Maya: Five Hundred Years Later

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"The Maya; Five Hundred Years Later"

by

Thomas A. Donahue

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Senior Scholar Program

Colby College
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Introduction

I have been asked many times, during the course of this past year, what the topic of my Senior Scholar paper was to be. When I answer that I have chosen to study the Mayan Indians, the response is usually a rather uncomfortable silence, followed by such a question as, "Who are they?"

I will admit, however, that the Indians of Southern Mexico and Guatemala do not make the headlines, or the sports page, in the Waterville Sentinel, on any sort of a daily basis. They do not take precedence over the bombing runs in Viet Nam, or the exploits of Wilt Chamberlain. If one thinks of them at all, it is in the context of some sort of a lost civilization, which built a lot of temples, and threw virgins into wells, the first action being a bit idolatrous, the second being downright foolish. Why then, would anyone want to study them?

I have chosen to study them for two reasons. The first is based on the intrigue of all men with what has gone before them. The second is based on the fact that I have spent a good deal of my life in countries where these people lived, and built, against fantastic odds, a culture which ranks, in my opinion, among the greatest this world has ever seen. One's fascination with bygone civilizations normally takes the form of an interesting and speculative conversation on a rainy afternoon when not much is going on. But when one finds himself face to face with history, in windy gorges, and on
barren mountainsides, the impression is a much more lasting one. In short, I am deeply impressed with the Mayan.

If the reader is to gain anything from this paper, he also must place himself face to face with the walking, breathing history which is the Indian. He must try always to divorce himself from his surroundings to understand truly what the Indian is, not what his ancestors have done. All too often, I believe, we tend to look at the early civilizations of this hemisphere as a conglomeration of potsherds, bloody deities, fearsome religious rites, and crumbling buildings. But this research will not be an archeological study. It will be an attempt to discover what the Mayan is, and how he came to be what he is. The reader will find that I have briefly covered the history of the Mayan of pre-Columbian times. This was done in order to give the reader a grounding upon which to view the Indian of today in Middle America.

Predominantly, then, the purpose of this study will be to form a greater understanding of the Indian of the here and now, the Indian which makes up a vast percentage of the population of Guatemala and Mexico. I should like to show how elements which appear to be inherent in his nature, are, in fact, manifestations of his own past, and how the qualities of that past rule him as strongly today as they did when his lands were governed by a hierarchy of priests and an ultimate ruler known as the "Halach uinich."

I have mentioned personal experience. Descendants of the Mayan Indians have cared for me when I was in no condition
to do so myself, have laughed with me, and been sad with me. Indians and I have discussed, at length, every topic from the color of horses, to the relative merits of green stamps. I do not presume, however, to be the ultimate authority on all things Indian. At the time I knew them best, at the time when I saw them on a daily basis, I did not have the analytical eye of the archeologist, nor the practiced method of the anthropologist. I have had most contact with them, rather, when I felt myself relatively carefree, and at ease. In this way, I have observed much. I have sat with the Indian beneath a "ceiba" tree in the cool of the evening. I have slept in his adobe "rancho," on his hammock. I have squatted by his hearth, and shared his "tortillas," and played with his children.

These things have been my artifacts. These places have been my classroom and my laboratory. My only hope is that the reader of this paper might gain something of what I have gained, and understand something of what I have seen.
PART I
The Beginning

No study of pre-hispanic culture can begin without some reference to the earliest humans who inhabited the Western Hemisphere. I shall admit to the reader, with no attempt to dissimilate my deepest feelings, that few things fascinate me quite so much as the contemplative practice of theorizing about early mankind in the so-called, "New World." It is perhaps this interest which first caused me to look at the Mayan Indian today as somewhat of a living fossil, and, therefore, a fascinating subject for study.

It is thought that men have inhabited this portion of the earth since the Pleistocene period of earth's history. That is to say, roughly thirty thousand years.\(^1\) Many theories have arisen as to how he arrived here, and why. One does, of course, have a wide field of ideas to choose from, for this subject has intrigued men for centuries. One of the most prevalent theories expounded during the conquest of this hemisphere by the Europeans, was that the Indians represented one of the lost tribes of Israel. Another idea, believe it or not, was that they were English. Serious research, needless to say, has disproved these and many similar theories.\(^2\)

It is generally accepted in our day and age that all pre-Columbian peoples are descendants of the Orientals who first crossed what was, during the Pleistocene at any rate, a
land bridge joining the Western Hemisphere to Siberia. One can safely assume that the earliest migrants were hunters and gatherers, for it is somewhat difficult to imagine any sort of agriculture at this time, especially in the northern Siberian and Alaskan climate.

Over a period, doubtless of many thousand years, these people moved further and further south. Always in search of game, they found it impossible to remain for any great length of time in a given area. Eventually, they arrived in what is now considered Central America.

Let us jump several thousand years here, and look briefly at the environment which faced the early men as they approached what was to be the main area of Mayan civilization.

The southern portion of Mexico, and the northern parts of Central America contain many and varied topographic and climatic conditions. It is a vertical land, with few exceptions. The Sierra Maestra mountains continue down through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and spread out into many choppy, shorter chains when they reach Central America. To the west of these mountains, both in Mexico and in Guatemala, there is very little by way of flat coastal plain. To the east, however, the terrain is entirely different. The Yucatan Peninsula, projecting into the Gulf of Mexico, is a vast area of rolling hills. Heavy brush growths dominate and there is a predominant limestone base, porous in nature, which covers the area. To the south and west of this stretches the immense Peten jungle. Almost every conceivable growth is evident here. To this day it has yet to be totally explored. It also rests on
a limestone base, and has an elevation, at its highest point, of no more than six hundred feet. Rainfall reaches as much as 170 inches per year, and yet water is constantly a problem. The porous rock drains the area, and usually, the only source of water is certain natural wells, called cenotes, which form in the earth. The author can safely vouch for the validity of the name given to this area – The Green Hell.

I have extended this description of the Petén area for a very good reason. It is here, rather than in the far more lush and temperate mountains, that the Mayan civilization flourished, and created its greatest achievements. This is not to say that no other area saw Mayan developments; many did, and these shall be seen at a later point.

Corn, beans, squash, cotton, and cacao grow best in the areas we have seen, and they take on prominence as civilization progresses in the region.

Agriculture began among the people who were to become Mayans in about 5000 B.C. It is assumed now that some secondary migration or wave came into the area from the north, driving out the remaining gatherers and hunters. It is, of course, impossible to say just when a strictly "Mayan" culture began to grow, but one can assume that the cultivation of corn, beginning around 2000 B.C. in Central America marks the beginning of at least the potential, or necessary, surplus, to begin what grew to be a culture. The Mayan man and corn are inseparable. To him, corn was man. This feeling was so ingrained that we find him believing that man had been fashioned from corn. It is thought, today, that corn is, indeed, a product
which originated in Central America.

We begin, then, with a settling down process beginning in approximately 5000 B.C. with the development of agriculture. We must remember one important thing here. The people who were to become the highly advanced cultured in later centuries, and who dispersed the less civilized groups in the Southern Mexican and Guatemalan highlands, were not in a vacuum. In the north and west of the Mayan area, other groups were springing up and beginning to assume characteristics similar to those of the Maya. One common error on the part of many students of these people, is to conceive of the Mayan as a highly advanced little creature, straining away in the darkest jungle and creating miraculous achievements, while the rest of the hemisphere wallowed in barbarity and ignorance. This is not true. The Olmec and Zapotec were, in the early stages, as advanced in every way as the Mayan. Many cultures in the Valley of Mexico were also highly advanced, though none in quite the same way as the Maya.

A certain trend is seen almost at once, when the period of adjustment has ended. We see three areas of concentration emerge. The first is the so-called "Highland Maya," who settled in the more mountainous parts of Guatemala (now called the Cuchumatanes mountains). The second group is known as the "Central Maya." This group tended to settle in the deepest portion of the Peten jungle. The third, and last, group is known as the "Northern Maya." These people came to rest eventually on the wide rolling peninsula of Yucatan. The only reason these distinctions can be made is by way of the
cultural development of each. All three spoke the same language (with very minor deviations), and all were very distinctly Maya. It is only in the so-called "central" region, however, that we find the truly great civilization arises.


2Such theories as these can be found in most histories of the conquest of this hemisphere. Prescott and Wolf are two worth mentioning.

3Wolf, loc. cit.

4I should like to mention that most of the information dealing strictly with historical matters has been taken from Eric Wolf's book, cited above.

Cities

To discuss the three major areas of Mayan civilization at this point would be foolish and might mislead the reader. It is not time for this.

Certainly by 1000 to 500 B.C. the Mayan people had found some stability in their world, and had truly begun to emerge as a culture distinct from others. We are only able to theorize as to the formation of their society at this time. We can assume, however, that the Mayan, as all primitive men, was imbued with thoughts of things over which he had no control. At first, we may imagine, all this took only the form of vague superstitions and fears of the unknown and uncontrollable. But it is from such as this that religions spring. And, as our study progresses, we shall see that to the Mayan - religion was life.

Of his early social structure, then, we can only theorize. We might imagine, however, that because of his fears and superstitions, certain areas or objects (for any of a thousand reasons) would become sacred. Perhaps we might also assume that certain members of the society, perhaps the "discoverers" of such holy places or things would emerge and consider themselves more adept at determining the wishes and idiosyncrasies of the unseen powers than other men. Since it would seem wise for men to attempt to appease the forces which they did not fully understand, it only seems natural that these "holy places" would be the objects of a certain degree of veneration on the
part of the rest of the society. Gifts, perhaps, would seem necessary to insure the continued benevolence of a given force, which would soon take on the aspect of a deity. A priesthood would arise which could presumably predict the wishes and appropriate necessities of the deities involved.²

The Mayan city, and what was later to become the city-state, evolved in the manner mentioned above. It was a temple-city. Only in the final years of Mayan decay do we see people actually living in the city. As a development of the temple-city, we see certain elements of secular power also. Not all buildings were devoted to the religious, however. At Tikal, for example, one of the oldest cities, and one which flourished throughout the developmental and advanced stages of Mayan civilization, one sees a predominance of construction devoted to the religious (pyramid-shaped temples, etc.), but one also sees a long stone building which apparently was devoted to the housing of secular leaders. The secular aspects of the society will be discussed at a later point.

But to build even a small pyramid to worship some unknown deity takes energy. It is possible, then, for us to theorize a great deal more about this early society, with a fair degree of accuracy.

The most formative period of Mayan history took place between 500 B.C. and 300 A.D.³ The original settling-down process had been accomplished. The classic Mayan house had been developed. Methods for the cultivation of the earth had been discovered. This was the "slash-and-burn" method which we shall see later. Towns and cities had been built
as we have seen. One point worth mentioning here is that is was not only "holy" areas which saw the construction of cities, but also areas near the natural wells (cenotes) to which we referred earlier. One must bear in mind that although the Peten jungle receives as much as 180 inches of rain per year, the lack of water is always a problem because of the extremely porous nature of the bedrock beneath the soil. Many cities which were built in areas where there were no cenotes constructed large cisterns to catch the rainfall. Tikal is a perfect example of this.

