

Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Humanities and Arts Department

Maya Studies

A Major Qualifying Project

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Abstract

Maya Studies sought provide a worthwhile and detailed introduction to the Maya culture –past and present, through a unique format in order to inspire readers to continue the research and expand a personal knowledge base about the diverse people.

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Maya Studies: *A Burning Ember*

I was first introduced to the Maya when I was sixteen years old, participating in a student exchange program to Mexico. I arrived on the island Carmen, Campeche –at the base of the Yucatan peninsula- expecting to meet Mexicans. Instead I found myself surrounded by Maya-Mexicans. They taught me Mayan vocabulary alongside Spanish. We visited stone ruins and they read the ancient carvings to me, as naturally as if from a book. On Saturday afternoon, after a late dinner, I sat with the littlest kids to hear about the Maya flood story.

Since that time the Maya have been a fascination for me; one I've never quite given up, even eight years later. The Maya were once the most advanced and sophisticated civilization on the planet. They lived in a dangerous, exotic environment. To survive, they designed engineering solutions that can only be described as elegant. Best of all, the Maya still exist today. Six million Maya are living in Central and South America, and that number is growing. With every new detail we learn about the past, the modern Maya are reclaiming their cultural identity. Has history ever been so exciting?

I admit, choosing Maya Studies as the theme for my MQP was mainly a selfish decision; I wanted to learn more. But the purpose of this paper is to share my passion. By providing small tastes of who the Maya were, the reader should better understand who the Maya are. So much the better, if anyone else develops a blazing fascination from these small embers.

I've chosen four main topics within the overarching theme of Maya Studies to share some of my conclusions:

- i. Maya Mythology
- ii. The Apex of the Maya Empire
- iii. Technological Achievements
- iv. Modern Maya

They make up the four stand-alone articles of this report. In the first, I define the influences of the natural world on the Maya religion. Following, I detail how the Maya, at the height of their civilization, were the equivalent of the Roman Empire on the American continents. Of the many technological achievements of the ancient Maya, I chose to explain the famous Maya Calendar in the third article. Finally, I draw the future of the modern Maya as a contemporary adaptation of their past.

Blue-framed dialogue boxes are interspersed throughout the articles. These contain interesting facts, extra notes, or personal comments that serve as companions to the articles:

The word *Mayan* is widely used among academics as an adjective specifically in reference to the languages spoken by the Maya. The adjective *Maya* is then used in conjunction with all other aspects of the people and culture.

Ex.

The modern Maya reclaim their heritage by eating traditional Maya foods, learning to play Maya music, and speaking the ancient Mayan language.

For the reader with no prior knowledge, the following articles are a personal introduction to the Maya. The concepts extend beyond those taught during a usual Mesoamerican unit of a fourth grade class. By focusing on the details, I've attempted to establish the opportunity for a deeper connection with the material.

For the reader with some experience in the subject, I hope these articles provide some new insights. Some of the research the articles draw on is as newly explored as 2009. Each article should build an intimate understanding of a narrow focus with the Maya.

Maya Mythology: Spiritualism In The Jungle

"Finally [the hero twins] are sent to the House of Bats, a room filled with fierce knife-nosed bats. To protect themselves the twins hide inside their hollow blow-guns, but Hunahpu peeks out to see if dawn is approaching, and at that moment the killer bat Camazotz snatches off his head." (Taube 59).

Maya mythology is rife with strange animal life. They had fearsome snatch-bats that shrieked all night, helpful mosquito allies, jaguar shamans, and possum body aides (Popol Vuh). Mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and even insects found their way into Maya art (Lopes). Carvings and paintings pictured human-animal hybrids. Most of the gods and shamans purported to turn into animal shape. Those that looked human surrounded themselves with animals. Even a child's given name was often taken from animal names.

Why animals? Chinese mythology is famous for its wandering dragons and arboreal intelligence. Celtic mythology had the Sidhe who lived in fairy mounds. Ancient Greek mythology hosted a variety of gods and humans in the best-known soap operas in history.

