Book Reviews

The Measure of All Things. A History of Analytical Chemistry. By Thomas R. Dulski. Pp. vi + 791, index. Book Locker: St. Petersburg, FL. 2018. £24.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-63263-714-7

The author, a metallurgical analyst and writer of science fiction, has produced a “pig in a poke” since, literally, the reader gets more than they bargained for in this hefty volume. For the past 50 years historians of science have successfully integrated their subject with political, cultural, and social history. Whilst this book pays lip service to this approach, it is executed ham-fistedly by separating the account into three sections for each chronological period of history; namely, events in world history, scientific history, and the history of chemical analysis. Readers must make their own integration of these potted accounts. The treatment reminds one of a primer of “facts and dates” beloved by Victorian educators. More curiously still, although billed as “A History of Chemical Analysis,” only 79 pages of the 791-page book (nine per cent) are specifically devoted to the subject. Thus, what could have been a useful complement to Ferenc Szabadváry’s excellent illustrated and fully documented History of Analytical Chemistry (1966), which concludes around 1960, will disappoint readers.

On a more positive note, readers wanting a convenient (albeit non-portable) vade mecum of world history, history of the sciences in bullet-sized chunks, and an add-on sketch of analytical chemistry, may find this a handy reference work. There is a reasonable index, but there are no primary or secondary references to the literature in the notes. The latter are solely explanatory expansions of the text. A pig’s ear, then, and not just a pig in a poke.

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Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism. By Peter Forshaw. Pp. 494+xxi, illus., index. Brill: Leiden. 2016. £152 (hardback or ebook). ISBN: 978-90-04-33494-6 (hardback), 978-90-04-33495-3 (ebook).

Focused on “the visual and symbolic in Western esotericism,” as the subtitle puts it, this impressive book takes its title from the famous passage in John 1:5 (“and the light shineth in darkness”), which was echoed in several significant early modern works such as those of Heinrich Khunrath and Jan Amos Comenius. Of the book’s eighteen essays on various subjects, ranging from the thirteenth-century Jewish Kabbalah to Roman Polanski’s movie The Ninth Gate (1999), seven relate more or less directly to alchemy. Lina Bolzoni evokes the Renaissance thinker Giulio Camillo and his far-ranging conception of a universal memory system, the Teatro della memoria, arguing that its underlying aim was “to teach the three arts of metamorphosis: alchemy, which acts on things; eloquence, which acts on words; and deification, which acts on souls” (p. 71). Thomas Willard offers a tentative deciphering of the successive dreams in Johann Valentin Andreae’s Chemical Wedding (1616) as