As the temple-city emerges, then, we see a threefold purpose to it. The first is obviously the religious aspect, and, as we have said, the vast majority of buildings within the city were for strictly worship purposes, or things related to it. The second purpose for the city was of a secular nature. The city was the seat of power for the temporal leaders of the area. The "government offices," as it were, were to be found here. The third purpose of the city was to bring together the many artisans and skilled craftsmen who were necessary for the construction of the many deity-oriented buildings and statuary. This third group found within the city we may conceive of as the last to take on any prominence as the society advanced. It is worth mentioning, I believe, that while these temple-cities were never inhabited by what might be called the masses, they did serve to house these three types of mass producers, which we have seen above. The vast majority of the population lived in the agricultural areas surrounding these cities. The cities grew larger and larger as time went on, of course,
because of the increasing number and variety of artisans, clergy, and secular leaders needed to administer the society. An interesting thing to note here is the sheer number of these temple-cities. Hundreds of these cities are known to have existed. The Peten jungle has been virtually impenetrable until recently, and we can only allow our imaginations to work for us in conjecture of what may be discovered in that area.


2 Many of the theories expounded here can be found in most of the better known works dealing with the Maya. Thompson, Morley, and Van Hagen have contributed to this section.

3 Morley and Thompson agree on this, but others have felt that this period began earlier.

4 The amount of rainfall and most characteristics pertaining to the geographic aspects of the Mayan area were established according to class lectures at the University of San Carlos, Guatemala.

5 The three-fold purpose of the city, and my views on it, can be found in Morley and Thompson.
One thing that I believe to be of utmost importance to mention at the outset is that at no time in the history of Mayan civilization was there ever anything which might be construed as an "empire." We may look to the south and north of Mayadom and find other cultures, such as the Inca and the Aztec, who did form empires, and who drove their influence far and wide into the region surrounding their capitals. We might also add that neither of these cultures endured anywhere near as long as did the Maya (war-mongering imperialists - beware!) The Maya never chose to create an empire, and one of the greatest enigmas of our time is why they did not. We find that even in the strictly Mayan lands of Guatemala and Southern Mexico there was never so much as a central capital. There was never one high priest whose ideas dominated religious thought throughout the area. Instead we find a series of city-states which hold almost total autonomy over the immediate area which they influence. One thinks immediately of the Greek polis, and, in fact, it is not strange to hear the Mayan referred to as the "Greek of the New World." These city-states were often at war with one another over such subjects as boundaries and trade routes, but these were never of great duration, and the culture was able to flourish despite them. But our discussion here is not of wars and boundaries, but of society. Forgive my digression.
By 300 A.D., as we have noted, the society of the Maya was fairly well entrenched in what was to be their cultural tradition for the next six hundred years. Let us begin, then, with a look at the secular leadership of the society.²

The man who led the society was known as the Halach uinich. He was supposed to embody all the virtues of Mayan manhood. He was, in effect, the best man. His office was virtually (and almost literally) smothered in tradition. The garments he wore were of the finest that craftsmen could produce. He, like all other Mayan men, wore a type of breechclout about his middle, a cape about his shoulders, and sandals. His headdress was immense, and woven with the most beautiful feathers of the many birds of the jungle. I often liken him to the leader of a string orchestra in the Mummer's Parade in Philadelphia.

To advise this man, there existed a council. This group was usually stocked with as many relatives of the head man as possible. One can only conjecture as to the amount of sway this council held over the Halach uinich, but one can assume that since the Maya was by nature reverent toward old age, and this council consisted of older men, then perhaps it was wise for the head man to heed the advice of this council.

Around each of the large temple-cities, there existed, as one might surmise, outlying areas, sometimes taking the form of small towns. All such places had to be governed also. It is not surprising, then, that the Halach uinich was willing to delegate his authority to men known as Batabob, who in turn
maintained constabularies beneath them. An interesting note here is that Batabob literally means, "the man with the hatchet" or hatchet man. One can only wonder if our modern term derives from this.

The priesthood, of course, played a tremendously important role as leaders of the society. While it was the Halachunich who was the absolute ruler, he could be hamstrung without the consent of the clergy. It was, after all, the priesthood who were able to foretell the future, who made all the scientific discoveries, and who could (as they would have had it understood) tell of a given deity's slightest whim. They were, in short, vitally important. Their importance will become more clear in a later section.

Beneath these people we have been describing, there existed a mass of relatively ignorant men, whose every move was determined by superiors, and the deliverance of whose very soul was nearly entirely in the hands of others. What sort of a man was he? How did he live? What were his hopes and aspirations? I shall try to deal with this below.

No discussion of the Mayan man can validly take place without mentioning the clan. To humble man of Mayadom, primary allegiance was to be paid to the clan. In past times, of course, the clan had been simply a large family living in a given area. It was a primary social unit, usually with a fair amount of self-sufficiency. These families grew to tremendous proportions. They became, in effect, large, agricultural communities. It should be fairly obvious that all of this would tend to take on a very paternalistic atmosphere, and it
The nearby temple-city would send its Batabob into the local community, but true leadership here was found among the so-called *principales*. These men represented a sort of loosely joined council of older men who tended to serve as consultants on basic issues of morality and general conduct. They were, in effect, the moral leaders of the community. Their power was never to be trifled with, as the Spaniard found out several centuries later, and the modern Latin American is still finding out.

As an example of the totally familial type of relationship which existed in the clan group, we might look at the marriage custom. Love and romance were non-existent, of course, and marriage contracts were sealed via an intermediary. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the whole affair is that after the couple were married for several years (during which time the groom worked in his father-in-law's fields), the young couple were given a four hundred foot square area for them to cultivate. This was a gift not from either side of the immediate family, but from the clan-community itself. This area was increased as the need arose to support new dependents. Communism might learn a lot from the Maya.

The "lower man," as he was called, was entirely a power of the wishes of the state. He was by nature a submissive soul, apparently, and took orders well. As in any state that is advanced enough to support non-producers, taxing in some form had to be exerted. The Mayans normally paid their taxes through two means. The first of these was by giving a certain portion of their farm produce to the state. The second was more involved. Maize or corn agriculture takes about one-half
of the year in actual working hours. In other words, from the
beginning of the growing season, when trees must be burned and
cleared, and seeds planted, to the end of the harvest, the
Mayan was very busy. When his crops were in and stored,
however, he had relatively little to do. It was during this
time, then, that he "paid his taxes" - in work.

Picture, if you will, a jungle. In a jungle the rate
of growth is fantastic. It is almost frightening. A constant
fight against the jungle's onslaught is necessary if any
progress whatsoever is to be made. The author has had some
experience with this in the region near Mazatenango, on the
southwestern slopes of Guatemala. The ranch buildings were
grouped in a cleared rectangle cut out of the undergrowth.
During the time of the author's stay at this ranch (about
two and a half weeks), the jungle growth had to be hacked back
twice, just to keep the area around the buildings from being
engulfed. This, then, was the tax the Mayan paid to his
state. There was a constant threat of erosion from the
heavy rains. Temples forever needed repair. Roads, the
beautiful raised causeways linking city to nearby cenote, were
constantly being undermined by water seepage and jungle growth.
Forces used against this were men and stones. There were
virtually no metal tools among the Maya, and no wheel, other
than in children's toys. What an appalling job. In the
twentieth century we are as unable to build decent highways
through this and similar areas. One gains a great respect
for Mayan endurance when one thinks of the task he faced with
the most rudimentary tools.
We have seen that the Mayan deities played an important role in the development of the culture itself, and in the building of cities. We may ask, then, what part, or to what extent, was the "lower man" involved in all of this. At this point, I do not wish to give any too detailed an analysis of what his religion was. It is important to note, however, that the lower men knew nothing of their deities. All control of their own destinies had been taken from them. They realized that the deities had to be placated, but it was also their firm belief that they alone could not do this. They felt that the priesthood was indispensable in such matters. Their belief in the powers of this priesthood, I believe, can be most dramatically displayed by looking once more at the service tax which each Indian was expected to fulfill. The great majority of work done during the time one served was spent on construction and maintenance of purely religious structures. For this, needless to say, the individual received absolutely no remuneration. It is evident, therefore, that the Mayan man had a healthy respect for the supernatural, and those who he felt represented it in the world of reality.

The Mayan daily life must have been at best a rather drab affair. He arose at four in the morning. While he dressed and prepared himself for his daily work, his wife had started the fire and was making the tortillas (corn cakes). After his breakfast, he left for his milpa (cornfield) to toil until just past noon, at which point he consumed a flask or gourd of nozole (a corn-based drink) and more tortillas. He would go home after this meal. His wife's duty was to prepare a steam bath with hot rocks and water for him. At termination
of this process, the man of the house customarily took a short
dip in the local cenote, if possible, or perhaps in a nearby
stream. Dull it may have been, but lovely somehow.

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1Dr. Jorge Luis Arriola, ex-Minister of Education of
Guatemala, and presently of San Carlos University, uses this
term often.

2The following comments on the social structure of Maya-
dom come from Von Hagen's work almost exclusively. To annotate
each bit of information would call for endless references.

3Only toward the end of Mayan hegemony do we see any use
of metals, and then only in articles of decoration.

4This section on his religious beliefs also has been
taken from Von Hagen. While most authors deal with this area,
Von Hagen has given the most concise account.

5J. Eric S. Thompson, The rise and Fall of Maya Civiliza-
Religion

I have alluded to the religious make-up of the society in general up to this point. I think it wise, before we continue, to delve somewhat deeper into the field of Mayan religion in an attempt to give the reader a fuller understanding of its influence on the Maya of many centuries ago, and on the Maya of today. I must warn the reader that to fully discuss the many aspects of Mayan religion, one would have to write a great deal more than time will permit me to do at this point. The fundamentals, then, shall be the main point of discussion at this point. ¹

All things on this earth had deities ascribed to them in the Mayan hierarchy. A god, or series of gods, controlled every animate and inanimate thing upon the face of the earth. Indeed, the earth itself had its deity. Actions of all kinds had deities ascribed to them. To clarify this last point, I shall use the example of the hunter. The hunt itself was thought to be controlled by a given god. If the hunter killed, let us say, a deer, he first asked permission of the deity in charge of such things. He also asked forgiveness of his gods for killing the deer, explaining that he had done so to provide for his family or clan. There were gods for planting, gods to insure fertility in women; gods, in fact for every conceivable function of human beings.

The Mayan thought of the world and the firmament above as resting upon the back of a crocodile. The world was held
at its cardinal directions by four gods. There can be noted an extremely reptilian aspect to Mayan religion. The crocodile is a good example of this, and we see that several of the more prominent deities are depicted as having scales. Color also played a definite role in Mayan beliefs. A god is most often matched with a color. The only trouble with this is that the Mayan kept interchanging these gods and colors, increasing greatly the difficulty involved in studying them.

