How can human sensuous experiences through sight, sound, taste, smell and touch be studied in past worlds? In which ways may such a bodily perspective affect our interpretations?

In this volume, the authors explore a wide range of topics, such as the materialisation and symbolism of colour, the sensuous dimensions of commensality, and cultural constructions concerning pain and odour. The articles comprise examples from various regions and time periods from Scandinavian Iron Age burial rites and classical Maya monumental art to issues of death and burial in eighteenth-century Sweden.
Making Sense of Things
Archaeologies of Sensory Perception

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The Colour of Money: Crusaders and Coins in the Thirteenth-Century Baltic Sea

Nanouschka Myrberg

The colourful dark ages

This paper investigates how colour was perceived differently in the European Middle Ages and carried significance beyond what we ascribe it today. It also considers how the various colours worked as important carriers of values and concepts in this context, where pigments were rare and expensive. A way to access the medieval understanding of colour is through heraldry and its colours, the *tinctures*, which combine hard and soft materials, even and three-dimensional surfaces, in a way that evades present-day definitions of colour. Medieval people used their senses in a cross-modal way to perceive colour and connect it to an intricate world of symbolism and values. To them, it is argued, colour was a *texture* just as much as a *hue*. The aim of the paper is to investigate this relationship between colour, ideas and materiality, filtered through the senses, and made manifest in a group of thirteenth-century Scandinavian coins. Were coins actually perceived as coloured?

Several studies have elucidated the idea that there are ways of perceiving, understanding and classifying colours other than in the modern western sense. Importantly, features other than hue or shade may be considered as defining factors and are specified by names. These features are due to cultural factors, separated from the pure biological preconditions of the human organism (Jones & MacGregor 2002:5f). Examples
include degrees of wetness and dryness (Conklin 1952), darkness and light (Rosch 1972), or brilliance (Morphy 1989). Apparently, more than one sense is put to use in the understanding of colour, and the cultural framework one belongs to is of crucial importance.

To achieve an understanding of how colours were perceived and applied in past societies, the multifaceted theoretical framework of the field that could be described an archaeology of the senses is of great interest. Colours are something in themselves (pigments, frequencies of light), but they acquire their meaning in relation to human senses and human cultural practices. Both the natural and the cultural aspects of colours can and should be investigated. Still, to make such a line of study interesting it is vital to connect abstract matters such as colour perceptions and symbolism to matters of materiality (Jones & MacGregor 2002:3), that is, to relate associations and conceptions to tangible material remains and archaeological sources.

Examples provided by Houston & Taube (2000) underline the close relationship between different sensorial stimuli, like how smell, sight and hearing trigger each other, and how this may be deliberately implemented to create various effects. Some senses apparently overlapped in ancient Mesoamerican thought. Thus, the sound of speech or song could be metaphorically expressed through beautiful or aromatic flowers, or through shining jade. Sound and scents were integrated with concepts of the soul and afterlife. Through architectural design, mixing symbols with icons and speech rolls, and scent, ancient Mesoamericans communicated and staged moral and hierarchal valuation. Also, the same style that was used to indicate senses (gently curving volutes) was used when depicting beautiful ‘sensual’ clothing or human bodies (Houston & Taube 2000:289), thus underlining the connection between senses and emotion.

The relationship between senses (sensory impressions) and emotions (thereby triggered internal processes) is an important link in the investigation into past perceptions and uses of colour. Here it is important to generate an understanding of how the material nature of colour affects the perception of it and its social deployment (cf. Jones & MacGregor 2002:3). In the case below, the focus will be on touch and the resulting arousal of emotion and mnemonic processes. When trying to access and understand past mentalities and what certain symbols or concepts may have meant, emotion, as a prerequisite for motivation and social agency, must not be omitted (cf. Tarlow 2000:717f).
Indeed, ‘emotion’ is intimately related to meaning, to symbolic and abstract thought and to language use. Societies are characterized by culturally shared emotional values, inherent in small-scale, local and personal interactions. Shared cultural understanding of emotion informs our material practices as well as the language and metaphors we use. While it may be difficult to study individual, subjective emotional experience, emotional values on a societal level may be more accessible to archaeological study (Tarlow 2000:728f).

