

STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COLOUR AND THE BODY IN THE MEDIEVAL IMAGERY: THE *EVANGELIAR OF OTTON III*, AT THE END OF 10th CENTURY

Marie Aschehoug-Clauteaux

E.P.H.E., École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France; and 44E Aldridge Road Villas, London W11 1 BW, UK.
marietepuy@hotmail.fr

The period stretching from the end of Xth century to the end of the XIIth century is a time of many changes. This is why, it seems interesting to us to study the emergence of code of colour for the body. Our current research is particularly articulated around the colour of the naked body and its relationship with the colour of the clothing which it covers: Is there a link between these two “spaces” of colour which are the skin and clothing? Does the colour of the body, naked or dressed, play a role in the status of the various represented characters?

The small number of manuscripts with colours remaining to this day, their state of conservation sometimes bad does not seem, initially, to justify our chronological choice. However, these documents appear to us as an enlightening of a time in complete transformation and they are, by the same occasion, carrying the indications of these changes. Our research enabled us to notice that there was not yet a defined chromatic system, but some tendencies. What is true of a manuscript is not of others. The transitory state of the period, which appears sometimes in transparency in the manuscripts and the scarcity of the direct or indirect sources on the colour of the characters, forces the greatest of prudence upon our conclusions.

Therefore, our first assumption rests upon the existence in our corpus of images, of a three poles dynamic, “naked - undressed - dressed”. Indeed, we wonder whether the “undressed” is not an independent pole of its own. Then, the second assumption is based on the way in which the colour of the body is expressed iconographically. We wonder here about the presence or not of chromatic techniques to translate the colour of nudity, of the skin, of the hair, but also to represent clothing. Finally, the third assumption is based on the existence of a link between the colour of the body and the status of the represented character. Sometimes indeed, one witnesses an effort to differentiate by using the colour, the positive skin from the negative skin and, beyond the skin, the status of the character represented in the scene. This effort of classification can, in certain cases, lead to giving to the most valued body, that of Christ, a particular colour.

In order to answer the questions that we ask ourselves, it seemed judicious to focus our attention on the study of an Ottonian manuscript dating from the end of Xth century, the *Evangeliar of Otton III*. The richness in the tinge and density of the colour, the excellent state of conservation of paintings, the close relationship between the colour of the body and the status of the characters represented makes this work a key element in our study on the colours of the body.

(1) Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm. 4453, towards 997.