The Maya's "natural world" was



A Natural Monster

Deep in Xibalba, the hero twins were put in a cave called the "House of Bats." They were surrounded in the dark by demon monsters: "Snatch-Bats" or "Death-Bats."¹ The bats' noses were "flint-shaped" wicked knives which they used to kill. All night they called "Eek-eek!" over and again. (Popol Vuh)

According to research of *Desmodus draculae*, the giant vampire bat, the camazotz may have been an accurate description of animals -until recently- common where the Maya lived (Turvey).

¹ The word *Camazotz* can be translated in different ways. This story comes from Chapter 2 of the Popol Vuh, where the camazotz are a cave full of monsters. In Chapter 3, there is a particular beast, similar to a camazotz bat, named Comalotz.

based in dense jungle, desert plains, and steep mountain lands. A world brimming with animals: peccaries, coatimundi, tapirs, agouti, paca, armadillo, ducks, and deer, among thousands of others. It should be no surprise that the jaguar –a silent, deadly hunter living in the neighborhood jungle- was a major religious image whenever there was a show of power to be had. Just so, the other dangerous and wondrous creatures that made up their "natural world" were illustrated as characters in their religion.

The hero twins of the Popol Vuh, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, were summoned into the dangerous underworld where the Xibalba gods plotted to kill them. To help, the twins called a notorious spy: the mosquito (Popol Vuh 117). He was exactly as we see mosquitoes in our world: tiny, overlooked, landing on exposed skin to suck blood and irritate his victims. The only supernatural aspect of Mosquito from the story was that he could talk. (Or perhaps the hero twins were supernatural to be able to converse with mosquitoes.)

The Maya mythology is filled with fantastic stories, but it was also steeped in reality. Many of

the stories were populated with strange monsters, but so was the Maya jungle.

The Maya had a firm belief in a logical, natural, tangible order that pervaded everything in the universe. It was a common essence that was shared by earth, plants, animals, people, and gods. The gods each controlled their aspect of the universe, maintaining creation as long as people behaved acceptably. While humans followed the rules set forth, the universe was predictable. It could be unkind at times, but it made logical sense.

That belief stemmed from observations of the predictable "celestial gods": moon, sun, stars and planets (Sharer 721). Then they projected that world view onto the environment they lived in.

Whether it began as the Maya's amazement at the diverse and powerful fauna they lived with... Or it began in their astrologically-based belief that the world was full of gods watching over human actions... animals played a mighty role in



("Popol Vuh.")

The Maya Bible

The Popol Vuh is a sacred text detailing the Maya creation myth, epic tales of some of the immortals, and genealogy. It was written after the Spanish conquest to Mesoamerica by the Quiché/K'iche' Maya in the Guatemalan highlands (Freidel 64).

Maya mythology. It is clear that the animal-rich environment enjoyed by the Maya was a vast influence on their religious tales.

Unlike European thought, the Maya didn't consider the spirit world to be any more "natural" than everything they saw by day (Sharer 721). The supernatural was already a part of their lives.

Consider the *Kuhkay*: ("Fireflies," in the Maya tongue. (Lopes))

"The "queen of stars" is a firefly (cocay), according to one colonial Yucatec source, and fireflies are said to carry "lights from the stars."" (Lopes)

A perfectly ordinary insect, seen every night, is said to share the glory of the celestial deities, whose movements may have founded the Maya's religious beliefs. Fireflies are also mentioned in the Popol Vuh: they were used in a rouse against the gods of the underworld by imitating the lit end of a cigar at night. Thus that ordinary insect was linked with the important religious practice of smoking.

It's easy to dismiss the supernatural tales and iconology we find in Maya ruins as obscure superstition and impractical religion, but to do so would put to waste important resources. They give us a useful insight into the Maya world-view. The places and creatures from mythology might more clearly than we think reflect what the Maya saw in their daily lives. What part the places and creatures played in mythology might show us how the Maya valued what they saw.

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The Classic Period Maya: The Roman Empire of the Americas

From AD 250 – 900, the Maya civilization enjoyed a peak in its prosperity and technological advancements, known as the Classic Period. This is the time, before the arrival of Spanish conquerors, that the Maya civilization was the most densely populated and culturally rich nation anywhere in the world.

In this time period, Europe was passing through the Dark Ages. Rome had fallen, leaving a crumbling network of communication between increasingly more isolated communities. Vandals destroyed what was left of the empire. China was experiencing the Period of Disunity. And the Arab empire was experiencing many bloody wars.

