Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures

Helaine Selin
Editor

Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures

Third Edition

With 2463 Figures and 138 Tables

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Dedicated to my editorial muses: Kennie Lyman, Annie Kuipers (in memoriam), and Maja de Keijzer. Thank you for helping me along on this most excellent journey.

Introduction to the Third Edition

Almost 20 years have passed since the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine* was published in 1997. What has changed?

The first thing I noticed is that the field has become very global. For many reasons, when I started out in the 1990s, most of the work came from the UK, the USA, and Australia. Now, contributors come from every part of the world. This might in part be because of communications; it was so difficult to find addresses and get in touch in the early years. Now, the whole effort of finding new authors and contacting them and getting back to them takes a week instead of months. And what also seems to be true is that the field has become much more academic. This might be because new sources are available for research (again because of technology) or because the work has become more acceptable for graduate-level research. Although the scholarly journals field has not done so well, access to online journals for scholars who are writing and for those doing research is much easier. When we look over the scholarly literature in the field, it is obvious that so much more work has been done since the first edition. And it has been so much easier to find materials that we were unable to find before. This new edition includes sections on ceramics, architecture, brewing, fishing, cosmology, hydraulic systems, food, and many more entries on ethnobotany, metallurgy, and city and town planning.

This change is also about the impact of social history or history from the bottom up that has affected all areas of historical research. In the beginning, we looked at mathematics and astronomy, the great thinkers and leaders and scholars. The study of everyday life is now legitimately part of the study of history. This is evidenced by the fact that there are new entries on glass, gardens, boats, farming, beads, games, fermentation, beer, quarries, wheelbarrows, cotton and silk, basketry, and jewelry. The study of indigenous knowledge has also become part of scholarship. In fact, agencies like the United Nations are finally realizing that people in Africa, for example, have known for years how to keep water cool and to build their houses in an ecologically sound way. They are including local people in their new initiatives. The *Encyclopaedia* deals very much with indigenous knowledge.

The history of non-Western science no longer feels like a subdiscipline of anthropology; it has become a legitimate discipline on its own. At the same time, it is also true that there is no other reference work that continues to bring all these elements together, so a new edition seemed necessary.

Personal Note from the Editor

Many years ago, I taught African history at a secondary school in Central Africa. A few years before, some of the teachers in the country had designed a syllabus that included pre-European history, since the curriculum, left over from colonial days, did not include any mention of Africa before the Portuguese. After a year of teaching from this revised version, I asked my students what they thought was the most significant moment in African history, and virtually all of them said it was the arrival of David Livingstone.

It may well be that that was the most important moment for Africa, but it shocked me at the time that no one considered any African achievements worth mentioning. Over the years, I came to see that the dominance of the West meant not only that Westerners disparage the rest of the world but also that the rest of the world sees itself as inferior to the West. This book was meant to take one step toward rectifying that, by describing the scientific achievements of those who had been overlooked or undervalued by scholars in both the West and the East. In the years since I began this project (1990), so much has changed, and I think it is pretty safe to say that is no longer the case.

The encyclopedia provides a view into how people describe and perceive and order their world. My hope, and that of the advisors and contributors to the project, is that it will expand the horizons of scholars, teachers, and students by illustrating how extensive the accomplishments of non-Western scientists are.

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