



The Cosmos of the Yucatec Maya: Cycles and Steps from the Madrid Codex

Merideth Paxton

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Flourishing by A.D. 250-300, Maya civilization extended over large sections of modern Mexico and Guatemala, as well as Belize, and into present-day El Salvador and Honduras. The pre-Conquest inhabitants of this vast area left important clues to their understanding of religious and historical events in the remains of their architecture, painting, sculpture, distinctive polychrome ceramics, and sophisticated hieroglyphic writing. A vital key to understanding these clues is an appreciation of the solar, lunar, and planetary cycles that are woven through the Maya chronological records. The Maya concepts of time figured heavily in their association of human rulers with celestial deities and cosmic events, and in the physical orientation of cities and buildings. In fact, scholars are now realizing that virtually every aspect of pre-Hispanic Mayan life was ordered by a religion based on the apparent annual movement of the sun through the sky.

In *The Cosmos of the Yucatec Maya*, Merideth Paxton provides an ingenious and thorough new study of parts of two of the Maya books, or codices, with particular focus on a previously unrecognized image of the solar year that appears in the manuscript known as the Madrid Codex. The motif of the solar year also underlies her identification of a regional organization among the ruins of the Yucatec Maya settlements. Incorporating analyses of art, archaeology, astronomy, and colonial and modern ethnography pertaining to Yucatán, as well as studies of sixteenth-century Spanish beliefs, Dr. Paxton elicits fascinating new meanings from her sources and she invites Mesoamerican specialists and students to consider links between components of pre-Conquest Maya civilization. This innovative, scholarly text is essential reading for all who are interested in Mesoamerica, and it is sure to stimulate additional developments in the field of Maya cosmology and ideology.

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