This paper follows these strands of thought on senses and emotions, using a combination of archaeology and written sources to explore how some such societal emotional values were solidified in language and material remains, and how these emotions were triggered by a cross-modal use of concepts of colour in Medieval Scandinavia. I will focus on three main topics: how colour perception was different for the European Middle Ages compared with that of the present day; how colour was expressed and perceived – without colour; and the relationship between visual and physical expressions and the ideas behind them. The otherwise abstract concepts are grounded through a discussion of coins and heraldry from the thirteenth century, specifically a group of coins from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, from the middle of one of the most emotionally fraught contexts of the period: the Crusades.

The historical context of the gotlandic coins

The coins in question were minted on Gotland, starting c. 1220 (Figs. 1, 2). The coins were anonymous and only later variations show cryptic combinations of letters (BBBB, ABOE, etc.). This group of coins is the successor of another group, which are closely related and attributed to Gotland (c. 1140-1220) on archaeological and numismatic grounds (Myrberg 2008). The main difference between the two groups is a change in iconography. If the first coins were inspired by contemporary Frisian or North German coins, through trading partners and allies in that area, the later ones are not easily classed in a similar scheme. While they initially kept the earlier clover-leaf cross on the obverse (Fig. 1, left), the reverse experienced a dramatic change, and instead of a depiction of an unspecified church, now exhibited a cross of a type that is typical for the crusader iconography of the time (Fig. 1, right). This iconography was adopted despite the fact that the Gotlanders, as far as is known, did not participate in the crusades or explicitly support them.
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These coins are of special interest to the historical archaeologist because they constitute a comparably large group within the thirteenth-century coins found around the Baltic Sea, in particular in churches on Gotland. They also form part of a somewhat enigmatic coinage that was one of the largest and most influential of the Early Medieval Baltic Sea area in the twelfth- and thirteenth centuries. The issuer is not mentioned on the coins and the contemporary written sources remain silent as well. The iconography thus remains one of the main clues – aside from the archaeological data – as to the circumstances around their issuing, and accordingly continues to attract attention.

The crusades here referred to were launched eastwards in the Baltic Sea on several occasions during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The crusading movement as a whole emanated from religious and church-oriented political desires in the eleventh century, and several crusades were launched against the Middle East and other areas during the following centuries. It became a mass-movement, the wish and duty for pious and sword-bearing men, and there are many accounts of the religious fervour with which kings, nobles and their men ‘took the cross’ to follow the pope’s exhortations. In the Baltic area, the crusades aimed for colonization of land as well as for conversion of heathens. In fact, it is likely that the people encountered in the eastern Baltic States and

Figure 1: Coin with ‘clover cross’ (obverse) and ‘hatched cross’ (reverse), minted on Gotland c. 1220 (-90). Coin from the collections of the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm (KMK 105035). Photograph: N. Myrberg.
Finland were already familiar with Christianity. These northern crusades thus used the spreading of the Word as an excuse for other ambitions, with the establishment of the continental Church and the conquering of land for the Danish crown a primary focus. One major agent in this story in the years around 1220 (when the coins mentioned above started to be minted), was the Danish archbishop Anders Sunesen, acting together with the Danish king; another was the German bishop Albert, acting on behalf of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. The Swedish king, Johan Sverkersson, also made an attempt to conquer Estonia in 1220, but the Swedish crusade ended in disaster. It is likely that they all, Germans, Danes and Swedes, sailed via Gotland towards their final destinations (Lind et al. 2004; Harrisson 2005; cf. Blomkvist 2005).

While the Danes had their main interests in what is now northern Estonia, the Germans primarily focused on, and with time were based in, what is now Latvia and southern Estonia. The city of Riga was founded on Albert’s initiative during the first years of the thirteenth century, replacing the former bishopric of Ikskile (Üxkull) further up the Daugava River. The story of ‘how the East was won’ was related by

Figure 2: The Baltic Sea area and some places mentioned in the text. The map is for orientation only and does not always correspond with thirteenth-century names or borders. Map drawn by Christina Larsson and modified by the author.
Henry of Livonia, a priest who was close to Albert, in one of the most important sources for this time and its events, the *Henrici Chronicon Livoniae* (German edition: Arbusow & Bauer 1955).