In the Americas, the Aztecs hadn't fully come into their time of power. The Olmecs had already ended theirs. The Maya people lived in relative autonomy, developing themselves.

Developing is exactly what they did. They developed boldly throughout Central America, across dangerous and diverse lands, developing trade into South America. Maya, almost universally, brings to

Map of Maya Empire



mind the intricate calendar system, the enormous step pyramids, the advanced writing system, and perhaps the human sacrifice. Those traditional images only begin to scratch the surface. Current research paints a complex social structure, deeply religious people, intelligent adaptive capabilities, and a culture as rich as the environment they lived in. The Classic Maya civilization was as culturally sophisticated as the Roman empire in its time.

The true measure of a culture is defined by a conglomeration of several characteristics of the group. Including: the values of its members, the languages spoken, any revered symbols, the material goods created, the norms followed, and the beliefs and expectations held. (Giddens 40)

The technological and academic achievements are, of course, amazing. The Maya were thinkers; they had to be, to survive in that dangerous and often inconvenient environment. The city of Tikal, in Guatemala, once hosted about 75,000 people, but there were no natural springs, wells, or rivers nearby (Smith, "Ancient"). The closest source of freshwater was Lake Peten Itza, more than 20 miles away.

Dr. Herman Smith, an archeologist devoted to the study of the Maya civilization, noted that the site for Tikal had probably been chosen for religious or political reasons, rather than after consideration for the logistics of water. However, the architects of Tikal were prepared to challenge the problem. When they quarried for limestone, they lined the holes with clay, creating reservoirs. The plaza at Tikal is tilted five degrees –barely noticeable when you're standing on it. It pours any rain water into the reservoirs.

The Mayas weren't the first Mesoamerican people to embrace the academic. The Zapotec –an early civilization that is still around today in highland Oaxaca- designed the earliest known calendar and writing system

Note:

See page 14 for a detailed exploration of the Maya Calendar.

(Taube 8). In 600 BC they were recording their own history. But the Maya writing system was especially complex in the Classic Period; they surpassed what the Zapotec did. The Maya's method of recording history was very exact, utilizing a complex calendar system, considered at least as accurate than the one we use today.

Fewer people know of the day-to-day life that existed beneath the scientific minds and technological advancements.

Of that life, the notes of Friar Diego de Landa paint a rich and interesting picture. The friar arrived in the Yucatan with Cortez at the end of the Classic period with the goal of converting the Maya

to Christianity. Landa wrote extensively about the people and customs he observed, frequently impressed by their advanced, community-conscious society where he had expected savages.

Friar Diego de Landa

Landa (AD 1524 - 1579) was a Franciscan monk, charged with bringing the Roman Catholic faith to the Maya (Vollemaere).

Landa's character is often vilified in history for his part in destroying the Maya. He ordered an Inquisition that is notorious for its violence. He had thousands of Maya books burnt, and "cult images" destroyed (Vollemaere). Today researchers are frustrated by having only four incomplete codices that survived of the Maya civilization.

Despite that, the friar was responsible for saving much of the pre-Columbian Maya culture in his notes and his book *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. He catalogued the religion, language, culture, and writing system. It is thanks to his work that we have an account of the social organization and Maya towns before the Spanish conquest (Folan).

Unlike most concepts of nationality, a single ruling body didn't govern all the Maya people. They existed as a number of diverse city states stretching through central and south America. The environmental concerns facing the different cities were unique and as diverse as their livelihoods. They spoke different languages, emphasized different gods, ate different foods, and lived in different time zones. Even within the cities, there was no one form of social organization, or common law (Sharer 665).

Flourishing trade routes connected the various cities, providing necessities to isolated communities, boosting economies, and sharing information. Like the roads of Rome, this networking enabled an thereto unseen growth of thought and technology.

