

2.4: Ancient Observations

Many of the ancient civilizations observed positions of specific stars and planets, like the rising and setting times of these objects. Ancient observatories were built to do this fairly accurately. For example, the **Mayan** observatory at Chichén Itzá had windows placed for observations of Venus. The **Polynesians** were some of the best observers for their island-to-island sailing navigation. The **Chinese** made incredibly detailed observations of the skies. This was done for their Emperor, the “son of the heavens.” They needed to accurately predict events to show the Emperor’s “divineness.” The Chinese were the first to record observations of comets, meteor showers, meteorites, eclipse predictions, and supernovae. It was the Chinese as well who built instruments to conduct these studies.

Other contributions of these early civilizations included the **Mesopotamians**, who were the first to develop a comprehensive catalog of the night sky, circa 750 BC, and the **Babylonians**, who combined the practice of astrology and astronomy.

The **Egyptians** also had an infatuation with the heavens. They developed the first recorded sundials in the form of Obelisks, and around 3500 BC recognized the seasons, and had implemented a day clock. The Pyramids also had astronomical implications; the Great Pyramid at Giza completed in 2680 BC, aligned with stars of Osiris and in a specific compass direction.

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