The origin, meaning, and development of the Latin verb *matizare*

Various medieval handbooks to the arts of painting contain a curious word under several different guises: *matizare*, *amatizare*, *ematizare*, *maptizare*, and so on. *Matizare* is attested for the first time in an opusculum on making pigments, called *De coloribus et mixtionibus*, whose earliest surviving copy dates from the early twelfth century. Subsequently it is found in a number of later adaptations of this work and other works on the making of pigments, such as the *Compendium artis picture* (xii\(^{th}\)/xiii\(^{th}\) c.), the *Liber de coloribus illuminatorum* (xiv\(^{th}\) c.), the *Liber diversarum arcium* (xiv\(^{th}\) c.), the *Scripta colorum* (xiv\(^{th}\) c.), and the *De arte illuminandi* (late xiv\(^{th}\) c.). It entered some of the European vernaculars early: in the late thirteenth century, it can be found in a French treatise on painting, as well as in a Portuguese tract. A derivative of *matizare* still survives in the Spanish word “matiz” and its cognates in Portuguese and Catalan. The Latin verb has not been well served by lexicographers: no medieval Latin lexica include it, save the *Novum glossarium*, which declares both its origin and sense uncertain. Over the past two centuries, however,

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2 See the references below for fuller information on these texts.
This word has attracted attention from a few scholars, who have proposed four different etymologies and several more possible definitions.

R. Hendrie in 1847 posited a derivation from *mappa*, on the basis of the attested form *maptizare*. D. V. Thompson and G. H. Hamilton in 1933 proposed a derivation from *haematites*, ‘red chalk’; *matizare < ematizarematisare < *haematizare < haematites*. Their interpretation rests on the fact that *matizatura, amatizatura, and ematizatura* are all attested (sometimes in the same text), and appear to be used indiscrimately. Edgar de Bruyne in 1947 did not offer an etymology of the word, but did suggest its equivalence with the French “renforcer”.

E. W. Bulatkin in 1952 proposed a derivation from the Low Greek λάμμα / λαμματίζειν, meaning “shade” or “highlight” (“to shade”), making this word a prime example of Byzantine influence on Latin and Romance technical terms. She reconstructed an etymology of λαμματίζειν > *lamatizo > *lamatizatura. *Lamatizatura* was then reanalyzed as the Romance article *la*, plus *matizatura*, and underwent a full or partial deglutination (junctural metanalysis) to *(a)matizatura*; the verb was accordingly reconstructed as *(a)matizo*. The form *ematizol ematizatura* she explains by the addition of the augmentative prefix *en*.

Each of these views has found adherents since Bulatkin’s study. Franco Brunello has backed Hendrie’s etymology, while Otto Prinz in 1961 independently proposed the same etymology as Thompson and Hamilton. More skeptical is H. Roosen-Runge, who, in his 1967 study, disposes of Hendrie’s proposal and De Bruyne’s curious gloss, while not positing any suggestions as

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6 The precise geological signification of *haematites* is difficult (see TLL s. v. *haematites*). Pliny (Nat. 36.38) lays out five different stones to which this word can be applied, of which one he says is the equivalent of Gr. μίλτος, “red chalk, ruddle” (L. *miltites*). This material, Pliny notes, is better than red ochre (L. *rubrica*) for any use, presumably including writing. Indeed, it was used for writing since antiquity (see for example, Terentianus Maurus, De litt. 225: *instar tituli fulgidula notabo milto*); and though the word *haematites* itself seems rarely if ever used to designate a writing material, from it were derived the words for pencil in some of the Romance languages (It. “matita” and Sp. “lapiz”). Thus, with some justification, we can translate *haematites* as “red chalk”.


to the correct derivation of the word\textsuperscript{12}. None of these scholars seem to have considered Bulatkin’s hypothesis. Otherwise, her reconstruction has found wide acceptance among Latinists, Romance lexicographers, and art historians\textsuperscript{13}.

Hendrie’s derivation may be readily dismissed. His reconstruction provides no justification for the insertion of the ‘t’ while, as Bulatkin has shown, the spelling variant \textit{maptizare} almost certainly results from orthographical hyper-correction, to render it parallel to words like \textit{baptizare} and \textit{septem}, as well as conscious etymologizing, considering the title of the work in which this form is attested is \textit{Mappae clavicula}\textsuperscript{14}. Further, his etymology offers no explanation for the forms \textit{amatizare} and \textit{ematizare}.

