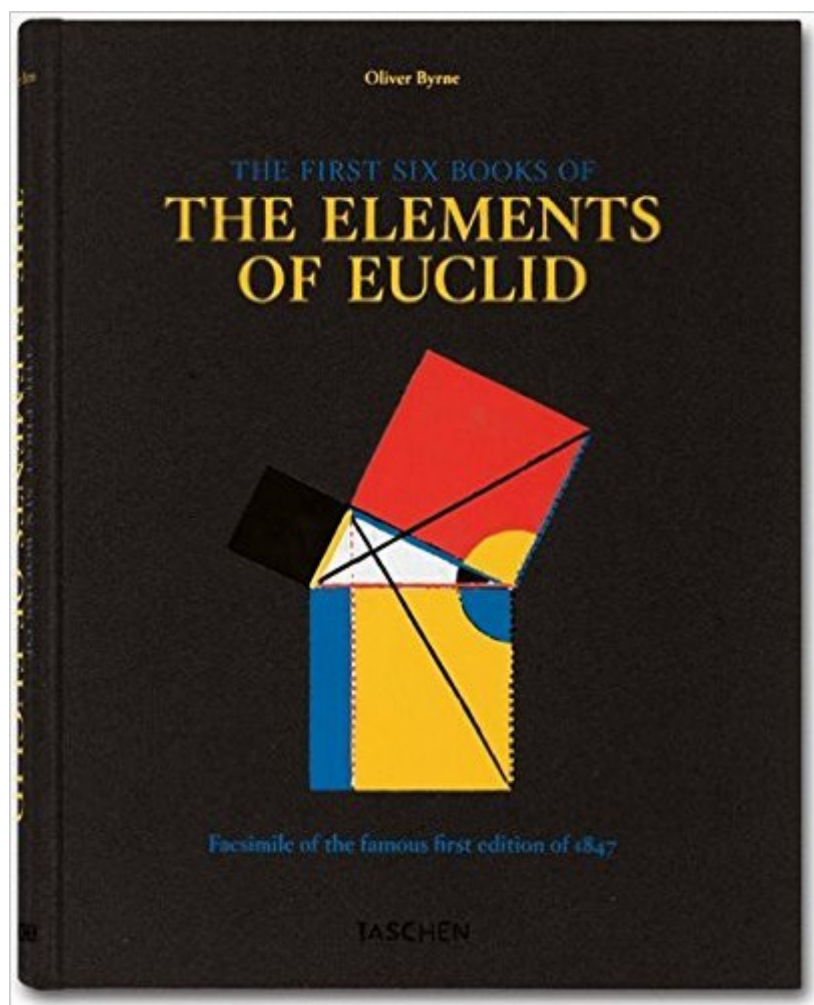


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Oliver Byrne: The First Six Books Of The Elements Of Euclid



Synopsis

Primary elements: Euclid in living color Nearly a century before Mondrian made geometrical red, yellow, and blue lines famous, 19th century mathematician Oliver Byrne employed the color scheme for the figures and diagrams in his most unusual 1847 edition of Euclid's Elements. The author makes it clear in his subtitle that this is a didactic measure intended to distinguish his edition from all others: "The Elements of Euclid in which coloured diagrams and symbols are used instead of letters for the greater ease of learners." As Surveyor of Her Majesty's Settlements in the Falkland Islands, Byrne had already published mathematical and engineering works previous to 1847, but never anything like his edition on Euclid. This remarkable example of Victorian printing has been described as one of the oddest and most beautiful books of the 19th century. Each proposition is set in Caslon italic, with a four-line initial, while the rest of the page is a unique riot of red, yellow, and blue. On some pages, letters and numbers only are printed in color, sprinkled over the pages like tiny wild flowers and demanding the most meticulous alignment of the different color plates for printing. Elsewhere, solid squares, triangles, and circles are printed in bright colors, expressing a verve not seen again on the pages of a book until the era of Dufy, Matisse, and Derain. Text in English, French, and German

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

BYRNE'S EUCLID Oliver Byrne's 1847 printing of Euclid's Elements, in which letters and symbols are replaced with yellow, red, blue, and black diagrams, was a tremendous technical printing feat in the mid 19th century, and remains the most unique Elements ever printed. Instead of "triangle ABC is equal to triangle ACD," the triangles are drawn out, in identifying colors, with an equals sign

between. Boldly-colored shapes are queerly compared on every page, making the book as surreal as it is playful. Byrne took one of the most important works of Western thought and made a book, a physical book, as unique and memorable as its intellectual content. Edward Tufte's effusive praise for the work is well-deserved. TASCHEN EDITION This reprinting, for the first time in 160 years (!), is a remarkable page for page copy of the original. The corrigenda page and matching errors in the text are preserved - as they of course should be - and the last page even has the "Chiswick: printed by C. Whittingham." type at the bottom. The originals tend to be foxed and browned, but Taschen found a copy in incredible condition to emulate (in collaboration with SF-based bookseller John Windle), and cleaned the digital scans to make a fantastically clean reprint. The ink and paper colors are near-perfectly replicated. The only noticeable difference between this and an 1847 original is the missing thickness of the diagrams. They look thick and painted in the original, while they are flat and printed in the Taschen edition - they're no longer tactile. All in all, though, mark me down as very impressed.

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