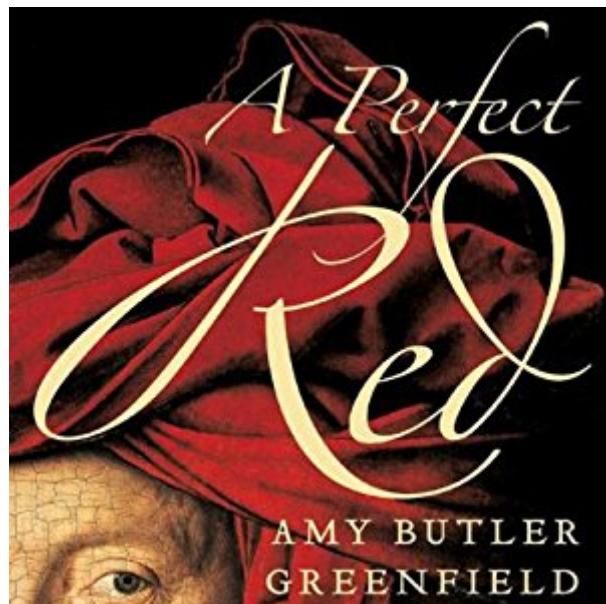


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A Perfect Red



Synopsis

A Perfect Red recounts the colorful history of cochineal, a legendary red dye that was once one of the world's most precious commodities. Treasured by the ancient Mexicans, cochineal was sold in the great Aztec marketplaces, where it attracted the attention of the Spanish conquistadors in 1519. Shipped to Europe, the dye created a sensation, producing the brightest, strongest red the world had ever seen. Soon Spain's cochineal monopoly was worth a fortune. Desperate to find their own sources of the elusive dye, the English, French, Dutch, and other Europeans tried to crack the enigma of cochineal. Did it come from a worm, a berry, a seed? Could it be stolen from Mexico and transplanted to their own colonies? Pirates, explorers, alchemists, scientists, and spies - all joined the chase for cochineal, a chase that lasted more than three centuries. A Perfect Red tells their stories - true-life tales of mystery, empire, and adventure, in pursuit of the most desirable color on earth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Beware Kindle Readers! This e-book, for which you will pay \$3 more than the print edition and second day shipping for a Prime member, has none of the illustrations referred to in the text. The notes are unwieldy to operate and the complete lack of part of the book (yes, plates and figures referred to and marked by the author are actually part of the book) is extremely frustrating. For this price, I expected not only the plates but live links to them. Aside from this, do buy the actual book and read this. Fascinating breakdown of the cultural and social history surrounding the economics

and aesthetics of Red and so much more.

This was a thoroughly fascinating book, and incredibly well researched. (Check the nearly endless bibliography at the back of the book if you have any doubt!) In a nutshell, color, particularly in textiles, was rare and valuable until the early parts of the last century. Amazing that what we now take for granted was beyond our great-great grandparents wildest imaginations. The masses dressed in dull vegetable dyes of beige, muddy yellows, and greys. Only the wealthiest could afford brilliant colors, and wearing it was the ideal way to flaunt their wealth and status. This book takes us from the discovery in "New Spain" (Mexico) of cochineal, a crushed insect dye which yielded a never before seen brilliant red color. Spain built an empire on cochineal, and went through great lengths to keep the origin of the dye a secret. Ms. Greenfield explores the far reaching effects of cochineal on history: empire building, piracy, espionage, scientific advancements (and infighting), the connotations of red through history, even exploring perceived racism and class distinctions based on lack of color, and later, when the tables turned, a surfeit of color. Who would have ever thought that something as simple as "red" would inextricably tangle itself in history in such a way? Red. Red? Red! An excellent read for anyone with an interest in history, fashion, textiles, or science.

In addition to being the definitive document on the red dye, cochineal; this incredibly well-researched book on organic red dye also includes a basic history of the colonies of New Spain, particularly Mexico, and their crucial importance to the dyed color red as craved by European royals. Although this is an historical treatise on a type of dye, it reads almost like a novel, never boring the reader as (s)he is led through the discovery of a superb red-dye bearing insect in New Spain and its subsequent huge commercial import on the then known world, leading even to the hijacking of ships bearing tons of the precious cargo by pirates sanctioned by the British crown. The reader will not be bored by this historical tale of a hugely useful, expensive bug.

A good read about something I seldom think about; that is, the history of color. This book could do with a few more foot notes as she easily glides by statements about the habits and mores of centuries as if they are established, long-known realities. I would have liked to know sources to better judge the credibility of some of the more interesting assertions. Still, a good, easy read...

Read this book on my Kindle. The timing is perfect because I am visiting Oaxaca Mexico as I read the book and I have just finished a history of the Mexican Conquest by Cortes. It is a fast read and

includes everything I ever wanted to know about the history of dyes in Europe with special attention on the color RED.

Well written and researched. This is an entertaining look at not only cochineal but the history of dyes. Only complaint I have is that the author references many "figures" (ie. fig. 1) that are not accessible in the Kindle edition, I would have liked to view these as I encountered them in the text. Illustrations I assume ?

This book was required reading for a class about the history of fashion, and I must say that it was one of the most informative and entertaining books of the semester! I was pleasantly surprised by both the depth of research which Butler conducted in order to write the book and by her fluid and effortless style. Even though it is not a particularly brief work, it only took two days to read, and due to its engaging nature those days flew by. As mentioned in another review, it is refreshing to see such extensive notes and such a detailed bibliography in a book of this nature, as most popular history books have sacrificed sources for academics in order to placate stingy publishers, but writing papers from this source was effortless. I must also compliment the illustrations in the center, which are printed brilliantly and on good quality paper - I only wish that there were more! This book is a worthwhile investment and a great addition to the libraries of individuals interested in the history of color and Early Modern Europe. My only grievance is that I wished that Butler had dealt more with the history of red in other periods, and not just with the cochineal trade. Know that this is primarily a history of cochineal (a pigment which produces a particularly potent red dye), and not of the color red in general.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that there would be enough information about a color to fill a book. After reading A Perfect Red by Amy Greenfield I can see there is lots of information, and this book has it. This book goes into everything about the color red; where it was made, how it was made, who made it, and more. The biggest and the brightest of them all was cochineal, a color so wonderful that people would kill for it. The book starts in the 1300's and goes right up through the 1900's. It also shows that red is a very powerful color, people really react to it. Red is the color of passion, of desire, of power. Think of the Communist flag, of fire engines, of blood. All bright red. For me red is also my astrological color and has always been one of my favorites. I gave the book four stars only because so much of the book is political and I skipped around a lot reading it. A good read about a fiery and dynamic color.

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