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Review of: The Zodiac Of Paris: How An Improbable Controversy Over An Ancient Egyptian Artifact Provoked A Modern Debate Between Religion And Science by Jed Z. Buchwald and Diane Greco Josefowicz

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Jed Z. Buchwald; Diane Greco Josefowicz. *The Zodiac of Paris: How an Improbable Controversy over an Ancient Egyptian Artifact Provoked a Modern Debate between Religion and Science.*

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Review by: James Evans

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than metropolitan ones, to manage the crisis and bring order to Cape Town. In the 1920s rabies went “wild,” as all manner of wild animals, large and small, were identified as potential carriers. Significantly, veterinarians and state officials now understood rabies as an endemic disease, rather than an imported one. They also identified the meerkat as the crucial vector: these animals enabled rabies to become endemic, and scientists began to study them. Reclassified as vermin, and a dangerous threat to livestock, wild populations of meerkats were subjected to what Brown labels a state-endorsed “meerkaticide.” In the 1950s and 1960s the rabies situation changed, with the “jackalization” of the disease. Rabid jackals threatened not only wild and domestic dog populations but also animals in game reserves; thus rabies catalyzed conservation discourse. During these years rabies was also frequently politicized, as concerns raised about animal extermination policies mirrored growing anxieties about apartheid policy.

Ultimately, the book succeeds in providing a different perspective on, and making an important contribution to, various aspects of twentieth-century South African medical, scientific, epidemiological, and social history. At times I was left wanting more on African ideas about rabies, which would have provided a contrast to the perspectives of experts and the discourse of print journalism that formed the backbone of Brown’s narrative. This expanded focus would have added depth to the questions pursued here, though the answers to these questions would demand oral history and ethnographic approaches in order to reconstruct a more multilayered account. Nonetheless, *Mad Dogs and Meerkats* is an excellent starting point for further explorations into the non-European history of rabies, which may in time lead to a shifting of dominant paradigms in favor of more inclusive explanations and more nuanced contextualizations.

NEIL PEMBERTON

Jed Z. Buchwald; Diane Greco Josefowicz. *The Zodiac of Paris: How an Improbable Controversy over an Ancient Egyptian Artifact Provoked a Modern Debate between Religion and Science.* vi + 428 pp., illus., bibl., indexes. Princeton, N.J./Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010. \$35 (cloth).

Mounted on the ceiling of a small room in the Egyptian department of the Louvre is the relief sculpture known as the round zodiac of Dendera. Occupying the middle of a square of stone about 2½ meters on a side, it is one of a small

number of zodiacs known to have been engraved on the ceilings of Egyptian temples in the Hellenistic period, and it probably dates from the middle of the first century B.C.E. The oldest known such zodiac, from about 200 B.C.E., rectangular in form, was at the temple of Khnum, but the building was destroyed in the nineteenth century, when the stone was used to build a canal. An image of that zodiac survives because it was sketched by Napoleon’s Egyptologists. Later rectangular zodiacs survive at Dendera and Esna. But the Egyptian zodiac that dominates the imagination has been the round one from Dendera.

The zodiac was a Babylonian invention, adopted by the Greeks as early as the fifth century B.C.E. The appearance of the Greco-Babylonian zodiac, in Egyptianized form, in Egyptian temples and on the interiors of coffin lids is a fascinating aspect of the religious and astronomical syncretism of later antiquity. Today, the Dendera zodiac provides insights into the introduction of the Babylonian zodiac into Egyptian temple culture during the Hellenistic period and the integration of the foreign zodiac with indigenous Egyptian constellations—and perhaps a few clues about the place of astrology in the temples of Greco-Roman Egypt.

But *The Zodiac of Paris* is not a book about the ancient context of the relief or its current interpretation. (For this, good places to start are the publications of Sylvie Cauville, including the massive *Dendera: Les chapelles osiriennes* [5 vols.; Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1997] and the more accessible booklet *Le zodiaque d’Osiris* [Peeters, 1997].) Remarkably, it is a book about the place of ancient Egypt in the European imagination (and especially the French imagination) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—that is to say, during the late Enlightenment, the revolution, the empire, and the early days of the Bourbon restoration.

