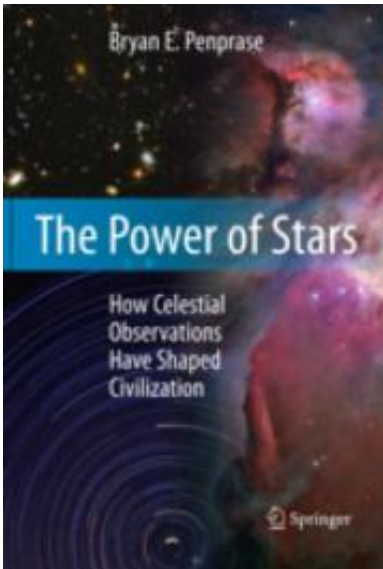


# The incredible impact of stars on culture

November 19 2010

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This is the cover of "The Power of Stars: How Celestial Observations Have Shaped Civilization." Credit: Springer / Heidelberg

For Hawaiian navigators, the star Sirius was "Hokuho'okelewa'a," meaning "star to guide canoe." Traditional Aboriginal Australians looked at the Magellanic Clouds and saw distant campfires in the sky.

In every culture, from prehistory to the modern day, the stars have played a key role in inspiring and shaping human efforts to understand and master the universe we live in. In a newly published book, *The Power of Stars: How Celestial Observations Have Shaped Civilization*, Bryan Penprase traces the cultural roots of modern [astronomy](#) through the various cosmologies, mythologies, calendaring systems, monuments

and theories with which people around the world have connected the heavens to their own lives.

"In these pages," Penprase says in the opening section of the book, "we will explore the many ways in which humans throughout time have responded to the sky. Sometimes they responded with fear, sometimes with great artistry and other times with great rationality. Each culture of the world for thousands of years viewed the same stars and planets we can observe on any clear night. And the power of the [night sky](#), filled with shimmering stars, has left its mark on [human civilization](#)."

The book ranges around the globe from the ancient Babylonians to the Incas, from Greek myths to Australian creation stories, from Mayan calendars to the Chinese Zodiac, and from the Egyptian pyramids to such modern celestial structures as the Rodin Crater Project of artist James Turrell, concluding with a brief history of the modern scientific understanding of the universe. The book also includes more than 200 images.

Penprase has been a member of the Pomona College (USA) faculty since 1993. He received his Ph.D. in astronomy and [astrophysics](#) from the University of Chicago. Penprase's research in astronomy and astrophysics has taken him around the world. He is currently a member of an international team conducting the largest study ever of near-Earth asteroids. The Power of [Stars](#) is his first book.

Provided by Springer

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