



# The Star-Crossed Stone: The Secret Life, Myths, and History of a Fascinating Fossil

*Kenneth J. McNamara*

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Throughout the four hundred thousand years that humanity has been collecting fossils, sea urchin fossils, or echinoids, have continually been among the most prized, from the Paleolithic era, when they decorated flint axes, to today, when paleobiologists study them for clues to the earth's history.

In *The Star-Crossed Stone*, Kenneth J. McNamara, an expert on fossil echinoids, takes readers on an incredible fossil hunt, with stops in history, paleontology, folklore, mythology, art, religion, and much more. Beginning with prehistoric times, when urchin fossils were used as jewelry, McNamara reveals how the fossil crept into the religious and cultural lives of societies around the world—the roots of the familiar five-pointed star, for example, can be traced to the pattern found on urchins. But McNamara's vision is even broader than that: using our knowledge of early habits of fossil collecting, he explores the evolution of the human mind itself, drawing striking conclusions about humanity's earliest appreciation of beauty and the first stirrings of artistic expression. Along the way, the fossil becomes a nexus through which we meet brilliant eccentrics and visionary archaeologists and develop new insights into topics as seemingly disparate as hieroglyphics, *Beowulf*, and even church organs.

An idiosyncratic celebration of science, nature, and human ingenuity, *The Star-Crossed Stone* is as charming and unforgettable as the fossil at its heart.

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