Discoveries

Lost Recipe for Medieval Blue Ink Found

The plant used to create a popular blueish-purple ink once used in illuminated manuscripts—and the ink’s recipe—has eluded scientists... until now.

Dubbed *folium*, the pigment was famous for its gorgeous blue/purple color and its staying power. Although it, along with the more well-known blue indigo pigment, was used to dye textiles, it was mostly used by monks to illuminate manuscripts. With the advent of the printing press, the process for producing *folium* was lost until a group of chemists, scientists, and biologists at the New University of Lisbon, Portugal, found the recipe in a 15th-century manuscript written in the extinct Judeo-Portuguese language of Lusitanic. There it was discovered that the dye’s sole ingredient was the plant, *Chrozophora tinctoria*, which, in the summer, produces a fruit that contains a blue fluid.

The group found the plant in the Portuguese town of Monsaraz, and, following the book’s instructions on how to collect the fruit in July and then squeeze out the fluid onto linen, they were able to re-create the medieval dye, which they believe is so stable that it may retain its original color for centuries. The discovery they hope will help manuscript conservationists repair areas with the original pigment, rather than modern, synthetic ones. The team has named their new pigment Chrozophoridin.

Re-written from https://www.mystorical.net/post/lost-recipe-for-medieval-blue-ink-found?fbclid=IwAR0QjI4ZGCqxmVjO6ZC_FS-E8DiU3Ng2fygX2KmvFfKpd -Dgxwzy5GhBw
260,000 digitized images of Jewish art and artifacts now online

The Hebrew University’s Center for Jewish Art has launched the world’s largest index of Jewish Art, The Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art, http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php, a collection of more than 260,000 digitized images of Jewish objects and artifacts from all over the world. These include artifacts from 700 museums, synagogues, and private collections in 41 different countries, as well as architectural drawings of 1,500 synagogues and Jewish ritual buildings from antiquity to the modern day.

Vladimir Levin, Director of the Center for Jewish Art, commented “Jewish culture is largely perceived as a culture of texts and ideas, not of images. As the largest virtual Jewish museum in the world, the Index of Jewish Art is a sophisticated tool for studying visual aspects of Jewish heritage. We hope that making this Index available will lead to further in-depth study of primary sources, and serve as an enduring launching pad for the study of the historical and cultural significance of Jewish art for many years to come.”

Some of the pieces documented no longer exist, but have a permanent place in the vast index that has taken more than thirty years to collect and six years to digitize. In some cases, the researchers were able to document an object just in time, such as right before a crumbling East European synagogue collapsed to its foundation, or a ritual object disappeared into obscurity at an auction.
One such expedition that researchers from the Center went on occurred in Siberia in 2015. Researchers on the expedition found that many synagogues, long since abandoned, were on the verge of collapse. While the expedition team worked tirelessly at documenting the objects that they could find, they also attempted to raise awareness among the locals of the importance of preserving Jewish heritage sites, not just for Jewish communities, but also as a significant part of their own history and culture.

Re-written from
https://www.medievalists.net/2017/08/260000-digitized-images-jewish-art-artifacts-now-online/

1,300 Year Old Church featuring Mosaic Floors Uncovered in Lower Galilee

A 1,300-year old church with ornate mosaic floors was recently uncovered in an Israel Antiquities Authority excavation in the Circassian village of Kfar Kama, near Kfar Tavor, in Lower Galilee. The excavation, led by archaeologist Nurit Feig on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, in collaboration with Prof. Moti Aviam of the Kinneret Academic College, and with assistance from local volunteers, preceded the construction
of a playground. Under Israeli law, every construction must start with an excavation, seeing as the country is filled with buried archaeological treasures.

The church, measuring $36 \times 108$ ft., includes a large courtyard, a foyer, and a central hall. There are three prayer niches – compared with most churches of the same era which offered a single prayer niche. The nave and side aisles were paved with mosaics incorporating geometric patterns, as well as blue, black, and red floral patterns.

