

Lake Pigments, Trade, and Labor in Ms. Fr. 640

OBJECTIVES

This activity aims to show students how lake pigments were discussed and used in Ms. Fr. 640, a 340-page compilation of sixteenth-century technical recipes and observations of artisanal practice. More specifically, it brings students' attention to:

- The various formats in which lake pigments were sold
- The various uses of lake pigments in specific artisanal projects
- Contextual information about natural materials that were used to make lake pigments and their place in international trade

Preparatory Reading and Discussion Questions

Erma Hermens and Arie Wallert, "The Pekstok Papers, Lake Pigments, Prisons and Paint-Mills," in *Looking through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research (Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek XI)*, ed. Erma Hermens (Baarn, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij de Prom, 1998), 269–94.

Points for Discussion

On pages 269–80 and 287–91, Hermens and Wallert discuss the labor practices involved in processing various red dyewoods.

- What does Hermens and Wallert's research suggest to you about the hidden histories of these materials?
- How do economic and labor concerns enter into the history of artisanal making writ large?

Secrets of Craft and Nature Assignment and Discussion Questions

Navigate to *Secrets of Craft and Nature in Renaissance France* (<https://edition640.makingandknowing.org>). Search the translation of Ms. Fr. 640 for the following terms:

- lake
- brazilwood
- madder
- cochineal
- *platte*
- *ronde*

Points for Discussion

- What terms commonly modify “lake” (e.g., Venice, Florence, *platte*, etc.)? What does this suggest?
- What materials are commonly discussed in conjunction with or in the text surrounding lake pigments? Why might that be?
- How are lake pigments used across the various entries? For what artistic ends?
- Brazilwood, madder, and cochineal are three materials commonly used to produce lake pigments. How are these materials used in the entries in Ms. Fr. 640? What does that suggest?
- What do you think *laque platte* and *laque ronde* mean? (If unclear, consult the *Secrets of Craft and Nature* glossary.) Why might the Making and Knowing Project have chosen to leave these terms untranslated?
- How are lakes in Ms. Fr. 640 represented as a product of trade rather than a product of workshop making?