

An unusual pigment in miniatures attributed to Simon Marmion in the *Donne Hours*

(Louvain-la-Neuve, Archives de l'Université, ms. A2)

A book of hours conserved in the archives of the University of Louvain-la-Neuve (ms. A2), for the use of Salisbury, is well known to art historians as the *Louthe Hours*. Recently, the owner whose coat of arms appear twice in the volume (fols. 13 and 100v) was identified as John Donne, an English courtier. Miniatures are attributed to Simon Marmion and to the Master of the Dresden Prayerbook.

Technical examination of the manuscript was performed recently. Under microscope, some areas in miniatures attributed to Marmion present a strange appearance (fig. 1). Reddish brown particles are placed on top of a white layer that shows a green to black surface hue.

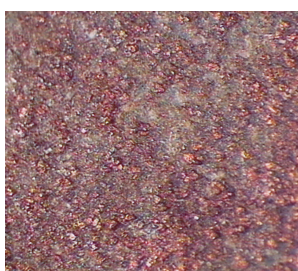


Fig. 1. *Donne Hours*, surface of the unusual pigment under microscope

XRF analysis (1) revealed that these particles are pure copper fillings. The underlayer is made of lead white and its greenish hue in surface is due to the oxidation of copper.

Marmion used this combination of pigments to render architectural elements (fig. 2), armours or even the eagle of saint John the Evangelist (fig. 3). It seems he tried to enrich his palette of metallic colours with their shimmering effects.

Unfortunately, the use of copper fillings as pigment in miniatures was not described before and it seems that its use is very rare. It was not described in medieval treatises. There is however a description which can be connected to this working method in the treatise of Jean Lebègue (*Tabula de vocabulis sinonimis et equivocis colorum*) dating from 1431 (Paris, BNF, lat. 6741)

« Pour escrire de laton et pareillement dor et dargent. Limez tres subtilement laton de tres pure couleur et puis le molez subtiliment sur le porphire qui est pierre tres seure, puis le mettez en un net vaisel et le laissez asseoir, puis ostez leaue et ayez vostre detrempe de gomme arabiche, et len destrempez puis en ouvrez de vostre pincel, et quant ce sera fait et sech, si le frotez et burnissez tres bien, une pierre qui est nommee ametiste et ainsi povez vous escrire dor et dargent » (2)

This research is still in progress and will be presented during the XIXth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting to be held in Bruges from 11th to 13th September 2014.



Fig. 2. *Donne Hours*, fol. 51: detail of the architecture



Fig. 3. *Donne Hours*, fol. 96v: eagle in the miniature representing Saint John the Evangelist at Patmos

(1) XRF analyses were performed by Jacqueline Couvert (Laboratoire d'étude des œuvres d'art par les méthodes scientifiques - Musée de Louvain-la-Neuve).
(2) M.P. MERRIFIELD, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting*, New York, 1967, p. 299, nr 312.