

## RESEÑAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS/BOOK REVIEWS

AMANDA–ALICE MARAVELIA, *Les Astres dans les Textes Religieux en Égypte Antique et dans les Hymnes Orphiques*. BAR International Series 1527. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2006, pp. xiv + 638; 72 figures and tables. Indices, including Egyptian terms. In French, with summaries in English, Greek and German. ISBN 1841719641. £70.00.

Amanda–Alice Maravelia's new volume in the BAR series is an ambitious and impressive archaeoastronomical comparison of celestial ideas in Egyptian religious thought with the Orphic Hymns from ancient Greece. Maravelia is uniquely poised to make this contribution to Egyptology: holding two doctorates, one in Egyptology and one in astronomy, the author has combined her interests into a readable and edifying look at the evolution of Egyptian astronomical thought and its "unique and fertile" synergy with archaeology. This work is the publication of her Ph.D. thesis (in Egyptology) for the University of Limoges. One of the subfields of post-processual archaeology, exemplified by Maravelia, is cognitive archaeology: not only to understand the material culture of the ancients, but also to understand what they perceived as their taxonomy of the world around them. In essence, how did they think? Astronomy is one of the best starting points in this sense. How did the ancients view the stars, what significance did they assign them based on what they saw, and how did this impact their lives?

The work is divided into six chapters, not including the preface (written by Dr. Galina Bolova), the introduction, and the epilogue: an introduction to Egyptology (chapter 1); an introduction to archaeoastronomy (chapter 2); a review of the conception of stars in Egyptian religious texts (chapter 3); a review of the conception of stars in the Hellenic Orphic Hymns (chapter 4); a philosophical comparison with modern cosmological and astronomical ideas (chapter 5); and a conclusion (chapter 6). In addition to the tables embedded within the text, there are 23 pages of tables at the end (including diagrams of the major constellations, as discussed in the texts), followed by figure and photo credits, eight indices, a list of abbreviations, and an extensive bibliography (divided between two sections: Egyptological and archaeological; and astronomical, archaeoastronomical, scientific, Hellenic, and general). Finally, the end of the volume contains abstracts of the work in French, English, Greek, and German. A minor fault may be found in the layout, especially regarding the placement of the tables. For instance, Table III.1 begins in the middle of a paragraph, leaving the reader to flip thirty pages ahead to find the continuation of the sentence. Table III.2 is placed mid-word, even.

The book is lavishly illustrated, including color illustrations on the cover and the frontispiece. High-quality grayscale images are found throughout. The charts complement the photos, making the available data easy to read and to reference. The charts could possibly be simplified, however; often the charts are many pages long

and can veer toward unwieldy.

Some aspects of the book are non-traditional: for instance, the preface opens with a photo of the author in her office, and the text begins with quotes from Umberto Eco and William Shakespeare. These touches help to give what could otherwise be a daunting topic a sense of the author's personality.

Traveling through the book, chapter one provides an Egyptological background to the study of astronomy, with a literature review covering major past treatments of Egyptian astronomical thought (or *pensée cosmovisionelle*, as she prefers, to allow for a differentiation between ancient, pre-scientific perspectives and modern inquiry). She follows this with an overview of her methodology, which includes pinpointing the precise astronomical elements in ancient Egyptian, performing a statistical analysis of these elements, studying their frequency, tracing the changes over time, and comparing them with the Orphic Hymns and modern ideas.

Chapter two continues this introduction, but shifts toward the mechanics of astronomy. This section is very heavy with mathematical formulae, and some readers may feel bogged down with the technical presentation of the material. Chapter three is an application of these mechanics, covering the Egyptian views of and references to astronomy. Given the crucial role that astronomy played in the Egyptian worldview, especially in their conception of the afterlife, Maravelia is certainly not the first to review the evidence. (This is by her own admission. Maravelia's original idea, to examine Egyptian texts both religious and profane, was quickly abandoned in favor a more concise and finite project focusing primarily on the Pyramid and Coffin Texts. She notes that her original thesis bore the unwieldy title of *L'Évolution de la Pensée Astronomique et Cosmologique dans l'Égypte Pharaonique: Recherches Comparatives d'après/entre les Divers Textes Religieux (et Profanes) Égyptiens, dès 2800 jusqu'à 1000 avant notre Ère, et les Hymnes Orphiques.*)

Maravelia systematically goes through the references to astronomy, describing the different elements (stars, sun, moon, and the planets) as recorded in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, treated separately. The Book of the Dead she treats briefly in only two pages; the majority of the information gleaned from the BD was already covered in the PT and CT and she hopes to present the new information in a future volume. Maravelia at this point also inquires into the astronomical orientation of the pyramids, offering a critique of several prominent theories (most particularly, she is quite critical of Spence's theories, advanced in the journal *Nature*<sup>1</sup>). A comparatively short section toward the end of the chapter covers the astronomical references in profane texts,

<sup>1</sup> Spence, K. "Ancient Egyptian Chronology and the Astronomical Orientation of the Pyramids," *Nature* vol. 408 (2000): 320-324 and Spence, K. "Ancient Chronology: Spence replies," *Nature* vol. 412 (2001): 699-700.

including the Shipwrecked Sailor, Sinuhe, and love songs.

