



To Be Like Gods (The Linda Schele Series in Maya and Pre-Columbian Studies)

Matthew G. Looper



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The Maya of Mexico and Central America have performed ritual dances for more than two millennia. Dance is still an essential component of religious experience today, serving as a medium for communication with the supernatural. During the Late Classic period (AD 600-900), dance assumed additional importance in Maya royal courts through an association with feasting and gift exchange. These performances allowed rulers to forge political alliances and demonstrate their control of trade in luxury goods. The aesthetic values embodied in these performances were closely tied to Maya social structure, expressing notions of gender, rank, and status. Dance was thus not simply entertainment, but was fundamental to ancient Maya notions of social, religious, and political identity. Using an innovative interdisciplinary approach, Matthew Looper examines several types of data relevant to ancient Maya dance, including hieroglyphic texts, pictorial images in diverse media, and architecture. A series of case studies illustrates the application of various analytical methodologies and offers interpretations of the form, meaning, and social significance of dance performance. Although the nuances of movement in Maya dances are impossible to recover, Looper demonstrates that a wealth of other data survives which allows a detailed consideration of many aspects of performance. To Be Like Gods thus provides the first comprehensive interpretation of the role of dance in ancient Maya society and also serves as a model for comparative research in the archaeology of performance.



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