

Otherworldly Color in the *Vision of Tundale*: Getty Ms. 30¹

Eileen Gardiner
University of Bristol ✉ 

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.100365>

Recibido: 21/01/2025 • Aceptado: 27/04/2026 • Publicado en línea: ?/?/2025

Abstract: In a rare opportunity to examine the colors recorded in medieval visions of heaven and hell, this paper will compare the original Latin of the *Vision of Tundale* against a French translation along with its illustrations in a deluxe illuminated manuscript (Getty Ms. 30). The aim is to identify how both the texts in question, rather than using a vocabulary of color, relied primarily on a vocabulary of light and dark and described both objects and materials with reference to their distinct light-reflecting or light-absorbing qualities. The illuminations, for the most part without cues from either text, employed a wide range of colors to communicate the varying qualities of light in both heaven and hell. This paper will not attempt to interpret the colors in text or image but rather to consider the interplay between text and image in communicating medieval color theories concerning light and darkness with systematic comparisons between text and image, analysis of color frequencies (histograms), categorization by scene type. It is a study to compare what language and what image can achieve in the realm of light and color.

Keywords: *Visio Thugdali*; otherworld visions; heaven and hell; Flemish illuminated manuscripts; Simon Marmion; David Aubert; medieval color theory.

ES Colores sobrenaturales en la visión de Tundale: Getty Ms. 30

Resumen: Aprovechando una oportunidad única para examinar los colores descritos en las visiones medievales del cielo y el infierno, este artículo comparará el texto original en latín de la «Visión de Tundale» con una traducción al francés, junto con sus ilustraciones, en un lujoso manuscrito iluminado (Getty Ms. 30). El objetivo es identificar cómo ambos textos, en lugar de utilizar un vocabulario de colores, se basaban principalmente en un vocabulario de luz y oscuridad y describían tanto los objetos como los materiales haciendo referencia a sus distintas cualidades de reflexión o absorción de la luz. Las iluminaciones, en su mayor parte sin indicaciones de ninguno de los textos, empleaban una amplia gama de colores para comunicar las diversas cualidades de la luz tanto en el cielo como en el infierno. Este artículo no pretende interpretar los colores en el texto o la imagen, sino más bien examinar la interacción entre texto e imagen a la hora de comunicar las teorías medievales del color relativas a la luz y la oscuridad, mediante comparaciones sistemáticas entre texto e imagen, análisis de frecuencias de color (histogramas) y categorización por tipo de escena. Se trata de un estudio para comparar lo que el lenguaje y la imagen pueden lograr en el ámbito de la luz y el color.

Palabras clave: *Visio Thugdali*; visiones del más allá; cielo e infierno; manuscritos iluminados flamencos; Simon Marmion; David Aubert; teoría medieval del color.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. The Text. 3. The Translation and Translator. 4. The Illuminator and Medieval Color Theory. 5. The Illuminations. 6. Hell. 7. The In-Between Places and Heaven. 9. Conclusion. 10. Sources and bibliographical references

Como citar: Gardiner, E. "Otherworldly Color in the Vision of Tundale: Getty Ms. 30", *De Medio Aevo*, avance en línea, 1-13. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.100365>

¹ This paper is based on a talk presented at "The Traces of the Colorful Souls. Visual and Material Arts in the Chromatic Middle Ages," Madrid, 2–4 March 2022. I would like to thank Roger Wieck of the Morgan Library, Jennifer Slikwa of King's College London, and Ronald G. Musto of the University of Bristol for their advice on this paper. I would also like to thank Filippo Ungar of the Scuola Superiore Meridionale in Naples for help with a Neapolitan manuscript. I am particularly indebted to the work of Thomas Kren, Roger Wieck, and the other authors in the Getty publications on this manuscript: Thomas Kren and Roger S. Wieck, eds., *The Visions of Tondal from the Library of Margaret of York* (Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1990); and Thomas Kren, ed., *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and The Visions of Tondal* (Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992). And finally I'd like to thank Nancy Turner, Conservator of Manuscripts, and Aleia McDaniel, Curatorial Assistant of Manuscripts, at the Getty Museum for their assistance with questions about the manuscript.

Introduction

The *Vision of Tundale*² presents a rare opportunity to examine the colors of the medieval otherworld. The original Latin text, the *Visio Tnugdali*,³ dates from 1149. It recounts the story of an Irish knight who appears to have died while visiting friends. As his body lies in a courtyard, lifeless except for a little warm spot on his left side, his soul is taken into the otherworld where his guardian angel leads him on a tour of hell and heaven.⁴ After three days, Tundale revives and describes what he has witnessed. His vision was recorded by Marcus, a monk from Cashel in Tipperary, who recently transferred to a monastery in Regensburg.

In describing the colors of the otherworld, Marcus did not generally use the names of colors but instead used the names of materials known for their capacity to reflect or absorb light, and particularly used terms to indicate light and darkness.

The Getty Museum in Malibu, California, holds a deluxe illuminated manuscript (Ms. 30) of a French translation of this work.⁵ This Franco-Flemish manuscript was produced in Ghent for Margaret of York, duchess of Burgundy (1468–77). The calligrapher was David Aubert, and he is also assumed to have translated the Latin text into the French text of this manuscript.⁶ Although there are other medieval manuscripts with illustrations of otherworld visions,

for instance the Morgan Library Ms. M.626,⁷ the Getty manuscript is the only known manuscript⁸ with a cycle of illustrations for the *Vision of Tundale*.⁹

The Text

The *Vision of Tundale* is a comparatively lengthy vision of ca. 10,500 words in the Latin original. It was an enormously popular work, translated into at least fifteen languages.¹⁰ Copies are known to survive in 243 manuscripts.¹¹ The text includes many features found in similar otherworld visions¹² but, with the exception of Dante's *Commedia*, here they are fashioned with greater detail and vividness. Peter Dinzelbacher calls it "the most important otherworld vision of the high Middle Ages."¹³ It describes multiple locations where sinners are punished and where the blessed delight in the celestial environment. The work is highly descriptive. It offers dramatic landscapes of rivers, lakes, mountains, pits, valleys, and fields. It includes architectural details of bridges, walls, and pavilions as well as industrial structures, such as forges and ovens. It provides physical descriptions of the beasts of hell, both generic devils and Lucifer, as well as distinctive, individual demons, not found in other hell literature. In his otherworld descriptions, the Tundale

² In this article, I will use the English "the Vision of Tundale" to refer to this work in general, "les Visions du Tondal" to refer to the French text in the Getty manuscript, and "Visio Tnugdali" to refer to the original Latin text.

³ Marcus von Regensburg, *Visio Tnugdali, Vision des Tnugdali: Eingeleitet, Übersetzt und Kommentiert*, ed. by Hans-Christian Lehner and Maximilian Nix (Freiburg: Herder, 2018). For English translations from the Latin, I rely on Jean-Michel Picard and Yolande de Pontarcy, eds., *The Vision of Tnugdali* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1989).

⁴ Although described as a vision of heaven and hell, "hell" is complicated by the fact that until Tundale reaches the pit of hell, the previous eight punishments are not eternal, and the souls therein may still be redeemed. This part of hell would become "purgatory," but the Latin text pre-dates that word with its doctrinal definition. The French text of the late fifteenth century reflects that change in the rubric on fol. 7 – "comment elle vey et senti les tourmens d'enfer et ainsi les peines de purgatoire" (how he saw and experienced the torments of Hell, as well as of Purgatory) (Mattia Cavagna, ed., *La Vision de Tondale: Les Versions Françaises de Jean de Vignay, David Aubert, Regnaud le Queux* [Paris: Champion, 2008], 165; English translation from Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 37) – although it makes no further alterations to the text to account for this change. Jacques Le Goff's work on purgatory falls short on several points, but it is still the essential text: Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). See also Mattia Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale et ses versions françaises (XIII^e–XV^e siècles): Contribution à l'étude de la littérature visionnaire latine et française* (Paris: Champion, 2017), 275–306. The texts also include two intermediary locations between heaven and hell: the place of "the bad, but not very bad," and of "the good, but not very good."

⁵ The text of this manuscript has been twice edited: Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008); and Yolande de Pontarcy, *L'au-delà au Moyen Âge: Les Visions du Chevalier Tondal de David Aubert et sa source la Visio Tnugdali de Marcus: Edition, Traduction et Commentaires* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011). Where possible, for English translations from the French, I rely on Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*.

