

Observing the Sky in Mesoamerica

Indigenous people have studied the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars for generations.



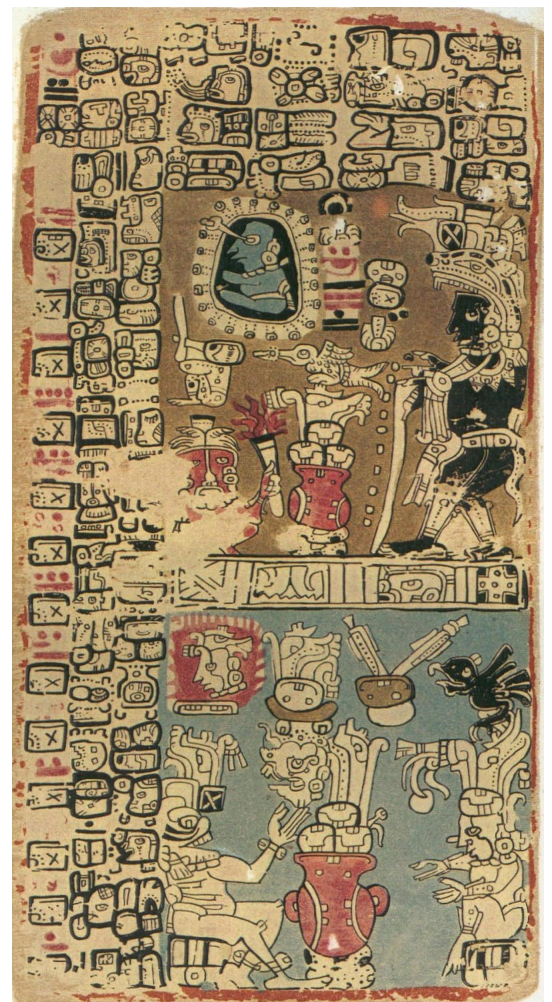
“El Caracol” observatory and “El Castillo” pyramid at the ancient Mayan city of Chichén Itzá

Many cultures around the world have long traditions of watching the sky. Mayan and other Mesoamerican peoples have used astronomy to time agricultural activities, predict climate patterns, and practice religious beliefs for thousands of years.

The ancient Maya built monuments to observe and celebrate movements of the Sun, Moon, and planets. For example, the city of Chichén Itzá had an observatory, known as “El Caracol,” to track the planet Venus. Chichén Itzá is also famous for its pyramid, “El Castillo,” which was designed so that a shadowy snake appears to crawl down the steps during the solar equinoxes in spring and fall.



Indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica have deep knowledge of their land and the skies.



The Madrid Codex (c. 1400) documents Mayan astronomy, religious rituals, and everyday activities.