



Organics in Illuminated Manuscripts

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The role of organic materials in Medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts was far greater than suggested by the traditional emphasis on minerals, earths and metals in the literature. This emphasis and the attendant neglect of organics stems from two main issues. First, organic colorants fade or discolor quickly and often thoroughly, becoming unrecognizable or even invisible to the naked eye; unaware of their presence in the images when first created, we risk offering stylistic analysis and conclusions that may not only undermine the achievements of some artists, but also misdate or misattribute artworks. Second, most organic materials cannot be securely identified with the currently available non-invasive analytical methods that meet conservation standards and curators' requirements; complex admixtures, multiple pigment layers and various preparation methods present the greatest challenges.