⁶ Richard E.F. Straub, *David Aubert, Escripvain et Clerc* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995); Danielle Quérue, *Les Manuscrits de David Aubert: "Escripvain" Bourguignon* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999).

⁷ *Vitae partum*, 1350–75, Naples. The *Vision of Barontius*, fols. 116v–119v; the *Vision of Wettli*, fols. 119v–123r. <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscript/122665>

⁸ The age of print provides a series of illustrated editions of this text from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Nigel F. Palmer, "Illustrated Printed Editions of *The Visions of Tondal* from the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries," in Kren, *Margaret of York*, 157–70.

⁹ Roger S. Wieck, "Margaret of York's *Visions of Tondal*: Relationships of the Miniatures to a Text Transformed by Translator and Illuminator," in Kren, *Margaret of York*, 119. The *Salting Book of Hours* or *Marmion Hours* at the Victoria and Albert Museum includes a composite illumination of the *Vision of Tundale* (fol. 153). The V&A record attributes it to the Master of Fitzwilliam 268, but I believe that it is more likely by Marmion or his workshop, who are credited with seven other illuminations in this manuscript. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1386233/book-of-hours-use-of-manuscripts>

¹⁰ Belorussian, Dutch, English, French, Anglo-Norman, Provençal, German, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Catalan, and Swedish. Wieck adds that among these there are the three additional Latin translations, ten different German translations, ten French translations, four into Dutch, and four into Italian, plus two into Serbo-Croatian. Three Latin translations include the version by Helinand de Froidmont (ca. 1150–after 1229, probably 1237) in his *Chronicon*, the version by Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1184/1194–ca. 1264) in his *Speculum historiale*, and the version erroneously attributed to Vincent of Beauvais in the *Speculum morale*. See Roger S. Wieck, "The Visions of Tondal and the Visionary Tradition in the Middle Ages," in Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 3. Cavagna (*La Vision de Tondale* [2008], 8) says that apart from those three Latin translations, this vision was translated forty-three times into fifteen languages. See also Picard and de Pontarcy, *The Vision of Tnugdali*, 11.

¹¹ Wieck, "The *Visions of Tondal*," 3. Palmer provides lists of 154 Latin manuscripts and 89 vernacular manuscripts as well as a list of translations. See Nigel F. Palmer, "Visio Tnugdali": *The German and Dutch Translations and Their Circulation in the Later Middle Ages* (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1982), 5–10, 435–39, and 1 respectively. Lists of manuscripts are also provided in Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2017), 579–83; and Kren, *Margaret of York*, 265–68.

¹² Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland, 1993).

¹³ Peter Dinzelbacher, "The Latin *Visio Tnugdali* and Its French Translations," in Kren, *Margaret of York*, 111–18 at 112.

author frequently evokes the senses¹⁴ and communicates a variety of emotions, particularly fear and joy. There could hardly be a text better crafted to challenge the skills of an illustrator.

The Translation and Translator

Roger Wieck, from the Morgan Library, examined the relationship between the Latin and French texts and wrote that the French translation in the Getty manuscript is a very close, but by no means exact, translation of the Latin original.¹⁵ The prologue does not use a word to specify “translation” but states that the text is *mettre de Latin en franchois* (put from Latin into French).¹⁶ It is indeed much closer to an adaptation than a translation, and it is either a translation of an unknown Latin adaptation or an adaptation of the original Latin text or of some other unidentified version. Its scribe, David Aubert, may have also been the “translator,” producing a text specifically for this manuscript, but this is not explicit despite a colophon that attributes the “writing” to him.

Cy fine le livre intitulé: Les visions que recheu l'esperit d'un chevalier des marches d'Irelande nommé monseigneur Tondal, lequel livre a esté escript et ordonné par le commandement et ordonnance de treshaute, tresexcellente et trespuissante prichesse madame Marguerite de Yorch, par la grace de Dieu duchesse de Bourgoingne, de Lothriik, de Brabant,...a esté en sa ville de Gand par David, son trespetit indigne escripvain, escript ou mois du mars, l'an de grace mil CCC soixante et quatorse (Here ends the book entitled: The visions that the spirit of a knight from the Irish marches named Lord Tondal received, which book was written and ordered by the command and order of the most exalted, most excellent and very powerful princess Lady Marguerite of York, by the grace of God, duchess of Burgundy, of Lorraine, of Brabant,... was written in her city of Ghent by David, her poor unworthy writer, in the month of March, in the year of grace 1464.)¹⁷

The French differs in several significant ways from the Latin. First of all, it begins with a table of contents and supplies its own brief introduction. It adopts the year mentioned in the original text (*mil cent et XLIX* [1149]), however, it changes the dating element “ab incarnatione” (from the Incarnation [March 25]) to “après ce que Jhesucrist Nostre Seigneur vint et regna sure terre,” (after our Lord Jesus Christ came and reigned on earth), which eliminates an important

indication of the actual year.¹⁸ The Getty text also shows a lack of interest in Irish historical matter and omits three sections from the Latin concerning notable Irish figures: Cormac Mac Carthaigh, king of Desmond (1124–38); St Ruadhán of Lorrha (Munster); and St Patrick.¹⁹ Wieck also notes several translation errors, some of which will be addressed later in this article.

Aubert identifies himself only as scribe, which differs from his other manuscripts, particularly ones written for Philip the Good (duke of Burgundy, 1419–67), where Aubert might more precisely use an expression as, for example, “*translater de latin en cler français*” (to translate from Latin into plain French).²⁰ In most cases, the translator is another, whose name is always included with the name of the scribe.²¹ While working for Margaret, Aubert may have worked mostly alone without a workshop and may have acted not only as scribe but also as translator/author as noted in other manuscripts, for example: *Pour ce, nous voulons racompter et mettre de latin en franchois, sicomme nous trouvons es vrais exemples, une merveilleuse vision.* (Because of this we want to tell and put from Latin into French just as we find true exemplars, a marvelous vision.)²²

The Illuminator and Medieval Color Theory

Although the Getty manuscript does not identify the illuminator, scholarly opinion has long attributed the work to Simon Marmion,²³ an artist praised after his death as the “prince of illumination.” Thomas Kren, formerly of the Getty Museum, writes that “Marmion was especially gifted in the representation of light and texture, and his understanding of atmospheric effects and spatial illusion grew throughout his career.”²⁴ These skills are particularly evident in his illuminations of the *Visions du Tondal*. It seems possible that Aubert and Marmion worked side-by-side to produce this rare volume.²⁵ If so, a copy of the Latin text may have been in their shared workshop, and perhaps Marmion could have relied on cues in the Latin text as well as in the French translation for

¹⁴ Eileen Gardiner, “Sensory Experience in Visions of Heaven and Hell,” (paper, International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 2 July 2018). https://www.academia.edu/37218953/Sensory_Experience_in_Visions_of_Heaven_and_Hell

¹⁵ On the question of the translation, see Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 121–24; Dinzelbacher, “The Latin *Visio*,” 116; and Wieck, “Margaret of York’s *Visions*,” 119. Dinzelbacher hints at a possible unidentified French source (116), but the text seems to clearly indicate a Latin source (Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* [2008], 165, ll. 151–52).

¹⁶ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 165.

¹⁷ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 221. The actual year according to the Gregorian calendar is 1475.

¹⁸ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 166. See Eileen Gardiner, “A Solution to the Problem of Dating in the *Vision of Tondale*,” *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982): 86–91.

¹⁹ For Cormac Mac Carthaigh, see Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Tnugdál*, 15; for St Ruadhán (d. 15 April 584), a Munster saint venerated in Germany, see <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13214a.htm>; and for St Patrick, the fifth-century Irish missionary, see [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/St._Patrick](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/St._Patrick). The abridged version of the French text in Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, also omits the section about Ireland in chapter 2, which is included in the Getty ms. on fols. 8–8v.

²⁰ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 122.

²¹ For a discussion of the formulas used in Aubert’s workshop to designate a scribe as opposed to an author/translator, see Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 121–24.

²² Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 165–66.

²³ Sandra Hindman, “The Case of Simon Marmion: Attributions & Documents,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 40.3/4 (1977): 185–204.

²⁴ Thomas Kren, “The Visions of Tondal, the Art of Simon Marmion, and Burgundian Illumination of the 1470’s,” Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 21.