Bulatkin critiques the etymology formulated by Thompson and Hamilton as untenable based on the semantic development of the word, according to her analysis of its various attestations. For example, one of the first secure attestations of the word occurs in the eleventh/twelfth century \textit{De coloribus et mixtionibus}. Two typical examples, with Bulatkin’s translation:

\begin{quote}
Carum minium \textit{incides} de bruno, \textit{matizabis} de rubeo minio. You will \textit{draw the form} on carmine with brown, you will \textit{grade the relief} with [red] minium.

Azorium misce cum albo plumbo, \textit{incide} de indico, \textit{matiza} de albo plumbo. Mix azure with white lead, \textit{draw the form} with indigo, \textit{highlight} with white lead.
\end{quote}

On the strength of the frequent repetition of this word in the text in very similar contexts (by her count, fifteen times with white, four times with orpiment, and four times with other colors), she conjectured its earliest meaning to be “to grade and accent the relief”, which was soon after broadened to mean “to highlight”. Only in texts from the fourteenth century and later, such as the \textit{Liber diversarum arcium} (xv\textsuperscript{th} c.), did it come to mean something like “to make linear embellishments with a light color”.


\textsuperscript{14} BULATKIN, “The Spanish Word ‘matiz’...”, p. 515.
On the other hand, according to Bulatkin, Thompson and Hamilton’s etymology requires a semantic development something like *haematites*, “red chalk” > *amatizare, ematizare, matizare*, “to draw with red chalk” > “to pencil or make flourishes with a pencil” > “to embellish with a linear pattern”. As a result, she argues,

“The principal objection to such a semantic development would be, however, that it uses as a *starting point* the meaning which, through the foregoing comparison of related texts, has been revealed as the *latest* stage of the semantic evolution of the word *matizare*, for it has been established that the meaning ‘to embellish with a linear pattern’ developed *from* the earlier meaning of ‘to highlight,’ which, in turn, developed from the meaning ‘to grade and accent the relief’”\(^15\).

New evidence, however, casts some doubt on her semantic reconstruction, and by extension, her proposed etymology. Every occurrence of this word hitherto recorded has been found in some technical treatise on painting\(^16\), but in a manuscript of the *Institutiones* of Priscian at Houghton Library of Harvard University, MS Lat. 44, written most likely in the early to mid twelfth century, a derivative of *amatizare* is found in one of the many marginal annotations\(^17\):

> Priscianus attendit tantum figuras prius inventas, non eas que primum amatizatores id est pictores librorum invenerunt. (2v)

“Priscian attends only to the letter-forms invented earlier, not those which the *amatizatores*, that is the painters of books, first invented”.

The manuscript was written in Northern France, and its glosses, roughly contemporaneous with the text, are particularly important as one of the few witnesses to the grammatical teachings of Lanfranc of Bec\(^18\). This fact may be important: the two earliest fragments of the *De coloribus et mixtionibus* were both written at Canterbury, the earlier of which (a folio removed from an


\(^16\) It should be noted here that *matizare* is attested in Burgundio of Pisa’s late twelfth-century translation of Johannes Alexandrinus’s commentary on the *De sectis* of Galen, ed. C. D. Pritchett, Leiden, 1982, p. 78; but, as the editor notes, the context demands *masticare*, and is likely an independent mistake.


unknown, late eleventh-century manuscript) even includes Lanfranc’s epitaph. If this word had some currency in Lanfranc’s circle, its presence in this Priscian manuscript would be less puzzling.

Three facts about the origin and signification of *matizare* can be drawn from this gloss. First, this gloss, roughly contemporaneous with the earliest attestations of the word discovered thus far, takes *matizare* in the broadest possible sense, “to paint books”, and in no way can sustain a technical meaning of “to grade and accent the relief” or even “to highlight”. On the contrary, the gloss suggests that the generally understood meaning of the word in the twelfth century was “to apply color”, an interpretation supported by the fact that a roughly contemporary treatise, the *Schedula* of Theophilus, uses the verb *illuminaire*, whose general signification is well attested, in contexts where other sources use *matizare*. Second, the fact that the word was glossed implies that the word was not common enough to be widely known, but was considered important enough by the author to be employed as a technical term. Finally, the context of the gloss, to *Inst. I.2*, *De littera*, does not refer to painting but rather to writing, or forming letters. Thus, when the glosser refers to “painters of books”, he means specifically those responsible for painting certain letters in books, most likely rubricators.

