

Azure

Therasia von Tux, Barony 1000 Eyes, Artemisia

Category: Alchemy
specific form: pigment

Entry contents:

1 vial azure pigment

1 piece of azurite plus malachite

A copy of *Artists' Pigments* with the Gettens and FitzHugh article can be found with my vermilion entry in the alchemy category; a copy of Cennini can be found with my "St. George" shield, in the Fine Arts category; Theophilus can be found with my silver entry, in the Alchemy category.



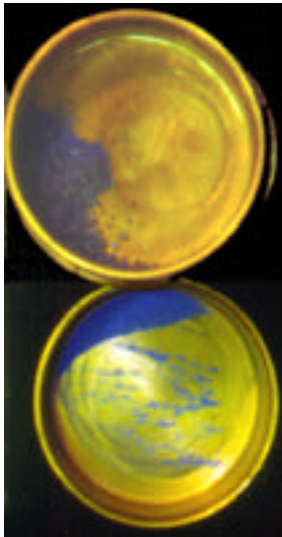
The picture on the left is a cartoon Title Block for my slide show on "Rocks that make paint." I used ground and levigated azurite in gum arabic to do the painting.

Cennini mentions azurite blue in *The Craftsman's Handbook*, but the copy Thompson used to make the translation has a lucuna in the azurite section. Thompson's foot note on the same page (p. 35) quotes a source written by Ambrogio di Ser Pietro da Siena which describes the process of levigation of azurite using lye. Gettens and FitzHugh (p. 25) concur that azurite is one of the pigments requiring levigation. The levigation recipe for ultramarine (lazurite, aka lapis lazuli) the Cennini gives on pp. 37-38 is similar to the Ambrogio di Ser Pietro instructions. Both these recipes use lye as the levigating agent.

Baroness Megan of Stonemarch (East), the lady who wrote the CA "A Palette of Period Pigments," showed me a marvelous thing at Pennsic many years ago, and that is that shavings of Ivory Soap work just as well as lye. Essentially, you grind the azurite in water with the soap, let the particles not caught by the soap settle, and separate them from the solution. Wash the settled particles with fresh water until all the soap is gone and then set them aside. Add some new soap and water to the solution and start grinding the minerals that are left in the soap and separate what settles out again. Repeat. Each separation will get paler than the one before it. The first particles will be the deepest blue, and the particle size will

be very fine sand to silt sized. Subsequent separations will be not only paler but will have finer particles. If you have the patience to levigate all your azurite, the last separation will be a very light grey-blue and the particle size should pass a 400 mesh sieve. (I never make it that far...)

My samples of azurite come from the Morenci Mine in southern Arizona (collected for me by a friend) or from near the Majuba Mine in Nevada (which I collected). My levigation method uses shaved Ivory Soap. The honey described by Ambrogio di Ser Pietro is not necessary. My experience is that with or



without the honey, the result is the same. As you can see by the pans, my first levigation is a deeper blue than the second. The little "Rocks the make Paint" painting was done using the second levigation (I'm saving the first levigation for something special; what that is, I don't know yet, but some day I'll use it).

Sources

Theophilus and Cennini are the primary sources. Since the publication of the *Artists' Pigments* series by the National Gallery at the Smithsonian, I no longer use Daniel Thompson's earlier *Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting* for pigment information, which more modern research has superseded.

Cennini, C., *The Craftsman's Handbook*, trans. by Thompson, D. V., 1933, Yale University Press, 142 pp. (available as a Dover book)

Gettens, R., and FitzHugh, E., "Azurite and Blue Verditer," 1993, in: Roy, A., Ed., *Artists' Pigments*, v. 2, Oxford University Press, pp. 23-36.

Theophilus, *On Divers Arts (De Diversis Artibus)*, trans. by Hawthorne, J., and Smith, C., 1979, Dover Publications, 216 pp.