Bishop Albert had a new order established to back up his missionary expeditions, the *Fratres Militiae Christi*, the ‘Brethren of the Sword’. The order was approved by the pope and started its work in 1202. The name derives from the Order’s insignia: a red cross and sword on a white cloak. These symbols were probably used from the beginning and definitely by 1210 (Harrison 2005:313). This order was inspired by the Cistercian ideals and rules, as were several other orders like the Knight’s Templars or the Teutonic Order. The Brethren of the Sword were very successful in gaining land for themselves and the Church, but later on this actually created a conflict with the Bishop who thought they were becoming unsettlingly strong and independent. In 1220 the Danish king allowed the Brethren a part of Estonia as their share of the conquered land, clearly against Albert’s wish (Lind *et al.* 2004:221), an indication that the former allegiance was not a top priority to the Brethren at that point. Still, their connections to the Danish king were not of a lasting character. By the 1230s they had lost much of their former authority in the area, eventually dissolved, and were incorporated into the Teutonic Order in 1237 (Lind *et al.* 2004:228–31).

Several important battles were fought in the area and the alliances and rights shifted. As for Gotland, the island is assumed to have maintained a fairly independent status through all these events. This was probably made possible through constant negotiation with different powers, and an ability to use the island’s geographical position to their advantage. It is known that the Danish archbishop, Anders Sunesen, visited the island several times around 1220 and played an active part in codifying their relationship with the Church, possibly also with the intention of founding a see on the island. It is also known that Bishop Albert used the island as an assembly point for his crusaders, among these surely his *Fratres Militiae Christi*. Finally, it is likely that the Gotlanders themselves were mostly uninterested in participating in the crusades and continued to do business as usual with the ‘heathens’ in the East (cf. Myrberg 2008:35f, 172).

The Gotlandic coins are executed in a very particular way which distinguishes them from other coins minted in the area, and the Baltic coins which appear later in the thirteenth century look very different, though often using a similar standard of weight and fineness. It is thus
fair to say that the group here discussed represents a continuation of
the twelfth-century Gotlandic coins and therefore did not arise as
a direct result of the crusades, or of the German or Danish military
presence in the area. This said, the radical change in iconography from
the older coins to the more recent group should still be regarded as
a consequence of the times, i.e. it was a way of complying with the
increasing presence of the crusaders, and their political and religious
rhetoric. Why the reluctant Gotlanders allowed their coins to carry the
crusader iconography remains a key question.

Heraldic colour and coin iconography

Using heraldry and coats-of-arms on coins is a common feature from
the beginning of the development of the medieval heraldic system. It
may be regarded as a simple continuation of the earlier employment
of distinct symbols of the ruler or religion on coins, but stylistically
it represents a shift into a more complex morphology of northern
European coin iconography. This was not always put to its full use on
lower denominations or smaller coins, but eventually flourished on the
later and larger medieval coins. In the early phase here discussed, though,
the coins were mainly small and rather simply executed, somewhere
between the early symbolism and the later, elaborated forms. For the
later medieval phase it is therefore not too difficult to imagine that the
coats-of-arms shown on coins were fairly well-known among the users,
who were quite able to identify the shapes and at the same time evoke
the heraldic colours in their inner eye, though the coins themselves
were monochrome. Though a similar familiarity with heraldry cannot
with certainty be established for the people of early thirteenth-century
Gotland, I here wish to argue that such a system of understanding
colours-without-colours may be traced back to that time.

