Book note:

Ancient Near East


Today's students of science probably will be surprised to learn that the "Pythagorean Theorem" predates Pythagoras by nearly a millennium and that complex mathematical problem solving, astronomical calculations, and detailed surgical experiments have been practiced for over four thousand years. In his two wonderfully organized volumes devoted to ancient sciences, Pichot makes available the accumulated scientific tradition of the ancients. The two volumes provide concise synopses of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Aegean advancements in agriculture, transportation, metallurgy, writing, mathematics, metrology, cosmology, astronomy, and medicine. Their consistent format makes them handy reference tools as do their numerous maps, charts, and diagrams. Moreover, Pichot explains the often complex linguistic, mathematical, and astronomical concepts in tandem with translations of the ancient texts.

On a critical note, one wonders why musicology appears only in the second volume devoted to the Aegean world, when the discovery and translation of a Hurrian musical score at Ugarit demonstrates that musicology is far more ancient. Though admittedly Ugarit falls outside of Mesopotamia, the Hurrians do not, and therefore some mention could have been made in a footnote. One also questions why, given their pocket-size, the volumes were not published as one. The separation implies an Aegean independence from Egyptian and Mesopotamian scientific thought that most scholars, especially in recent years, have come to question. Despite these minor criticisms, Pichot's work restores to the ancients of the Mediterranean world a scientific sophistication that all too often goes unrecognized today despite the modern academic emphasis on the sciences.

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AKKADIAN GRAMMAR. By Arthur Ugnad.

Some thirty years ago, when I studied Akkadian with Prof. Hoffner, we utilized a monograph translation of Ugnad-Matouš, Grammatik des Akkadischen, which Hoffner had prepared to facilitate the teaching of the language. In the subsequent decades I continued to utilize this translation for my own students in Akkadian. Hoffner's decision to make his useful translation available to a wider audience is most welcome.

The Ugnad-Matouš Akkadian Grammar, though not the latest word on the subject, retains its introductory value. Its succinct grammatical sketches, comprehensive paradigms, and otherwise concise introduction to the language have made it a successful tool for over a half-century. Hoffner chose not to provide a six-revised edition, but only to add a few notes and minor updates to the bibliography, thereby retaining the text of the fifth edition. Although there now exists a number of introductory Akkadian grammars in English (e.g., D. Marcus, Manual of Akkadian, [1978]; K. Riemschneider, An Akkadian Grammar, translated by J. F. Sheehan [1976]; R. Caplice, Introduction to Akkadian [1988]), this translation of Ugnad-Matouš should become the required text for many introductory courses in Akkadian, at least for North America. The reasonably priced paperback edition should add to its popularity.

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The Ur III period lasted just over a century yet it produced the largest corpus of cuneiform