



# Aztec and Maya Myths (The Legendary Past)

*Karl Taube*

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The myths of the Aztec and Maya derive from a shared Mesoamerican cultural tradition. This is very much a living tradition, and many of the motifs and gods mentioned in early sources are still evoked in the lore of contemporary Mexico and Guatemala.

Professor Taube discusses the different sources for Aztec and Maya myths. The Aztec empire began less than 200 years before the Spanish conquest, and our knowledge of their mythology derives primarily from native colonial documents and manuscripts commissioned by the Spanish. The Maya mythology is far older, and our knowledge of it comes mainly from native manuscripts of the Classic period, over 600 years before the Spanish conquest.

Drawing on these sources as well as nineteenth- and twentieth-century excavations and research, including the interpretation of the codices and the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing, the author discusses, among other things, the Popol Vuh myths of the Maya, the flood myth of Northern Yucatan, and the Aztec creation myths.

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