There is a great deal of duality in the Mayan cosmology. A god may appear as a benevolent creature at one time, and as a vile beast at another. Along this same line we see that certain gods are connected with time periods in the past. The strangest aspect of the entire religion is, I believe, the fact that names of deities change, seemingly at will, from one period of history to the next. There are great inconsistencies in this area. One wonders how the lower men were able to keep any of these straight in their minds. The answer to this is simple. They did not.

There was very little need for the lower men to have at their fingertips the names of every deity who ever existed in their pantheon. There were several main deities who controlled areas of such vast importance to the Maya, that others must have faded almost into anonymity. We shall enumerate now several of the main gods of the pantheon.

**Itzamna** - This god was the head of the contemporary pantheon. He was, in keeping I feel with the paternalistic aspect of Maya life, pictured as an old, toothless man.

**Hunab Ku** - He was the creator of all things, but one
feels as though he has exerted his influence and departed.

He is not normally included in any discussion of the pantheon.

Chac - He was the god of rain. He was, without a doubt, the single most important deity of all. Without his benevolence, there was nothing, and the Mayan knew this very well.

Yum Kaax - He was the god of corn. Corn was the life and breath of Mayadom. His importance is self-evident.

With the thousands of deities present in Mayan life, it became necessary that there be adequate administration to take care of the myriad ceremonies and sacrifices surrounding each important god. A hierarchy, therefore, grew in each city for just such a purpose. There was no single "high priest," but rather a sort of council of ten or twelve old and venerated priests called Ah Kin who meted out the dictates of the faith. Beneath these men, there existed a group called the Chilanes who can be likened somewhat to traveling friars. These men were prognosticators. They were the bearers of communications from the higher priests, and normally traveled about within the sphere of influence of a given temple-city. To aid the high priests (Ah Kin) there were men known as Chacs (not to be confused with the rain god). They were not what we might call clergy, but rather old, and, presumably, wise men who aided in the functions of the faith.

One more person is to be found in this section. He is the nacon. We may think of him as forming a liaison between the clergy and the secular side of the state. One does not find him participating too actively, although he is the man in charge of removing the hearts of sacrificial victims. In
short, he represents the titular head of the clergy, but in reality he is not.

Certain elements are seen to have been somewhat prominent in the Mayan beliefs. Blood is seen to have had a great mystical effect for the people. In the same vein, we find that water is involved in most ceremonies to one degree or another. We see also that the concept of virgin birth pervades certain aspects of the faith. Confession was considered a necessity, especially before death. Also, children entering puberty were expected to confess their sins to the Chilanes who were administering the rites of passage. A certain aspect of transubstantiation is seen also. We find that certain beliefs held that one could take on the qualities of a given deity by eating an image of that deity made of corn.

1 The facts contained in this section are taken almost exclusively from Von Hagen's work on the subject. He has the backing of Morley and Thompson.
Commerce and Trade

The Mayans were great traders, both on land and sea. One of the main functions of the temple-city was to bring the people of the area together on a common ground for the purposes of trade. All manner of materials were subjects of barter. Normally we find that the cacao bean (the bean from which chocolate is produced) is the standard of exchange. Surpluses of all kinds were to be found in the markets of the temple-cities. To attempt to form a list of even the most common articles for sale, would take us forever. Let it suffice to say that oftentimes the Mayan had what we might call a "home industry" which produced, in small quantities, such articles as featherwoven breechclouts, pottery of all shapes and uses and sandals. Food surpluses of the "Mayan Trinity" (Beans, Corn, and Squash) were always available.

On a much larger scale, trade routes reached far and wide. The Usumacinta River was a virtual Wall Street of commercial traffic. The Laguna de Terminos, on the Gulf coast of what is now Mexico, was the seat of probably one of the greatest areas the world has ever seen. Xicalanco (as this area was called) represented a common ground between the Mexican cultures flourishing at the time throughout southern Mexico, and the Mayan from the south. Slaves, among other articles of barter, were bought and sold at this great trading center. Every conceivable product of the
cultures surrounding the area was to be seen. I often enjoy likening the Xicalanco trading area to a sort of Mammoth mart without Green Stamps.

Trade was bustling, but there were never any records kept of the completed or pending transactions. One of the most frequent causes for war among the city-states of Mayadom was an unpaid debt, real or imagined. 4

An interesting thing to note here is that of the major pre-Columbian cultures, the Maya was the only one to make frequent use of waterways. It is not really difficult to understand this, when one attempts to picture what one would be faced with if he attempted to traverse land miles through the jungle. Canoes of up to forty feet in length put to sea and traded with the coastal towns as far north as northern Mexico and as far south as Panama and several islands off the coast of Venezuela. There have been conjectures that the Mayan seafarers went as far as to reach some of the eastern Caribbean islands. Whether this is true or not, I do not know. I am doubtful of such a story, for to speak of reaching the eastern Caribbean, is to speak of crossing vast reaches of open sea with no instruments, and no power other than human. This seems very un-Mayan to me.5

2 This term is so often used that I frankly do not know its origin.
3 Von Hagen, op. cit., p. 55.
4 Ibid., p. 90.
5 Ibid., p. 84.
Achievements

Between the years 625 A.D. and 800 A.D., the Mayas saw their greatest advances. These were the truly flourishing years of the culture. They were also the years prior to the collapse of the civilization as we have seen it so far.¹ In this section I shall attempt to convey to the reader some idea of why they are considered to have been the "intellectuals of the New World," by giving some examples of their greatness.

One can hardly speak of the Maya without mentioning their system of calendrics. The Mayans had three calendars: (A) the haab - or standard 365-day year, (B) the tzolkin - or the religious calendar, and (C) the so-called "Long Count" - which kept track of time since the beginning of mankind.² It is interesting to note that the Maya considered man to have been created, and there is some discrepancy on this date, in the year 3111 B.C. Why this date was chosen is unknown.

The Haab was the calendar for everyday use. It was composed of nineteen months.³ Eighteen of these had twenty days and the last, which was called the Uayele and devoted to religious festivals, had five. It was a perfect calendar and there was no need for a "leap year."

The Tzolkin was the religious calendar, and contained only 260 days. A baby's birthday was considered to be the day in the Tzolkin, not the Haab calendar, and it was imperative that he be born on a "lucky" day at that.
There was a belief among the Maya that history repeated itself. It became vital for them, therefore, to keep an exact notation of everything that happened in a given day. There may exist here, the very reason for the Mayan fascination with time and its passage. The masses were of the belief that time had a beginning and an end. The priest-scholars, however, knew that this was not true, and had dates inscribed probing 90,000,000 years into the past (truly appalling for an "unenlightened" people). To demonstrate the tremendous impression the passage of time made on the Mayan, I shall quote Gallenkamp:

To the Maya, time was never a purely abstract denominator by which events were arranged into orderly sequences: rather it was an infinite beyond-world inhabited by omnipotent forces of creation and destruction. Its alternating cycles - the days, months, and years - were believed to bring with them the benevolence or evil of gods who bore them along their endlessly recurring cycles. Each bearer was the patron of a sacred number and assumed a form by which it could be portrayed in hieroglyphic inscriptions, and divisions of the calendar were regarded as "burdens" carried on the backs of these divine guardians of time.4

Somehow, though, there is a great paradox here. We see almost a total lack of pragmatism. It is true that the Mayan priest had developed an absolutely perfect calendar. But the reason for its creation? Only to know exactly when to appease a certain deity. Men carried loads of produce for miles to market, while behind them trailed a child dragging a toy cart with four wheels. The Mayan could predict to absolute perfection the time of an eclipse, but thought that ants were eating the universe when it happened. The Maya knew exactly the synodical revolution of Venus (584 days). And we, with all our modern methods have found that it is 583.92. And yet
why did they do this? They did it in order to know exactly when the appropriate religious ceremony should begin, and what deity to appease.

The Maya had developed a system of mathematics, upon which I will not expound here, called the "sistema vigesimal." In effect it was based on multiples of twenty rather than ten, and allowed the Mayan to go into extremely high numbers. This system was used essentially for astronomical calculations.

The system of Glyph writing which had been developed was doubtless one of the chief accomplishments of the culture. It was, in effect, the only culture in the Americas to possess a truly written language. To this day we are unable to decipher the major portion of the language, thanks to a crusading friar in the 1600's who burned thousands of priceless manuscripts, thus robbing mankind, perhaps forever, of the ability to translate the Maya glyphs. Some have been partially translated, but the rest are not likely to fall into any sort of order. Something like this is the Chinese language, with thousands of symbols, well advanced beyond the purely pictographic state, yet still not far enough advanced to be simplified into vowels and syllables. We can only hope that the three remaining codices (Tro-Cortesianus, Peresianus, Dresdenianus) will someday provide us with an answer, or at least a clue, to the problem.

The above, then, are what we might call the "true achievements" of Mayadom. To mention beautiful featherwork and truly artistic pottery in this section would be foolish and superfluous. I shall not do this, then, but rather end
this section with a poignant note. Does it not seem pitiful that all this was lost. By "all this" I don't mean the actual, physical realities. I mean instead the spirit of the entire thing. Perhaps, I also mean the utter simplicity of it all. I think a spirit died and the world lost something great when the last temple-city fell before the Spaniard.


2Ibid., p. 137.

3Much of this comes from the lectures by Arriola at the University of San Carlos. Von Hagen also goes into this subject, at length.


5Thompson, op. cit., p. 144.

6Ibid., p. 165.
The Beginning of the End

There is certainly nothing more depressing for the student of the Mayan civilization than to read of the beginning of the end of something that was truly beautiful. And yet, one cannot but admit that that which had been beauty, and light, and, in a sense, something that the world will never see again, did decay and eventually die. To discuss this, I feel that it is necessary to bring the reader up to date on what we have seen so far in the way of chronological history. We began with the formative period of Mayan culture, which took place roughly between the years of 500 B.C. and 300 A.D. After this time, and right up into the ninth century we see what might be called the Golden Age of Mayan civilization. The last 200 years of this period, from 600 to 800, saw the greatest advances the civilization was ever to witness.¹ Beginning, however, with about the year 800, we begin to see signs of decay creeping into the society. Building of temples appears to cease, and building in general takes a turn for the worse. A lessening of care is evident as a trend throughout the Mayan region. Finally, we see what appears to be a total abandonment of the temple-cities. We see evidence of violence; crushed statuary, mutilated facades on the buildings, and, in some cases, outright destruction of temples. But by far the most striking factor involved is the apparent total abandonment of the once beautiful cities.
I suppose that there are as many theories as to why this occurred as there are anthropologists who have studied the subject. I shall enumerate briefly the major theories held by such men as Morley and Thompson, and try to pick the one which seems most rational.

