

Exploring Ancient Skies

An Encyclopedic Survey of Archaeoastronomy

Exploring Ancient Skies brings together the methods of archaeology and the insights of modern astronomy to explore the science of astronomy as it was practiced in various cultures prior to the invention of the telescope. The book reviews an enormous and growing body of literature on the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, the Far East, and the New World (particularly Mesoamerica), putting the ancient astronomical materials into their archaeological and cultural contexts. The authors begin with an overview of the field and proceed to essential aspects of naked-eye astronomy, followed by an examination of specific cultures. The book concludes by taking into account the purposes of ancient astronomy: astrology, navigation, calendar regulation, and (not least) the understanding of our place and role in the universe. Skies are recreated to display critical events as they would have appeared to ancient observers - events such as the supernova of 1054, the 'lion horoscope' or the 'Star of Bethlehem.' Exploring Ancient Skies provides a comprehensive overview of the relationships between astronomy and other areas of human investigation. It will be useful as a reference for scholars and students in both astronomy and archaeology, and will be of compelling interest to readers who seek a broad understanding of our collective intellectual history.

Exploring Ancient Skies uses modern science to examine ancient astronomy throughout the World, that is, to use the methods of archaeology and insights of modern astronomy explore how astronomy was practiced before the invention of the telescope. It thus reviews an enormous and growing body of literature on the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, the Far East, and the New World, particularly Mesoamerica, putting the ancient astronomical materials into their archaeological and cultural contexts. The book consists of two parts. The first emphasizes naked-eye astronomy: the motion of objects in the sky, the determination of time and calendars, corrections due to various factors such as parallax or atmospheric diffraction, and rare or transient phenomena such as eclipses, aurorae and comets. The second part begins with a discussion of the Paleolithic and Neolithic roots of astronomy. It then turns to the antecedents of the modern Western Astronomy: Mesopotamia, Greece, ancient and mediaeval Europe. Separate chapters deal with astronomy in ancient Egypt and Africa; India; China, Korea and Japan; the cultures of the Pacific; and the Americas, with particular emphasis on Mesoamerica, since this is one of the few areas for which written evidence is linked to astronomical alignments. Throughout, the discussion emphasizes the main purposes of ancient astronomy, many of which it shares with modern astronomy: astrology, navigation, calendar regulation, and understanding of our place and role in the universe. Exploring Ancient Skies provides a comprehensive review and reference for scholars and students in both astronomy and archaeology.

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