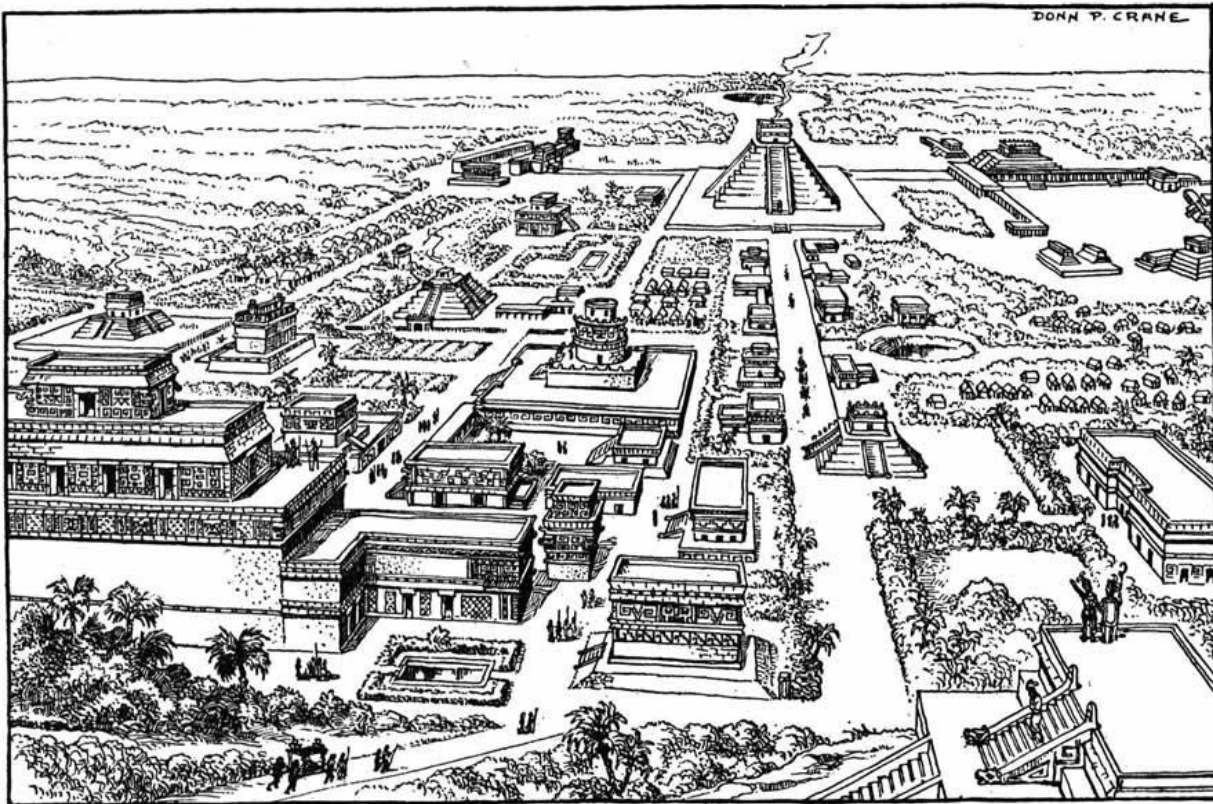
The cities didn't always live in harmony; wars were regular occurrences. However, they were tied by a common belief system. In sharing the same religion they were united by their fears and values.

Many cities were ruled by a shaman king or queen, in a seamless mix of church and state.

As envious as the top position might seem, the rank came with some fairly unappealing responsibilities. The ruler served as the intermediary between the gods and mortals, as well as other supernatural beasts and spirits. This was accomplished through ceremonies that nearly all involved some form of bloodletting. Since the highest ranking blood provided the most efficient line to the gods, the ruler was known to pierce their foreskin, if they were male. Or their tongue, if they were female. (Smith "It's Great") Also the ears, cheeks, and lips. Enough blood had to be drawn to ink a message on a piece of

bark paper that was then burnt (Smith "It's Great"). The ruler was also expected to keep track of the calendars, which indicated the correct activities for each day; and correctly record the history.

The social classes within the Maya city included a nobility, priesthood, and common people. (The commoners were farmers, hunters, warriors, and craftsmen.) The place of residence within the city indicated a person's rank. Temples and plazas were the heart of the city. The houses immediate to those belonged to the chiefs, priests, and leading men. Beyond them the most esteemed men lived. Common people lived at the borders of town. Plantations surrounded them. (Landa 26)



("Maya People.")

Community was of utmost importance to every Maya. The people provided for their chief and priests (Landa 32). Within the city, the people lived in peace; the crippled were cared for (Landa 12). Wealthy children were often schooled in writing and mathematics to further their potential. Women wove clothing for their families, and more elaborate cloth to sell.