²⁵ Wieck (“Margaret of York’s *Visions*,” 124–25) seems to indicate that the illuminator may have been part of the process of laying out the manuscript folios and not simply left to fill in blank spaces.

the coloring of illuminations. But how do we assess the relationship between colors that are often only alluded to in the text and the colors painted in the illustrations?

Although we are considering colors, it must be clarified from the outset that we are not seeking to identify or decode a symbolic system of color employed in this manuscript based on medieval color theory, since “colors were usually associated with a broad range of different meanings, often both positive and negative.”²⁶ From Eraclius²⁷ to the anonymous author of *De coloribus et mixtionibus*,²⁸ to Theophilus²⁹ and Abbot Suger,³⁰ and finally to Robert Grosseteste³¹ and the *Liber colorum secundum magistrum Bernardum*,³² what emerges most notably for our purposes from medieval color theory is that “in the Middle Ages, the most pre-eminent properties of colors were their brilliance, vividness and brightness,”³³ as opposed to hue, which essentially defines the notion of color in our own modern culture. Brilliance, vividness, and brightness and their antitheses are indeed the properties that are found in the Latin and French texts as well as in the Getty illustrations. Luminosity, radiance, beauty, brilliance, and brightness are associated with the divine, and thus heaven, whereas darkness, gloom, ugliness, shadows, and obscurity are associated with evil, and thus hell.

Another point to emerge from medieval color theory concerns the nature of color: was color light or matter? Medieval color theories might posit color either as a material substance or as light. The *Vision of Tundale* demonstrates how both these meanings worked in the visual interpretation of a text: how matter and light are both evoked. The author and translator of the *Vision of Tundale* named objects and materials to convey the idea of color rather than using the names of colors. And they also wrote in terms of light and darkness rather than color. Like so many medieval topics, color conflates both technology and theology so that the description and application of color reflect a divine ordering.

The Illuminations

In Getty Ms. 30,³⁴ twenty illuminated miniatures are colored with “tempera colors, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink,”³⁵ as well as some silver paint.³⁶ Fifteen il-

luminations are two-columns wide and fill about half the text block inside elaborate borders, five are smaller — one-column wide — and fill less than a quarter of that space. The illuminations include two of Tundale on earth; eleven of Tundale at the brink of or in hell; three of Tundale in the places between hell and heaven — the places for the “bad but not very bad” and the “good but not very good” — and four of Tundale in heaven.³⁷ The number of illuminations for each location is roughly proportional to the text: for example, hell accounts for approximately half of the pages and approximately half of the images.

The texts, while highly chromatic, seldom mention colors, instead relying on descriptions of the light in each location. Using composites of each set of scenes, this author was able to create color histograms for these locations. These histograms [Fig. 1] illustrate the range of the spectra. Although gray remains a constant, the brightness dramatically increases and moves to the right up the scale from hell as the location rises, with the earth expanding the range in hell, although still quite dark, the in-between places being increasingly dominated by brighter colors rather than grey, while heaven becomes even brighter. Clearly this reflects the medieval notion that luminosity, radiance, brilliance, and brightness are associated with the divine, and thus heaven; whereas darkness, gloom, and obscurity are associated with evil, and thus hell.

In the illuminations, Marmion concretely renders the coloration of the locations. The language of the texts, however, tells a different story about color. As noted above, Marcus hardly mentions specific colors and often speaks in contrasts between light and dark, and we are alerted that throughout we will witness the contrast between the divine and the demonic, good and evil, heaven and hell, salvation and damnation.

The first two illuminations, fol. 7 and fol. 11, depict earthly locations: an interior dining space with nine figures and a courtyard with ten figures where devils are already gathering in the sky. Neither scene is described in the text, nor is the scene on fol. 11v where Tundale and his angel stand at the threshold of hell confronted by a troop of devils.

From this point on, Tundale and his angel usually appear at the edge of scenes fully described in the text, observing the activity. Throughout Tundale is depicted naked with dark hair, distinctly darker than the angel's blonde hair,³⁸ the positive and highly val-

²⁶ Alberto Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art: Theories, Matter, and Light from Suger to Grosseteste (1100–1250)* (Rome: Viella, 2023), 26.

²⁷ Fl. ca. 1000.

²⁸ Circa end of 11th century. See Paola Travaglio and Paola Borea D'Olmo, “De Coloribus et Mixtionibus: Tradition and Transmission of the Most Widespread Text on Mediaeval Illumination,” *Medioevo Europeo* 5/1 (2001): 137–89.

²⁹ Fl. ca. 1070–1125.

³⁰ Ca. 1081–13 January 1151.

³¹ Ca. 1168/70–8 or 9 October 1253.

³² Thirteenth century. See Paola Travaglio and Thomas Reiser, *Der Liber Colorum Secundum Magistrum Bernardum Ein Maltraktat aus dem Norditalien des 13. Jahrhunderts: Neuedition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Martkredwitz, Germany: Dr. Thomas Reiser, 2023).

³³ Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 330.

³⁴ Measures 36.3 × 26.2 cm (14 5/16 × 10 5/16 in).

³⁵ <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RWK#-full-artwork-details>

³⁶ The Getty description does not identify the use of silver (paint, powder, or leaf) (<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/>

object/103RWK#full-artwork-details), but Nancy Turner of the Getty Museum has confirmed the use of silver paint in border designs and decorated initials and in the metal implements on the dining table on fol. 7. (Email message to author, 24 July 2025.)

³⁷ A complete, high-resolution set of the illuminations is available online from the Getty Museum at <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RWK>.

The Getty confirms that “the photography is color corrected to best match the manuscript in ideal conditions and lighting. The images on the website are true to color and reflect the highest quality possible.” Also, “the pigments are stable and much like how they appeared when painted.” (Email messages to author, 22 and 24 July 2025.)

The figures for study have been selected to represent all of the analyzed categories with as wide a range of particular features as possible.

³⁸ Michel Pastoureau, *Yellow: The History of a Color*, trans. Jody Gladding. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 96–103.

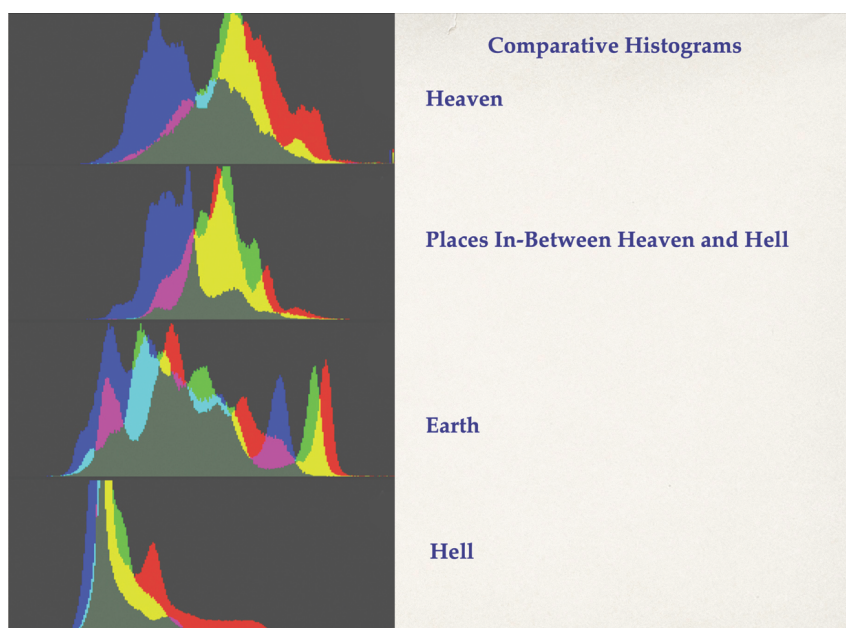


Fig. 1. Comparative Histograms: heaven, the places in between heaven and hell, earth, and hell. The X-axes represent the tonal scale, and Y-axes represent the number of pixels in an image within each area of the tonal scale

ued hair color, which was considered most beautiful in the Middle Ages. The text does not describe the angel and characterizes him only as a spirit of light. Marmion presents the angel throughout the manuscript in a blue gown with impressive wings of the same blue color, which by this time had moved out of the shadows and, according to Michel Pastoureau, had become an “aristocratic and fashionable” color, which “acquired economic and social value as a color for clothing.”³⁹ Medieval angels are often depicted in blue but not exclusively, and Marmion himself uses a range of colors including white. For instance, the angels in his *St Bertin Altarpiece*⁴⁰ appear in red, green, and white.