Perhaps the most common "explanation" for the desertion of the Mayan cities stems from a view of the agricultural methods used by the natives of the region. Although we have seen this briefly in another section, I shall re-describe it here. It was, in effect, what is known as a "slash and burn" method of farming. This method consists of burning and slashing out a portion of jungle, and, using the natural fertilizer provided by the ash, cultivating the cleared land. It is an obviously primitive method, but fairly efficient. What some theorists have said, however, is that by this method, one must necessarily leave certain portions of the earth bare for one or more growing seasons. The theory is, then, that instead of the normal jungle growth emerging as before the process was begun, a thick mat of grass forms, totally impenetrable if one is using the rather primitive planting stick which was prevalent among the Maya. Unfortunately, research has shown that in the river valley near Copan, Honduras, the site of one of the first cities to be abandoned, this theory did not hold true. If a farmer left a certain portion of his fields bare for a growing season, the jungle did indeed emerge as it had been before the slash and burn had taken place. It is presumed, since the Copan area is fairly representative of the type of growth one finds throughout the
jungle areas of the Mayan region, that the theory expounded above must then be false.

Let us recall, before we continue our discussion, that the area under discussion here is what we have called the "Central Area" of Mayan civilization. Due to the abandonment, or at least the apparent abandonment, of the central area's cities, the "Northern Area" will begin to take on new prominence. But this will come later.

Another pet theory deals with the idea of population dispersion. As the population grows, more and more people will be forced to live at a greater distance from the temple-cities. It is imagined, therefore, that it became impossible for the city to exert its politico-religious prerogatives over as high a percentage of the population as it had done before. It is assumed, by way of this theory, that the people in these outlying areas would tend to feel restless, and feel the need, perhaps, for a certain amount of autonomy over their own affairs. 3

A third theory, and one which, I will admit, I tend to agree with more than the others presented here, deals with the entire socio-religious structure of the society. A brief background for all of this is necessary.

In the beginning of Mayan civilization as an identifiable entity, we see a highly simple relationship between the upper elements of the society, and the masses. In the field of religion, this is, perhaps, most evident. The Mayan pantheon had grown tremendously over the course of the centuries. As the priesthood and the nobility of the society had become ever more sophisticated in their learning and outlook, the gulf
between them and the lowly farmer who sustained them became ever more evident. The number of non-food producers (artisans and the like) became greater and greater. The population was, of course, constantly growing. In effect, the apparent wealth of cities was growing out of all proportion to the comparative poverty of the countryside. The "lower men" must increasingly have felt that all their lives were spent in an attempt to provide the most pleasurable kind of life for the city-dwellers, or, better said, the non-taxpayers. At the same time, tax burdens were becoming increasingly more difficult to bear because of the tremendous increase in public building. Priests, in the eyes of the lower man, were becoming too concerned with deities which did not pertain to the fundamentals of life. This was probably true. It has been discovered through recent investigation, that toward the end of strictly Mayan hegemony in the Central Area, that certain of the ruling families were worshiping deities of their own. They had, in effect, created a new system of beliefs for themselves alone. The lower man must have felt this ever widening gulf between himself and his rulers. Combine such a feeling as has been described, and the pressures of an ever increasing population. Add to this a tremendous variance in the apparent wealth between the city and the countryside, and the seeds of revolt are sown. This would explain the sudden decadence of the cities, and the halting in the process of temple-building. On this idea, Gallenkamp has said:

Of what value to the common man were strivings into abstract realms of mathematics and astronomy which no longer concerned the simpler gods of the earth and sky - knowledge which was
kept from them as sacred beyond their caste and complex beyond their ability to understand? Too long had the masses remained in a state of servitude, too exacting was the burden of labor required to erect temples and tend the fields necessary to support the priestly orders. And too obvious were the tricks with which the priests were weaving their cabalistic patterns of psychological domination - the system of punishments and rewards intended to awe the populace into strict obedience.\(^5\)

Now before we continue, I think it wise to dispel a very common myth concerning this phenomenon of the disappearance of people from the Mayan cities between the years 800 and 925. Early anthropologists and historians who were able to surmise that some violent overthrow had taken place within Mayadom, and then saw evidence of a rapid decay of the cities after 800, automatically assumed that some sort of a migration had taken place. This theory was bolstered by the fact that, with the fall of the cities in the Central Area, an increased activity is noted in the Northern Area (the area of the Yucatan Peninsula). The idea, however, that there was some sort of mass migration from the Central Area northward, and that the cities were totally abandoned is absolutely false.\(^6\)

There were many Mayans living in the Copan area when the first Spaniards arrived, and the same was true for the majority of the other so-called "abandoned cities." During the period we have been talking about, the period of the apparent violent overthrow of the temple-cities, what actually occurred was that the cities had lost the prominence which they had held before this time. It can only be imagined that the masses carried their wrath to the very doors of the temples and palaces, and probably banished or put to the sword all representatives of that class of people who they felt were making
life miserable for them. Since there was no real standing army as such, this must not have been too difficult a task.

Perhaps one thing we might look at to prove our point of view is the deliberateness with which destruction of the various stelae (time-marking statuary) was carried out. If this were any other culture than the Maya, one would most naturally assume that the destruction had come through some incursion from outside, some invading army perhaps. The entire Mayan area, however, was so tremendously isolated from all others because of the jungle, that such a theory becomes highly improbable. It is this isolation which enabled the Mayans to establish a society and truly flourish. We have mentioned that there were frequent wars between the various city-states, but one is led to believe that these most often took the form of brief skirmishes wherein the capture of the captain of the opposing force signaled the end of the combat. In later years it was to be just this formalized view of war which was to cause the defeat of the Mayans by the Spaniard. But, to get back to what we have said before, the isolated nature of the Central Area of Mayan culture makes it very improbable that any foreign army caused the overthrow of the old regime in the temple-cities.

Concurrent with the overthrow of the old regime in the Mayan area, we see that similar events are taking place in other parts of Central America and Mexico. The settlers in the Valley of Mexico, 800 miles to the North, had formed theocratic city-states roughly on the same order as that of the Maya. It is curious to note that at almost the same time as the Mayan revolt,
similar revolts, or at least disturbances, were taking place in the majority of these areas. The Toltec culture saw such an upheaval in the Valley of Mexico. They had been ruled by a type of triumvirate which was chosen by a council. One member of the triumvirate attempted to pass the reigns of leadership to his son, Quetzalcoatl. Such an action was banished from the realm. The story has it that he sailed away to the East, presumably in the Gulf of Mexico, promising to return. The followers of Quetzalcoatl also left, and began a migration to the South. As time passed, a virtual religion arose to worship their banished leader, and the Plumed Serpent Cult of Quetzalcoatl was born. Why this symbol was chosen, history does not tell us. At any rate, we see the Toltec people (called the Itza by the Mayan) moving en masse to the south during the period from about 925 to 975, and arriving in the Northern Area of Mayadom (the Yucatan Peninsula) in about 980. The dates of these occurrences are very interesting. We may notice that the Toltec incursion from the north takes place almost concurrently with the collapse of the city-states in the Central Area of Mayadom. With the fall of the city-states, we are able to note an increased activity in the cities of the Yucatan Peninsula. There were, in effect, quite a few immigrants from the areas of the collapsed city-states to the south. I stress again, however, that these areas were at no time abandoned, and any migration northward toward Yucatan did not take the form of a massive move on the part of the entire population. We might picture the whole situation as a movement
of cultural leadership from the south to the north.

The Mayans, as we have seen, were in a state of chaos in the latter part of the tenth century; leadership was shaky in both the northern and central areas. They were easy prey, therefore, to the more warlike and well-disciplined Toltec peoples. It was no time at all before the Mayan people were, in effect, totally dominated by the invaders. By the year 1000, the Toltecs had gained hegemony in the Yucatan area.9

Thus began what has been referred to rather loosely as the Renaissance period of Mayan history. It was, in a sense, a rejuvenation of culture. We find very little evidence of oppression by the Toltecs over the Mayans. We find, in fact, that many things which had been typically Toltec, begin to take on certain Mayan aspects. Building, for example, was designed to suit the conquerors, but the actual art work in the form of sculptured facades and the like, has a definitely Mayan lilt.10

The cult of the Plumed Serpent is adopted by the Mayan, and is called Kukulcan. We see a total rejuvenation of art. Art becomes very secular in nature, and quite baroque. The emphasis on the strictly religious seems to have fallen off. The character of the adopted religion of the Toltec was also different from what the Mayan had been used to. Under the old regime, religion had been cloaked in the greatest secrecy at all times. Priests were magicians as much as anything else. It is assumed, in fact, that this was one of the primary reasons for the revolt on the part of the masses. Once one "sees through" magic, the value of it is lost. The new religion, then, may be characterized as a more open form of worship. The temples
built for worship were columned and open in nature. Con-
struction in general under the Toltec tends to be more prag-
matic. The massive pyramids are still evident, yes, but
aside from these, we see what are presumed to have been
dwelling places for the clergy or high government officials,
which are very open in nature, with many openings and
corbeled archways. This form of archway (corbeled) was
created by the Mayan, not the Toltec.

In general, then, we find a great deal less emphasis on
the austere aspects of religion and life, a leaning toward
the baroque in art and architecture, and a general loosening
up and rejuvenation of the society.

Warrior cults begin to arise not long after the Mexican
incursion. In fact, one might say that militarism in general
was considered a good thing by the new rulers of the land.
It has always seemed to me that in this we begin to see the
true decay of Mayan culture. Militarism is a dangerous thing,
and can only lead to bloodshed and chaos wherever it exists.
The Maya were no different. 11

By the year 1200 whole city-states are being ruled by
the warrior class of society. Cities like Mayapan, Chichen
Itza, Uxmal, which had been the front-running cities in this
period of rejuvenation which we have been discussing, fall prey
to military dominance. Infighting begins among cities. Mili-
tary dynasties begin. The Xiu and the Cocom dynasties were two
main ones. All of Mayadom is divided up into petty kingdoms
which tear at one another like so many rabid dogs. It is at
this time (somewhere between 1200 and 1500) that we first see
walled cities arising. Around these cities we find moats and
all manner of defense structures. It was, indeed, a pathetic state in which the once great Maya found himself. E. Thompson sums up this entire period by saying:

The picture we have, then, is of a complete reorientation of life. Alien gods and an alien ruling class impose a new way of life on the Maya of Yucatan and of the Guatemala highlands; the old agricultural life of the peasant continues as before, but now supports new masters who, from regarding warfare as a means to an end, have inevitably found that the means are far more important than the end; warriors organize to serve the gods, but the latter in turn become patrons of warfare.¹²

And then one morning a man, a warrior on guard duty perhaps, gazed out to sea and beheld a most strange object. It was a sailing ship, under the command of a Spaniard whose name was Hernandez de Cordoba. The Conquest had Begun.

² Thompson says that Morley felt this to be the case. Morley's beliefs were disproven.
³ Thompson, op. cit., p. 87.
⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Thompson, op. cit., p. 85.
⁸ Galenkamp, op. cit., p. 145.
⁹ Thompson, op. cit., p. 270.
¹¹ The information on warrior cults and their manifestations comes from many authors, all of whom treat it amply. Thompson's work is the best in this area, but Galenkamp's is a close second.
¹² Thompson, op. cit., p. 107.
The Conquest

To discuss fully the conquest of the New World by the Spanish would be a job which, in itself, would demand a lifetime of research. My aim here, then, will be to give the reader some idea of the more sweeping events of it. The conquest, and its effects, will be seen in a later section.

