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Maya art and hieroglyphs constitute one of the world's most fascinating, visually striking, and complex systems of expression. Most scholarly interpretations of Maya art and culture have emphasized that this ancient civilization was oriented toward inland centers and preoccupied with the blood of royal lineage and ritual sacrifice. Drawing on recent archaeological discoveries and developments in deciphering Maya glyphs, this groundbreaking volume presents a revisionist reading that shifts the emphasis of interpretation to the mythic power of the sea as the basis of a larger, deeper cultural narrative and history for the Maya.

Surrounded by the sea in all directions, the Maya viewed water as a source of both life and danger. Through the artworks presented—including acknowledged masterpieces and many never before exhibited in the United States—readers will gain a new appreciation for water's influence on Maya cosmology, its role in their interpretation of the supernatural, as well as its impact on Maya cross-cultural contacts, trading practices, and power dynamics. Essays by prominent scholars provide an interdisciplinary context for understanding Maya art as well as new interpretations of traditional iconography and symbolism.

Accompanying a monumental exhibition comprising almost 100 artworks ranging from carved stone monuments to delicate jade sculptures, this compelling, richly illustrated publication will fundamentally transform the interpretation of Maya art.