

The Dyer's Handbook – Memoirs on Dyeing by a French Gentleman-clothier in the Age of Enlightenment Translated and Contextualised

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Introduction

The Dyer's Handbook is the Ancient Textiles Series Vol. 26 (published by OXBOW BOOKS, 164p.) and is edited by Dominique Cardon. The book is an English translation of a French manuscript, *Mémoires de teinture* (Memoirs on Dyeing). The original French manuscript is privately owned, and only one copy is known to exist, which is fragile and beautiful. The manuscript contains description of the dyeing processes with good illustration by samples of fine broadcloth dyed in the corresponding colours with a total of 96 pages (however, Pages 13 to 32 are missing). The English translation is not only a translation of the original French manuscript but also gives additional number of essays on the related historical, economic and technological context.

The Dyer's Handbook consists of three parts:

Part I – a new life for mysterious manuscript

Part II – memoirs on dyeing – English translation of the original French text

Part III – polyphony on colours

Part I consists of three chapters. In Chapter 1, the story of translating the original French manuscript into English was introduced. The original French manuscript is anonymous and so an interesting story about the searching of its author is told in this chapter. Chapter 2 describes the general features of the *Memoirs in dyeing* which contains four distinct but complementary essays. The first essay was announced as *Memoirs on dye – drugs which serves as an introduction to dyeing of the clothes that were made in Languedoc for the Levant*, occupies Page 1 to Page 37 of the original manuscript. The second essay entitled, *General method – To dye broadcloth in the best mode of dyeing for the ports of the Levant*, corresponds to Page 38 to the upper part of Page 77 of the original manuscript. The third essay, described as *Instruction on the testing procedures for false colours*, corresponds to the bottom of Page 77 to Page 79 of the original manuscript. The fourth essay, entitled *Annotations on the colours made for the Levant with – Their patterns, their processes, and some observations*, corresponds to Pages 80 to 96 of the

original manuscript. Chapter 3 describes the details of cloth used for making the manuscript.

Part II of this book is the page-by-page translation of the original French manuscript into English. The relevant page in the original French manuscript is marked next to the English translation. It is of great interest to me that different dyes were used for making the memoir and the details of usage and application are described, the dyes include Alums (with different origins), Logwood, Old Fustic, Brazilwood, Young Fustic, Lees Ash, Cochineal, Coccus polonnicus, Crystal or Cream of Tartar, Copperas or Green Vitriol, Aqua-fortis, Tin, Weld, Galls, Madders, Lac dye, Oil of vitriol, Indigo, Orchil, Woad, Redoul, Sandal, Rock Salt, Sal ammoniac, Tartar (red and white), Vermilion, Flax-leaved Daphne, Verdigris and Blue Vitriol. Based on the description, it is noted that natural dyeing was very popular at the time of writing the *Memoirs on Dyeing*. The usage and application details could provide readers knowledge about different natural colorants.

Part III of the book is the polyphony on colours. Starting from the discussion of the water, mordant and minerals, the author explains in detail the usage of the chemical substances used in *Memoirs on Dyeing*. Then, the author classifies the colours that appear in *Memoirs on Dyeing* and categorises the colour according to the dye drugs used. Blue is the first colour, followed by red, yellow, brown, black, grey.

After the three parts, the author illustrates the dyeing procedures used in *Memoirs on Dyeing* which were used at the time of writing the *Memoirs on Dyeing*. There are three Appendixes in the book which are used for providing related scientific information in response to the information written in the *Memoirs on Dyeing*. Appendix 1 provides metric equivalents to measurement units mentioned in the *Memoirs on Dyeing*. Appendix 2 is the dye analysis of the samples of dyed broadcloth in the second and fourth of the *Memoirs on Dyeing*, and Appendix 3 presents the colour measurement and colorimetric data of cloth samples in the *Memoirs on Dyeing*.

To conclude, this is an interesting book describing a long historical technique – dyeing. The original French manuscript is more like a colour pattern card used in the industry nowadays. The dyes used in the original French manuscript are natural dyes. However, because of the industrial revolution and industrialisation, people have started using synthetic dyes, because of their better and consistent dyeing quality, instead of natural dyes. However, because of concerns regarding sustainability, the use of natural dyes is increasing. Most of the natural dyes, such as alum and logwood, have been used since long as described in the *Memoirs on Dyeing*. In my opinion, *Memoirs on Dyeing* can be considered as the first colour pattern card for natural dyes.

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