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COLOR attracts attention, evokes emotions, conveys information, carries complex meanings, and makes things beautiful. Color is so meaningful, in fact, that research on the color choices of Ancestral Pueblo people has the potential to deepen our understanding of religious, social, and economic change in the ancient Southwest. This volume explores museum collections and more than a century of archaeological research to create the first systematic understanding of the many ways Ancestral Pueblo people chose specific colors to add meaning and visual appeal to their lives.

Beginning with the technical and practical concerns of acquiring pigments and using them to create paints, the authors explore how many colorful materials embody connections to landscapes and sacred places. Contributors examine the development of polychromes and their juxtaposition with black-on-white vessels, document how color was used in rock paintings and architecture, and consider the inherent properties of materials, arguing that shell, minerals, and stone were valued not only for color but for other visual properties as well. The book concludes by considering the technological, economic, social, and ideological factors at play in color selection and demonstrates the significant role color played in aesthetic choices.

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"A fascinating book by highly qualified authors."

—**Wesley Bernardini**,
professor of sociology
and anthropology at the
University of Redlands

"This volume could not have had better editors and authors. The discussions of color's multidimensionality, embodiment, animation, and nexus with history are fascinating, and I suspect that readers will adopt similar approaches with their own research."

—**Will G. Russell**, historic
preservation specialist,
Arizona Department of
Transportation





Color in the Ancestral Pueblo Southwest

Marit K. Munson and Kelley Hays-Gilpin, Eds. 2020. [The University of Utah Press](https://www.utah.edu/press/). xii+153 pp., 44 figures, 4 tables, references, index. \$50.00 (Hardback), \$40 (eBook).

Reviewed by Dr. Corin C.O. Pursell, Gardener.

Over fifteen years ago, while engaged in a quest (or more formally a Master's Thesis) to make myself into a regional expert in color in the prehistoric Southeastern United States, I asked the authoritative Mesoamericanist Dr. Don Rice for advice on finding color literature in North American archaeology. He paused thoughtfully before answering, "Look to the Southwest," he intoned, dismissing his own region as a resource. "The only good work I've seen is there." In 2020, I might give the same advice to a young archaeologist and might hand them this book. Co-editors Marit K. Munson and Kelley Hays-Gilpin have put together a surprisingly concise and complete edited volume on the subject. "Edited volume" makes it sound like something other than it is, so it should be stated clearly that there are only three other authors (Jill E. Neitzel, Polly Schaafsma, and David E. Witt) and more than half the book is written by the editors themselves.

There are six topical chapters, plus an introduction on studying color and a summarizing conclusion that unites the various chapters into a few complete statements about each period and area. The work is transparently aimed at the Puebloan and Southwestern archaeological communities and will shortly become a required addition to a scholarly library on that subject. Although not the overt target audience, the work may also appeal to indigenous peoples of the region. Outside of the region the work is of interest mostly to sensory archaeologists and the curious, although it does present a good example of how to tightly cover a topic in an edited volume. The book is also physically appealing, dense and solid despite its compact size, with a lovely hard cover and many rich color images of the subject material (crucial in a work on color). Utah Press has done a good job as well, and "Color" halfway qualifies as a coffee table book.

The introductory material on color (Munson) is a much-needed summary of anthropological and archaeological approaches, including the impact of the Munsell and its connection to the Berlin and Kay evolutionary paradigm – as well as its deserved criticisms. There is a section on the biology of color perception and a historical review, perhaps somewhat overemphasizing art historical and technical perspectives from Europe. Yet this allows the authors to explore a critical problem of imposing European understandings of color onto the native sensory past. Next, the author moves into discussing culturally-specific examples that shed light on studying color, including the famous Hanunóo example, but more directly relevant cases such as the less-hue-based Maya or the color-as-a-process Zuni peoples. That material effectively undermines simple Munsell-type, European color understandings. Finally the author carefully threads the difficult theoretical needle of relying overmuch on direct historical analogies, such as claiming the 20th century Zuni and 13th

century Chaco Canyon have the exact same unchanging color system, or relying excessively on purportedly universal color codes, such as asserting that red always means blood. Many archaeologists make such mistakes. Munson has here laid out the biggest pitfalls of studying color, and the tone of the volume is established.

Chapter 1 (Munson) is a review of the ethnographic literature on color symbolism, colors and directions, color use, and colored materials in the region. Combined with the introduction, this correctly positions the reader to understand color for the Pueblo in its own cultural context. There are some especially interesting details on the manufacture of color and color as a prayer itself. Chapter 2 (Munson) is addressed to pigments, paints, and paint tools archaeologically, acting as an encyclopedic reference of all known examples from known contexts and major sites in the area. Chapter 3 (Hays-Gilpin and Neitzel) takes on pottery. Chromatic pottery is too large a topic to summarize like Chapter 2, so instead the chapter is a review of the technical approaches to producing colored ceramics (slips, firing, pigments), a history of pottery studies in the region, and explanations of the well-known polychromes. Chapter 4 (Schaafsma) is intended to cover wall art in homes and circular kiva buildings, describing techniques, variations through time and space, color sources, and one of the book's longest passages on meaning. Chapter 5 (Schaafsma) does exactly the same for rock art. Chapter 6 (Neitzel and Witt) contains discussions of the raw materials, production, decoration, and deposition of colored Puebloan jewelry. The Conclusion (Munson and Hays-Gilpin) summarizes by period and area, comparing uses and meanings of color in different media, and ends with commentary on meaning and ways to move forward.

I have little to complain about in this work, which I enjoyed and would recommend, even to those who merely want a cool archaeology book to read. This book is more or less a checklist of everything you could want in a volume on the subject, aided dramatically by the excellent preservation of archaeological color unique to the arid Southwest. Therein lies my only substantive critique. Excepting perhaps Schaafsma, the authors are reluctant to engage with meaning. Some intriguing comments about the transformational power of color and the fact that these pots had a life of their own (Chapter 3), for example, are simply mentioned rather than explored. These authors have context, chronology, access, ethnography, and comparative material across multiple media with outstanding preservation. You could hardly have a better dataset. The aversion to meaning starts to become unsettling—if this is not enough information, what is? Instead of leaving this as a criticism, however, I will end by elevating this as a positive. Writing adequately about meaning would have swollen this book to many times its current size. Instead, Munson and Hays-Gilpin have briefly given their region all the tools needed to go beyond. Later researchers with more specific datasets and even richer, more detailed context could take this framework and give the archaeological community thickly layered worlds of ancient color. This work doesn't quite do that, but it makes the space for doing that.