Several rooms adjacent to the church have been partially uncovered. According to a ground-penetrating radar inspection operated by Dr. Shani Libbi, there are additional rooms at the site yet to be excavated. The researchers have suggested “it is quite possible that this large complex was a monastery.” In the early 1960s, a smaller church with two chapels was excavated in the village of Kfar Kama, and was dated to the first half of the 6th century. According to Prof. Aviam, “this was probably the village church, while the church now discovered was probably part of a contemporary monastery on the outskirts of the village.”
The new discovery hints at the apparent importance of the Christian village settled in the Byzantine period close to Mount Tavor, an area of primary religious
significance for Christianity, identified as the site of the transfiguration of Jesus into radiant in glory upon a mountain. In 1876, when the Circassian Shapsug tribe first settled in Kfar Kama, they used the stones of the ancient village to build their houses.

Re-written from

Archaeologists find 1,000-year-old Christian jewelry mould

An archaeological dig has uncovered a small artisanal district dating from the Middle Ages beside a former prison in the southeast Swiss canton of Graubünden has unearthed a 1,000-year-old mold (9th-11th century) that was used to forge Christian-themed jewelry. Measuring 9 x 8.5 x 3 cm, it was used to cast seven different types of objects including earrings and a crucifix.

https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/archaeologists-find-1-000-year-old-christian-jewellery-mould/45917948

Lewis Chessman 'Warder' (late 12th/early 13th-century ivory chess piece) rediscovered in Trondheim, Norway

This 'Warder' (AKA pawn) was stored in an antiquer's drawer is one of the famous 'Lewis Chessmen,' a nearly-complete chess set carved in Norway and found in Scotland in 1831. Five pieces were missing when the set was originally found. After this piece was rediscovered, four more warders and one knight remain missing.

https://imgur.com/S86OI7X
How a Trashed Italian Manuscript got Sewn into a Sweet Silk Purse

The 5 x 6-inch purse is plenty pretty on the outside: emerald silk, embroidered with dainty yellow, purple, and peachy-pink blooms, arcing out of metallic vases. But things get more interesting when one pries the lustrous little parcel open. Between the seams and under the stitches, there’s something faded and faint, but unmistakable: a blue “Q” tucked between two stems, a stylized red “M” near one edge, rows and rows of tidy, brownish letters. In the belly of the bag, where one might expect just fabric, there is instead text—four parchment fragments, cut from a medieval manuscript.

Whoever made the bag, likely in Italy in the 17th century, started by deconstructing a volume and snipping the bifolia—the sheets of parchment that were folded to make the pages—into four tapered triangles. They stitched these together around the edges to form a little skeleton to build the rest of the bag around. The
fragment is “an integral part of the purse itself,” says Jay Moschella, curator of rare books at the Boston Public Library. The bits of bifolia wouldn’t otherwise be visible, but are here because the lining has gone missing. “It’s the non-decorative insides you weren’t meant to see,” he adds. “It looks fascinating now, but when it was produced, you would have had no idea that there was a fragment inside of it.”

The fragment, likely part of a 14th- or 15th-century Italian breviary, dated by comparison of the rotunda script has become an accidental archive of its own, preserving something that was never meant to be seen again.

Re-written from https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/manuscript-fragments-purse-lining
St Albans cathedral wall paintings recreated with light projections
Defaced early 13th-century medieval wall paintings that made pilgrims "fall to their knees" have been recreated at St. Alban’s Abbey the first time in nearly 500 years using light projections. Whitewashed over after the dissolution of the abbey’s monastery by Henry VIII in 1539, the cathedral had "long wanted to lift the veil of time to see how these paintings might have appeared."

St Alban and St. Amphibalus

The new color images are being projected over what is left of the original paintings on the walls. Starting with high-quality digital photographs of the paintings, experts recreated the light projections. Julia Low, chairwoman of the cathedral guides, said: "The colors are as close as we believe we can get to what they may have looked like. They are really unique. This has not been done anywhere else in this format." She said when a conference of 60 cathedral delegates saw the illuminations, their "collective jaws dropped." The paintings will be illuminated every half hour between 13:00 and 17:00 BST on Sunday and during guided tours.
Reconstructing the largest medieval image of St. Thomas Becket in England


**Rare 15th-century bust discovered displayed on top of a cupboard at Anglesey Abbey in central England**

The bust of the martyr St Agnes has been identified as being by Niclaus Gerhaert von Leyden or his workshop, arguably the most important 15th-century sculptor in northern Europe. Because only 20 of his works have survived, the newly-discovered sculpture is the only work by Gerhaert in a UK public collection. The discovery was made as part of a National Trust four-year sculpture cataloguing project to fully record and research all 6,000 sculptures and statues in its collection. It is the first time the Trust has had the resource to study all of its sculptures in this way.
The bust shows St Agnes holding a lamb and was a reliquary which would once have contained a piece of bone or another relic from the saint. The relic has long been lost and the cavity in which it would have rested has, at some point, been sealed.