It's difficult to judge a civilization with purely impartial standards, but the Maya of the Classic Period built one of the greatest civilizations in the world. They had all the characteristics expected: advanced technology, a complete language and precise system of writing, religion, a diverse economy, and social organization that fostered the improvement of the community as a whole.

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The Maya Calendar

During the Industrial Revolution in Europe, a strange thing happened to the concept of time. With the invention of the watch and commercial networking, people began adjusting their schedules to a region-wide abstraction. The concept of time became linear; for the first time people could "lose" time or "waste" time.

Almost everywhere else in the world, in every other society, time was known as a cyclical structure (Wilkes). It was based off the observations of nature: day became night, and became day again; seasons passed and returned; all the stars spun on a rotation in the sky. It was also influenced by (and perhaps influenced) religious beliefs about death and rebirth.

The Maya people were masters of cyclical time, but they also developed the use of linear time in order to relate two events to each other. As astrologers they were fastidious in chronicling the movements of the stars. As mathematicians they were exact in charting the orbits and pinpointing our relational placement. Many scientists have lauded the Maya for their intricate calendar system –some say even more precise than our own.

But when the massive stone sculptures are displayed in museums with a plaque indicating the carved pictures represent a calendar, very few people can appreciate the genius. As confusing as the Maya calendar might seem, its intricacies have been some of the most interesting things to me in my research.

The Maya were not the first Mesoamerican civilization to create a calendar. The Maya calendric system shares many characteristics with the earlier Zapotec and Olmec systems (Tondering). But the Maya calendar was the most sophisticated –more so than even the later Aztec and Miztec calendars.

In fact, the Maya had

A Note on Pronunciation

The Mayan language uses what is known as a "glottal stop." It's a sound created by catching breath at the back of the throat.

















Ex. "uh-oh!" The glottal stop occurs where the hyphen is.

When we write Mayan words, any glottal stops can be indicated by an apostrophe. However, since English doesn't officially have a symbol to indicate it, the practice is inconsistent.

three important calendars that all ran concurrent to each other: the Long Count, the Haab', and the Tzolk'in.

20 Day Names of the Tzolk'in Date

The 20 day names varied by region among the different Maya states. These are those used by the Maya of the Guatemalan highlands (Sharer 104):

Imix		Chuwen	
Ik'		Eb	
Ak'bal		Ben	
K'an		Ix	
Chikchan		Men	
Kimi		Kib	
Manik'		Kaban	
Lamat		Etz'nab	
Muluk		Kawak	
Ok		Ajaw	

The Haab' is the civil calendar of the Maya, completed with the solar cycle we recognize as a "year". It is made up of 18 20-day months, making 360 days (Sharer 107). The remaining five days are known as Wayeb', the nameless days, or the unlucky days. The Wayeb' was a five day religious festival (Landa 61). The dates in the Haab' calendar are written with the day number preceding the name of the month. Seasonally speaking, the Haab' isn't the best calendar because it ignores the extra quarter day that the Gregorian calendar allows for with the leap year.

The Tzolk'in is the Maya Sacred Calendar Round. It is constructed with 20 day names and the numbers 1 – 13. The day names are to the left (Sharer 104):

The first day in the cycle would be 1 Imix', the second 2 Ik', the thirteenth 13 Ben. After 13 Ben the numbers begin again at 1, but the day names continue in sequence: 1 Ix, 2 Men, etc. Using this system, the day 1 Imix'

doesn't repeat for 260 days.

The reason for the 260 day cycle is unclear, but it seems to have something to do with the Maya religious interpretation of birth. 260 days is roughly the average number of days in a human pregnancy. It is also the number of days between planting and harvesting. (Tondering) However, the number could just as easily have been chosen for mathematical or astronomical reasons. The numbers 20 and 13 are religiously significant to the Maya.

The Tzolk'in cycle was so important that Maya children in the Guatemalan highlands, before they reached a certain age, took their name from the day they were born on (Sharer 104). A prefix indicated their gender. Calendar names weren't as boring for Maya children as naming a little boy 'Tuesday' would be. Most Maya calendar names came from animals. A boy born on 5 Ix was named after the Jaguar (Crystal).