Hell

If the divine is revealed in luminosity, radiance, beauty, brilliance, and brightness and the colors that convey them,⁴¹ then we can only associate the monochromatic darkness of hell with evil. And yet, the illuminator’s exceptional skill in depicting light is especially evident when he interprets the written text’s descriptions of the light or the absence of light in eleven hell locations. Using dark outlines with brighter highlights even against very dark backgrounds, his technique produces translucent and transparent scenes with an ethereality much more obvious and startling than his scenes of heaven.

Rather than discussing the hell images sequentially, here we group them into three categories: hell’s chambers, hell’s paths and bridges, and hell’s beasts. Hell’s chambers, which include concentrated fields of bright color, comprise the valley of homicides (fol.

13v), the house of Phristinus (fol. 21v), the valley of fires or forge of Vulcan (fol. 27), and the cistern of hell (fol. 29). Hell’s bridges and paths, which tend to be entirely dark except for prominent gold, sometimes red, details, include the mountain of unbelievers and heretics (fol. 14v), the valley of the proud and presumptuous (fol. 15v), and the nail-studded bridge for thieves and robbers (fol. 20). Finally hell’s beasts include the massive figures of Acheron (fol. 17), the winged beast (fol. 24v), and Lucifer (fol. 30v).

Hell’s Chambers

Discussions about and reproductions of the hell scenes from this manuscript often focus on its remarkable beasts. However, one of the most stunning illuminations is the valley of the homicides (fol. 13v) [fig. 2]. Tundale and his angel stand to the left on a dark ground before a somewhat lighter background. The Getty text describes a frightening, deep valley full of burning coals:

et sur icelle vallee avoit ung couvercle de fer en reondeur tout ardent,... Sur cest couvercle descendoit lors une grant multitude des ames dempnees quy estoient illecques bruslees et arses, et furent coulees et passees parmi cèstuy ardent couvercle en la maniere que l’en passe une saulse parmi l’estamine. (Over the valley was a round lid of iron, all burning and awesomely massive. On top of this lid was falling a great multitude of damned souls who were burned and roasted there and were then liquified and strained through the burning lid like a sauce strained through a canvas sieve.)⁴²

The original Latin text is slightly more elaborate: “ad modum cremii in sartagine concremati omnino liquescerent” and “sicut colari solet per pannum.” (completely melted like cream when it is reduced in

³⁹ Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, trans. Marcus I. Cruse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 49. See also, Michel Pastoureau, *Les Couleurs Au Moyen Âge: Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*. (Paris: Éditions Le Léopard d’or, 2022).

⁴⁰ Oil on oak, ca. 1459. Gemäldegalerie (Berlin) and National Gallery (London).

⁴¹ Viridis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 330.

⁴² Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 175; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 41.

a skillet ...sieved...as wax is sieved through a cloth).⁴³ The illustration features a large and rounded, red, bowl-shaped valley. It dominates almost a third of the illustration. Above the bowl, falling souls pass through blue flames toward the orange and gold lid of the bowl. On this surface, the partially submerged bodies of murderers are melting into the flames below. It is a dark space made remarkably bright by this burning, bowl-shaped valley.



Fig. 2. "The Torment of Murderers," Getty Ms. 30, *Les Visions du chevalier Tondal*, fol. 13v.

Marmion uses a similar design for the house of Phristinus (fol. 21v), flipping the valley over so that the viewer looks into a bright red cavern to see a red field of fire at the top and blue flames at the bottom; gold flames are licking at the top of the entry. Two dark beasts silhouetted in gold stand apart from the house, one, with his back to the viewer, uses a pitchfork against the souls, while the other appears to be luring Tundale inside. The darkness of the place, *tenebres*, is contrasted with the radiance of the angel, *la clarté de angele* (radiance of the angel),⁴⁴ who stands golden-haired on the left at the forward edge of the image in his bright blue robes and wings highlighted in gold.

In the valley for those who commit evil upon evil (fol. 27), a bowl-shaped valley, like the one in fig. 2 (fol. 13v), occupies half of the frame. Similar blue flames rise up from the top of it, while in its pit, we can identify devils tormenting souls on forges amid red and gold flames. Gold is used to define the shapes of the devils, their eyes, and their hands. Gold is also used to show the reflection of fire off their bodies, as well as off the tools of torture mentioned in the text: *tenailles de fer ardantes* (burning tongs of iron), *fourches de fer* (iron forks), *ardantes englumes* (burning anvils), and *grans marteaulz* (big hammers).⁴⁵ A long fork reaches out of the valley and grabs Tundale by the back pulling him toward the flames as a devil grabs his arm. The text charges the illustrator with the task of showing the reader the burning instruments of torture in the fires of hell.

In the fourth chamber, the cistern of hell (fol. 29), Tundale's angel stands above him as he is being pulled headfirst into the torment by a devil with a gold grappling hook. Here the text indicates colors without naming them.⁴⁶ The bright central segment of the illustration is a large red triangle of fire that becomes darker as it rises out of a square⁴⁷ black pit. Against the red background of flames, we can discern tormented souls and tormenting demons, highlighted in gold. The demons are described in the French text with few hints of color: "*la estoient ilz plus noirs que airement, et plus esmeuz que chiens acarneiz. Leurs yeulz estoient ardans comme feu, les dens avoient plus blans que nesge*" (There they were blacker than the air and more excited than rabid dogs. Their eyes were burning like fire, their teeth were whiter than snow). The Latin describes the spirits as "*nigri sicut carbones, oculi vero eorum ut lampidades ignis ardentes, dentes etiam eorum nive candidiores*" (black as coals, their eyes were like burning torches, their teeth were whiter than snow).⁴⁸

Hell's Paths and Bridges

It's remarkable how much is visible against the dark backgrounds that Marmion paints. By contrast to the chambers of hell, hell's bridges and paths are without any large fields of brighter color. The background for the illustration of the place of punishment for unbelievers and heretics (fol. 14v) shows Tundale and his angel on a narrow path at the foot of a mountain. In the foreground is an icy lake: "*En une des parties de la montaigne il avoit ung grant feu de souffre tres horriblement paunt, et de l'autre partie avoit grans viviers et estans glacés*" (On one side of the mountain there was a great fire of sulphur, very horribly stinking. And on the other side were great icy ponds and lakes).⁴⁹ Details are buried in the dark of the illumination. Blue and gold are the brightest colors here, with the former used again for flames, but also for hell's frozen waters where souls struggle. Gold highlights the burning hooks that the demons use to grab souls and toss them back and forth from torment to torment. The Latin and French texts again refer to flaming instruments of torture: iron pitchforks and tridents, "*en leurs mains tenoient grans crocs et fourches de fer tous embrasez et ardans*" (they held in their hands big iron hooks and forks...on fire and burning).⁵⁰ Both the Latin and French descriptions combine the material — iron — with its state — flaming and on fire. Marmion interprets the description to highlight these fiery implements in gold with red.

⁴⁶ For a closer look at the devil and color, see Michel Pastoureau, *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ Described as "*quarée*" (squared) in French (Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 199) as opposed to "*quadrangulam*" (rectangular) in Latin (Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 142).

⁴⁸ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 200; cf. Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 51. Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 144; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdali*, 137.

⁴⁹ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 176; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 42.

⁵⁰ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 177; my English translation differs from Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 42, which introduces the word "red," which is not in the original. Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 94.

⁴³ Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 92. Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdali*, 117.

⁴⁴ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 189; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 47.

⁴⁵ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 196; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 50.

The valley of the proud (fol. 15v) has a very limited and dark range of color. The frame is cut in half horizontally by a straight gold line that represents a very long and narrow bridge. Below the bridge the valley appears bowl-shaped, like hell's chambers, but in this valley, the conflagration — “*une bien grant flambe*” (a great conflagration) — is pictured, not bright red, but a dark sulphurous blue to match the smell described in the text: “*une telle puanteur de soffre*” (a stench of sulphur).⁵¹

The illustration of the bridge for thieves and robbers (fol. 20) [fig. 3] is similarly laid out. The bridge is picked out in red, representing burning nails, against a dark background. Four figures are on the bridge: Tundale, his angel, and a cow, and coming from the opposite direction, a soul carrying a golden sheaf of wheat. Beneath the bridge there is again a bowl-shaped reddish-brown lake with blue waves cresting at its surface. In the water are visible the white teeth and eyes of dark beasts whose mouths emit red flames as they wait for souls to fall from the bridge. The Latin reads: “*Ignis etiam de ore ipsarum exiebat ita, ut stagnum bullire a cernentibus putaretur.*” (Fire was coming from their mouths so that onlookers thought the lake itself was boiling.) The Getty text adds nostrils, although the illustration does not seem to embrace this particular detail: “*Feu et flambe sailloit de leur gueule et de leurs narines par telle habondance que tout cel estang en bouloit radonneement.*” (Fire and flame spouted from their jaws and their nostrils in such abundance that the whole lake boiled violently.)⁵²



Fig. 3. “The Torment of Thieves: Tondal Leads a Cow Across a Nail-studded Bridge,” Getty Ms. 30, *Les Visions du chevalier Tondal*, fol. 20.