Medieval Italy provides us with an early description of a coats-of-arms.
In 1251 the arms of the city of Florence were changed due to political
events. The new arms were described as “il campo bianco e ’l giglio rosso”
(Villani, VII:XLIII); that is, a red lily on a white field (background). The
physical execution of that description may be seen on a gold coin, a fiorino
d’oro, from 1252 (Fig. 3a), and in a picture from the Museo dell’Opera
del Duomo in Florence (Fig. 3b), red lily on white marble (probably
from the fourteenth century). The lily on the coin shows a diamond-
chequered pattern (diagonal cross-hatching). One interpretation could
be that the pattern illustrates a shadowing to make the flower look more realistic on the monochrome coin; another may be that the die-cutter intended to evoke the idea of the red-coloured Florentine lily. There is no way of proving either interpretation, but the *fiorino* may serve as an example of the techniques used on coins to extend the limited artistic possibilities and to arouse different associations.

The Gotlandic coins have a similar pattern of cross-hatching on the reverse cross (Fig. 1). It appears as if the Gotlandic coins actually display a ‘St. George’s cross’, using the cross-shape that is often associated with that saint in Scandinavia (a *cross pattée* with triangular cross-arms). The arms of St. George (well-known to all Brits and used in many other contexts) are blazoned, or described heraldically: *argent, a cross gules* (on silver, a red cross). The icon of the Gotlandic silver coin seems to fit in well with that description, but a specific worship of St. George is not known from thirteenth-century Gotland (though the saint surely was known at the time). Rather, the iconography of the coins seems to use elements commonly in use within the crusader sphere, but not in a way which can be easily tied to a specific power or Order. The exact shape of the cross also varies slightly and the cross-arms are sometimes more straight than triangular, or more curved (*Mantua cross*). It thus seems as if the precise shape is not of crucial importance here, but that

![Image](image_url)

Figure 3: Argent a *fleur-de-lys* gules; on silver, a ‘flowery’ red lily. Coat of arms of Firenze, Italy, seen on a *fiorino* d’oro coin from 1252 (left) and on a marble inlay (right). Not to scale. Photographs: Gabriel Hildebrand, Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm (coin); Nicolò Orsi Battaglini, Opera di S. Maria del Fiore, Florence (arms).
it serves to allude to the idea it embodies. The idea of the red cross may be thought-provoking, but seems quite logical when related to the medieval heraldic system of colours; it definitely opens up the field for new and interesting studies of coins and coin agency.

There is colour – and ‘colour’

One striking thing about heraldic colours, the tinctures, is that they evade the definitions of colour we use in modern language. There are the basic chromatic colours red (gules) and blue (azur); and the metal-colours silver (argent) and gold (or) which may, when suitable, be substituted by plain white and yellow. In addition, there are pattern-colours which are stylizations of animal furs: black-and-white ermine and blue-and-white vair (squirrel). The patterns of the furs derive from the black tails hanging from the white winter ermine furs, and from the different parts of a winter squirrel, the bluish back and the white stomach sewn symmetrically together (Fig. 4). Also the colour black is derived from and named after animal fur: the sable and its brown-blackish colour. Possibly, the red gules has a similar background referring to dyed red fur or the reddish throat of an animal, but the etymology is disputed. The mixed colours purple and green are also used, but mainly for special purposes like imperial powers. Finally, the term proper should be mentioned, designating the natural colour of an item – though these are formalized and do not necessarily indicate the real colour of the item (Hellström 1941:50-2; Dahlby 1964:19-22; Dennys 1975:46-8; Woodcock & Robinson 1990:51-3; von Volborth 1991:18, 21f).

A colour may also be expressed in heraldry as patterns or scratches, hatching, in cases where it is difficult to use the very colour, such as memory codes for the medieval heralds (also, often as abbreviations) or in later printed heraldic books (Fleetwood 1917:35f; Raneke 1982:92; cf. von Volborth 1991:18-21; Paravicini 1993:109, 116-37, 2005:185-7). These patterns are today standardized, e.g. red is represented by vertical lines, blue by horizontal lines, gold by dots and black by straight cross-scratching (Fig. 5). It is not known, though, how far back this system can be traced; its uniform standards certainly belong to more modern times than the one focussed upon here and derive from a scheme developed at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Petra Sancta 1634, 1638; c.f. Neubecker 1997:86). Certain patterns (diapering) are for decoration only and are not standardized or invested with meaning, though it has
Figure 4: Tinctures, the heraldic colours: metals, colours and furs. After von Volborth 1991:18, 22, adapted by the author.
been suggested that they may have denoted colours on medieval seals. Patterns of cross-hatching on monochrome surfaces, distinguishing fields from each other, are known on Swedish seals from the beginning of the thirteenth century (Raneke 1982:92), but the intention may be to simply point out that the field had a colour other than that of the background or the adjoining field, rather than indicating the precise shade (Fleetwood 1917:24f).

