Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Mystery of Numbers*. x + 314 pp., illus., bibl., index. New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. $22.
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The book under review is a recast of Franz Carl Endres's *Das Mysterium der Zahl*. An introduction treats »Numbers and Number Systems«; »The Heritage of the Pythagoreans«; »Gnosis and Cabala«; »Islamic Mysticism«; »Medieval and Baroque Number Symbolism«; »Superstitions«; and »Number Games and Magic Squares«. The bulk of the book is a »Little Dictionary of Numbers«, which for each single number of interest tells its uses in magic, in religious or mystical numerology, or as a topos or round number. All numbers between 1 and 25 are listed, after which the list becomes gradually less dense, ending with 666, 1000, 1001 and 10,000. Islamic, Persian, Indian and Chinese cultures provide a large proportion of the examples, which in principle are connected to specific cultures. The list is largely descriptive; even though the preface expresses the hope that the reader will understand why the traffic light has three phases (p. vii), all that is told about the topic (p. 83) is that it is listed in a publication dealing with ternary phenomena in American folklore.

Even a descriptive dictionary might have been useful for historians of science as well as students of literature, had it not been for severe shortcomings. The rare references to sources for the information are unspecific. This characteristic is shared by many dictionaries, and need not imply that the information itself is unreliable even though it is mostly unverifiable and its representativity unassessible. However, much of what *can* be checked turns out to be misleading (space only allows select examples). »Classical antiquity« turns out to encompass third millennium Mesopotamia and second millennium Egypt (p. 219). $144{,}000 = 2 \cdot 60^3$ is believed to represent an enhanced 12 in the sexagesimal system instead of an enhanced 2 or an enhanced $60^3$ (p. 197), and $36{,}000 = 10 \cdot 60^2$ an enhanced 36 instead of 10 (p. 243). Ideas about astronomy are vague; it seems to be presupposed that the division of the zodiac is a fact of nature (p. 192), as is the division of the circle into 360° (p. 243, cf. p. 258); the polar night is believed to last nine months (p. 176), and the disappearance of the Pleiades not to depend on latitude (p. 245); the Metonic cycle is misunderstood (p. 225), and the Maya years of 360 and 365 days are mixed up (p. 206). It is thus fitting that astronomy is understood as astrology (p. 243)—likewise, »psychology« always means Jungian speculation (*passim*), and the gauge of mathematical importance is Nicomachean (e.g., p. 213).

Repeatedly, information is taken from mistaken rumour or faulty memory; thus it is told that the cyclop devours all twelve of Odysseus's companions (p. 205); that al-Khwārizmī teaches the Hindu numeral in his book on *Al-Jabr* (p. 6); and that Aristotle determined the number of categories numerologically (p. 182).

Too often, wholly unspecific categories like »early times« (p. 106) and »the earliest human beings« (p. 86) occur, and too often the exposition itself verges toward numerology. Even though the illustrations are black and white, the book is best characterized as a coffee table book.

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