Élodie Dupey García y María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual (eds.), *Painting the Skin: Pigments on Bodies and Codices in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018.

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We are in the midst of an exciting moment in the study of Mesoamerican color technologies. Every month brings new reports on the materiality of individual works of art, as well as increasingly nuanced studies of Mesoamerican words and ideas about color. The present volume is a welcome addition to this new generation of color studies, striking a balance between presenting new data and offering summative reflections on the developing picture of Mesoamerican practice. What emerges is an impression of Mesoamerican color as an exceptionally rich and multifaceted field of expression. As the authors in this volume sustain, color cannot be disentangled from a larger sensory universe: It necessarily involves smell, taste, and touch as well as sight. Luster, luminosity, brilliance, and texture matter as much as hue, shifting with different qualities of light. The materials from which colors were prepared also had medicinal and symbolic properties, and artistic and cosmetic uses of color were always connected to these other kinds of meanings. At the same time, Mesoamerican practices of conceptualizing and naming color were full of rich symbolism, inextricable from other domains of meaning.

The editors take an expansive definition of skin as the organizing theme of this volume, joining together studies of painted bodies and the painted surfaces of books, made out of deer hide or amate fiber (the "skin" of the tree), with an additional contribution about plaster as the skin of a building. This ample definition permits a kind of cross-media comparison that opens up new avenues for analysis and inquiry, and also helps overcome some of the evidentiary hurdles of studying color in Mesoamerica, especially as relates to its most ephemeral expressions. Given the conceptual importance of skin in unifying the volume, it would have been helpful to read more about how Mesoamericans understood skin: I think, for example, of the way that the catalog of body parts in Book 10 of the *Florentine Codex* begins with skin, as if it is understood as an exceptional kind of interface between the body and the world. If skin can be defined as "any surface that envelops a body" (p. 17), what does that tell us about how bodies are understood in Mesoamerican thought? The role of skin in constituting an *ixiptla* might also merit further consideration, as would the kinds of processing required to turn skins, whether animal or vegetal, into surfaces for books.

Encompassing a wide geographical and chronological range, including studies of Teotihuacan, Maya, Mixtec, Nahua, and Chichimeca uses of color, the essays in this volume also present a variety of methodological approaches. An international group of historians, conservators, materials scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and art historians have contributed to this volume, and the combination of these different perspectives demonstrates the necessity to bring together interdisciplinary approaches to realize a full understanding of the meanings of color in the Mesoamerican world. Bookended by useful syntheses of color technologies, the volume is divided into two sections, the first focusing on coloring dead and living bodies, and the second on the color of codices.

After a characteristically insightful forward by Stephen Houston, the introduction, by Élodie Dupey García and María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual, ably summarizes the state of the field. The first chapter, "Painting the Skin in Ancient Mesoamerica", by Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual, places what we know about Mesoamerican body colorants into global comparative context. The author provides a number of useful rubrics for analyzing the application of color to bodies, for example, singling out three key properties

that contribute to the prestige of any pigment: provenance, availability, and complexity of processing, while also enjoining us not to neglect other particularities of use and symbolism. Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual also highlights the different kinds of ways that color might be prepared to apply to bodies: as raw or minimally processed materials; as thick pastes mixed with materials like honey, copal, or liquidambar; and as smooth unguents mixed with materials like acacia gum or chia oil. That so many of these materials had additional aromatic or medicinal properties highlights the interconnection of these domains in Mesoamerica.

In "Materiality and Meaning of Medicinal Body Colors in Teotihuacan", María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual, Sélim Natahi, Véronique Darras, and Linda R. Manzanilla Naim present new data from a study of the Teopancazco apartment compound, where pigments were found in a number of contexts, primarily mortuary ones. One especially significant finding is that colors were almost always mixed and combined into preparations with materials including clay, mica, pine resin, chia oil, and other excipients. Through comparisons with colonial documents and practice in other parts of the world, the authors argue for the medicinal properties of a number of the compounds that they encountered, as well as highlighting the importance of aroma, luminosity, and luster. They place particular emphasis on the capacity of colors to heal, noting that colors had "medicinal properties based not only on their constituent components […] but also on their ability to transmit heat or cold to an ailing body in order to counter a temperature that was causing illness" (p. 37). This seems particularly important in the context of how red pigments might be understood as adding solar heat to a cold corpse, a practice also explored in subsequent chapters.

The next two chapters address mortuary treatments in the Maya area. Drawing on an extensive database of burials on the Yucatán peninsula, Vera Tiesler, Kadwin Pérez López, and Patricia Quintana Owen present evidence for the use of red pigment in burials, a practice that endured for over a millennium before almost completely disappearing in the Postclassic period, yet another indication of radical rupture at the moment of the Maya collapse. Corpse reddening was practiced at all levels of society, but significantly, the use of cinnabar was highly correlated with elite status, while

hematite was more sporadically used in lower status burials. There are also suggestions that the pigments were applied in different ways, with hematite sprinkled directly over the body, while cinnabar was applied in more elaborate preparations. The subsequent chapter, "Body Colors and Aromatics in Maya Funerary Rites", by María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual, Cristina Vidal Lorenzo, Patricia Horcajada Campos, and Vera Tiesler, offers even more information about the different kinds of possible compounds. Reconstructing a "science of the intangible" (p. 73), the authors explore how traces of materials such as copal, pine resin, pepper leaves, jasmine, lily, and acacia were found in burial contexts, providing aromas that could help mask the smell of the decaying corpse, but also furthering an analogy between humans and trees, between blood and sap, or *itz*, "the very matter of creation, fertility, and life" (p. 56).

