

isation. Of course, Robert Temple sees at once a connection between the Nommo of the Dogon and Oannes and the Annedotus of the Chaldeans; he kindly reprints for us in English translation the accounts of Oannes from Berossus *et al.* Oannes came from the Erythraean Sea, not from Sirius—so far so good. The author goes on to suppose, however, these myths to be literal statements of historical truth. Is this reasonable? The answer is—we simply don't know. Robert Temple is not the first non-astronomer to be misled by calculations of the 'probability' of life on other worlds, which are simply the prejudices of the respective writers dressed up in a spurious numerical precision. Certainly the idea of intelligent visitors from space is not *absurd*. How much evidence one would require before embracing the hypothesis tells more about one's psychology than it does about the historical problem.

This is a fascinating book because the nugget of mystery that the author has mined and polished is from a pure vein. The book is frustrating because the arguments are loose, and much of what the author has written is only marginally connected with his theme. A shorter, tighter book would have made more impact.

Ultimately, the book is sad for two reasons. In the first place, Robert Temple attempts to dissociate himself

from ". . . the people who will enthusiastically receive my researches with open arms (but who are) the sort of people one least wants to be classed with". The author brings to his work a scholarship in oriental studies, and a belief in it that is transparently honest. The book should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, when all has been said and done, he (like others before him) is building a pyramid of speculation on a mustard seed of mystery. Such speculation can be judged only by its fruits. How often, since first learning of these ideas, have I been able to say, in my historical reading, "ah yes, that fits in so well." The answer is, not once; but perhaps I have been reading the wrong works.

This book is sad to me also in a different and deeper way. By taking myth only as history, we demythologise it. Myths (so I believe) express truths about the human predicament that cannot be expressed except in mythopoetic languages, in whose very ambiguity lies a richness of understanding. To take myth as history is to reduce it. It may be so. But I would rather my gods danced still on Mount Olympus than merely to have leased a country house in one of the more desirable subdivisions of Thessalia. □

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Vision in children

The Visual World of the Child. By Eliane Vurpillot. Pp. 372. (Allen and Unwin: London, April 1976.) £9.50.

If 4-yr-old children are presented with two panels bearing a square and a circle, they can learn to select the square consistently to obtain delivery of a sweet. If the experimenter then makes the sweet contingent on their pressing the circle, they normally take longer to learn this 'discrimination reversal' than they took to learn the original task. There is a story that as reversal training was about to begin one experimenter accidentally knocked over the apparatus that presented the stimuli and rewards; he restored it to an upright position, remarking that he hoped it was not broken. The child learned the reversal in a single trial. The story illustrates the extent to which children's behaviour may be governed by their expectations of how a piece of apparatus will behave and of how experimenters themselves are likely to behave. Such considerations have largely been ignored by the long list of psychologists whose work is summarised in *The Visual World of the Child*.

Disappointingly few secure or interesting conclusions emerge from Mademoiselle Vurpillot's catalogue *raisonnée* of experiments. Many of the theoretical issues raised are in any case so ill formulated or so trivial as to preclude the possibility of interesting answers. A question of the former sort is whether the child proceeds from 'syncretic' to 'analytic' vision—no-one knows; one of the latter sort is whether a child's eye movements become more systematic with age—they do. Research on visual development, particularly in Europe, still suffers from Piaget's obfuscations and some of the master's vague concepts, like 'centration' and 'assimilation' have proved singularly unhelpful when applied to perception, but are unfortunately still taken seriously. Moreover, the plethora of contradictory experimental results in this area stems in part from the difficulty in replicating many of his experiments.

Although the book comes with the good psychologist's seal of approval, provided in an encomium written by Professor Jerome Bruner, it will be useful mainly to those who would like some signposts through the morass of the European literature on vision in children. N. S. Sutherland

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