With this meaning in mind, we can reinterpret the passages in the *De coloribus et mixtionibus*. All of the instances occur with *incidere* which Bulatkin interprets as “to draw the form”. If this is correct, and if *matizare* means “to paint”, as it does in Harvard MS Lat. 44, then the examples above can be retranslated as follows: “You will draw the form on carmine with brown, you will paint with red minium” and “Mix azure with white lead, draw the form with indigo, paint with white lead”. As a result, Bulatkin’s proposed semantic

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19 See Petzold, “*De coloribus et mixtionibus*…”, p. 61-62. One potential difficulty to this argument is the fact that the fragment does not in fact contain the word *amatizo*, though fuller forms of the same text do. But given that this fragment is only a cutting (an actual size photo of which can be found in Petzold, “*De coloribus et mixtionibus*…”, p. 60, fig. 3), it would be rash to make any assumptions about what the rest of the text would or would not have contained, without giving sufficient weight to the testimony of other manuscripts. In addition, due weight must be given to the fact that the majority of later manuscripts containing the *De coloribus* are in fact of English origin, according to Nigel Morgan, “Aspects of Colour in English and French Manuscript Painting of the Late 13th Century”, in Gerhard Schmidt and Elisabeth Liskar, eds., *Europäische Kunst um 1300. Akten des XXV. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, Bd. 6, Wien - Köln - Graz, 1986, p. 111-116 (p. 113).

20 Bulatkin, “The Spanish Word ‘matiz’…”, p. 487-488 et p. 500-501. For *illuminaire* as “to paint”, see Du Cange, s. v. *illuminaire*, where references as early as the ninth century to this meaning of the word are provided.

21 The precise meaning of *incidere* is a difficult question: as a Latin verb it is polysemous, deriving from both *in + caedo* (“to fall”) and *in + caedo* (“to cut”). I interpret the translation “to draw the form,” as deriving from the second meaning: that is, *incidere* describes separating or cutting the area of the drawing away from the surrounding area by outlining. Nonetheless, this verb still requires a far more detailed explanation.
development is flipped on its head: rather than progressing from a specific meaning of “to grade the relief” in the twelfth century, to the general meaning of “to embellish with a linear pattern” in the fifteenth, this word seems to have progressed from a general meaning of “to apply color with red or white chalk or lead” in the late eleventh century to a meaning of “to highlight” in the twelfth and thirteenth to “to embellish” in the fifteenth. By removing the semantic objection and the precise semantic equivalence with λόμμα, this proposed development provides some support for the etymology posited by Thompson and Hamilton. The development of the word could be reconstructed as haematites “red chalk” > matita, amatita, ematita > *matitizo, *amatitizo, *ematitizo > ematizo, amatizo, matizo. The final development involves a simple haplology of the repeated -ti-, and while the form *matitizo is not directly attested, it could lay at the root of a very curious word from the Compendium artis picturae, a thirteenth-century painting manual: maticero or maticaro. While treated as a separate word by the Novum glossarium, its context, precisely identical to the context of matizo in the De coloribus, requires an equivalence. This word could be a garbled, haphazardly abbreviated version of *maticizo (a palatalized spelling of *matitizo), as the penultimate vowel has been omitted through abbreviation, and Caroline long z can be easily confused with long r. Another trace of the missing medial syllable can be found in a late thirteenth-century Italian derivative of the De coloribus, called the Scripta colorum. While this tract includes the conventional form amatizare, it also includes the curious form matetizare. This form likely represents an incorrect vowel shift from *matitizare, an unsurprising development considering the

22 As Peter Marshall has noted, the technical sense of matizare remained fairly vague and primitive until the fourteenth century (“Two Scholastic Discussions of the Perception of Depth by Shading”, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 44, 1981, p. 170-175 [p. 175]), which complements the general-to-specific semantic evolution proposed here.

23 Ed. Hubert Silvestre, “Le MS Bruxellensis 10147-58 (s. XII-XIII) et son ‘Compendium artis picturae’”, Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire, 119, 1954, p. 95-140. The exact spelling of the word is unclear – while Silvestre prints maticeramus, he notes that the medial syllable has been abbreviated, and so other readings such as maticaramus are equally plausible (ibid., p. 124, n. 3).

24 See Novum glossarium s. v. maticero. One example of its use in the Compendium: “Incidit de indicio vel nigro maticeramus de minio puro vel lazurio mixto cum albo” (ed. Silvestre, p. 125).

25 This tract was uncovered by Francesca Tolaini, “Incipit Scripta Colorum. Un trattato contenuto nel ms. 1075 della Biblioteca Statale di Lucca”, Critica d’arte, 7a serie, 58/3, 1995, p. 54-68, where she argues that this text should be seen as the Italian representative of the De coloribus tradition; and edited EAD., “Proposte per una metodologia di analisi di un ricettario di colori medievale”, in Il colore nel medioevo. Arte simbolo tecnica. Atti delle Giornate di Studi, Lucca 5-6 maggio 1995, Lucca, 1996, p. 91-116 (p. 107-112).