On March 3, 1517, Hernández de Cordoba, sailing under the orders of Valasquez, the Spanish governor of Cuba, sighted the coast of Yucatan. It was his intention only to explore, and, if possible, make some maps to prepare for later Spanish movements in the area. He thought it might be wise to land, briefly, and see what sort of an area he was dealing with. As he put ashore, a large group of the natives watched from the beach. He was allowed to take a few steps into the jungle before he was halted. Through sign language, he was told that if he and his men did not depart within the space of a short time, they would all be killed. Wanting no fight at this time, Cordoba re-embarked. This constituted the first contact the European and the MAYAN had ever had.

In April of 1518, Juan de Grijalva, and a small force of Spanish adventurers, landed on the island of Cozumel, just off the Yucatan Peninsula. This island was the seat of a shrine dedicated to the goddess Ixchel, controller of fertility in women. Apparently the Mayans took it personally that someone should be encamped on their symbol of fertility. In any case,
a large force of Indians soon appeared and literally drove the Spaniard back into the sea.

In 1527, Francisco de Montejo, and a somewhat larger force of Spanish soldiers succeeded in establishing a beach head on the Peninsula itself. They quickly built a fortress and attempted to set up some sort of a colony. Montejo, and a small band of men, set off through the hinterland to explore. The garrison left behind began to be harassed on a daily basis by the Indians. To make matters worse, the diseases of the tropics began thinning the ranks of the invaders. By the time Montejo returned from his expedition, it was obvious that the garrison could not hold out much longer. A retreat was ordered, and, once again, the Mayan had repulsed the invader.

In 1531, Montejo tried again. Again the combination of the tropics and the Indian harassment was too much for his expedition to bear. It became obvious to the Spaniard by this time that he was dealing with a truly ferocious fighter. It might be added, by way of comparison, that no other of the major pre-Columbian civilizations took so long to succumb to the onslaught of the European. Somehow this destroys the myth that so many people hold of the Maya being the intellectuals of the jungle, far above the barbarities of war.

Finally, in 1541, Francisco de Montejo, son of the one spoken of above, was able to smash the last of the resistance. The most powerful families surrendered to him one by one. With the surrender of the Xiu family, it was evident that the last of any real resistance had been met. When the Mayans saw that the most ferocious of the military dynasties had
fallen to the invader, they surrendered en masse to Montejo.

There was but one area left to be conquered. In the very middle of the Peten jungle lies a body of water known as lake Tayasal. A group of Mayans had retreated to this lake, and built a town on its banks and on the islands which lie in the middle of the lake. They lived here totally unmolested until 1697. At this time, a crusading friar named Avendano was able to reach the head men of the community and convince them that within a brief time they would fall before the Spaniard. We must recall the Mayan belief that history repeated itself. By the calculations of the Mayan calendar, it was time for another invasion. Although Avendano was off by about two years, the head men of the village consented to receive into their midst a garrison of Spanish soldiers. It was their idea that they were to be governed by some official sent by the Spanish. The soldiers came, attacked, and the last free Mayans died defending their homes. One cannot help but feel pity for these, and all Mayans, who saw their entire world upset, burned, and destroyed by forces so totally alien to them as to be incomprehensible. When held side by side, it is often difficult for the observer to determine whether in the contest of the conquest, civilization won out over the forces of barbarism, or the other way around.

1 The facts in this section are stated very succinctly by Gallenkamp in Maya: The Riddle and Rediscovery of a Fabulous Civilization (New York: Pyramid Publications, Inc., 1959), pp. 1-23.
PART II
Today is the seventh day of March, 1965. Lyndon Johnson is busy building a "Great Society." The New York Yankees have just begun training in Florida. That nasty little war off in Asia is still going on. People are trying to put men on the moon and invent crashproof automobiles. The Beatles are contemplating another trip to the United States.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to conceive of anyone not knowing these simple things stated above. But I shall ask you to try to do just this.
Coban

A few hundred miles Northeast of the Capital of Guatemala lies a small town by the name of Coban. A few miles further east, and one finds himself on the verge of the Peten jungle. Coban is set in the foothills of the Cuchumatanes mountains. The surrounding area is lush with a combination of tropical growths which seem to come from the nearby jungle, and the typical pines, laurels, and oaks which one finds in more temperate areas. Parrots swoop from pine tree to palm tree, and cattle graze in fields literally coated with flowers whose aroma permeates the entire atmosphere. A wide, shallow stream runs by the town. Men and animals alike drink from it. In the evenings, it is not uncommon to see whole groups of people swimming and playing in it.

There is a road which leads to this town from the capital of the republic, making the town itself somewhat of a rarity, even in this day and age. Unfortunately, for better than four months out of any given year, this road is totally impassable. There is no bus service, even in the dry season, and only an occasional "Camionetilla" (large station wagon) comes through with several passengers. There is an airplane service operated by the national airline, which sends one plane a day into the town. No produce can be carried in this plane because of its small size, and usually one finds no more than a handful of passengers. No one ever really wants to go
to Coban. This is odd, considering it is one of the largest cities in the entire country.

But to return to the town itself, we see that it has one doctor, several government officials, one priest, one taxi, and three or four barefoot soldiers wearing overcoats, helmets, and carrying M-1 rifles with fixed bayonets in the 90 degree heat. In the sentence above, I have enumerated the sum total of Coban’s contact with the twentieth century.

But these things are not Coban. They only rarely participate in the functional realities of society. One wonders, occasionally, why they are there at all. The town doctor, who is my deep personal friend, and who will live in my memory all the days of my life, had an answer to this question. He told me once that there were two major reasons for his being in Coban. "I am here," he said, "by the will of God, and a hell of a lot of good strong rum." He had a tendency to be earthy.

Let us look, then, at what I have described as the "functional realities" of the society. Let us look at them closely on particular areas of the society in an attempt to find out why it is the way it is. Let us place ourselves in the bell tower of the church on the central plaza of the town. From this vantage point, we shall be able to witness the happenings of the town, but still not become involved in them as yet.

As the gray mists of dawn recede, and the sun begins its daily journey across the heavens, we see small groups of Indians converging on the town from the surrounding hills. They are walking barefoot upon trails made perhaps hundreds of years ago.
We see that upon their backs they carry all manner of produce. These people are bound for the market, which lies across the plaza from where we are. The entrance of these people into the town signals the beginning of each day. We are able to note that the majority of these people are women. Most are carrying children, many of which are suckling at their mother's breast as they are carried along. The bells of the church are tolling now, to call the holy to prayer. Across the plaza, the municipio, or, government offices, open their doors. The mayor arrives. He is not an Indian, and this he makes as obvious. His dress is neat. His shirt is pressed and clean, and he is wearing a tie. People from the capital always wear ties.

From all sides now comes the peculiar patting sound of the corn tortillas being slapped into existence for the morning meal. Dogs are barking and yawning. Babies begin to cry for their breakfast. The town is awake.

Down the street from our vantage point, we are able to discern a ramshackle building, made of tar paper and iron beams. This is a school. We see that several children go in. We see that many more do not. But there is another school. It is connected to the church. It is run by nuns. This school is designed to train pupils, mostly female, for church work. It is hoped that many of these pupils will become nuns. Few do!

By now the Indians are busy setting up their stalls in the market place. As each passes the church, he lowers his load of produce to the ground and enters the church to pray. One always wonders what they ask for in their prayers. We see a small group
of women enter the church decked in their finest attire. They take up kneeling positions in a line along one side of the church. They will stay there all day.

From our vantage point, we are able to see the river stretching out below the town. In the early morning hours, many people have bathed in it before beginning the daily routine of their lives. Now we see women approaching it with bundles of laundry under their arms. The standard method of washing clothing is to beat it between two rocks until it either disintegrates or is washed clean. When this process has been completed, the clothing is spread over flat rocks by the stream's edge, or over nearby bushes.

On to the plaza now walks a man. His bearing tells us that he is not an ordinary farmer from the countryside. His dress is essentially the same as that of his compatriots; cotton shirt and pants, no shoes. But in one hand he carries a cane with a polished silver head. He is a "principal," a head man, a leader in his society.

We have noticed, heretofore, that the majority of people we have seen have been women. To find the men it is necessary for us to descend from our tower and leave the town. Using any one of the trails we saw earlier, we find ourselves immediately in purely agricultural surroundings. On either side, and usually spaced quite a distance apart, we see the "ranchos," the one-room, thatched roofed dwellings of the Indian families. In the town we saw an occasional whitewashed adobe structure, or even a brick and mortar building, for even in this society there are degrees of wealth, but by far the most common dwellings
are the "ranchos." The design of these, and the materials used in their construction, have not changed in roughly 3000 years.

In recent years a new type of activity has arisen in the town. It is the institution of the small shopkeeper. These shops line the streets around the central plaza. The articles of stock in these stores are many and varied, but are almost always of a small, cheap nature. One is likely to find such articles as razor blades, cigarettes, ribbon, cloth, or baked goods. There are no newspapers, no books, no magazines. Why should there be? Probably seven eighths of the population is totally illiterate.

There are thousands of towns like Coban. Perhaps I have not chosen a good example, even with Coban, because of all the progress evident. Coban, at least, has a doctor, a few stores, a small dispensary. People of the Coban area have at least seen automobiles and trucks. But still, we shall use Coban for our study because it has all the characteristics of a typical Indian community in our modern day and age. Our object, then, will be to dissect Coban. We shall take it apart, and try to see the way the town, and the Indian society function. But, much more than this, we will attempt to trace the origins of certain traits in the society, which will become evident as our study continues. The Mayan Indian needs help. It is only through an adequate study of his culture that a realistic approach can be made to the problem.
We shall begin with a view of the social structure of the contemporary Mayan community, because knowing this will enable us to understand with greater ease the various other facets of life among these Indians.¹

One does not discuss the society of the Indian of today in Latin America, without mentioning the quality of Paternalism. The Indian's nature is such that he lends himself well to this sort of outlook on life. Orders, or, better said, the order of his life, are always handed down to him from above. The Indian feels no need whatsoever to be the master of his own fate, and is usually quite content to accept the dictates of both his superiors and his society. I have never known a rebellious Indian.

The society itself is a tremendously simple affair. There are no bureaucracies and very few intermediary statuses between the leaders of the community and the led. The main point to keep in mind is submission. The Indian has tremendous respect for authority. This aspect of his character enabled the conquering Spaniard to take the grossest advantage of him. I shall expand this idea in a later section. We may say, at this point, then, that status is of the utmost importance in the Indian community. The role carried out by the possessor of the particular status is usually irrelevant.

