



Dyes in History and Archaeology 37/40

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- This long and colorful history will take the reader from the earliest times: a glimmer of color in the distant past, to the very real conservation problems of deteriorating containers of early synthetic dyes

Deep in the past, in South America and Mesopotamia, textile fibers were being given color, purple and red, to make them attractive and interesting and to give pleasure to those who wore them. Many centuries later, South America was the source of a bright and unusual blue, Maya blue, used in painting, but this too is associated with a more complicated, more varied story.

An important element of the story is that if the technology of dyeing in 18th-century London with, for example, madder is examined, it is not so far away from the work of the dyer in Mesopotamia centuries earlier. However, the 18th century was the time of wonderfully colorful and exuberant fabrics and tapestries. A century and a half later, a new age of brilliantly colored synthetic dyes, the likes of which had never been seen before, exploded onto the scene with hundreds of colors with exotic names and doubtful permanence. However, some old dyes were still used on an industrial scale: lichen purples and browns, unassuming and still widely traded, were used throughout the 19th century.

These and other stories will take the reader from the earliest times, a glimmer of color in the distant past, to the very real conservation problems of deteriorating containers of early synthetic dyes – a long and colorful history.

The topics covered in this edition vary from the dyes of South America, Mesopotamia, Austria, 17th – 19th Century Flanders and England to the use of lichen, lac and redwood lake as pigments and cochineal for paints and inks.

These papers were presented at the 37th, 38th and 40th meetings of the DHA group at NOVA University of Lisbon (2018), the University of Amsterdam (2019) and the online conference hosted by the British Museum, London (2021).