Hell's Beasts

Finally, we arrive at the beasts found in Tundale's vision. Only Lucifer, the last described in the depths of hell, is traditional. Acheron (fol. 17), probably the most-reproduced image from this manuscript, is a huge beast who devours the greedy. His dark head fills two-thirds of the picture space. His open red mouth, which accounts for half that space, has gold

fangs and emits gold and blue flames. The Getty manuscript describes his eyes: “*deux telz yeulz quy mieulx ressembloient deux grans charbons tous embrasez,*” (two eyes such that they resembled two large embers, all ablaze) unlike the Latin text that describes them as: “*Oculi vero eius ignitis assimilabantur collibus*” (its eyes were like hills on fire).⁵³ However, in the illustration, they are predominantly whitish with red in the inside corners. Otherwise, although Acheron is thoroughly described and fully visualized, references in the text to *feu* (fire) and *obscurté de tenebres* (obscurity of darkness) give the only key to any coloration.

The large, winged beast (fol. 24v), who punishes unchaste priests and nuns, is mostly blackish-gray against a dark brown background. He has a prominent, long and pointed red beak, which the Getty text describes as “*ung becq de fer*” (an iron beak). His claws, described as “*ongles de fer*” (iron claws), are perched on the edge of an icy lake. Marmion clearly is not strictly following any formula in interpreting hints about color in the text: for “iron,” for instance, he will use either red or gold paint or gold leaf. The lake — *ung grant estanc tout engellé* (a large pond, all frozen)⁵⁴ — is colored a deep blue. Parts of this beast's body, including one of his wings, are strikingly highlighted in blue.

Finally, we reach Lucifer (fol. 30v) [fig. 4], described in the French as “*plus noire que charbon et plus ardent que mille feuz embrasez.*” (blackier than coal and more ablaze than a thousand burning fires). The Latin text refers to him as the “*principem tenebrarum*” (the prince of darkness) and “*nigerrima sicut corvus*” (very black, like a crow).⁵⁵ In accordance with the written text, he appears almost black. Pictured against a red background, similar to the hell chambers discussed above, he is much blacker than his devils. According to Pastoureau, “before and after the year 1000 and for many centuries, black was constantly called upon to adorn the body or clothes of all those maintaining relationships of dependence or affinity with the devil.” And not just black, but “all dark colors: brown, gray, purple, and even blue.”⁵⁶

All of these creatures dwell in a pit of shadow, covered by smoke and the fog of death, dark, vast and gloomy where the shadowy fire casts no light. This evil fire is the antithesis to the radiant and divine light of heaven and is perhaps the greater artistic achievement: the ability to paint the color of air in the darkness, to create darkness with enough transparency that the denizens of hell clearly emerge. It will certainly strike many that the hell images are more vivid, interesting, and visually compelling than the images of heaven. This phenomenon is not limited to the images in the Getty manuscript, nor indeed to any images of heaven and hell, but also holds true for textual material. Representing heaven is more about

⁵¹ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 178; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 43. Although elemental sulphur is yellow, when burned, it produces a blue flame.

⁵² Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 108; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 123. Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 185; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 46.

⁵³ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 180; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 44. Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 100; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 120.

⁵⁴ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 192; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 49.

⁵⁵ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 202; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 52. Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 146; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 138.

⁵⁶ Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color*, trans. Jody Gladding (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 52.

light and spiritual abstractions, whereas hell is easily presented as a narrative with compelling scenes that lend themselves to naturalistic rendering. It is hard for radiance and the unknowable to compete visually with devilry and misery.⁵⁷



Fig. 4. "The Gates of Hell and Lucifer," Getty Ms. 30, *Les Visions du chevalier Tondal*, fol. 30v.

The In-Between Places and Heaven

After examining Marmion's illustrations of the darker realms, we look at his seven depictions of the in-between places and heaven. These scenes fall into two categories: those using a landscape as background and those using a wall.

Open Landscapes

The landscape scenes are generally open spaces. We see green with unobstructed horizons signaling an ambivalence that may reflect the condition of the souls in the in-between spaces.

As Tundale and his angel enter the location of the "*non valde bonorum*" (the good but not very good) (fol. 34v), they pass across a sandy and rock-strewn place with a few small shrubs towards a portal that serves as the entrance to a higher realm. Within the gate they can see a field "*tout vert*" (all green). Marcus does not name this color, but the French text does; and while both go on to mention flowers, only the French text again references green, saying that the flowers "*croissoient parmi celle verdure*" (growing

among the greenery)⁵⁸ where *verdure* can mean both the greenness of vegetation, but also the vegetation itself, so both a color and a material. Although the text does not mention their colors, Marmion depicts trees with green foliage and a luminous golden fountain — the Fountain of Life.⁵⁹

In the following in-between region (fol. 35), Tundale and his angel come upon the Irish kings Conchober and Donatus⁶⁰ standing in the middle distance in an open green field with green shrubs and several small green trees. Donatus is described in the Getty text as "*vestu d'une vesture si precieuse que oncques homs vivant la pareille ne vey. Ainsi elle regarde celle vesture en soy merveillant de celle grant noblesse et gloire*" (dressed in such a precious garment that no man living ever saw the equal. And so marveling she [the soul] looked at this garment itself of such great nobility and glory). The manuscript illustration shows the kings dressed simply in white robes and wearing gold crowns. Marmion does not illustrate any more of the text's description. He omits a castle of gold and silver paved with fine gold and precious stones. The texts use precious metals and gems with rich fabrics to describe the scene. Tundale sees a throne for Donatus: "*ung siege tout de fin or et de pierres precieuses tendu a l'entour de draps d'or et de soye et de moult precieux aournements*" (a seat all of fine gold and of precious stones stretched around with cloths of gold and silk and many precious ornaments). Servants put "*hanapz et autres vaisseaulz d'or et d'argent sur les tables, et boistes d'ivoires*" (goblets, vessels of gold and silver, on the tables and ivory caskets). When the moment arrived for Donatus's daily punishment, the castle became "*toute obscure et plaine de tenebres*" (all dark and full of gloom).⁶¹ This place echoes both heaven and hell and provides an interlude that includes more earthlike surroundings, but Marmion was not interested in a full representation of the fabricated elements, which might be colored to reflect the materials described. He leaves the two Irish kings standing face-to-face in a field. Perhaps he was limited by the small quarter-page space allocated for the illustration; perhaps the allocation was based on a decision reflecting the lack of interest in Irish historical figures as discussed above.

The final open-landscape in heaven is the place for good monks and nuns (fol. 39v). It is a green field full of tents or pavilions. The Latin and French descriptions use words that signify both color and material. The Latin describes many pavilions: "*papiliones plurimas et purpura et bisso, auro quoque et argento et serico mira varietate confectas*" (many pavilions made of purple and batiste (?), of gold and silver,

⁵⁸ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 207; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 55.

⁵⁹ According to Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite (Letter IX.1), this fountain is a symbol of the divine. An illustration of the "Visions of Tondale" in the *Salting Book of Hours* (see n. 9 above and <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1386233/book-of-hours-use-of-manuscripts>) includes a very similar but larger fountain in its background (fol. 153).

⁶⁰ Conchobhar Ua Briain, king of Thomond (the northern half of Munster), 1118–42; and Donnchadh Mac Carthaigh, brother of Cormac Mac Carthaigh (see n. 19 above). Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 15–16.

⁶¹ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 209–10. Cf. the translation in Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 55.