The "principal," or headman, is the leader of the society.
There are usually quite a few of these. To reach this status, it is necessary simply for the Indian to acquire age. Age, as we shall see, is venerated throughout the Indian world. The principals of the village are the ones who determine what the policy of the community shall be. These men have been one of the greatest stumbling blocks to progress among the Indians. The principals, as most older people, tend to reject change in any form, and if the outsider does not find acceptance among these men, he will never be accepted in any quarter of the society. I do not wish to convey the idea of any kind of fixed council of elders, sitting in judgment of a new idea, or a stranger to the area. The institution of the principal finds its strength in an acceptance, on the part of the younger members of the community, of the wisdom of old age, as embodied in the individual principal. We might say, then, to recap our original idea, that this is a manifestation of the paternalistic bent of the society as a whole.

In the area of family relationships, we see a similar thing occur. The oldest member of the family is generally the most venerated. In most cases, this is the father or grandfather, but I have known families where it is the grandmother who we might say is the former of family policy. Respect of the elder is also a characteristic of Mayan children. Sons are rarely disobedient to their fathers, and daughters always follow the dictates of their mothers. Families are well-disciplined, and penalties are harsh for those who may disobey established rules of conduct.

The Indian woman lives for two purposes; to bear children
and to serve her husband in every way. In public, women are never seen to take an equal position with men. Normally it is found that a woman will walk slightly behind her husband, and keep silence until she is spoken to. This rule, however, does not hold true in the market, where women jabber incessantly in an attempt to sell their goods. In general, however, we may say that when man and wife are together, the man carries out all dealings. In the home, or at any rate, in private, we see that the wife and husband confer on an equal basis on all issues of family life. No major decision is made without a conference between man and wife. Most Indian marriages are what we might call happy. There is rarely any real manifestation of family discord. I believe that this can be traced to the acceptance of the authority of one person (usually the husband) in all family affairs, and brings us back, once again, to the paternalistic aspect of the entire society.

There is great rigidity in this social structure, and for a very simple reason. It has existed for thousands of years. We may recall that, in times past it was the wife's job to prepare the daily steam bath for her husband. This was but one of the many daily chores she was expected to perform. Among the pre-hispanic Maya, women were expected to take an entirely secondary role in the society. The man was everything in Mayan society. It was the custom, for example, that when a man and woman met going opposite directions, the woman would lower her eyes, or turn the other way. In the field of child raising, it is not difficult to see why the
Indian woman of today feels it her duty to have as many children as possible. Aside from the Roman Catholic teachings on the subject, we find that in ancient times, the failure to bear children constituted grounds for a divorce, and the barren woman tended to be rejected from society altogether.²

It is not strange that we find such an emphasis on the status of the individual in the community. I believe that this can be traced back to the entire idea of the Indian's submission to authority. In ancient times, it was improvident to question the actions of the head men of the clan, or the priests of the village or city. Since the conquest, it has not become any more wise to do so. We see, then, that the Indian's entire background has been one of submissiveness before established authority. This feeling on his part permeates the entire society in which he lives.

On the subject of the Indian's submissiveness, and I can't stress the point enough, I should like to show how this attitude has moved into other areas of the society. We shall not be looking here at the Indian town, but at the Indian republic, and I shall take Guatemala as an example, because it is the one I know best.

I believe, in effect, that the political instability of Guatemala is, in part at least, due to the total submissiveness of the Indian when confronted with a symbol of authority. The history of Guatemala is virtually a case study of dictatorship. All too often, the Anglo-Saxon sees this as the outcome of illiteracy, and general ignorance on the part of the masses. This is true to a certain extent, but there is much more to
the problem than this. After the American Revolution, for instance, how many Americans were literate? Very few. And yet a dictatorship did not arise in this nation. People had an interest in what was going on in the country which they had just won for themselves. I believe that this feeling of awareness, this interest in the happenings outside of their immediate area, stems from a feeling on the part of all Americans that they, the individuals, are important. They are not willing to submit to that which does not appeal to them, because they feel that their voices can be heard, and should be heard, as loudly and clearly as anyone else's. With the Indian, this is not the case. Throughout the history of the pre-Columbian Maya, the thought of anyone but the established leaders having any say whatsoever in basic policy, was inconceivable. In the fight for independence from Spain, the Indian saw one of his conquerors trying to eliminate another. He did not view himself as an integral part of the whole affair. Before the Spaniard had arrived on his shores three hundred years earlier, the Mayan had seen roughly two hundred years of bloody wars among the temple-cities of his lands. In these he had never been a part, but only a pawn. The Spaniard came, and three hundred years of total submission to a conqueror had begun. When the wars of independence were fought, the Indian saw them as simply one conqueror fighting another, with himself playing the part of the cannon fodder. After these revolutions, the Indian saw himself once again the pawn of outsiders whom he did not know, and whose language he did not speak. His only security was his milpa (corn patch) and his Indian town. To these, then,
we see him recede. Add to these factors, ignorance and regionalism, and we have a huge, inert mass of people who become, once again, the pawn of anyone who makes them feel as though they can better themselves by following his wishes. From this comes the "caudillo," the regional strongman who can swing the inert masses to his advantage, and, once in power, usually turn around and oppress them more than ever, which in turn only makes them more wary and recessive.

I have not tried to say, in the section above, that this is the way all Latin American politics function. I have only tried to show what has often happened in the so-called "Indian Republics," and that the Indian's feeling of submission arises from a long history of having his destiny decided for him by powers over which he had no control. When we come to the section dealing with his religious beliefs and dogmas, this same theme will be seen. In fact, it will become evident that the entire realm of Indian existence is one of submission before unseen or incomprehensible powers.

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1 I wish to point out that a great deal, in fact, most, of what shall be said will derive from my own personal experience with the society of the Indian. The views expressed are almost entirely my own and derive from life among the Indians.

Education

The education of youth if today, and always has been, the problem of the individual parents. Learning is done by imitating the elders. From the time they are old enough to walk, the Mayan children follow their parents around through the daily routine of their lives. This form of education is as old as mankind. If it does nothing else, it passes on, from generation to generation, the same skills and accomplishments of the forefathers. It also passes on the same diseases, superstitions, and misery.

Mayan girls learn to do the things they will be expected to do all their lives by the time they are eight years old. The same thing is true of Indian boys. The entire process is very simple when an entire family sleeps and eats in one room. Mayan children learn about sex at an early age because they watch their parents. By the time the child has reached puberty, he or she has learned all the essentials of life.

In an attempt to incorporate the Indian into the national mainstream of life, the government, at various times, has instituted vast programs of educational reform. In some areas these programs have been successful. In many areas they are not. It is estimated that by 1970, there will be 600000 children of school age who have never received any formal schooling.¹

What I have just quoted is a figure put out by the govern-
The situation is actually a good deal more desperate. The birth rate of Guatemala is 48.8 per thousand. This makes it the highest in the Americas, and probably the second highest in the world. By Guatemalan government statistics, which tend to color the truth, the country is 71.1 percent illiterate. The birth rate is climbing among the Indians. Who dares estimate what it will be by 1980, or by the year 2000? Attempts have been made by the government to educate the national army. These have proved dismal failures. Often, when the soldier returned to his home, the total lack of reading material has caused him to forget what he learned while he was in the capital. Virtually every government which has ever come to power has made some attempt to educate the Indian. The normal procedure for this is to send truckloads of supplies into the interior of the country, and begin building schools. Unfortunately, there are rarely any teachers to put in these buildings, and the local populace soon finds what it considers a far better use for them. I saw one of these edifices in the town of Coyotenango. It was being used to store corn. The picture is black, and getting a good deal blacker. One ray of hope is that the National University is now beginning to institute programs where by students who profess a desire to be teachers are forced to spend a two-year period in the interior. I spoke to one such student. His father knew someone in the Ministry of Education who was going to get him out of performing this tiresome task. Almost everyone in the capital "knows someone." Most of the rural school teachers themselves are not
much above the level of their students. In most towns, being literate qualifies one to teach, and "literacy" covers an extremely broad area. The girl who was my personal servant in the capital was literate to the degree that she could read and write her own name, and write numbers from one to ten. In the census taken in the spring of 1964, she was classified as literate.

On the local side there are other stumbling blocks. We may assume that the government is able to build a school successfully. Let us also assume that they are able to provide a teacher for it. Is the problem solved? Not quite. But let us even assume that the government is in a position to support the school and supply it with books, paper, and pencils. Let us remember, before we continue, that that which we have "assumed" without batting an eye, is virtually inconceivable in many areas. If all these things are provided, other questions arise. Who will attend the school? Far more important, perhaps: Why should he attend it?

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to rural education is tradition. The parents of many school-age children are highly suspicious of the school. In a very realistic sense, they complain that it takes the children out of the home just when they are needed most. Since Mayan history began, sons have helped their fathers till the soil, gather the crops, or herd the animals. The parents complain that these things cannot be done without the aid of a son. In most cases they are right. Daughters have always helped their mothers tend to the household chores. When such chores include the
finding of firewood, caring for two or three young children, feeding chickens or pigs, and preparing meals, one begins to realize the value of the daughter in the Indian home.

There is another barrier to rudimentary education. To my mind, it is the most frightening. It is the barrier of language. Many of the Indians of southern Mexico and Guatemala, and I am unable to give an exact number, do not speak a word of Spanish. Even if a system of education could be developed which suited all the parties concerned, it could not be implemented until the children involved were taught Spanish. This could, on a crash program, be done in a year. But "crash programs" need money and a sincere effort on the part of all concerned.

There are many towns where educational programs are in full swing. Coban is, by comparison, one of the more advanced towns in this respect. But in most of these places the curriculum is so antiquated that one is skeptical of the value of the school as a whole. A curriculum which includes algebra and Latin in the fifth and sixth grades becomes somewhat ludicrous in a town where perhaps five percent of the people own shoes. Giving a classical education to an Indian has always seemed to me somewhat like teaching the abominable snowman to dance. A noble venture, to be sure, but with whom would he dance? I do not mean to be funny. I simply mean to point out the lack of pragmatism demonstrated in such a system of learning.

In recent years, programs of education have been implemented which seem somewhat more rational. The United Nations organizations and various aid programs from the
United States have been trying to bring education down to the level of the Indian, in the hope of getting him interested, at least, in the whole idea. I do not wish to imply, by what I have said, that the Indian of today is not interested in bettering himself. He is. The difficulty is showing him how to better himself in a way that he can accept. When a man has 3000 years or more of a given way of life behind him, it is difficult to change his way of thinking on even the slightest matter.

