



A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire

Amy Butler Greenfield

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"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.

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