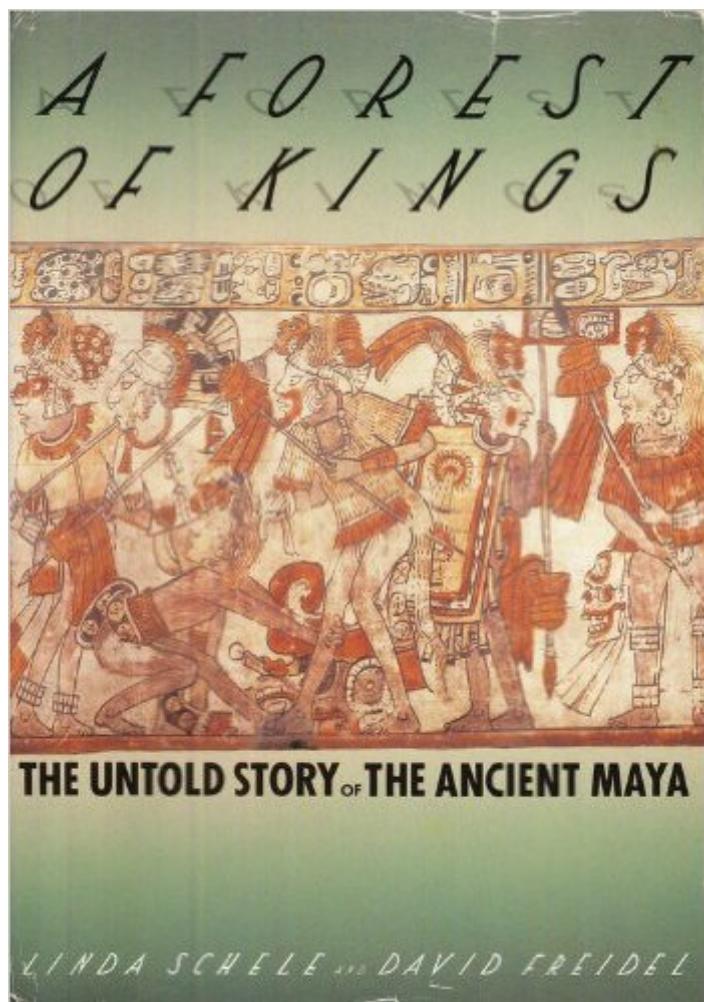


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# A Forest Of Kings: The Untold Story Of The Ancient Maya



## Synopsis

The recent interpretation of Maya hieroglyphs has given us the first written history of the New World as it existed before the European invasion. In this book, two of the first central figures in the massive effort to decode the glyphs, Linda Schele and David Freidel, make this history available in all its detail. *A Forest of Kings* is the story of Maya kingship, from the beginning of its institution and the first great pyramid builders two thousand years ago to the decline of Maya civilization and its destruction by the Spanish. Here the great historic rulers of pre-Columbian civilization come to life again with the decipherment of their writing. At its height, Maya civilization flourished under great kings like Shield-Jaguar, who ruled for more than sixty years, expanding his kingdom and building some of the most impressive works of architecture in the ancient world. Long placed on a mist-shrouded pedestal as austere, peaceful stargazers, the Maya elites are now known to have been the rulers of populous, aggressive city-states. Hailed as "a Rosetta stone of Maya civilization" (Brian M. Fagan, author of *People of the Earth*), *A Forest of Kings* is "a must for interested readers," says Evon Vogt, professor of anthropology at Harvard University. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is so sad that we have lost Linda Schele. But we can rejoice that we still have her wonderful books. This book is among her best. It is almost magical in the way she and David Freidel create the atmosphere of the Mayan culture. There are wonderful pictures and illustrations. She unfolds the stories of the archaeological discoveries and then helps us understand the real lives revealed in the

evidence. The book also shows how the Mayan glyphs and counting systems work. There are nowadays very good texts on the writing system itself, but this book shows us how the glyphs are woven into the culture and religion of these people. We learn how the lineage worked and how the monuments were used as what we would call propaganda to support one line over other possibilities. We learn about the role of magic and visions and the way the leaders were the empowered by those visions. There is just so much here that any reader will be richly rewarded. The Mayan civilization is incredibly fascinating because it is so foreign to our own and yet it is a part of the heritage of the American continents. This book isn't just a text, it is a work of art in itself. You will have a hard time putting it down.

Of the various books available on Mayan culture that a layman has any chance of engaging profitably, this is one of the best. Detailed and well-organized, it presents a wealth of material on the subject, with plenty of accompanying illustrations that are well linked to the text, unlike other books which drop in pictures seemingly at random or which fail to explain why they are placed as they are. (Or, my personal favorite, those that assume you know why the picture is there, and what it's of, and don't bother to provide captions.) If you're not afraid of "tomes," this is an excellent book for you, though it's not an introductory text. I'd recommend starting with something a little more basic before you tackle this fellow. But once you've familiarized yourself with the lay of the land regarding the Mayas, you won't find many books that cover so many different aspects of their life and culture in such a deep, dense way. You can feel these authors' love for their subject. However, that being said, I must warn you this is a fairly dry book, and I am a reasonably tolerant reader when it comes to subjects I enjoy such as this one. It's chock full of great stuff, but its tone and style are heavily scholastic, so be prepared. It's still worth it. I have read any number of books thicker than this in a few sittings, but I found I retained more of the material and stayed more engaged by taking small bites of it over a few weeks.

When I was first introduced to "A Forest of Kings" by Linda Schele and David Freidel, I was, frankly, a bit suspicious. Another book on the Maya by a couple of well-meaning outsiders focusing on bloodletting and the mysterious ballcourts? I was surprised to find this book to be scholarly, highly readable and not goulishly focused on the bloodier aspects of this ancient culture. Their deft translation of Mayan pictographs and symbolism is very well done. The book is loaded with black and white line drawings of carvings and inscriptions with translations along side. There are detailed explanations of Mayan cosmology and an explanation of the calendar reputed to be the most

accurate ever invented. It also includes extensive notes for each chapter. I don't know how else they could have been handled, but reading "A Forest of Kings" involved having several book marks at once, so I could read the notes, refer back to other illustrations and photos and keep my place in the text. Over all, it's fascinating reading for an amateur who's fascinated with the Maya. I only wish I'd had this book when I visited the Yucatan!

I bought this book prior to visiting the Mayan ruins at Copan, Honduras. I found it a very useful guide to the Mayan world. I have a purely amateur interest in the Mayas, with no academic background. I wish I had this book with me when I visited Tikal, Chichen Itza and other sites in Mexico. The book devotes a chapter each to the major Mayan sites such as the two I just mentioned, Palenque, Copan, and others. It provides basic cultural information about Mayan language and social structure, interspersed with interesting if unconventional narrative passages in which the writers imagine what a day in the life of a historical Mayan figure might have been like. Some might be put off by these passages, but I liked them well enough. You can read the book simply for general cultural background, or take it with you on a stela-by-stela tour of the ruins. At times, there was a bit too much detail for my purposes, but I would rather have too much information than too little, and mostly the amount of information was just right. The book also provides a few portraits of archaeologists who have devoted their lives to uncovering the history of the Mayas, including some discussion of the cracking of the Mayan Code. It was informative and a worthwhile read, particularly if you are planning a trip to see the ruins for yourself.

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