Beeswax candle black

Reconstruction
Recipe by Anonymous, c. 1400

Normalized (Italian)

Il nero si ottiene in molti. […]

Si fa pure in altro modo; cioe si abbia una bacinella di ottone pulita o di terracotta invetriata, e vi si ponga sott, accesa, una candela di cera vergine, di guisa che la fiamma lambisca la parte concavadella bacinella, e raccogli cautamentequel nero prodotto dal fumo e riponilo e usane a tuo piacere. (in: Brunello 1992: p. 46-47)

Translation (German)

Schwarz wird auf vielerlei Weise erhalten. […]

Es wird auch auf andere Weise gemacht; Das heißt, Sie haben eine Schüssel mit sauberem Messing oder glasiertem Steingut und stellen eine brennende Kerze aus jungfräulichem Wachs darunter, so dass die Flamme den konkaven Teil der Schüssel berührt; nehmen Sie das Schwarz, das durch den Rauch entsteht, vorsichtig auf, lagern Sie es und verwenden Sie es es zu Ihrem Vergnügen.

Translation (English)

Black is obtained many ways. […]

It is also done in another way; that is to say you have a basin of clean brass or glazed earthenware, and place a candle of virgin beeswax under it, lit, so that the flame touches the concave part of the basin; and carefully collect the black produced by the smoke, store it and use it to your pleasure.

Handout instructions

Source

Anonymous. End of the 14th century. 'De Arte Illuminandi, MS XII.E.27', National Library Napoli.

Reference

Brunello, Franco. 1992. *De Arte Illuminandi : E Altri Trattati Sulla Tecnica Della Miniatura Medievale*. Venice: Neri Pozza.

Ingredients & equipment

Beeswax candle
A basin of clean brass, glazed earthenware or porcelain
Feather
Paper to store the pigment powder

Preparation steps

(1) Light the candle
(2) Cover with a porcelain bowl or cup
(3) Collect the soot with a feather into a paper and transfer it into a container. (This is not mentioned in the recipe)
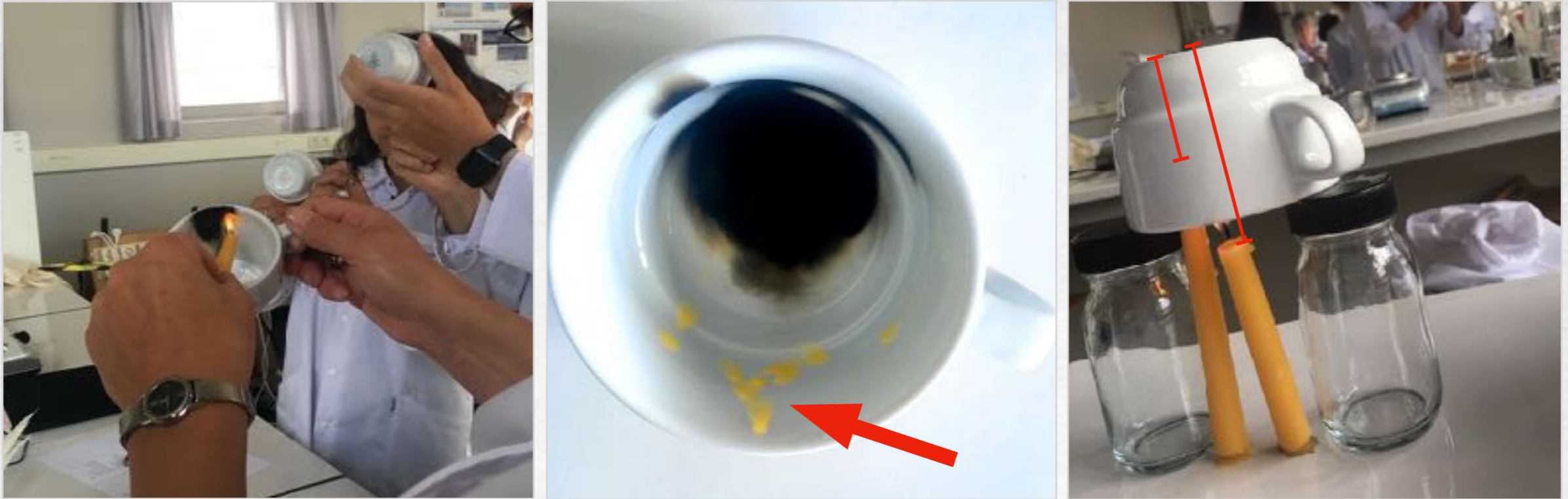
Date & Place

"Burgundian Black" Summerschool ROOTS: Research on the origins of historical techniques, University of Antwerp, 1-5 July 2019.

Photo report: step-by-step reconstruction

1. Light a beeswax candle and collect the soot

Wax drips into the cup while checking how much soot has already deposited.
The wax is difficult to remove afterwards.

Trying to set up a station where a candle is mounted on a fixed place was not effective.
The distance to the porcelain surface increased constantly because the candle gets shorter when it burns down. As result less soot is deposited onto the cup.

Birgit Reissland

Photo report: step-by-step reconstruction

2. Collect soot with a feather

A little wax drips into the cup while checking how much soot has already deposited. The wax is difficult to remove afterwards.

The soot can easily be wiped off with a feather.

Birgit Reissland

"Burgundian Black" Summerschool ROOTS: Research on the origins of historical techniques, University of Antwerp, 1-5 July 2019.

What did we learn during the reconstruction?

We tried to hold a beeswax candle in one hand and a cup in another to collect the soot. This method is not effective. The wax drips into the cup and contaminates the soot.

If the candle is mounted on a fixed place, the distance to the surface increases constantly because the candle gets shorter when it burns down. As result less soot is deposited onto the cup.

The porcelain is opaque and therefore does not allow to judge how much soot is already deposited. One might try to use a pane of (fire-proof) glass.

Enjoy your own reconstructions !

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