⁵⁷ Martin Kemp, *Visions of Heaven: Dante and the Art of Divine Light* (London: Lund Humphries, 2021), 13, 73.

and of silk of wonderful variety). The French is less descriptive: “*plenté de trefs et pavillons illec tendus, moult riches, fais de pourpre et de cendal.*” (numerous tents and pavilions, made of royal purple and silk).⁶² The Latin uses *purpura*, which the French translates as *pourpre*, words that could mean “purple” but also may refer to the rich, royal, expensive purple fabric. The Latin text uses *bisso* and *serico*, while the French uses *cendal*. *Bisso* is sometimes translated as linen but was originally a yellow sea silk, and the Latin *serico* means “made of silk” or “silky.” The French *cendal* is a taffeta-like silk that was often dyed red. It is again likely that the materiality of colors plays a decisive role and that the names of materials rather than the names of colors are being used to suggest coloration, just as the words that follow in the Latin – *auro...et argento* (gold...and silver) – also refer to materials as much as or even more than colors. This is supported by the French term *fais*, although the Latin term *confectas* (finished) is less conclusive. The pavilions would have been *made* from materials but could have been *finished* in colors. However, despite the mention of *purpea*, none of the pavilions is purple. Perhaps because of its rarity and costliness, no purple is evident here or in any of the illuminations. Nor are any of the pavilions colored yellow or red. A pink pavilion is most prominent, but apparently in the Middle Ages “pink” did not have a name. The word that Italian, French, and Spanish now use for pink is *rosa* or *rose*, but in the Middle Ages, this word would probably have meant vermillion. Pink is certainly not among the vivid colors often preferred in the Middle Ages, although it was a craze at the French court of Jean, Duc de Berry (1340–1416).⁶³ Marmion may have chosen pink based simply on its beauty or to signify a different quality of light in heaven. While caution is always warranted when speaking of something as subjective as colors, particularly colors from the past, there is nothing to indicate any significant deterioration of the colors in these illuminations,⁶⁴ so we can assume these colors are close to the originals, that this pink pavilion was always pink, not purple, at least as we currently identify those colors.

Curiously the Getty text does not include, and so Marmion does not illustrate, the description that follows after the place for good monks and nuns. It would also presumably be an open field where Tundale comes upon the defenders and builders of the Church sitting under a tree. It is one of the most

striking descriptions of the heavenly realms in the original text:

Et respiciens vidit unam arborem maximam et latissimam frondibus et floribus viridissimam omniumque frugum generibus fertilissimam. In cuius frondibus aves multe diversorum colorum et diversarum vocum cantantes et organizantes morabantur, sub cuius etiam ramis lilia et rose multe nimis et cunctarum herbarum specierumque oderiferarum genera oriebantur. (And, turning around, he saw a very big and wide tree, verdant with foliage and flowers and abounding with fruits of all sorts. In its foliage there lived many birds of various colours and different voices singing chants and descants, and under its branches countless lilies and all types of herbes and odoriferous spices were growing.)⁶⁵

Typically, here the author hints at colors, sometimes through material objects like lilies and roses, but mentions only one single specific color, green (*viridissimam*), although this word can also mean *young*, *fresh*, *lively*, and *youthful*. It seems odd that the compilers of the manuscript would eschew the opportunity to represent this Tree of the Confessors. Roger Wieck has made an important observation about this omission, noting that “Heaven, by the fifteenth century, had become a very urbanized place...a man-made city.” He points out that Marmion had used a series of increasingly fine walls. If he had illustrated this description of the tree, he “would have destroyed this unifying theme of walls.”⁶⁶

Walls

Four walls are described and depicted in the Getty manuscript: the high wall where Tundale finds the “bad but not very bad” (fol. 33v), the silver wall where he finds the faithfully married (fol. 37), the gold wall of the martyrs and the pure (fol. 38v), and the jeweled wall with gold mortar of the virgins and nine orders of angels (fol. 42).

Walls usually serve as boundaries, but in this manuscript, despite the text, three of the four illustrations depict them as display spaces. The walls all have corners and visually give the sense that Tundale and the viewer are outside rather than inside. This is very different from the impression of concentric heavenly walls that the text leads us to expect. Wieck comments on the problematic illustration of these walls in the Getty manuscript.⁶⁷ First of all, Tundale finds the

⁶² Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 176; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 149. I would not agree with their choice of the word “batiste.” Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 214; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 59.

⁶³ Michel Pastoureau, *Red: The History of a Color*, trans. Jody Gladding (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2107), 146.

⁶⁴ According to Andreas Petzold, (“The Iconography of Color,” in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. Colum Hourihane [London: Routledge, 2016], 445) “in illuminated manuscripts...the pigments have remained relatively stable and are for the most part true to how they were when first painted.” While it is also true that “hardly any medieval artworks, even if *in situ*, fully retain their original color” (Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 325), Nancy Turner has confirmed that the only apparent deterioration in these illustrations is in some tarnishing of the silver paint (see n. 36 above) and that “the Tondal manuscript in the Getty’s collection is in excellent condition, and I can say that the pigments are stable and much like how they appeared when painted” (Email message to author, 24 July 2025).

⁶⁵ Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 180; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdal*, 151.

⁶⁶ Wieck, “Margaret of York’s *Visions*,” 125. Marmion does, however, break this urbanized theme with the field of pavilions, clearly not an urbanized space. If Wieck is correct, rather than being driven by the text, the layout – and the decision to omit the tree – would derive from the illuminator’s program with the result that no space was provided for an illustration between fol. 39v and fol. 42, despite plenty of room, since there are more than three blank ruled pages, numbered on the recto, following the end of the text. This might indicate that the illuminator had knowledge of the text and had influence on the design prior to the layout of the pages and the scribing of the text and perhaps was at work in the same workshop.

⁶⁷ Wieck, “Margaret of York’s *Visions*,” 121–22.

“bad but not very bad, (fol. 33v)” *ensconced* in their very high wall based on an error of translating the Latin “*infra*” (below) as “*dedans*” (within).⁶⁸ Although this arrangement within a wall may not have been the intention of the original text, it is not an unusual arrangement and may have been a practical solution for Marmion.⁶⁹

Regarding the illustration of the place for the “bad but not very bad,” the Latin and French texts provide no additional details except to mention that Tundale and his angel had left the shadows and entered the light. Marmion paints a green field with two trees in the left middle distance and blue mountains in the background against a golden sky. The tall, gray wall, which extends to the top and right of the frame, contains five niches with rounded arches. The niches are occupied by two women and three men dressed in undecorated, plain, light-colored robes.

Wieck also points out a discrepancy about the second wall, the first wall of heaven, where Tundale finds the faithfully married (fol. 37).⁷⁰ He and his guide arrive outside a wall with no door, then, according to the Latin text, find themselves inside. The French text is not clear on this point, and the illustration clearly shows souls standing on the outside. In an almost singular mention of the color of garments, the souls are described as “*tous vestus de robes blanches*” (clothed in white robes), and they are indeed painted as such. The wall is described as “*ung mur moult hault et tres reluisant...tout massif d’argent bien ouvré et tres plaisant*” (a wall very tall and shining...of solid silver, well wrought and very handsome),⁷¹ but illustrated not in silver but in a rich blue-gray,⁷² a brighter gray than the grays of hell, where gray is dominant and gloomy.

On the other hand, for gold, Marmion uses both gold paint and gold leaf, and in the second heavenly

location (fol. 38v) [fig. 5], we find the golden third wall – of the martyrs and virgins (*martyrum et continentium*). They sit in niches in a wall that the Latin describes similarly to the previous one, although of gold: “*de auro purissimo et preclarissimo*” (of the purest and brightest gold) and the French as “*tout de fin or*” (entirely made of fine gold). According to the Latin, this wall incorporates “*plurima sedilia de auro et gemmis et universis preciosorum lapidum generibus constructa et preciosissimis sericis cooperta*” (many seats made of gold and gems and all sorts of precious stones and covered in the most costly silk). The French text describes them as “*tres riches sieges quy tous estoient fais de fin or et de toutes pierres precieuses, et estoient au dessus couvers de riches draps d’or et de soye*” (very rich seats that were made of fine gold and of all precious stones, and they were covered with rich cloths of gold and silk). The Latin text describes the figures as “*vestiti sericis et stolis candidis thiaris et universis ornatibus...facies uniuscuiusque ex eis splendida, sicut sol splendet in meridie, et capillos habebant auro simillimos, et coronas habebant in capitibus aureas isdem gemmis ornatas*” (dressed in silk garments and white robes [stoles] and tiaras and all manner of finery...everyone’s face was radiant like the sun shining at noon, and they had hair similar to gold, and, on their heads, golden crowns, adorned with gems). Both Marcus and the translator name the light of a splendid sun and specify materials such as gold, silk, and gems to convey color. However, these descriptions are not faithfully followed in the illustrations. Five figures— four male and one female – each sit in a niche of gold with an open book on a shelf in front of them. Behind are color panels, presumably cloth, two pink, two blue, and one green. The figures are like statues, and while the French text says they are “*tous vestus de draps de soye et de blanches estoiles*” (all dressed in silk cloth and white stoles)⁷³ the “garments of silk” become robes of blue or pink, but all have stoles over their shoulders, either white or blue. The figures are crowned in gold, and their robes are trimmed in gold. There is no evident effort at depicting gemstones.