In the area of health education, the situation is also devastating. The introduction of even the most rudimentary health service has caused the rate of birth to climb, as we have seen, to fantastic proportions. Unfortunately, accompanying programs have not been implemented. By this I mean that while many more children are being saved from early deaths, by the use of simple hygiene, this only provides many more mouths to feed, and adds to the hunger problem. Hunger is the handmaiden of disease, and diseases, let loose upon an undernourished population, wreak havoc. In most areas, real medical attention is an impossibility. The reasons for this are many. Let us begin with a statistic of two reasons. In 1950 there were 450 medical doctors in the republic of Guatemala. Of these, three quarters had practices in the capital of the country.\(^4\) Needless to say, this leaves vast tracks of the republic totally without medical assistance. A case in point is Coban. Tomas Leal is the only doctor in Coban. He runs a dispensary with about one hundred beds in it. There are no sheets on these beds, and they are literally
crawling with lice of previous patients. No one is admitted unless he is in truly dire need. There is never enough medicine. Everything is filthy. I am not a squeamish man, but I could not stand the odor which came from the main ward. The doctor, who as I have mentioned is my personal friend, told me that most patients who come to him die within the first twenty-four hours. This is not because he is a bad doctor. He is, in fact, a specialist in tropical diseases who has studied at Tulane University, and the University of Texas. An example of what he faces every day was the man who came to him with a wound received from a machete. The wound had gone unattended, and gangrene had set in. This was the odor which had affected me. It was with some pride that Dr. Leal told me that he had been able to save thirty seven people from death caused by the bite of a certain snake prevalent in the area. He had saved thirty seven in three months. He had lost sixty two. Parasites which enter the body through cracks which open up in bare feet take thousands every year. Measles, mumps, whooping cough, and respiratory diseases of all kinds literally decimate whole areas on occasions. Dr. Leal is a tired man at the end of a day. He has fourteen children of his own, and while this does not quite pertain to the subject at hand, his wife makes the best mashed potatoes I have ever tasted.

But up to this point, we have dealt with only one end, so to speak, of the problem. Now let us deal with the other. The "other," is the Indian. Medical practices which date back to the beginning of the Mayan culture are still in practice.
Herbs and magic make up the physical aspects of medicine among the Indians. For me to discuss the various forms that magic takes among these people, I would have to write a separate volume. Magic is everywhere, and all things contain it. The "evil eye" is one of the worst fears of the Indian. Babies, in many areas, are kept under close cover, lest an "evil air" blow upon them. Pregnancies and births are always accompanied by rites and incantations. In certain areas, it is thought that emersion in cold water, followed by direct inhalation of the smoke caused by burning certain woods, will rid a person of consumption. While I was in Coyotenango, a man cut himself severely with a machete. The man I was with cleaned and dressed the wound and gave the man an injection of penicillin.

A few weeks later, we returned to the town, and saw the man again. His wound had healed almost completely. In his mind, it had healed despite the foreign and, therefore, evil, substances which the mayordomo (my friend) had placed upon it. In his words, "It was God's will."

A few years ago, a team of doctors was sent into the interior for experimental purposes in a town called San Juan Sacatepuequez. Part of their work required that they take blood samples from each of the inhabitants of the town. They were at the point of being hacked to shreds by the local populace, when an anthropologist was called in. He was able to discover that the natives of this region felt that their blood, once lost, could never be recovered. The thought of a nosebleed struck terror in the hearts of these people. And, lest the reader think that something monumental had been
discovered by this anthropologist, it was discovered that in a town roughly fifty miles distant, the natives felt that one often suffered from too much blood. It is safe for one to assume, in other words, that of a given thirty towns, there will exist thirty different sets of beliefs in the area of health. How a people who are so alike in so many ways, are so different with regard to their personal well-being, is frankly unfathomable to me. Perhaps the answer lies in the totally regionalistic nature of the Indian, which will be discussed in a later section.

I believe that we can safely summarize this section, then, by saying that the educational problems faced by the governments of Mexico and Guatemala are frightening. If the problems are to be solved, something must be done, and done now. The lives of an entire race of people depend on it.

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1 This estimate was delivered in a lecture by Dr. Jorge Luis Arriola, the University of San Carlos, May 2, 1964.


3 Ibid., p. 261.

4 Ibid., p. 229.
Trade and Commerce

We have alluded to the regionalistic nature of Mayan medical beliefs in the previous section. To a certain extent, this must be carried over to any discussion of commercial life among the Indians. Only in recent years has it become possible for one to buy produce from a given area without actually being in that area. The Indians within about a fifty mile radius of the capital will now bring in most produce to be sold in the capital city itself. But in almost any other area of the country, one still finds a great deal of regionalism when one studies the commercial aspects of the society. To understand what I have said, I believe it wise that we return to Coban, and take another look at the market place.

In the hills surrounding the town, one finds that a wide variety of foodstuffs is being grown. To mention several of these would be wise. The so-called "Mayan Trinity," beans, corn, and squash, can be seen in abundance. In addition to these staples of the society, one can find avocados, peaches, potatoes, tomatoes, oranges, and even some coffee and tea. In the area of animal produce, we see that dairy and poultry predominate. By this, however, I do not mean that milk is sold, or even extracted from the cow for the purposes of feeding humans. Chickens and eggs are readily available, however, and one finds these, on a daily basis, in the market place in the town. The area produces pork, and "chicharron," which is a
bacon-like product made from the dried and singed outer layer of flesh, is quite commonly eaten. It is only at ceremonial times of the year (i.e., birthdays, Christmas, Saint's days, etc.) that meat is eaten at all in most areas.

But there is another area of produce, which has nothing to do with that which is eaten, and which shows, better than anything else, the regionalistic nature of Mayan commerce. We might refer to this second area as the artistic area. By this, I do not mean "objets d'art," but rather produce in the areas of household goods and articles of clothing. I have referred to the people who produce such articles as "artisans," and they are. The people of the Coban area produce woven materials to be made into the "huipil," the loose sleeveless blouse worn by virtually every Indian woman. The market place, then, is flooded with bolts of cloth of every color, design, and texture.

Another example of this sort of thing would be the town of Chinantla. The people of Chinantla produce pottery. Virtually every woman is employed in this endeavor, while the husband is away in the fields. The produce of this town is then taken to the Capital city to be sold, as Chinantla lies within twenty miles of that city.

The people of Solola produce heavy woolen jackets. This is not strange, considering that Solola lies in a very high mountain valley and can become quite chilly at times. The jackets that these people produce are normally sold locally, as it is impractical to take them to the capital, but in recent years, bus service has been provided at a cheap enough
price to enable many individuals to bring their produce to the capital.

But to return to Coban, let us enter the market area, and see its assorted goods, and who buys and sells them. The Coban market has a roof over it because of the heavy rains which fall in the area. This is somewhat strange, because the average market is an open air affair. We have seen that the women of the area arrive very early in the morning. They bring their produce with them each morning, since nothing is left overnight in the marketplace. Normally, if the produce is food, it is spread on a sheet-like piece of cloth on the floor of the market area. This floor is usually dirty and allows every conceivable type of insect to have a taste of the produce before the actual buyer gets to it. Around the sides of the market area, one finds the stalls, which can be rented by an individual Indian for periods ranging up to one year in most places. These consist simply of a roof, four walls, and a counter. In many markets, the idea of the stall is a relatively new one and is still a luxury to many Indians.

By nine in the morning, the market area is ready for the day. The buyer who comes to the market is usually doing so to supply her family with food. One rarely sees men in the market area, as it is considered unmanly to have anything to do with food preparation. As the customer enters the market normally with two or three children in tow, she will usually walk from aisle to aisle and get what she considers a good idea of what is available before any attempt is made to actually begin buying anything. Chances are very good that she will know many of the people she sees, and one can easily imagine
that in an economy which tends to be of a subsistence nature, it becomes a luxury to buy food which will last for any more than the very immediate future. The Indian woman, then, buys to supply the very daily needs of her family, and can only hope that tomorrow there will be enough of a surplus to enable her to buy more.

Perhaps the single most interesting thing about the marketplace is the institution of the "regateo," or what we would call bartering. There is no such thing as a fixed price in the Indian economy. Literally everything from horses to onions is open for dispute in the area of cost. Normally this process begins when the buyer enters the area surrounding a given seller. The seller begins advertising his or her wares by giving the price of the article before the buyer has even asked for it, and before she even knows that the buyer is looking for her particular goods. The buyer normally presents the appearance of being totally indifferent to all of this. A critical eye is cast upon the goods in question, and the buyer, with facial expression alone, indicates that the price asked is outlandish. What usually occurs is that the buyer eventually offers the seller roughly half of the original price asked. Then a process occurs whereby they both give ground, a little at a time, until each is satisfied. While all this discussion may become quite excited at times, the Indian rarely loses his temper, and there is an obvious attempt to maintain an objective attitude. In other words, the seller is never heard to say that he actually "wants" the money, but rather that the money "is necessary" if he is
to continue in business, or if he is to be able to buy the proper medicines for his ailing mother. In fact, any of a thousand reasons may be given. The buyer always indicates that he is really not interested in buying the article in question at all, but that he also has an ailing mother who demands that he do so. The whole process is very amusing to watch. Stories build around this practice, and people who can go through the process well gain a certain amount of notoriety among their friends. No holds are barred in one of these contests, and any form of lying or cheating is valid. As we shall see, the Indian is not, by nature, a man who tends to lie. It is strange, then, to see him go through this entire process without batting an eye. Where the idea originated, I do not know. It is probably as old as mankind.

We must remember that the Mayan has been, throughout history, an avid trader of goods, and perhaps it is here that we can find the answer to the problem. In Mayan history, wars were begun and halted through trade. Perhaps it is not so unnatural, then, that the Mayan of today should find it quite acceptable to shave the truth for the purposes of trade.

It is time, I believe, to look at the broader aspects of Indian commerce, and attempt to see how it fits in with the rest of life. To one degree or another, all aspects of Mayan life show tendencies toward the ceremonial. The area of commerce is no different. We noted, in our earlier view of Coban as a whole, that as the women bearing goods for the marketplace neared the center of town, they stopped before the church and prayed. It is not strange to find that a woman will return two or three times during her day at the marketplace
and enter the church to pray. The Indian is, by nature, a devout person, but I believe we should look a bit closer to this aspect of his life, and attempt to trace its origins.

To gain a full understanding of this aspect of the Indian's life, I believe it wise that we think once more of the temple-cities of the ancient Mayan. Simply the name, "temple-city," should give us a good indication of what we wish to find. The Mayan city was a place reserved predominantly for religious worship. We can recall that the earliest, in fact, most, of the Mayan cities were founded around places which were presumed to be holy. The vast majority of the edifices in these cities were devoted to the practice of worship, and we find, in fact, that it was only toward the end of Mayan hegemony in the area that the "lower men," farmers and the like, began moving into the cities.

We might say, then, that the single most important function of the city was a religious one. But there was another. This second one involved trade and commerce. The cities were areas, or, centers, of trade. It was a place where the small-time artisans (i.e., the wives of the farmers) were able to find a market for the goods which they produced at home. All this has not essentially changed to this day.

