

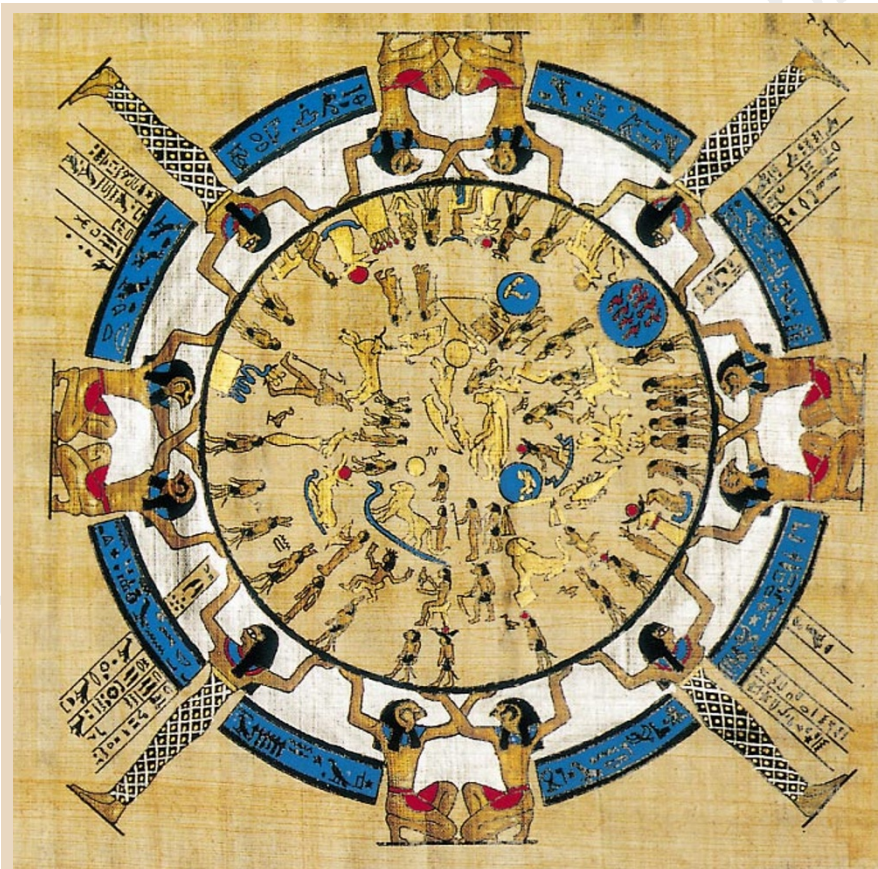
Luckily the editors — or lexicographers as they prefer to be called, allowing for inclusion of Dr Johnson's definition of a lexicographer as "a harmless drudge" — have had the good sense to realize that a mere list of definitions, although useful, would fail to acknowledge the countless scientists who have formed the field, many leaving their names behind in the process. So they tell us that, whereas the Lewis acids were named after the US chemist G. N. Lewis (1875–1946), Lewis antigens derive quite literally from Mrs H. D. G. Lewis in whom they were first identified. A large number of short biographical entries are also included for the more important personalities in the field; well, Nobel laureates anyway.

Another aspect that raises the dictionary above a simple list of terms and meanings comes from the inclusion of structure diagrams. These have long been vital pieces of information for the modern biologist, for whom form and function are intimately

linked. Some pages may look like a cross between the Aldrich catalogue and a seven-year-old's *My First Picture Dictionary*, but then few of us could guess the relative molecular mass of the reserpine in the fridge, even if we knew it to be (3b,16b,17a,18b,20a)-11,17-dimethoxy-18[(3,4,5-trimethoxybenzoyl)oxy]yohimban-16-carboxylic acid methyl ester.

Along with the main text, the appendices provide a good grounding in the mysteries of bioinformatics, nomenclature conventions and so on, making this a useful first point of reference. Of course, in such a fast-growing field, omissions are unavoidable — anyone wishing to know the difference between MAD (multiwavelength anomalous diffraction) and Mad (Mothers against decapentaplegia) must search elsewhere — but any copy of this book that finds itself on a research laboratory's bookshelf will be dog-eared and coffee-stained in a matter of months. □

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## Making sense of the stars

The ancient Egyptians combined star-gazing with mythology, as this painting on papyrus from a Ptolemaic temple demonstrates. As well as showing the signs of the zodiac of Dendara, it includes *sa'mut* (the hippopotamus with a crocodile on her back), *Meskhietiu* (the bull) and *Selket* (the scorpion goddess). But it was the Greeks who laid the foundations of astronomy as we know it. The invention of the telescope

provided the next great leap forward, and advances in the past few years have given us a much more detailed view of the heavens. The development of astronomy from the early astrology of the Babylonians in 5000 BC to Hubble and beyond are chronicled by Robert Wilson in *Astronomy Through the Ages* (Taylor and Francis/ Princeton University Press, £19.95, \$29.95).

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