26 For example, Scripta colorum, 19 (ed. Tolaini, p. 111): “Carminium incide de brunio, matetiza de minio ruboe”. 
Italianate orthography of the work. A close reexamination of the manuscripts of these texts might shed some light on these words; whatever the case, however, Bulatkin’s account of *matizare* can scarcely accommodate these variant forms.

Thus the development of *matizare* may not have so much to do with its purpose, as Bulatkin supposed, but rather its material. In the *De coloribus*, most of the instances of the word occur in conjunction with minium or white lead. While these two were closely identified with each other, minium was also closely associated with *haematites* as early as Pliny the Elder. At the earliest stage of the word’s development, it may well have meant “to paint with *haematites* or minium, that is, with red or white chalk or lead”, effectively assimilating the meaning of the classical verb *miniare*, from which the word *miniatura*, or painting, later developed. Indeed, the Priscian gloss uses *amati-zatores* for rubricators, as argued above, and rubrics were often written in this period with red minium. From this, its meaning evolved the technical sense of “to highlight”, since white lead or minium was the material usually chosen for this purpose. The word’s full semantic development could then be constructed thus: *ematizare*, *amatizare*, *matizare* “to apply red or white chalk or lead” > “to apply color, to paint” > “to highlight” > “to embellish.” This etymology is further supported by the fact that *amatita* and *ematita* are both attested as forms of *haematites* as early as the eighth-century *Compositiones*, and *matita* is found as early as the sixth century. In addition, Italian simultaneously offers all three variants of this word – *ematita* (hematite), *matita* (pencil or hematite), and *amatita* (either) – all of which are attested by the end of the fifteenth century. This explains the variation between *amatizare*, *ematizare* and *matizare* without having to resort to diverse linguistic explanations (partial vs. full deglutination) and hypothetical prefixes. This etymology also allows us to omit the deglutina-
tion of the definite article, which, as Bulatkin admits, is not otherwise attested before the thirteenth century 32.

Further, the suffix -izare was used since antiquity with metallurgical and minerological nouns, such as aerizare, smaragdizare, hyacinthizare, and aurizare (auricare) 33. Colors too were so suffixed: purpurizare 34, colorizare, *viridizare, *albizare 35. Further due to the confusion between -izare and -icare in some places, which produced such forms as bapticare and dogmaticare, (a confusion also attested to in the spelling of the word in question: maticare, maticatura), many more parallels were apparent, such as rubricicare, nigricicare, viridicare, albicare. Rubricicare is a particularly good parallel as it developed very early from CL rubrica, ‘red ochre’ to ‘red writing’ to a verb meaning ‘to redden’ or ‘to write in red’ 36. Another (almost exactly) parallel semantic development occurs in Sp. lapizar, a verb meaning to draw, derived from lapiz, pencil, itself derived from L. lapis haematites 37.

As a result, no obstacle remains to assuming the derivation of amatizare from haematites, which of all explanations is linguistically the most probable, and, as I have shown, semantically the most justifiable. In addition, given the unambiguous gloss presented above, there ought no longer be any doubt about its original meaning. Thus instead of representing an instance of the infusion of Greek technical terms into Latin, this word is most likely a learned coinage invented in the second half of the eleventh century in Lanfranc’s circle in England or Normandy, a contribution which through its modern descendants in Spanish and Portuguese still retains its currency.

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34 Leumann, “Griechische Verben...”, p. 382; see entry in the Du Cange.
36 In fact, we find as early as Pliny the Elder rubrica and haematites closely associated: “Sotacus e vetustissimis auctoribus quinque genera haematitarum tradit praeter magnetem... quarti generis hepaticen vocari, quamdiu crudus sit, coctum vero miltiten, utilem ambustis, ad omnia utiliorem rubrica” (Nat. 36.38).
Résumé. — L'article explore l’étymologie d’un terme technique utilisé pour décrire une partie du processus de la peinture, matizare. L’étymologie reçue actuellement fait dériver ce verbe du verbe grec tardif lammatizein. A partir d’une attestation de ce terme passée jusqu’ici inaperçue dans une glose marginale contenue dans un manuscrit de Priscien, l'article soutient que le verbe matizare dérive du nom latin haematites, et qu’il a été forgé vers la fin du XIe siècle dans l’entourage de Lanfranc du Bec.

Summary. – This article explores the etymology of a technical term used to describe part of the process of painting, matizare. The currently accepted etymology derives the verb from the Late Greek verb lammatizein. Using a hitherto unnoticed attestation of this word in marginal gloss in a manuscript of Priscian, this article argues that the verb derives from the Latin noun haematites, and was coined around the end of the eleventh century in the circle of Lanfranc of Bec.