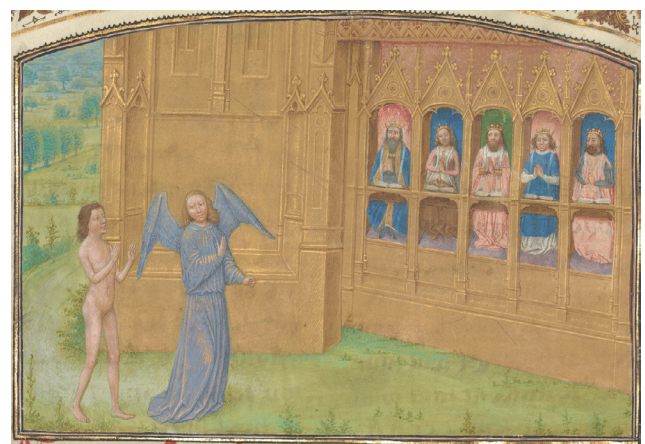


Fig. 5. “The Glory of Martyrs & the Pure,” Getty Ms. 30, *Les Visions du chevalier Tondal*, fol. 38.

⁶⁸ Illustrations from printed editions show the souls gathered at the bottom of the wall. For example, on leaf 19v in *De raptu anime Tundali* (Speyer: Johann and Konrad Hist, ca. 1483). See Wieck, “Margaret of York’s Visions,” 121.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the donors on the front cover of the *Ghent Altarpiece*, the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432), St Bravo Cathedral, Ghent; or the angels in heaven in the “Fall of the Rebel Angels,” *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (1412–16), Musée Condé Ms.65, fol. 64v. This was also a design feature in late fourteenth-century/early fifteenth-century Italian frescoes, for example, in the *Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas* by Andrea di Bonaiuto (1365–67), the Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence; the *Virgin and Child with Saints* (1395) by Taddeo di Bartolo, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest; and *The Adulterers* and *The Lustful* by Taddeo Di Bartolo (1413–14), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

⁷⁰ The location of the married in the first heaven is tied to a subject of importance among the Irish at the time of Marcus’s writing. Irish marriage practices, which were not aligned with Roman practice, were blocking papal recognition of the Irish bishops. It is, therefore, not surprising that for Marcus the place of the faithfully married should occupy a prominent position, but it is worth noting that it would be considered significant enough to warrant a place as one of only four heaven illustrations in this continental manuscript. See Anthony Candon, “Power, Politics and Polygamy: Women and Marriage in Late Pre-Norman Ireland,” in *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, ed. Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 106–27.

⁷¹ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 211; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 56.

⁷² Nancy Turner notes the use of silver paint in the manuscript decoration but does not indicate that it is used in this illustration. See nn. 36 and 64 above.

⁷³ Marcus, *Visio Thugdali*, 174; Picard and de Pontfarcy, *The Vision of Thugdali*, 148. Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 213; cf. Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 57.

In the last manuscript illustration (fol. 42), Tundale and his guide approach the final wall of heaven. From here Tundale could “*ainchois se veoit tout le monde ainsi comme se l'en feust dessoubz ung seul ray de soleil*” (also view the whole world, as if under a single ray of the sun).⁷⁴ But it is the wall that is depicted. As already noted several times, Marcus rarely mentions colors by name, he does however repeatedly mention gold. And although gold was a color in the Middle Ages,⁷⁵ Marcus seems to use it here particularly as a material in the same way that he talks of silver and ivory as materials, not colors. His lexicon of gems is far vaster than his lexicon of colors, and we see in the French translation of this description a vocabulary where fine gold is the mortar that holds together the precious stones that are itemized in the text:

ilz appercheurent tantost ung mur quy tant estoit plus hault et plus bel et plus resplendissant a veoir, que tous les autres n'y sont reins a comparer. Et estoit cel mur tresbien ouvré de pierres precieuses moult diverses et de diverses vertus et de diverses couleurs, et si avoit metal avecques entremeslé, tant que moult clerement enflambissoit, et tresbien sembloit que le mortier en fust de fin or. Icelles pierres precieuses estoient nommees cristal, jaspre, crisolite, jacinte, saphirs, esmeraudes, oniches, colpatres, sarde, crisopates, amictistes et grenates. Celluy mur tant cler et reluisant estoit... (they saw a wall that was so high and beautiful and resplendent that all the others were nothing in comparison. This wall was wrought with precious stones of assorted properties and numerous colors. Its metal was so intermingled with them that it shimmered as if aflame, and its mortar, indeed, resembled fine gold. The names of these precious stones were: crystal, jasper, chrysolite, hyacinth, sapphire, emerald, onyx, topaz, sardonyx, chrysoprase, amethyst, and garnet. This wall was so bright and shiny...)⁷⁶

It is almost certain that Marcus's audience would have recognized the names of gems more readily than the names of colors. This speaks clearly to the materiality of color in the Middle Ages. In addition, however, according to Dionysius the Aeropagite, “for each stone of a different color there is an anagogic explanation which connects it symbolically to the supersensible world.”⁷⁷

According to Herman Pleij, “medieval scholars constantly linked colors with brilliance, intensity, and luminosity. This explains their many references to precious stones, which caused light to burst into the most exciting colors.”⁷⁸ Marmion tried to capture the reflective quality of these gems by the swizzles that he added to the blue-grey wall. It's hard to believe

that just a few decades earlier, between the mid 1420s and 1432, in the very same city, Jan Van Eyck was working in oil paint and tackling the same problem with quite different results, as evidenced most spectacularly by the crown of the central figure of the Almighty in the *Ghent Altarpiece*.⁷⁹

Finally, to close our discussion of the color of light in heaven, we turn our eyes to heaven's sky. In every scene in heaven showing the sky, as well as all three scenes in the in-between places, the sky is gold: “a colored surface, illuminated throughout, and free of shadows,” a reflection of Plotinus' supreme Intelligence.⁸⁰ The behavior of the light of the sky — presenting itself as gold rather than blue — is outside of natural law and a clear indication that the source of this light is divine: “for the medieval artist, real gold was explicitly or implicitly analogous to divine light, generating its own radiance and resisting spatial definition.”⁸¹ It is not the bright blue or gray-blue of Marmion's earthly skies in his *St Bertin Altarpiece*,⁸² his *Lamentation of Christ*,⁸³ or his illuminated manuscripts like the *Grandes Chroniques de France*⁸⁴ or the Huntington Library Book of Hours.⁸⁵ In sacred scenes, Marmion often used a gold-ground background. For instance, his *Mass of St Gregory*⁸⁶ displays the instruments of Christ's torture on a ground of gold and his *Pietà*⁸⁷ features a gold background. In fact, the convention of using gold ground for heavenly skies would be going out of style in Italy by the late fifteenth century, when Botticelli, for instance, was tending to more naturalistic treatments.⁸⁸ However, Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity*⁸⁹ is a particularly dramatic example of the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly sky. Above the Nativity scene, the blue earthly sky is rent open to show the golden vault of heaven above. The Tundale texts never mention the color of the sky. Throughout both the Latin and French, the word “gold” seems to refer to a material and not a color. The Getty text mentions only that “*le soleil n'y absconsa oncques*” (the sun was never hidden).⁹⁰ It speaks of radiant light, but its source is attributed to the heavenly souls themselves: “*La clarté*

⁷⁹ See n. 69 above.

⁸⁰ Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 63.

⁸¹ Kemp, *Visions of Heaven*, 86 and 213.

⁸² See n. 40 above.

⁸³ Oil and tempera (?) on oak panel, ca. 1473. Met Museum, New York.

⁸⁴ 1457, National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg.

⁸⁵ HM 1173 from ca. 1450–75. See James Thorpe, *Book of Hours: Illuminations of Simon Marmion* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2004).

