chapter on 'Medieval monsters', for instance, we are entering the mind of a churchman who contemplates the carving of a mermaid in his place of worship, seeing her through his eyes and sharing his arousal, guilt and unease over watching the overt sexual depiction of a female (upper) body. In Chapter 2, 'New world, new wonders', we accompany a ship's mate out in the ocean as he witnesses his crew members' 'sighting' of a mermaid (without seeing her himself). As a reviewer, I am not quite sure what to make of it; as a reader, letting the imagination go up a notch by this novel-like narrative felt almost like a guilty pleasure.

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Alexander Jones and Liba Taub (eds.), The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 1, Ancient Science

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Back in 2002, Cambridge University Press launched a new book series titled The Cambridge History of Science. Its aim was truly ambitious: to offer, in eight volumes, an authoritative, up-to-date account of science from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to the twentieth century. The book under review, although only recently published, is, in fact, the first volume of this formidable enterprise.

The substantial (around 650 pages) *Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 1, *Ancient Science* comprises a brief, yet informative, introduction by the editors (A. Jones and L. Taub), thirty papers by leading experts divided into five parts based on the culture on which they focus, and a helpful index. Part I (four chapters) deals with Mesopotamia (F. Rochberg, 'Science and ancient Mesopotamia'; M.J. Geller, 'Babylonian medicine as a discipline'; J. Høyrup, 'Mesopotamian mathematics'; and J.M. Steele, 'Babylonian and Assyrian astral science'). Part II (four chapters) places emphasis on ancient Egypt (A. Imhausen, 'The cultural context of (mathematical) experts in ancient Egypt'; J. Nunn, 'Egyptian medicine'; R. Krauss, 'Egyptian calendars and astronomy'; and J. Høyrup, 'Egyptian mathematics'). In Part III (sixteen chapters), Greek science gets the lion's share (D.W. Graham, 'Physical and cosmological thought before Aristotle'; A. Falcon, 'Aristotle: an overview'; E. Lewis, 'Aristotle's physical theory'; J.G. Lennox, 'Aristotle and the origins of zoology'; L. Totelin, 'Botany'; L. Taub, 'Science after Aristotle: Hellenistic and Roman science'; M. Tuominen, 'Late antiquity: science in the philosophical schools'; P. van der Eijk, 'Medicine in early and classical Greece'; V. Nutton, 'Hellenistic and Roman medicine'; N. Sidoli, 'Greek mathematics'; A. Jones, 'Greco-Roman astronomy and astrology'; K. Geus, 'Greek and Greco-Roman geography'; A.M. Smith, 'Greek optics'; A. Barker, 'Harmonics'; S. Cuomo, 'Greek mechanics'; and C. Viano, 'Greco-Egyptian alchemy'). Part IV (three chapters) examines the case of India (K. Plofker, 'Astronomy and astrology in India'; C. Montelle, 'Mathematics in early India (1000 BCE–1000 CE)'; and P.A. Maas, 'Indian medicine and Ayurveda'). And finally, Part

V (three chapters) explores ancient Chinese science (K. Chemla, 'Mathematical knowledge and practices from early imperial China until the Tang Dynasty'; V. Lo, 'Medicine and healing in Han China'; and C. Cullen, 'Chinese astronomy in the early imperial age: a brief outline'). The majority of the contributions mentioned above offer surveys of three particular fields: astral, mathematical and medical sciences. The few remaining chapters attempt to shed light on usually neglected topics, such as geography, zoology, botany and alchemy. Regarding the volume's structure, a point of concern is that no individual or collective bibliography is provided. Certainly, this is not a deal breaker. The interested reader could resort to the available footnotes; nevertheless, a bibliography section would have been handy.

One of the major challenges that contemporary historians face when called upon to teach an introductory course on ancient science is the absence of a collective, updated and authoritative work of reference. It is worth noting that this has not always been the case, as general histories of ancient science had been in wide circulation until the first half of the previous century. However, the historical and historiographical developments that followed, together with the sweeping criticism of post-structural theory, made the idea of a unified grand narrative of all fields and cultural backgrounds of ancient science seem impossible. Thus a question emerges: does *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 1, *Ancient Science* offer the unified narrative that historians of science are looking for?

On the one hand, the answer to this question is probably negative. By virtue of being an edited volume comprising numerous individual chapters that were meant to be self-standing, the book under review could not offer a unified narrative – especially if it is taken into consideration that its editors consciously did not attempt to impose a singular approach on all authors. Furthermore, it includes only those scientific traditions that have left substantial textual evidence. Perhaps the greatest challenge in similar projects stems from applying the term 'science' to the ancients' attempts to understand, control and predict nature. As all contributors would agree, there is no equivalent of modern science in antiquity. The editors of this volume – two well-recognized scholars of our times – acknowledge this complication, but still employ the term, describing it as 'a convenient and useful anachronism' without further justification. A more detailed examination of the criteria on which the choice of what constitutes an 'ancient scientific discipline' (p. 2) is based could be beneficial to the reader. Otherwise, I am afraid that the old Meno puzzle seems to be hanging over our heads.

On the other hand, the criticism above is perhaps somewhat unfair, given the enormous amount of work that such an enterprise would require. Even if *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 1, *Ancient Science* does not offer *the* grand, complete narrative of the history of ancient science (assuming that such a project is even possible), it certainly constitutes the best available step in this direction. The contributors, all leading experts in their respective fields, successfully reveal the diversity of goals, contexts and accomplishments in the study of nature in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and India. In addition, the volume editors have managed to efficiently organize the available material compellingly, thus producing an updated narrative, which is comprehensible to non-specialists.

In conclusion, the book under review provides a convincing and comprehensible introduction to the history of ancient science. The variety of historical approaches and historiographical tools employed by each author allows the interested reader to appreciate the field's richness and diversity. In this sense, I welcome the publication of *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 1, *Ancient Science*, and I have no hesitation in recommending it. In fact, I propose to use it as a work of reference for my courses on ancient science in the coming year.

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