Body paint is the subject of the following two chapters. Virginia Miller thoroughly examines representations of body adornment at Chichen Itza, concluding that "the only consistent aspect of the body color and decoration at Chichen Itza is the lack of consistency" (p. 76). This finding is significant because it suggests the variable and situational nature of corporeal decoration, a point reinforced by the multiple repaintings of chacmool sculptures at the site, where color might change drastically from one iteration to the next. In "The Yellow Women: Naked Skin, Everyday Cosmetics, and Ritual Body Painting in Postclassic Nahua Society", Élodie Dupey García examines how and why the bodies of Nahua women were represented as yellow in color, considering both parallels with deities of maize and sustenance and the application of yellow cosmetics. As was the case in the Maya burials analyzed by Tiesler and colleagues in Chapter 3, Dupey García observes significant class differences in the use of colored materials, here inflected with a moralizing valence: virtuous elite women colored their bodies with a yellow-colored clay (perhaps a lake pigment) called *tecozahuitl*, while prostitutes used a greasy, insect-derived unguent called *axin*. Rounding out the section, Olivia Kindl combs through historical sources and modern ethnographic practice to uncover the significance of red pigments for Chichimeca groups in "The Colors of the Desert: Ritual and Aesthetic Uses of Pigments and Colorants by the Guachichil of Northern Mexico".

The second half of the book addresses painting on Mesoamerican codices. In their introductory essay, Davide Domenici, Costanza Miliani, David Buti, Brunetto Giovanni Brunetti, and Antonio Sgamellotti survey the non-invasive analytical techniques used to study codices and provide an overview of the pigments used in them, with a particular focus on the materials of the *Codex Cospi, the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, and the *Codex Madrid*. They observe regional patterns in the use of materials, most notably a strong divide between the restricted, largely mineral-based colors of the Maya codex tradition and the Central Mexican and Oaxacan traditions that make more extensive use of plant-based pigments. Yet, as they stress, the material divisions between the two groups are not absolute, hinting at moments of contact and interaction between traditions. Significantly, they observe that "Available data suggest that while central Mexican and Mixtec scribes were willing to accept the innovative Maya blue from the south, Maya scribes were much less ready to accept central Mexican technologies" (p. 140). This was the case in the *Codex Madrid*, where the almanacs reveal a deep knowledge of Central Mexican manuscript traditions, but the colors show no signs of Central Mexican influence. Chapter 10, by Fabien Pottier, Anne Michelin, Anne Genachte-Le Bail, Aurélie Tournié, Christine Andraud, Fabrice Goubard, Aymeric Histace, and Bertrand Lavédrine, offers a preliminary report on the colors of the *Codex Borbonicus*, demonstrating its contiguity with Central Mexican painting tradition. The authors conclude: "we have detected no European influence in the codex materials, apart from the Spanish writings" (p. 172). Observing at least two different hands at work in the codex and subtle changes in materials between different sections, as well as instances of repainting, this study suggests that further analysis of the *Codex Borbonicus* may continue to yield interesting results.

In addition to the non-destructive chemical analyses stressed in Chapters 8 and 10, the chapters present a range of other approaches to the study of manuscript color. Tatiana Falcón's experimental replication of the *Codex Columbino*, based on recipes in the *Florentine Codex* and in Francisco Hernández' *Historia natural de la Nueva España,* yields deeper insight into the means of producing Mesoamerican codices, while simultaneously highlighting continuities with textile dyeing techniques still practiced by Indigenous artists today. In "Convergence and Difference in the Borgia Group

Chromatic Palettes", Élodie Dupey García and María Isabel Álvarez Icaza Longoria stress the importance of direct observation, noting that the eye can see nuances difficult to document with present tools. Their account of subtle changes in color within the Borgia group highlights the material diversity in this group of stylistically similar documents, as well as the rich color vocabulary within individual books.

Dupey García's summative reflection, "Making and Using Colors in the Manufacture of Nahua Codices: Aesthetic Standards, Symbolic Purposes", combines textual sources with the kinds of material evidence stressed throughout this volume, to great effect. For example, she proposes that conflicting descriptions of yellow and Maya blue pigments in the historical sources relate to their nature as lake pigments composed of organic colorants precipitated onto a clay substrate. One of the most interesting questions that she raises is why Central Mexican codices developed a tradition of painting with colors derived from flowers, most of them not native to the Valley of Mexico, when locally available minerals like hematite and calcite were so extensively used in architectural painting. In addition to producing brilliant colors and resonating with Mesoamerican tropes of flowery speech (cf. Domenici 2016), the exotic nature of these pigments related them to other charismatic colored materials including precious stones, shells, and feathers, as well as dyed textiles, all of which entered the Aztec capital from the provinces. To this, I would only add that the tradition of painting with lake pigments is documented in Maya and Zapotec wall painting as early as the fourth or fifth century CE, raising interesting possibilities about a history of cross-media transfer.

The book concludes with Franco Rossi's excellent study of Maya plaster, which focuses attention on the underappreciated centrality of limestone to Mesoamerican culture. Highlighting the medicinal properties of lime as well as the use of lime in preparing plaster, paper, and tortillas, Rossi makes a compelling case for the imbrication of many of the different kinds of materials brought together in this volume. Through a careful examination of the multivalence of the Maya term *sak*, which means white, artificial, human made, clear, brilliant, and bright, Rossi explores the multiple domains of resonance for coloristic and technological processes in the Mesoamerican world.

The studies collected in this volume provide a valuable snapshot of a moment in a burgeoning field of inquiry and will be of interest to scholars of Mesoamerican color in its many aspects. But as a snapshot of a field still in development, they also allow us to look forward to the ways in which our understanding will continue to grow with the presentation of still more data, and also as the questions expand to include murals, feathers, stone mosaics, textiles, and other media that conjoin color and material in significant ways. This book paves the way for many future studies.

REFERENCES

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