The Long Count is a non-repeating base-20 calendar. It was used for chronicling history and anything to last longer than 52 years. It begins on zero day (the creation day, according to Maya mythology) and progresses forward. That day, according to the Gregorian calendar, is roughly August 11, 3114 BCE. (Tondering)

Periods of time in the Long Count are below, with their Gregorian counterparts to the right (Tondering):

The Long Count Units

<i>Maya unit</i>	<i>equivalent</i>	<i>Gregorian unit</i>
1 day		1 day
1 uinal	20 days	20 days
1 tun	18 uinals	360 days (~1 year)
1 katun	20 tuns	7,200 days (~20 years)
1 baktun	20 katuns	144,000 days (~395 years)
1 Great Cycle	13 backtuns	1,872,000 days(~ ½ millennium)

The Long Count is written with decimals, the leftmost values being the bigger cycles. For instance, 9.12.0.8.3 represents 9 baktuns, 12 katuns, 0 tuns, 8 uinal, and 3 days after zero day (Sharer 110). Although there are 6 types of cycles in the Long Count, the decimal notation generally includes only the first 5. That's because the first Great Cycle hasn't ended yet. It doesn't end until 13.0.0.0.0 –in 2012 AD by the Gregorian calendar.

The days and units of the Maya calendar had religious significance in the daily lives of the Maya people. Much of the divination practiced was conducted with the assumption that supernatural forces

20 Day Gods

Each day was linked to a different god in Maya mythology. For the most part, the days were named after those gods.

Day	God's Name	Specialty
Imix	Crocodile	Reptilian body of the planet, or world.
Ik'	Wind	Breath, life, and violence
Ak'bal	Night-house	Darkness, underworld, evil
K'an	Maize	Abundance, ripeness
Chikchan	Snake	Celestial serpent
Kimi	Death	Death
Manik'	Deer	Lord of the Hunt's sign
Lamat	Rabbit	Planet Venus, sunset
Muluk	Water	Water, fish
Ok	Dog	Who guides the night sun through the underworld
Chuwen	Monkey	Arts, knowledge, thread, crafts
Eb	Grass/Point	Rain, storms
Ben	Reed	Growth of corn, cane, and man
Ix	Jaguar	Night sun, maize
Men	Eagle	Wise, bird, moon
Kib	Own/Vulture	Death-birds of night and day, wax, soul, insect
Kaben	Earthquake	Power, season, thought
Etz'nab	Knife	Obsidian sacrificial blade
Kawak	Rain/Storm	Celestial dragon, thunder, lightning
Ajaw	Lord	Radiant sun

that influenced a particular calendric date would reappear when the date cycled around again. The completion of significant calendar cycles, like the k'atun, were often celebrated with the construction

and dedication of a new monument (Taube 15). Shamans had the ultimate responsibility for recording and tracking the calendars, but even the poor Maya farmer would have known enough of the basics in order to organize his life and family (Sharer 102).

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The Modern Maya

There are 6 million Maya living today in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize, 10 centuries after the Maya empire fell from its prosperity (Rio). They have survived; adopting foreign religions, accepting new citizenships, learning new trades. They no longer live in the stone cities built by their ancestors. They've lost most of their history and traditional arts. They are denied the rights of citizens of an independent Maya state. Even within the Maya community there are enormously different goals. They are frequently caught between extremist rebels and the government, sometimes to devastating result. But the Maya live on, in more than just bloodline.

At the core of all societies is a common language and belief system; and the Maya oral tradition has preserved that. Many of the descendants living in modern countries are at least bilingual—one language being their ancient Mayan dialect.

The written language has been rediscovered opening up firsthand accounts as useful historical sources. Particularly the four codices that survived the Christian fires or rotting mildew. And of course, the sacred Popol Vuh text, written by the K'iche' Maya of highland Guatemala (Freidel 43).

Small Maya communities were reformed where they could relearn their own traditions, similar to the diverse and isolated communities of ancient Maya. Maya schools were opened to help the people rediscover their past. Shamans have become more confident in sharing the rituals they've kept

The Fall of the Maya Empire

The Classic Period ended and the Maya empire began to decline between AD 800 – 900 (Sharer). The event (sometimes known as the Classic Maya Collapse) is one of the biggest mysteries in American history. There are 88 different theories to explain the collapse (Gill), but none that is universally accepted. Many of the cities in the Guatemalan highlands were abandoned. People migrated further up the length of the Yucatan peninsula.

