Non-invasive investigation on a VI century purple codex from Brescia, Italy.

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Highlights

- • Purple codices are among the most prestigious artworks of Medieval age.

- • Parchment was dyed with Tyrian purple mixed with other lesser value dyes such as folium or orchil.

- • Only non-invasive techniques were used.

Abstract

Purple codices are among the most relevant and prestigious book productions of Late Antique and Medieval age. They usually contained texts from Holy Writings written with golden or silver inks on parchment dyed in a purple hue. According to the tradition, the colour of parchment was obtained by the well renowned Tyrian purple dye. From the material point of view, however, very little is known about the compounds actually used in the manufacture of these manuscripts. Presently, the information available is limited to the ancient art treatises, with very few diagnostic evidences supporting them and, moreover, none confirming the presence of Tyrian purple. It is more than apparent, then, the need to have at disposal larger and more complete information at the concern, in order to verify what came to us from the literary tradition only. In this study, preliminary results are presented from non-invasive investigation on a VI century purple codex, the so-called *CodexBrixianus*, held in the Biblioteca Civica Queriniana at Brescia (Italy). Analyses were carried out with XRF spectrometry, UV–visible diffuse reflectance spectrophotometry, molecular spectrofluorimetry and optical microscopy. The results suggest the hypothesis that Tyrian purple had been used as a minor component mixed with other less precious dyes such as folium or orchil.

Graphical abstract

Purple codices are among the most prestigious artworks of Medieval age. In a VI century Italian codex, the *Codex Brixianus*, parchment was dyed with Tyrian purple mixed with other lesser value dyes such as folium or orchil.
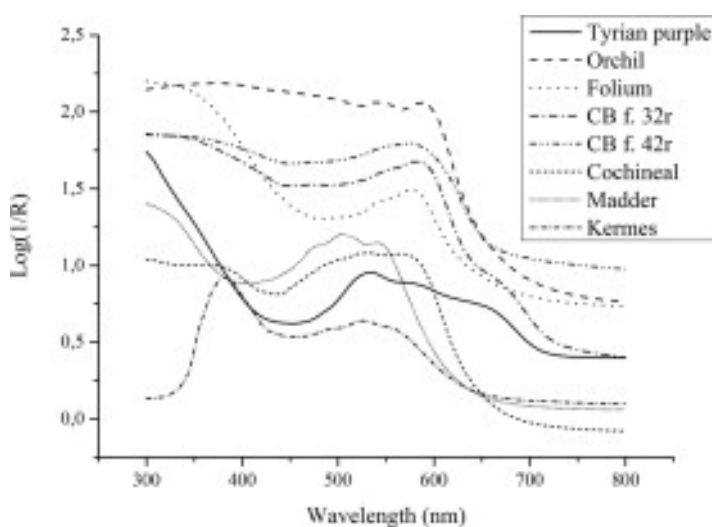
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Keywords

Purple codices; FORS; Fluorimetry; Tyrian purple; Orchil; Folium

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