The ancient industry of imperial purple dyeing was eradicated during the sack of Constantinople in 1453 and its secrets, purposefully kept mysterious, were lost with it. This booklet attempts a practical explanation of the micro-biological processes that could transform, as if by magic, the liquid from marine molluscs into an insoluble purple pigment. The methodology is accompanied by ancient and medieval references to the dye which was used to clothe Alexander the Great, Roman emperors and Christian rulers.

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Tyrian purple may first have been used by the ancient Phoenicians as early as BC. The dye was greatly prized in antiquity because the colour did not easily fade, but instead became brighter with weathering and sunlight. Its significance is such that the name Phoenicia means 'land of purple.'. The first historical record of the dye is in texts from Ugarit and Hittite sources, which indicate that the manufacture of Tyrian purple began in the 14th century BCE in the eastern Mediterranean. Cloth dyed with Tyrian purple was a hugely successful export and brought the Phoenicians fame throughout the ancient world.

Category Archives: Research into historic dyes .. John Edmonds' book: Tyrian or Imperial Purple Dye: The Mystery of Imperial Purple Dye.

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