Colour, metal, fur and pattern: medieval heraldic colour is multi-dimensional, a *texture* just as much as a *hue*. Hard and soft materials, even or smooth and three-dimensional surfaces, are combined. The luminous metal is different from the saturated colour of enamel or paint, and from the soft glow of a fur. To achieve the maximum effect, the different textures were applied to make the surface lively and variegated, clear and distinct; again following standard rules (e.g. metals cannot abut onto each other).

Furthermore, an intricate symbolism was added to the tinctures during the course of the Middle Ages, all becoming associated with different precious stones, celestial bodies, metals and animals. This symbolism is known to have existed in an elaborated form in the sixteenth century (cf. Woodcock & Robinson 1990:53f) and may have much earlier roots (cf. Dennys 1975:44f). The tinctures were invested with certain values or moral characteristics, and should be assigned carefully to a person (Dennys 1975:44-8; Friar 1987:344), though the symbolism was sometimes applied in an ambivalent and contradictory way (cf. Pastoureau 1986:40).

Thus, ‘colour’ is something malleable and ambiguous in medieval thinking. A metal is a hue is a planet. An animal is a fur is a pattern. A hue may be rendered nonchromatically; a natural colour may have nothing to do with reality, etc. Features from underground (metals) were connected with others from the surface of earth (animals, pigments) and the sky (celestial bodies). *Colour* here definitely includes *shape* and *sense*. It is fascinating to follow the logic of the heraldic world-system, which is also an important clue to conceptions of colour during the European Middle Ages.

Several authors have occupied themselves with the number of colours present in a language at a certain point (a recent example is Wolf 2009 on Old Norse-Icelandic), regarding that as an indicator of a linguistic, or even societal, level of development of thought. I argue that the research on medieval thought and perceptions regarding colour has
Figure 5: Hatchings representing colour. Above, the system as published by Petra Sancta in 1634. Below, after von Volborth 1991:18, adapted by the author.
to take into consideration a whole package of other ‘colours’, without the acknowledgement of which we would be working with incorrect assumptions and understandings, and the medieval mind in scholarship would forever be unjustly trapped in evolutionary simplicity.

Form and content - the cross-modality of heraldic colour

What is said above is in regard to the physical shape of a coat-of-arms. The arms in reality, though, consist of the blazon, the verbal description. This is where the core of the arms is. Indeed, arms may consist only of a blazon and never be painted at all (Woodcock 1990:51; Pastoreau 1997:12). The relationship between the blazon and the image of it is a fascinating field of study in itself and involves considerations on visualization principles and pedagogy, as well as issues of memory and transfer of knowledge (cf. Boudreau 1997).

The blazon is a verbalization of a concept worked out by the nobleman or commune with the herald to describe what they find to be a proper and significant icon or symbol for a person, family or group (e.g. a city). This is to work as a *pars pro toto* for the indicated person or group, through the use of attributes. It thus picks up elements from their perceived reality like social status and geographical setting, or from the family name, or from what they aspire to or find desirable to be (though perhaps not ‘true’). This concept is processed through the conventions of heraldic language and eventually visualized by an artist. The visualization follows certain rules, as noted above, but the scope for individual interpretation of the details is wide-ranging. The representation is secondary to the blazon, and style and precise execution is even less conclusive. Thus the same family may have several generations of arms in different variations, following the style of the time, the imagination of the artist, and the taste of the commissioner. The physical shape is just one among several possible executions of the content of ideas held in the blazon.

