

Book Reviews

HEINZ MODE, *Fabulous beasts and demons*, London, Phaidon, 1975, 4to, pp. 280, illus., £9.95.

Mythical beasts and fabulous animals have always proved to be a popular theme and many books describing them have already appeared. This one, however, is probably the largest, and certainly the most sumptuously illustrated. It also deals more adequately with the rich oriental aspects of the theme than most of its predecessors. Written by a professor of oriental archaeology in the University of Halle, it appeared first in East Germany and is now offered in English at what is a remarkably reasonable price when one takes into account the 405 illustrations, many of them in excellent colour, and the overall size of the book.

The account spans five thousand years and in it we find the well-known fauna: the sphinx, centaur, dragon, griffin, unicorn, mermaid, and many more that are less well known. Most of them seem to have arisen from faulty observation and misinterpretation and were transmitted by the gullible and the uncritical, accounts of them growing in grotesqueness as they were handed on. We can now offer a rational explanation for some of them, the unicorn and the mermaid for example, but many defy elucidation, most of these being true creatures of the imagination, dreams or of hallucinations. Monsters, no doubt, arose from animal and human teratology, and possibly from cross-breeding.

A more complete analysis of this fascinating topic is necessary, for Professor Mode does not deal with it extensively. He is more concerned with monsters as a separate zoological group and divides them into five for ease of description.

His bestiary will become an important source-book of reference, and at the same time one that will give great pleasure to those who wish to browse leisurely and examine the illustrations. Unfortunately the text reflects in stolidness its Germanic origins, and, although there are 257 notes and a lengthy bibliography, more detailed documentation would have been desirable; this is also the case with many of the illustrations which have only rudimentary references to their origins. There is a useful 'Glossary of monsters' which serves both as an index and an entertaining source of fabulous information and outlandish names.

N. H. KESWANI (editor), *The science of medicine and physiological concepts in ancient and medieval India*, New Delhi, All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, 1974, 8vo, pp. x, 185, illus., [no price stated].

The editor introduces this book with an account of the history of Indian medicine from prehistory to the sixteenth century. Thereafter a series of ten essays discuss various aspects of it, including the theory of pneuma, physiology in the various types of Indian medicine, (Vedic, Yoga, etc.), neurophysiology, body and mind, *Unani* (Arabic) medicine; there is also a helpful glossary of Sanskrit words and their English equivalents. There are the usual attempts to show that Indian concepts antedated equivalent ones in Western cultures, but the admitted uncertainty of the dating of the Indian material makes this a perilous exercise. It is perhaps better to admit that Chinese, Indian and Mediterranean communities were in contact with each other during antiquity, but questions of priority and of who influenced who have yet to be answered.