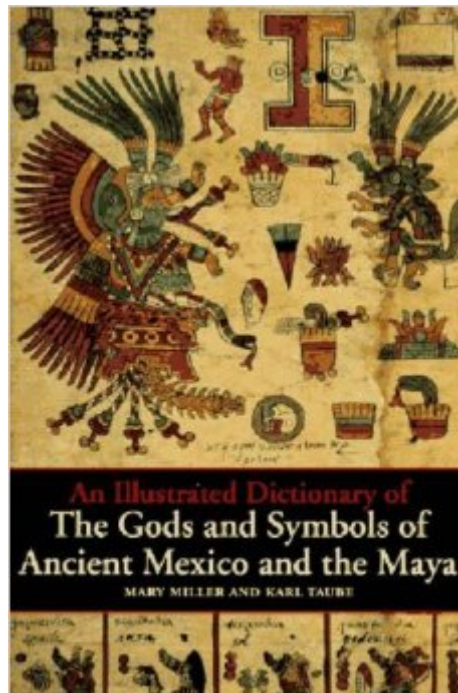


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# An Illustrated Dictionary Of The Gods And Symbols Of Ancient Mexico And The Maya



## Synopsis

The myths and beliefs of the great pre-Columbian civilizations of Mesoamerica have baffled and fascinated outsiders ever since the Spanish Conquest. Yet, until now, no single-volume introduction has existed to act as a guide to this labyrinthine symbolic world. *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* is the first-ever English-language dictionary of Mesoamerican mythology and religion. Nearly 300 entries, from accession to yoke, describe the main gods and symbols of the Olmecs, Zapotecs, Maya, Teotihuacanos, Mixtecs, Toltecs, and Aztecs. Topics range from jaguar and jester gods to reptile eye and rubber, from creation accounts and sacred places to ritual practices such as bloodletting, confession, dance, and pilgrimage. In addition, two introductory essays provide succinct accounts of Mesoamerican history and religion, while a substantial bibliographical survey directs the reader to original sources and recent discussions. Dictionary entries are illustrated with photographs and specially commissioned line drawings. Mary Miller and Karl Taube draw on their research in the fast-changing field of Maya studies, and on the latest Mexican discoveries, to produce an authoritative work that will serve as a standard reference for students, scholars, and travelers. Photographs and illustrations throughout

## Book Information

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: Thames & Hudson (April 17, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0500279284

ISBN-13: 978-0500279281

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.7 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (39 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #47,359 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Aztec](#) #5 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Ethnic & Tribal](#) #5 in [Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Mayan](#)

## Customer Reviews

I am not a seven year grad student of the authors but a curious amateur anthropologist, former history teacher who loves art. That said this is the perfect book for the average layman, not too technical or with an overabundance of esoteric jargon. ... This book is filled with just about everything you need to know about the fabulous cultures that existed in Meso-America. All the

famous cultures are covered including the Toltecs, Olmecs, Zapotecs and every other "tec" or "mec" you could imagine. Although the focus is the Gods, it is nearly impossible to cover the Gods without addressing the issue of culture. Some very fascinating information that even the most knowledgeable of readers will find captivating. Upon first getting the book I went through half the book in one sitting!! No matter your base of understanding there is something to learn here. A reference book but yet very readable as it is well written and full of great illustrations and photographs. The good thing is that if you don't feel like reading page after page, some drawing will catch your fancy and the next thing you know you are reading about it. So whatever the mood there is something here for the reader at all times. The paper is of thick stock and the size is handy enough to put in your backpack to take anywhere. Since I am not a scholar and have a limited understanding of the subjects, much clarification was given to issues I knew about but didn't fully understand. ... So the book is full of information that clarifies and breaks down all aspects of ancient Mexico, even those that have somehow been lost in the shuffle of modern times. Arranged as any dictionary alphabetically, it is a valuable source of information for all interested in Meso-American Gods and symbols and their meanings. There is a brief introduction that gives an overview of the time periods covered and the cultures that is very concise and informative. This is followed by an index that has the subjects covered in an easy to find format if you are looking for a particular subject. The end includes a guide to sources and a bibliography for further study. Especially recommended for students, artists or history buffs this is a book that compliments any library that features books about Mexico prior to the conquest. Truly a gift of the Gods, the ancient symbols are preserved and explained here in this compendium by way of the east coast to the Pacific rim. I'll learn much from this book for years to come.

One of THE definitive reference works for everyone even remotely interested in the cultures of ancient Mesoamerica, "Gods and Symbols" well comprises the most important as well as more specialized facts, covering all its subjects from Olmec to Aztec times in the same amount of detail. It's written to be accessible to both beginners and people more firm with the subjects, and certainly offers more than enough for both groups. However, although the cross-references are fine, the encyclopaedic, culture-jumping approach makes for a somewhat fractured read, and the sheer amount of information can prove overwhelming at times; it therefore could be useful to have some background knowledge beforehand that can help you place facts in a larger contextual framework when you need to. However, this hardly is a reason for criticism given the book's intent, and it doesn't stop it from being a highly readable standard work I can unhesitatingly recommend to just

about anyone.

I am a seven-year graduate student of Dr. Karl Taube, at the University of California, Riverside. I highly recommend this text to anyone interested in the gods, religion, or iconography of ancient Mesoamerica. There exists no book in English comparable to this one. This book is concise, yet packed with a plethora of hand-drawn illustrations by the authors and laden with innumerable useful tidbits of interest to scholars, lay-men, art historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians. Quite honestly, this book is perfect for anyone needing a quick but poignant and on-the-mark "dictionary" type reference from two of the best cutting-edge scholars in ancient Mesoamerican studies today. You will definitely get your money's worth with this choice - buy it today! By-the-way, this is an unpaid advertisement; strictly a humble review by a graduate student who worships the ground Drs. Taube and Miller walk on - translated, not biased in the least.

I enjoyed looking through this "dictionary," but I hope it is revised with separate sections on the Olmec, Maya, and Aztecs (the alphabetical format could be retained). As a "dictionary," it also should have been much longer (four or five hundred pages instead of two hundred). Nevertheless, the general reader interested in Mesoamerica will enjoy this book. I have a large collection of books on Mesoamerica, and I found several illustrations that I have not seen before. There is a fascinating picture of a jaguar skeleton with a jade ball in its mouth (Aztec). The illustration of a Maya dancer is also fascinating. "In a state of shamanic transformation, a May lord would take on an animal self or 'uay,' most commonly the jaguar." Another shows a "Maya figure wearing a War Serpent headdress." The fangs of the serpent rise above the figure's head. Still another shows "The monkey scribal gods painting a codex." The monkey-headed men are dressed like Maya scribes. I would recommend buying a used copy of this book.

I find this book to be an easy reference for lots of the symbols found in the various early cultures of Central America. Although not an extensive description of each symbol or deity, it gives a general definition. This might be best for someone new to the many early cultures of Mexico. It can easily be taken along on a trip to some of the ancient ruins as a reference for many of the images that are prevalent in their art. Since many of these groups have similar roots and share many beliefs and symbols, one can begin to understand the context of the religion and art of the people.

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