



Ancient Loons: Stories Pingree Told Me

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"Ah, I'm Pingree. We meet again. Splendid. Won't you sit down?"

I looked around David's room. Short of the library stacks, I had never seen so many books piled into a single room. Where could I sit down? Every square inch of horizontal surface was covered. Books, papers, notes, manuscripts—all congregated in random and chaotic disorder.

This small encounter and the snapshot of the protagonist on the cover of this book introduce the reader to David E. Pingree, the eminent classicist, Orientalist, historian of ancient science, and member of the Department of the History of Mathematics at Brown University. This is a book of his stories, retold by Phil Davis, award-winning author and raconteur par excellence, who reconstructs them from letters and many conversations with his friend Pingree.

The stories trace connections between ancient characters, historical and mythical, and recreate a world in which the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake leads to unexpected pleasures and associations. They capture a world best described by Saul Lieberman's quip about Gershom Scholem's great work on the Kabala: "Trash is trash; but the study of trash is scholarship," and David Pingree's imagined response, "Yes, but there's always something of value to be learned."

The book is dedicated to preserving and promoting the specialized knowledge and thoughts of David Pingree, a truly remarkable person and to inspire readers to follow academic tradition and at the same time explore unusual connections.

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