Chapter four marks a shifting of gears from the earlier three chapters, as does chapter five (on modern ideas). While many readers will likely find their questions answered in chapters one through three, these later chapters are essential to the author's goal of providing a comparison and complement to the Egyptian data. Chapter four is an examination of the Orphic Hymns, the Greek poems focusing on the celebration of Orpheus, recorded by at least thirty authors. There are 87 of these so-called hymns, attributed to Orpheus. Dating from at least the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the hymns detail how the Greeks intertwined their theology with their cosmogony. Organizationally, she follows the same structure in this chapter that she followed in the previous chapter (treating the stars, the sun, the moon, and the planets in succession).

While Maravelia's scholarship is sound, one must question the conceit of her volume: is there merit to be found in a comparison between the Egyptian astronomical texts and the Orphic Hymns, which date from entirely different periods and regions? In other words, were the Orphic Hymns influenced by Egyptian celestial thought? The longest chapter, chapter four, is dedicated to answering this question (although the earlier chapters stand on their own as individual studies). Her comparison starts with the heliocentric aspects of the two cosmogonies, comparing the Egyptian Hymn to Re to the Greek Hymn to Helios. She next examines the idea of the cosmic egg, appearing in both Egyptian and Orphic texts (here, despite her earlier caveat, she relies heavily on the Book of the Dead). Finally, she examines the idea of universal law in ancient Egypt (*ma'at*) and ancient Greece (*Anagkē/Eunomia/Dikē*). These comparisons seem more contrived than organically obvious.

Chapter five is a similar examination of modern concepts, focusing in particular on the similarities with the ancient perception and the reconciliation of the two. Finally, chapter six ties the book together with a recapitulation of the material covered throughout the text and suggestions for future research.

The author's fluidity with language may pose a problem for some readers, in particular as she weaves fluently between the French, ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Greek, with Hebrew (some of which is transliterated into the Roman alphabet, some of which is not – none of the Greek sources are transliterated and few are translated) and English. It makes her intended audience all the more clear that she uses these languages interchangeably but devotes a significant amount of time to an explanation of modern astronomy. Although some modern astronomical concepts are essential to the ancient understanding (for instance, the movement of the stars through the sky), this particular reviewer was left wondering why so many pages were dedicated to the complicated mechanics of astronomy (for instance, the Stefan-Boltzmann constant) when these concepts were beyond the understanding of the ancients and thereby perhaps irrelevant to the scope of the work.

This book certainly represents an incredible effort. Does it succeed in its goals? That depends on which goals the reader is most interested in: As an archaeoastronomical work, it achieves what it sets out to achieve, namely outlining and comparing the Egyptian and Orphic attitudes towards the sky. As an overview of Egyptian astronomy, it synthesizes many other works, but other sources may perhaps be more specific and therefore more germane to Egyptologists. (The author herself is aware of this problem. The abstract states that the “comparative study of the Orphics is complete, while [its] analysis of the Egyptian sources is not exhaustive, because other researchers have already worked on this domain with considerable success.”) The largest problem lies in the interpretation and what can be told from the comparative nature of the work. Why is a comparison of ancient Egypt against ancient Greece necessary or revealing? Does tracing the evolution of astronomical thought suggest that ancient Egyptian thought influenced Greek (and thereby modern) thought, or did the different societies come to similar conclusions independently? Either way, what are the implications for furthering our understanding of each society? The author frequently uses the Latin expression *mutatis mutandis*, which she seems to be using to forgive the inherent differences in the two societies and to allow her to make broad comparisons between groups that are not inherently comparable.

What the book does best, in this reader’s opinion, is to whet one’s appetite for the possibilities of archaeoastronomy. This is one of the many areas in which archaeology is burgeoning, and the possibilities of how it can augment our understanding of the ancients is tantalizing. Egyptology as a field is often slow to adopt the theoretical approaches that are yielding amazing results in other areas of the world. Works such as Maravelia’s are important steps forward in how we interpret and analyze the ancient world in order to better understand it.

TRACY MUSACCHIO  
*University of Pennsylvania*

LESTER L. GRABBE, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, Londres, T & T Clark, 2007, xx + 306 pp. ISBN 978-0-567-03254-6. U\$S 32,95.-

Esta nueva contribución, escrita de manera clara y didáctica, aunque destinada no tanto al público no especializado como al académico, presenta un necesario estado de la cuestión de la historiografía contemporánea sobre el “antiguo Israel”. Si tomamos en cuenta el arco de opiniones que conforma la historiografía actual sobre Israel y establecemos en un extremo una posición “maximalista”, que adopta la narrativa bíblica como histórica salvo que se demuestre lo contrario, y una posición “minimalista”, que considera la narrativa bíblica como no histórica hasta que se presenten evidencias de lo contrario, sin dudas Grabbe se inclina hacia esta última opción. Aun así, en una considerable cantidad de puntos el autor prefiere un camino intermedio, lo cual