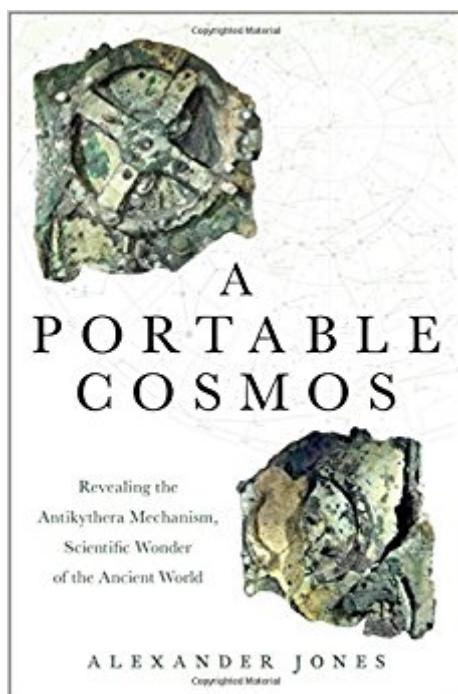


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A Portable Cosmos: Revealing The Antikythera Mechanism, Scientific Wonder Of The Ancient World



Synopsis

From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Terracotta Army, ancient artifacts have long fascinated the modern world. However, the importance of some discoveries is not always immediately understood. This was the case in 1901 when sponge divers retrieved a lump of corroded bronze from a shipwreck at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea near the Greek island of Antikythera. Little did the divers know they had found the oldest known analog computer in the world, an astonishing device that once simulated the motions of the stars and planets as they were understood by ancient Greek astronomers. Its remains now consist of 82 fragments, many of them containing gears and plates engraved with Greek words, that scientists and scholars have pieced back together through painstaking inspection and deduction, aided by radiographic tools and surface imaging. More than a century after its discovery, many of the secrets locked in this mysterious device can now be revealed. In addition to chronicling the unlikely discovery of the Antikythera Mechanism, author Alexander Jones takes readers through a discussion of how the device worked, how and for what purpose it was created, and why it was on a ship that wrecked off the Greek coast around 60 BC. What the Mechanism has uncovered about Greco-Roman astronomy and scientific technology, and their place in Greek society, is truly amazing. The mechanical know-how that it embodied was more advanced than anything the Greeks were previously thought capable of, but the most recent research has revealed that its displays were designed so that an educated layman could understand the behavior of astronomical phenomena, and how intertwined they were with one's natural and social environment. It was at once a masterpiece of machinery as well as one of the first portable teaching devices. Written by a world-renowned expert on the Mechanism, *A Portable Cosmos* will fascinate all readers interested in ancient history, archaeology, and the history of science.

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Customer Reviews

"Jones' book is written in such a way that makes it profitable reading for a wide range of readers, from the specialists on the Mechanism to those who have never heard of it. It presents in detail and explains clearly and in a pleasant way the Mechanism and its context by using all the existing specialised literature: this is really the Bible of the Antikythera Mechanism. The only recommendation to the unprepared reader is to use the book with moderation. One can easily become addicted to the Antikythera Mechanism, this absolute technical marvel of Antiquity, and dedicate oneself to the endless search for its lost planetary gear trains." --Efthymios Nicolaïdis, *Almagest*"Jones's text, too, is precise but calm, elegant and with a certain charm. His learning is broad: here's Ptolemy, here are gear ratios, here's Cicero and Galen, Babylonians, planets, lunar months, Glauco, epicyclics and the 'Spindle of Necessity'. And it is not just the cosmos that is demonstrated, but the vast difference, and astonishing similarity, between us and our ancestors. So out of the history of science comes a sense of our humanity and the ancient desire to comprehend. God knows, it's timely, in the shrivelled cosmos we are building. We need more books like this. And probably more sponge-divers, too." --Michael Bywater, *The Spectator*"A historian of science and technology, Mr. Jones played a role in this endeavor. His job was to link the complexities of the Antikythera Mechanism to what the ancient Greeks believed about the astronomy of a geocentric universe. His virtue as an author is an exhaustive knowledge of his subject, such as how Greek calendars varied from city to city and how pre-Copernican astral calculations accounted for the mystery of the planets' retrograde motion...Mr. Jones can be refreshingly candid, avoiding scholarly habits of overcaution." --John J. Miller, *Wall Street Journal*"A Portable Cosmos is a fine account of everything that pertains to the Antikythera mechanism-the story of its discovery and decipherment, the scholarly debates about its date and provenance, and the meanings it would have held for an ancient viewer. The book is notable for its sweep, and the ease with which it moves back and forth among ancient literature, the phenomena of astronomy, and the mechanical details of the surviving artifact. This is a gem of a book."-James Evans, University of Puget Sound"My major contribution to this amazing lost-and-found story occurred when I was asked to referee a paper on the remarkable Antikythera Mechanism, which had been recovered from an ancient ship wreck. I told them, 'You should really ask Alexander Jones.' They did, and the unexpected result was that Jones, an

outstanding scholar and an expert in both ancient Greek and antique astronomy, was invited to join the team. Here Jones describes the long and fascinating path to decipherment in the decades since the device was found by divers in 1900." -Owen Gingerich, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics"Alexander Jones has done a huge service with *A Portable Cosmos*, dispelling many of the myths associated with this fascinating artifact... he has provided an engagingly written and detailed history of the Mechanism, covering the discovery itself, research undertaken to date, the ancient scientific and technological expertise underpinning the object and the cultural contexts of the Greco-Roman world in which it was made and meant to be used. Jones persuasively argues that the Mechanism was intended as an educational tool, rather than a specialist bit of kit...its intended audience may have been the ancient counterpart to those readers who will be drawn to Jones' authoritative and insightful account. *A Portable Cosmos* is set to become the definitive history of the Antikythera Mechanism, and will be of great value to specialists, as well as students and those interested in ancient Greco-Roman science and technology."-Liba Taub, University of Cambridge"Alexander Jones' comprehensive look at the Antikythera mechanism and its context will suit readers interested in the mechanism or the history of science in general." - Publishers Weekly

Alexander Jones is Professor of the History of the Exact Sciences in Antiquity at New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World.

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A great addition to the works about this object.

very interesting read

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