⁸⁶ Oil and gold leaf on wood panel, ca. 1460–65, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

⁸⁷ Tempera on vellum on panel, late 1400s, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Sliwka, “Sandro Botticelli's *Saint Francis of Assisi with Angels*,” in *Saint Francis of Assisi*, ed. Gabriele Finaldi and Joost Joustra (London: National Gallery Global. Exhibition Catalog, 2003), 88. For context, see Lauren Porter, *Gold* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2014); and Alison Wright, “Crivelli's Divine Materials,” in *Ornament & Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, ed. Stephen J. C. Campbell and Jean Campbell (London: Paul Holberton Publishing; Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Exhibition Catalog, 2015), 57–77.

⁸⁹ Oil on canvas, 1500. National Gallery, London. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/sandro-botticelli-mystic-nativity>.

⁹⁰ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 207; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 55.

⁷⁴ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 219; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 59.

⁷⁵ Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 54.

⁷⁶ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 218; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 59.

⁷⁷ Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 332; see also Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 15.

⁷⁸ Herman Pleij, *Colors Demonic and Divine: Shades of Meaning in the Middle Ages and After*, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 11.

d'icelles ames...s'eslevoit par dessus toute la gloire que l'ame avoit jamais par avant veue" (The light from these souls...[was] greater than all the glory that the soul had previously seen).⁹¹ However, the source of even their light is the divine light of God whose nature was equated with light in the Middle Ages.⁹² Here in his use of gold, we have Marmion's essential interpretation of the idea of divine light as color and color as divine light.

Conclusion

Marcus, the author of the twelfth-century *Visio Thugdali*, did not particularly describe otherworld landscapes using the names of colors. He wrote mostly of light, particularly using terms to indicate light or a certain quality of light. He employed multiple forms of various Latin words: *ardens*, *arsus*, *caligo*, *candor*, *claritas*, *coruscare*, *flamma*, *fulgore*, *fumus*, *furvere*, *ignis*, *ignitus*, *lucidus*, *lumen*, *lux*, *nitator*, *radium*, *splendere*, *splendor*, *sulphur*, and *tenebra*.⁹³ Marcus repeats these terms often throughout the text. The Getty French translation uses words like *ardans*, *ardantes*, *charbons*, *clarté*, *cler*, *clerement*, *embrasez*, *enflambissoit*, *engellé*, *feu*, *fevres*, *flambe*, *glace*, *luisant*, *lumiere*, *obscurté*, *obscur*, *reluisant*, *resplendissant*, *soleil*, *souffre*, and *tenebres*.⁹⁴

In an effort to convey light and color, Marcus also speaks in terms of materials that were recognized for their capacity to reflect or absorb light. In heaven, those materials included jewels, metals, particularly gold and silver, and cloth such as silk and perhaps purpura. In hell, these materials were limited to iron, ice, and coal in an atmosphere of smoke, sulphur, and fire. For the most part, the French text follows Marcus's conventions. Medieval audiences would have easily and immediately recognized these materials and their reflective qualities. On the other hand, the names of colors would be much less likely to convey notions of light, luminosity, and brilliance or darkness and obscurity. In the illuminations for the text, Marmion was able to convey the light of heaven, divine light, and the darkness of hell, the obscurity of evil, by translating the terms used in both texts into a visual palette comprising a broad range of colors and hues.

Sources and bibliographical references

Candon, Anthony. "Power, Politics and Polygamy: Women and Marriage in Late Pre-Norman Ireland." In *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, edited by Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, 106–27. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006.

Cavagna, Mattia, ed. *La Vision de Tondale: Les Versions françaises de Jean de Vignay, David Aubert, Regnaud le Queux*. Paris: Champion, 2008.

⁹¹ Cavagna, *La Vision de Tondale* (2008), 215; Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 58.

⁹² Virdis, *Colors in Medieval Art*, 67.

⁹³ Burning, burning, darkness, whiteness, clarity, brilliance, flame, brilliance, smoke, fury, fire, ignited, luminous, light, light, brilliance, radium, splendid, splendor, sulphur, and darkness.

⁹⁴ Burning, ardent, coals, clarity, clear, clearly, blazing, enflamed, frost, fire, fever, flaming, ice, gleaming, light, darkness, obscure, shining, resplendent, sun, sulfur, and darkness.

- *La Vision de Tondale et ses versions françaises (XIII^e–XV^e siècles): Contribution à l'étude de la littérature visionnaire latine et française*. Paris: Champion, 2017.
- de Pontfarcy, Yolande. *L'au-delà au Moyen Age: Les Visions du Chevalier Tondal de David Aubert et sa source la Visio Thugdali de Marcus: Edition, Traduction et Commentaires*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Dinzelbacher, Peter. "The Latin *Visio Thugdali* and Its French Translations," in Kren, *Margaret of York*, 111–18.
- Gardiner, Eileen. "A Solution to the Problem of Dating in the *Vision of Tondale*." *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982): 86–91.
- *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook*. New York: Garland, 1993.
- "Sensory Experience in Visions of Heaven and Hell," (paper, International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 2 July 2018). https://www.academia.edu/37218953/Sensory_Experience_in_Visions_of_Heaven_and_Hell.
- Hindman, Sandra. "The Case of Simon Marmion: Attributions & Documents." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 40.3/4 (1977): 185–204.
- Kemp, Martin. *Visions of Heaven: Dante and the Art of Divine Light*. London: Lund Humphries, 2021.
- Kren, Thomas. "The Visions of Tondal, the Art of Simon Marmion, and Burgundian Illumination of the 1470's." In Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 19–36.
- , ed. *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and The Visions of Tondal*. Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992.
- , and Roger S. Wieck, eds. *The Visions of Tondal from the Library of Margaret of York*. Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1990.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Marcus von Regensburg. *Visio Thugdali, Vision des Thugdal: Eingeleitet, Übersetzt und Kommentiert*. Edited by Hans-Christian Lehner and Maximilian Nix. Freiburg: Herder, 2018.
- Palmer, Nigel F. "*Visio Thugdali*": *The German and Dutch Translations and Their Circulation in the Later Middle Ages*. Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1982.
- "Illustrated Printed Editions of *The Visions of Tondal* from the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries." In Kren, *Margaret of York*, 157–70.
- Pastoureau, Michel. *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes*. Translated by Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- *Black: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- *Green: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- *Red: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- *Blue: The History of a Color*. Translated by Marcus I. Cruse. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- *Yellow: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.

- . *White: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022.
- . *Les Couleurs Au Moyen Âge: Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*. Paris: Éditions Le Léopard d'or, 2022.
- Petzold, Andreas. "The Iconography of Color." In *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, edited by Colum Hourihane, 441–56. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Picard, Jean-Michel, and Yolande de Pontfarcy, eds. *The Vision of Tnugdali*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1989.
- Pleij, Herman. *Colors Demonic and Divine: Shades of Meaning in the Middle Ages and After*. Translated by Diane Webb. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Porter, Lauren. *Gold*. London: Royal Collection Trust, 2014.
- Quérue, Danielle. *Les Manuscrits de David Aubert: "Escripvain" Bourguignon*. Actes du Colloque Paris 1993. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999.
- Sliwka, Jennifer. "Sandro Botticelli's *Saint Francis of Assisi with Angels*." In *Saint Francis of Assisi*, edited by Gabriele Finaldi and Joost Joustra, 88. London: National Gallery Global. Exhibition Catalog, 2003.
- Straub, Richard E. F. *David Aubert, Escripvain et Clerc*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995.
- Thorpe, James. *Book of Hours: Illuminations of Simon Marmion*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2004.
- Viridis, Alberto. *Colors in Medieval Art: Theories, Matter, and Light from Suger to Grosseteste (1100–1250)*. Rome: Viella, 2023.
- Wagner, Albrecht, ed. *Visio Tnugdali: Lateinisch und Altdeutsch*. Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1882.
- Wieck, Roger S. "The Visions of Tondal and the Visionary Tradition in the Middle Ages." In Kren and Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal*, 3–7.
- . "Margaret of York's *Visions of Tondal*: Relationships of the Miniatures to a Text Transformed by Translator and Illuminator." In Kren, *Margaret of York*, 119–26.
- Wright, Alison. "Crivelli's Divine Materials." In *Ornament & Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, edited by Stephen J. C. Campbell and Jean Campbell, 57–77. London: Paul Holberton Publishing; Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Exhibition Catalog, 2015.

