinkling with a little water and fully clean the flesh side with pumice so as to make it quite wet again (11). Then tighten up the cords, equalize the tension so that the sheet will become permanent. Once the sheets are dry, nothing further remains to be done (12).

Note:

Actually, a few things do need to be done before writing or painting on the surface of this vellum.

The hair side of the parchment has the best tooth and is the side preferred for writing and painting. After processing, the natural oils of the hide will continue to rise to the surface. Remove the oils by rubbing the hair side of the hide lightly with pounce made from cuttlefish and fine grade pumice. Then, to bring the surface of the hide to a soft, velvety finish, lay it on a smooth table top and using 360 grit sandpaper, gently rub out any veins and even the surface. This will also raise the nap. Next, pounce the surface with gum sandarac and rub in a circular motion using 400 grit sandpaper until the parchment is smooth.