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Star Gods of the Maya: Astronomy in Art, Folklore, and Calendars (Linda Schele Series in Maya and Pre-Columbian Studies)

Susan Milbrath

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Observations of the sun, moon, planets, and stars played a central role in ancient Maya lifeways, as they do today among contemporary Maya who maintain the traditional ways. This pathfinding book reconstructs ancient Maya astronomy and cosmology through the astronomical information encoded in Precolumbian Maya art and confirmed by the current practices of living Maya peoples.

Susan Milbrath opens the book with a discussion of modern Maya beliefs about astronomy, along with essential information on naked-eye observation. She devotes subsequent chapters to Precolumbian astronomical imagery, which she traces back through time, starting from the Colonial and Postclassic eras. She delves into many aspects of the Maya astronomical images, including the major astronomical gods and their associated glyphs, astronomical almanacs in the Maya codices [painted books], and changes in the imagery of the heavens over time. This investigation yields new data and a new synthesis of information about the specific astronomical events and cycles recorded in Maya art and architecture. Indeed, it constitutes the first major study of the relationship between art and astronomy in ancient Maya culture.

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