

**MR1060315 (92a:01014) 01A16****Clagett, Marshall (1-IASP)****★Ancient Egyptian science. Vol. 1.**

Knowledge and order. Tome 1, 2.

Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 184.

*American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA, 1989. Tome 1: xvi+406 pp.; Tome 2: pp. 407–863. \$60.00. ISBN 0-87169-184-1*

This double volume is the first of several planned volumes presenting the general outline and single branches of Egyptian science in the context of Egyptian culture and thought. The first volume focuses on two essential features of this context: (I) the development of writing, and the character of scribal knowledge and culture; (II) cosmogonic and cosmological (we might say theological) thought. In both sections, extensive general introductions are followed by a number of original documents, some of them translated in extenso and others in excerpt. Both the introductions and the documents are provided with copious notes on different existing interpretations and on the choices made in the translation, as well as references to related documents and discussion of implications and conclusions to be drawn. All translations are made by the author, with specified regard to existing translations into modern languages. A third section includes a chapter on chronology and indices of Egyptian words and of names and subjects, together with a bibliography and 125 pages of illustrations (often essential and always informative).

Among the documents belonging to Section (I) is (in complete translation) the only one which would have been included in a more traditional collection of sources for the history of science or mathematics: The Palermo stone, a set of annals composed during the Fifth Dynasty (c. 25th century B.C.), in which the beginnings of calendaric counting can be traced, and in which the observations of the Nile height at maximal yearly flood are listed. (A closer discussion of what the author reads as a rudimentary place value system in certain metrological notations is postponed to Volume 2). In addition, Section (I) brings Old Kingdom epitaphs of high officials (administrators, royal architect, royal physician) and some of the texts which were used in the Middle Kingdom scribal school to inculcate students with professional pride.

Among the documents illustrating Section (II) are the “Pyramid” and “Coffin” texts in excerpt (Old and Old through Middle Kingdom, respectively), excerpts from the (New Kingdom and later) Book of the Dead and a number of corresponding texts describing the voyage through the Netherworld, a sample of hymns, a dream-book, and the Harris magical papyrus.

Different as this bountiful first volume is from *Archimedes in the Middle Ages*, its scope and its scholarly quality promises the series to become a worthy successor.

Reviewed by *Jens Høyrup*