

The Sky in Mayan Literature. By ANTHONY F. AVENI. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. x, 297 pp. Cloth. \$39.95.

The major objective of this compilation of essays is to draw the nonspecialist into a deeper understanding of the Maya. Along with an abundance of Maya writing concerning mathematical equations, celestial observations, and astronomical recordings, the contributions of ten specialists from diverse academic disciplines shed light on previously little-understood portions of Mayan history. Stemming from a workshop in November 1989 at Colgate University and edited by Anthony Aveni, professor of anthropology and astronomy, the volume's ten contributions examine components of the four Maya books that have survived, the codices.

In the first essay, ethnologist Barbara Tedlock surveys the impact of the living astronomy and calendrical reckoning system among contemporary Mayan people of western Guatemala. In chapter 2, Harvey M. and Victoria R. Bricker, both anthropologists, briefly review the basic periods that make up the Maya calendar and also study seasonal almanacs.

Aveni's own contribution, chapter three, concludes that the Mayan astronomers used Venus for their lunar calendar, as opposed to the modern use of the sun. Anthropologist Charles A. Hoffing and biologist Thomas O'Neil examine "the lady with the question mark on her forehead," who takes up several pages in the Dresden Codex, and suggest that the moon's appearance in the pictorial seems to represent more than the common interpretation, a metaphor for casting omens.

Michael P. Closs, professor of mathematics, asserts his belief that certain tables in the Dresden Codex actually predicted phenomena, instead of just recording them as previously thought. The Brickers return to analyze zodiacal references in the codices and to determine that the Maya devised a zodiac incorporating animals, sun, moon, and planets.

Anthropology professor Floyd G. Lounsbury assesses the correlation between the Mayan and Julian calendars. He also explores the implications of the Maya notation 1.5.5.0 and its proper place in the Dresden Venus table. Meredith Paxton studies the relationship between the Books of Chilam Balam and their linkage to the codices, and Dennis Tedlock, professor of English, examines the origin of Maya mythic history. In the last chapter, Charles Frake, an anthropologist, places the work in a more general anthropological framework.

Although esoteric at times, the book accomplishes its overall objective rather well. The various illustrations and tables, coupled with the bibliographies and footnotes in each chapter, prove effective and certainly help the nonspecialist understand the various points each author constructs. The book represents an innovative historical study using an interdisciplinary approach that marks tremendous progress in historical research.

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