Afterwards

The Spanish didn't begin to move among the Maya until roughly AD 1520. It took them about 500 years to fully conquer the area.

A history of abuses, wars, and revolutions followed. Independent countries were formed and the Maya were forgotten by the world.

By the time anyone thought again to wonder, the Maya had been integrated into the contemporary variety of Mesoamerican cultures.

safely private for so many generations. All of this points to the Maya culture expanding once again, damaged but undefeated, even in the face of the modern world.

The modern Maya is not an extremist nor terrorist. While those groups do exist within the Maya community, they will not be able to survive. Modern societies will never accept violent demands for a return of Maya land (Radu). Nor will they allow a revival of human sacrifice and sexist mutilation (Grayson). The modern Maya will assimilate into the present day while retaining the important heart of their culture.

The modern Maya shamans are a prime example of what the modern Maya culture brings to the world. Religion is always a useful descriptor of a culture, because it paints clearly the world view of a people –their fears and hopes; their purposes in life.

Maya shamans exist to be an intermediary between humans and the spirit world. They keep track of the sacred calendar to better understand the world. They can communicate with the gods who maintain their world, with ancestors, demons, and any other unseen beings. In ancient Maya communities, shamans were kings, but modern shamans are servants of their people. As poor as their oppressed farming communities are, is as poor as the shaman is. As often as they hold rituals calling for rain, the shaman is fixing fences and lending an attentive ear to troubles (Freidel 31). And just as in the past (de Landa 32), the shaman's home and table is provided by the people. The exchange of mutual providence emphasizes a core value that has always existed among the Maya: community responsibility.

In the past, the community had to be protected above the individual to save it from the jaguars of the jungle and the invasion of foreign tribes. Today it is treated the same for the sake of community growth and individual well-being.

Modern shamans are also still responsible for teaching social conduct and role models. Through the tales preserved in their sacred texts, modern Maya are warned against greed and arrogance (Taube 17). The Popol Vuh tells a story about hero twins who defeated the monster bird because of his excessive pride. It also details the creation of man for the purpose of sustaining the gods. In ancient times that purpose necessitated human sacrifice. In contemporary times, it is a responsibility to help maintain the cosmic balance (Taube 17). The movements and forces of nature should never be ignored by the modern Maya. Fortunately for the jungles of South America, the Maya are taught to be dedicated environmentalists.

Of course, the modern shamans have lost as much of their tradition as the rest of the Maya community. Through continued research they are able to regain some of their healing rituals and prayer practices.

Other Maya traditions are relearned in the same way: through study and practice. Modern Maya women use backstrap looms, like their ancestors, to weave traditional patterns (Rio). They wear traditional clothes. Many farmers use the old "slash and burn" method for their milpas (Rio). And women use traditional "low tech" methods to prepare their meals. Not from necessity, but to regain their culture.

The modern Maya are surely a conglomerate of cultures, struggling to hold onto their history, and striving to make a place for themselves in contemporary times. But in all important aspects, they are still Maya. Language, religion, traditions, and world view are direct descendants of the ancient culture.

The Future of the Maya

The most important thing for the Maya now is to regain as much of their culture as possible. Studies like *Unnatural Causes*, have shown the affects of losing a culture can be physically devastating even generations later.

To that end, significant steps have been made –and are being made now. More will be required in the future:

- Protect the cities. Ancient Maya community sites must go first to the researchers, not the independent businessmen.
- Don't support illegal scavenging. Priceless artifacts are destroyed every time a gem-encrusted bowl is brought to the black market. More often than not, the artifacts taken to the black market are irrevocably compromised in an effort to make a them more valuable.
- Educate yourself. The more people understand the Maya, the easier their community's acceptance will be. Look out for social prejudice about the Maya.

I am not optimistic about some of the political goals -to return the Maya their ancestors' land, or reinstitute the practices regarded as mutilation. Fortunately, those goals are not reflected by all Maya. The other goal: to bring what it means to be Maya into the light of the 21st century, is being pursued every day. My advice is to become a part of that exciting process.

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