As the concept is transformed to words and transferred to colours, surfaces and shapes, several aspects of the human body are activated. The cultural understanding, sensorial perception and creative abilities of the brain are used to envision the conception; the verbalization includes the organs of speech; the physical execution employs hands and eyes; and when the object is used, eyes/gaze, hands/touch, brain/understanding will evoke emotions and memory. The use of the coat-of-arms would often be accompanied by sound, as the herald would read the blazon
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aloud to introduce the person behind it to the participants of a gathering or the public.

In this sense, heraldry is cross-modal: it demands the activity of several senses to produce, to experience and to understand it. It combines a universalist interpretation of colour metaphor with an individual application which demands familiarity with a cultural framework in order to be decoded. The few basic elements are used and reused in various combinations, truly creating a language of colours. Colour materiality is part of this – the various elements not only having a chromatic value but also a textural one. The flat and hard surface acquires depth, body and warmth through its glittering or shimmering; two-dimensional patterns evoke the three-dimensionality and softness of fur. Metals as well as animals may make sound, etc.... The range for associations is vast. Also, in this sense, heraldry is cross-modal, taking advantage of different senses to evoke associations on many different levels, according to purpose, or to the degree of cultural understanding of the beholder.

The red cross goes north-east

The outline of the historical context of the coins above intends to acquaint the reader with some important strands of thought relevant for the interpretation of the ‘red cross’ of the Gotlandic coins, and thus with parts of the cultural understanding which may have surrounded their use in the Middle Ages.

During the twelfth century, Europe experienced a religious revival which formed the ideological basis for the crusades. Bernhard of Clairvaux, a religious superstar of the time, was a major engine driving the movement of pilgrimages and crusades, and a supporter of knightly orders which protected the pilgrims and religious leaders (Lind et al. 2004:253f). One major incentive to ‘take the cross’ and participate in the crusades was the promise of receiving indulgences, particularly the plenary indulgence, or forgiveness from all sins (Lind et al. 2004:138f; Palmén 2005:102). This was apparently very important to the medieval mind, since for most participants it was the only compensation promised. Indulgences were promised both with regard to life on the ‘other side’, and as a release from penitence in the present – typically praying, fasting etc. (Lind et al. 2004:144–6, 179–81). It should therefore be remembered that the crusading movement was not mainly a matter of politics and conversion by the sword, but also from another point of view represented

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hope of salvation and spiritual freedom for a large number of devoted Christians. Pilgrimage, making a journey to the Holy Land, was a large movement both metaphorically and in the physical sense.

In the European Middle Ages, religious symbolism was of great importance, and great philosophical effort was invested in the interpretation and development of texts and symbols. For example, the Cistercians (a religious strain emanating from the teachings of Bernhard of Clairvaux) were deeply involved with theorizing and interpreting symbolic representation. Symbols, it was concluded in the 1120s, were a visible form of invisible matter. Symbols refer to invisible realities, which may be disclosed and made real through *imagination*. Imagination was a mysterious but strong human power, capable of exceeding the limits of visible and invisible, of material and immaterial, and of revealing the spiritual content of the symbol. The purpose of the sign or symbol was thus to convey knowledge and make these invisible contents visible (Palmén 2005:99).

In a famous passage, Abbot Suger (1081-1151) of St. Denis describes how the sight of a precious reliquary studded with gems carries his mind from the material to the spiritual world. The gems and gold here act as the very means for imaginative creation and the pious man’s spiritual journey; the power of the object derives from a religious symbolism of the time where light was the visible manifestation of the divine, and where the shininess of gold and gems were metaphors for light and for the realm of light. The spiritual transformation this resulted in was made possible only because Abbot Suger’s philosophy sanctioned an apprehension of the supernatural in terms of sensuous symbols (Gombrich 1978:15f).

What is of interest here is the medieval conviction that concepts are inherent in the physical representation. The exact shape of the representation is not conclusive, still on the other hand it is important that a representation be made – metaphorical thinking is well developed and a metaphor or a *pars pro toto* may well substitute for the real thing – but some material form of it is a must. This forms the basis for all medieval beliefs in relics – the symbol or piece of the divine, referring to invisible realities and made real through imagination and what could be called the ‘magic of touch’ or ‘magic of sight’.