How the Dendera zodiac wound up in Paris is as wild a tale as anything from an Indiana Jones movie. It was sketched in 1799 by Dominique Vivant Denon, who accompanied Napoleon on his invasion of Egypt. But it was only in 1820 that a wily French publisher and antiquities collector named Sebastien Saulnier conceived the idea of taking the Dendera zodiac to France. (The other zodiacs were too large and formed integral parts of the buildings in which they were located.) The removal was carried out in 1821 by a French engineer named Jean Lelorrain, who secured a vaguely worded firman from the pasha Mehmet Ali granting permission to explore and excavate. Lelorrain used gunpow-

der to blast small holes in the ceiling, through which he passed saws. With a team of laborers cutting nonstop, he managed to extract the zodiac in a matter of weeks and transported it down the Nile, while dodging the agents of his rivals. When the zodiac arrived in Marseilles, Saulnier launched a campaign, ultimately successful, to sell it to Louis XVIII.

The Dendera zodiac had been reproduced and discussed in France for some two decades before its physical arrival. Jed Buchwald and Diane Greco Josefowicz situate this tale in the context of the religious revival that had begun already under Napoleon and continued into the restoration. The anticlericalism of the late Enlightenment and the hostility to religion of some of the revolutionary leaders had given way to a new religious conservatism. Scholarly debates over the antiquity of the Dendera zodiac assumed multiple dimensions. *Savants* used astronomical arguments, based on precession and the assumption that the relief reflected the state of the heavens at the date of its manufacture, to show that the zodiac must be older than the Noachian flood—older than the religious believed the world itself to be. But classical scholars such as Jean-Antoine Letronne disputed the applicability of the astronomical arguments. Prominent roles are played by Arago, Delambre, Biot, Fourier—a *Who's Who* list of French astronomers and physicists from circa 1820—as well as Jean-François Champollion, best known for his role in the decipherment of hieroglyphics. The authors take their title from a *vaudeville* (a satirical play pieced together from songs and sketches) called *Le zodiaque de Paris*, which was performed in Paris in 1822. A copy of the script, with annotations and cancellations by the royal censor, survives in the National Archives. In all, it is an intricately woven story that has much to say about science versus religion, astronomy versus philology, and academic struggles for influence and reputation at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The astronomical dating arguments are not explained as clearly as they might be, and there are some astronomical slips. Something seems to be amiss with Figure 8.5, which is said to show the positions of the sun on the date of Sirius's heliacal rising, for five different epochs and three different values of a visibility parameter known as the *arcus visionis*: the figure seems to imply three different ecliptics, when of course the star Regulus (the period in the backward question mark of Leo) must be always practically on the ecliptic. And in Figure 3.4 the ring of constellations must move counterclockwise, rather than clockwise as the caption

claims. But these are minor complaints about a wonderful book that richly repays close reading. The book is well furnished with engravings as well as color plates, reproducing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century illustrations as well as modern photographs of the temple at Dendera.

JAMES EVANS

John P. Herron. *Science and the Social Good: Nature, Culture, and Community, 1865–1965.* vi + 280 pp., illus., bibl., index. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. £32.50 (cloth).

In *Science and the Social Good* John Herron tackles two challenges inherent in the study of science, society, and nature. One is to negotiate the relations between knowledge and context, reading science as neither the simple expression of social values nor the inspiration of cloistered experts. The other is to examine scientific practices in terms of both the work done by individuals and the support provided by institutions and the wider society. Grounding his approach to these challenges in sympathetic portrayals of three scientists, Herron sketches a century of American intellectual and social history, emphasizing the central role of science and nature.

He begins in the nineteenth century with Clarence King: mountain climber, surveyor of the American West, founding director of the U.S. Geological Survey. Shifting into the twentieth century, he examines Robert Marshall, forester and founder of the Wilderness Society. Finally, he follows Rachel Carson from her formative experience as a biology student at Woods Hole to fame as writer and interpreter of nature to the nation. These scientists varied widely in training, temperament, and influence. But Herron makes effective use of these differences, examining their roles as witnesses to and sometimes participants in transformations in American social and intellectual life. Each of the three also provides a window on the formation of his or her discipline. King exemplified the importance to geology of western expeditions and the influence of ideas about landscape, mountains, and national destiny. Marshall practiced forestry just as this profession was establishing its central role in managing the American landscape. Beginning with her studies at the Marine Biological Laboratory, Carson witnessed biology's transformation into a socially engaged scientific discipline.

King, Marshall, and Carson all lived in interesting times, amidst economic and political systems undergoing transformation. But they agreed that,