



The Power of Stars: How Celestial Observations Have Shaped Civilization

Bryan E. Penprase

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The "Power of Stars" fills a much needed niche in the literature, by providing a lively, richly illustrated survey of the human response to the sky across the centuries and across all cultures. The book covers all aspects of how civilizations studied and responded the sky. From the opening chapter, which gives a survey of visible phenomena from the sun, moon and planets, the book provides a multicultural perspective on the experience of the sky. The motions of the sun and moon across the sky and on the horizon were noticed by ancient people and the book describes their legends and skywatching practices. In Chapter 2, the book gives an overview of constellations from a wide variety of cultures, including the ancient Chinese, Egyptian, Hawaiian, Native American Chumash and Navajo tribes, the Inuit culture, and also covers the Southern skies, such as the Aboriginal Australians and the Incan cultures. In Chapter 3, Creation Stories from a wide variety of cultures are described, and in Chapter 4 their models of the universe or Cosmologies are described and illustrated. The wide variety of descriptions of the early universe, the the structure of the physical universe from ancient Greek, Egyptian, Chinese, Babylonian, Mayan and other cultures are explained and illustrated with original art. In Chapters 5 and 6 the evolution of timekeeping and calendars are described, including the dramatic stories of the Mayan 2012 cycle, the Harrison navigation clocks, and the development of modern atomic clocks and GPS systems. Chapter 7 describes "Celestial Architecture" where temples and buildings (Stonehenge, Newgrange, and also cathedrals) are aligned with the sun and stars. The remaining chapters turn a lens onto our own culture, and describe how our modern cities contain within them cosmological symbolism and alignments, and how ancient traditions and modern technology coexist in the 21st century. The last chapter also gives a history of the development of the Modern Big Bang cosmology, and some of the remaining "unanswered questions" to be studied and explored by future astronomers. The book provides a unique wide angle lens to the many ways that society understands and describes the stars, and in the process explores how that process reveals universal qualities of humankind.

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