I propose, that this ‘touch magic’ was also working through coins and their iconography, for they were some of the most frequently spread images and were normally handled in different situations more than
most other images; quite literally, they were very ‘hands on’. In the case of the Gotlandic coins from the early twelfth century the concept conveyed through the crusader cross may have embodied and evoked the spiritual contents of the crusading ideology, possibly on several levels: the pious pilgrimage of the individual alongside the forceful politics of the sword. Further connotations may have been evoked, if it may be assumed (as suggested above) that the cross was perceived of as red, thus likely connected with the Brethren of the Sword or other knightly orders, and on a deeper level to the Passion, the death and suffering of Christ.

The colour red is a ‘visual metaphor’ that easily lends itself to symbolic use. There are certain physical features that are red, like blood or fire, that one readily associates with pain or violence, though it must be remembered that the value or meaning of red is in itself not fixed and grounded in biological facts, but is always culturally situated (Gombrich 1978:13). Red in this medieval context may have had general associations with elite, royalty, blood and feasting occasions, derived from its traditional use on precious Frankish and Scandinavian jewellery, but the use of the colour by the crusaders will likely have added new (or substituted old) dimensions.

As a result of the Baltic Sea crusades, all of Livonia (Estonia and Latvia) was devoted to St. Mary in the middle of the thirteenth century. It thus became possible to make a symbolic pilgrimage there rather than going all the way to Jerusalem (Rydbeck 1967). Through the medieval imagination, the sites of the Holy Land could be recreated there, the spiritual journey completed, and indulgence bestowed. Perhaps the ‘red cross’ of the Gotlandic coins was a reminder of this concept for the visitors to the island, acting as a means to make the disclosed visible, through fingers and eyes, to reveal the spiritual content of the symbol and draw its immanent realities to the surface.

The colour of money

Several studies have shown that there are ways of perceiving, understanding and classifying colours that are distinct from the modern approach, observing features other than hue or pigment as defining factors. These classifications originate in cultural factors, separated from the pure biological perception of the human organism (Jones
To add to the examples mentioned earlier (degrees of wetness, light or brilliance), medieval heraldry provides an example of how texture, the very materiality of the tincture, is of utmost importance to the understanding of colour in that setting. This conclusion has important implications for any study regarding colour during the European Middle Ages, and perhaps it is also of some consequence regarding other times and materials. It might also be suggested that the exact chromatic shade may have been less important than we think. For example, until the thirteenth century blue and green were often regarded only as variations of black (Pastoureau 1986:36), and shades of red often became darker, almost brown or black, with the passing of the years. Still, the colour on a shield would ‘be’ what was stated in the blazon, not the actual shade.

In certain contexts, such as monochrome coins, it may be argued that specific elements of the image worked as colour codes, understandable to those who were familiar with the code, or with what the image was supposed to look like. Such elements are normally difficult to identify, and what appear today as decorative elements or patterns may really be signs for breath, sight, sound or reflection (cf. Houston & Taube 2002). Wells argues that decorated surfaces always refer to something else (Wells 2008:43). Using the example of medieval European heraldry, it may be argued that the cross-hatching on the Gotlandic coins was intended to evoke the idea of the colour red, and any further connotations that may have brought with it. It cannot be established with certainty that the pattern intended to represent colour, but the interpretation is suggested by several indications. The idea of coloured coins in itself certainly opens the door to new and innovative studies regarding coin images and coin agency.

Given the general scarcity of images around on a daily basis, pictures such as on the coins may have had a far deeper impact on the medieval viewer than today when we are flooded with images. Coins often spring from elite milieus but move in other contexts, becoming everyday objects and perhaps not even really being ‘seen’. At least in part, a coin is seen through the fingertips, then as now, and we are used to ‘feeling’ what they look like. Arguably, part of their agency therefore emanates from our sensory perception of them, activating the same parts of the brain as would reading with the eyes (cf. Malafouris 2008:404). Thus they ultimately activate cultural understandings and connotations, among which colour may be one.
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