



Scientific Jefferson: Revealed

Martin Clagett

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Well known as a politician and architect, Thomas Jefferson also made important contributions to science. He was elected the third president not only of the United States but also of that most august of scientific clubs, the American Philosophical Society, following in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin and David Rittenhouse. He penned what was arguably the most important American scientific work of the eighteenth century, Notes on the State of Virginia. He designed architecture that promoted a healthy mind in a healthy body and the prevention of infectious diseases, and devised codes and a cipher machine to shield the new Republic against threats of foreign espionage. In his new book, Martin Clagett explores these and other achievements, returning Jefferson to his rightful place as an innovator in the scientific realm.

Scientific Jefferson: Revealed explores how science shaped Thomas Jefferson's views on politics, religion, economics, and social developments in America. The first of all sciences for Jefferson was agriculture, to which he was attached "by inclination as well as by conviction that it is the most useful of occupations of man." He introduced new and useful plants and livestock into America and advocated the study and practice of agriculture as a science. Perhaps most importantly, he brought forth his original invention of the mathematically precise "Mouldboard Plough of Least Resistance."

Clagett also highlights Jefferson's endeavors in archaeology. Jefferson developed the scientific methodology of stratification, which is the foundation of modern archeological techniques, and because of this innovation, he is often called the "Father of American Archaeology." In addition, Clagett examines Jefferson's contributions to anthropology, ethnology, comparative linguistics, paleontology, and medicine.

Scientific Jefferson is punctuated with color illustrations, charts, and documents that demonstrate Jefferson's scientific talents, interests, and accomplishments. Clagett concludes with a broader summary of Jefferson's scientific achievements and offers a fresh view of Monticello, the University of Virginia, and even Jefferson's own gravestone as testimonials to his devotion to science.

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