Known for his unusually lively and naturalistic sculptures, Gerhaert’s life-sized bust of St Agnes, c. 1465, is carved from walnut and would originally have been painted. It is believed that the St Agnes was part of a set of four sculptures including St Barbara, St Catherine of Alexandria, and St Margaret of Antioch, commissioned for the Benedictine Abbey church of Saints Peter and Paul in Wissembourg, Alsace, northeastern France. They survived in the church until the late 19th century. Three of the busts were later sold in Paris, subsequently ending up in museums. Nothing was known about the whereabouts of St Agnes until it came into the collection at Anglesey Abbey between 1932 and 1940 by the house’s owner Lord Fairhaven. The bust was wrongly described in his 1940 inventory as ‘The Virgin and the Lamb’ and since has been on display on top of a cupboard in the Windsor Bedroom for many years.

The discovery was made by Dr Jeremy Warren, the National Trust’s Sculpture Research Curator. “… the sculpture was of superb quality, with enough clues to lead us to look at the work of sculptors who were working in the later 15th century.”

A $2.4 Million Restoration of the Ghent Altarpiece Has Yielded Shocking Revelations—Like the Mystical Lamb’s Humanoid Face

A recent restoration of the Ghent Altarpiece completed by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Belgium has uncovered long-concealed original details in the masterpiece. The altarpiece was completed in 1432 by Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, and is a canonical piece of art history whose iconography has long challenged researchers. The three-year conservation initiative adds further wrinkles to the ongoing conversation about the work, including a surprisingly human-like face on the sacrificial lamb representing Christ, and buildings that reflect the architecture of medieval Ghent.
The project, which cost €2.2 million ($2.44 million) to carry out, required experts to use microscopes and a surgical scalpel to chip away, centimeter by centimeter, at a 16th-century overpainting job. This painstaking process ultimately showed that roughly 70 percent of the altarpiece’s original outer panels had been hidden under brown varnish for centuries.

The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, which appears in the center of the five lower interior panels, contained a particularly notable revelation, with the face of the sacrificial lamb being much more human-like and engaging than previously recognized. Describing the lamb as “cartoonish,” Dubois explained that art historians will now need to determine why the pair of artist brothers chose to portray the animal in such a way.

Re-written from

New Medieval Studies Journal: Medieval Leavings

Ever been rolled by an academic journal? Ever-memed Reviewer Two apparently had blackmail on the editor, and overrode two positive reports? Three positive reader reports, but still rejected? The dreaded R&R&R: revised, resubmitted, and rejected? New Editors don’t agree with Past Editors? Most of us have experienced this kind of mess at least once, and most of us have at least one piece sitting on a hard drive somewhere not being read. It’s written. It has been reviewed. It has merit! But because of the tangle of current academic publishing in the humanities, it isn’t going to be published.

This is where Medieval Leavings may be able to help. (More specifics about what kinds of submissions we’re looking for, and what we aren’t, here.) We’re an Open Access, online journal that publishes such editorial orphans on topics in Medieval Studies (broadly construed) and makes them available for our community to use. We hope to ameliorate some of the inequities (and maybe also indignities) of journal publishing.

Medieval Leavings will also feature a special section, Archival Darlings, highlighting exciting archival finds that may be useful for other scholars to know about, but that simply don’t fit our own formal publication plans.

If we accept your article at Medieval Leavings, your article is peer-reviewed, but not in the usual sense, and so it may or may not count toward your annual review or REF. Medieval Leavings provides the benefit of an audience at last. Sometimes that is enough.

https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol7/iss2/11
Interested in submitting a piece to *Medieval Leavings*? Look for more on our process [here](https://medievaleavings.hcommons.org/about-our-journal/).

**Relaunch of Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art**

Continuing founding editor Rachel Dressler’s vision, a new editorial board has been appointed and a new issue focused on “Medieval Art History: Are We Post-Theoretical?” The journal is being sponsored by the Material Collective, a group of medieval art historians who explore a variety of new approaches to objects

[https://thematerialcollective.org](https://thematerialcollective.org)