The Indian who carries his wares into the town during the early hours of the morning, and stops to pray in the church near the market, is performing the same function as did his ancestors shortly after the birth of Christ. All of this only helps to strengthen the very regionalistic nature of the
Indian. He looks at "his" town as the place where he satisfies his spiritual and temporal needs. Occasionally one finds what might be viewed as extreme cases. Sol Tax has done a study of the Indian economy and has noted that there often exist "market homes," which are houses in the town itself which are only occupied during the day, or days, during which the market is in session. One will not find this sort of thing in the smaller town, because the market is normally small also. In many of the larger cities, of predominantly Indian population, one will find certain days which are reserved strictly for marketing. In such towns, one will find that the entire family, not only the woman, is involved in commercial endeavor. Usually, the bigger the town, the bigger the market. The bigger the market, the more men become involved. When men become involved, and the size of the market area increases, one begins to find the phenomenon of the "market home" or "Sunday town." At times when the particular market is not in session, many homes in the town are virtually deserted and will remain so until the next market day. Perhaps this, more than anything else we have said, illustrates that the Indian has not essentially changed in this respect in thousands of years. Market day is normally on Sunday, although this may vary from town to town. Perhaps this may suggest to us the union of the spiritual and the commercial throughout Mayan history. In any case, the epitome of all this seems to have been reached in the idea of the "market home," where the Indian maintains his corn fields and home in the hills to supply his family with food, and uses the town to
fulfill his spiritual and commercial needs.

One cannot speak of the Indian economy without feeling a bit depressed. By the word "economy," I mean the goods which are produced, usually in the home, for sale in the market. As an example of what I mean, I shall refer to the woman I spoke to in the town of Antigua. She was in the process of weaving what is known as a "tela." This is simply a piece of cloth which is highly decorated with woven design in many colors, and which is eventually made into a dress or skirt by the buyer of it. This woman had been working on this particular piece of woven work for nearly two weeks. She told me that she would finish in another three. Later, I saw similar "telas" in the central market in the capital of the country. They were selling for about four "quetzales," (four dollars). In the town of Chimaltla, where most women are employed in making pottery, the situation is equally depressing. To make the pottery, a certain type of sand must be used. In past years, I was told, this sand could be extracted from the nearby hills. In recent years, however, a man had bought up the land, and laced a fence around it. Sand was still available, but it now had to be bought from one man who had access to it because of a deal worked out with the owner of the property. Nowadays, after buying the sand, and firing the pot (for a price) in the public kiln which the government had set up, the pottery maker makes a profit of about three cents to the pot, if he manages to sell it. When a woman must work five weeks to earn four or five dollars, and another makes pottery to be
sold at a profit of two or three cents, business is not booming. One almost wonders why the whole process is continued. Certainly the profits serve no useful purpose to the family as a whole, and one always feels that the woman could be better employed elsewhere. I have no real answer to all these questions or to the problem itself. Despite the fact that the Indian has historically enjoyed a great deal of trade, he is, by modern standards, a horrible businessman. He seems unable to grasp even the most fundamental concepts of basic economic endeavor. It is only among the mestizo laborers in the cities, for example, that the idea of a labor union has gained any real following. One must say, however, that while he is a pitiful businessman, the products he turns out are truly beautiful. His hand-woven goods rank among the finest in the world for durability and true craftsmanship. Perhaps herein lies the answer. The Indian insists that his product be sturdy and serviceable. If he makes a blanket, it is 100% wool and beautifully designed. If he takes two months to make it and sells it for seven quetzales, he has failed economically, but his artistic nature has found expression, and he is proud of his work. The Indian's work is well done, and his products are widely used, and yet he cannot be considered to be truly included in the national economy. Except in the area of tourist trade, his products barely make a showing in the gross national product. Perhaps his only sin is that he has not stepped into the twentieth century as yet. Perhaps he has not stepped out of the fifteenth.

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Religion

The Mayan religion of today has its roots in antiquity. There is nothing new about the faith, and I think it is best that we return, at least briefly, to what we have already seen. I should like to give the reader a look at what we might call the "man on the street" religion.

To the ancient Mayan, religion was life, and all things pertained to it. There was no part of his daily existence which lacked some religious significance, or which was not surrounded with some sort of ritual. He saw his life ruled by deities totally unfathomable to him. It was for this reason, as we have seen, that he created the temple-cities and produced a tremendously powerful and opulent priest sect within his society. He held a healthy fear of the supernatural, and he felt he needed all the help he could get in coping with it. The status quo is all-important to the Mayan, and any attempt that could be made to preserve it was justified.

As an example of this we may look at the ceremony which took place at the end of the fifty-two-year calendar round. It was the Indian belief that there was always great danger at such times that the sun might not rise again, and the earth might be plunged into eternal darkness. During the last night of the cycle, therefore, elaborate ceremonies were performed in praise of the gods, in the hopes that they would intercede and allow their world to continue. One can
imagine the sighs of relief when the first light of dawn appeared. It is fairly well-known that the priests were well aware of the fact that time was continuous, in fact, eternal, but the "people" apparently did not realize this.

But to return to our original point, religion was everywhere, and all things were performed with a certain amount of ritual in order to appease certain unseen deities. This tended to do two things. On one hand, it tended to preserve the hegemony of the priest class and the general structure of society. And along with this we might say that since people feared these unseen deities, they tended to do things in a strictly determined way, feeling that any change from the prescribed pattern might offend the powers of the almighty. But on the other hand, and this began to take over in the final stages of Mayan decay, it left itself wide open for great disillusionment when things did not progress as they were supposed to. In the middle of the fifteenth century, for example, the Mayan lands were hit by draughts. No amount of ceremony could alleviate the suffering. The Mayan had seen great storms hurled against his lands. Despite all his prayers and ceremonies, these storms continued to come. We must remember, in fact, that it was just this sort of disillusionment that had caused the fall of the city-states. The religion which the priests espoused in the cities no longer seemed to apply for the common farmer. He felt that he was loosing contact with his deities. Revolts occur when people begin to believe that the only thing between themselves and some desired end, is the
established social order. When Cortez entered the valley of Mexico, and the Aztec saw that "Hummingbird-on-the-left" did nothing, one can imagine how they felt.

A major point, I believe, and one which must not be left out of any discussion of Indian faith, is that the Indian at no time truly attempts to understand his gods, only to appease their wants. This is entwined, I believe, with the entire Indian attitude toward authority. The ancient Mayan believed himself incapable of reasoning in the area of religion. We see him, therefore, creating a priest class to handle such matters. I cannot believe that when the overthrow of the city-states of the central area did occur, that it was the small farmer who began it. I feel rather that it was the small-town priest who had begun it. One can hardly imagine that a people who had subjected themselves to eight or nine hundred years of subservience, would suddenly revolt, no matter what the cause. I believe, that the lower echelon of the priests, men who had been relegated to the fringe areas of the cities, inspired their people to revolt. The point, in any case, is clear. The Indian does not wish to question his beliefs, only to believe in them. All of this, the Indian's blind subjugation to authority; and his lack of desire to question his beliefs, left him wide open for the Spanish conquest of this hemisphere.

It may appear strange to the reader to find, under the section discussing religion, an account of the Spanish conquest of the Mayan lands. I have chosen to place this section here for various reasons. The conquest of the "New World" was as
much a religious one as it was a military one. It is at this
time that we see the foundations of what was to become the
Indian religion of today. The beliefs he holds, and his
general attitudes toward his place in the universe, are a
combination of this own pre-hispanic beliefs, and the dictates
of the Roman Catholic Church. It is at the time of the
conquest, and shortly thereafter, that we see these two
great forces combining to form the person we see today in the
form of an Indian. It seems only natural, then, that we should
discuss the conquest, from the point of view of the "lower
man," in this section.

To truly understand the conquest, I think it wise that
we look at the nature of the Spaniard who partook in it, and
at his country. Europe was in the midst of the Renaissance.
Spain, in the 1400's, was in the process of driving the Moors
from the southern tip of Spain back across the sea into
Africa. In the year 1492, the last of these had been driven
out. Moorish lands were being divided up among the soldiers.
The spoils of war were everywhere, and every soldier wanted
what he considered to be his fair share. A merchant class
had grown up in Spain. Entrepreneurs were appearing. When
the last of the Moors had been driven out, it was clear that
there was not going to be enough land to go around. Spain,
therefore, saw thousands of restless, footless men, who had no
place to go, and no money to go there. In any land, at any
time, this sort of phenomenon is dangerous. It was, indeed,
a happy event, then, when Columbus landed on an island in the
Caribbean in October of 1492. At once, ships were fitted out
and thousands of the soldiers mentioned above volunteered for the adventurous undertaking of conquering new lands for Spain. These men were determined that this time, they would not be left out when the final tally was taken. The hope of booty beyond their wildest expectations drove them on. This idea was augmented by tales of men who began returning from the Western Hemisphere with tales of untold wealth for the man brave enough to take it. The Spaniard did not lack valor.

There were other currents in the stream of Spanish feeling at the time. The years of arduous battle with the Moors had been undertaken under the cross of the holy mother church and for salvation, their individual loyalty to a church. The battle with the Moors had been as much an ideological one as any other. And now the Spaniard saw a chance for a new and different sort of religious conquest.

The New World challenged the devout to beat Satan in his very element. It was an age of tremendous religious zealotry. These two currents met on every boatload of adventurous soldiers and devout friars which sailed for the Western Hemisphere. All were imbued with a sense that they were performing some sort of manifest destiny. Each must have felt that it was God, and He alone, who commanded them in this strange new world. If there were riches to be had, so much the better. I think it wise to point out that all manner of foolish atrocities were committed in the name of "destiny" and "true religion." One of the charges against Atahualpa, for example, (the last true Inca chief) was heresy and bigamy. Armies and ideologies met and fought, and the Spaniard took
all. The Spaniard seemed to understand that he was making history. He said and did things which one can only imagine were done for effect. Pizarro's capture of the Inca Atahualpa, for example, took place amid literally thousands of the Inca's battle-trained troops. One can only be impressed with the valor of the handful of Spaniards who attempted such an undertaking. Cortez entered the valley of Mexico between the two monstrous volcanoes of Popocatetepel and Ixtacihuatl, rather than take a much easier route around them. On this subject, Wolf says:

Actors, acts, and motives seem superhuman: their lust for gold and for salvation, their undivided loyalty to a distant monarch, their courage in the face of a thousand obstacles seem to defy simple psychological explanations. They not only made history; they struck poses against the backdrop of history, conscious of their role as makers and shakers of this earth. The utterances of a Cortez, a Panfilo Narvaez, a Caray, are replete with references to Caesar, Pompey, and Hannibal. Cortez plays not only at being himself; he is also the Amadis of Gaul celebrated in the medieval books of chivalry. They were not satisfied with the simple act; they translated each act into a symbolic statement, an evocation of a superhuman purpose.4

The cross and the rosary were no less important than the sword and cannon. The shock troops of the early religious conquest were the friars. These men followed close on the heels of the advancing soldiers. It was their job to convert everything that moved. Tales of their zealotry are unending. Cortez's personal confessor baptized up to fifteen hundred Indians a day. For lack of holy water, he used his own saliva for the task. The hope of the friar was to see a church constructed upon the site of every pagan building in the New World. They came close to succeeding. In the town of Cholula, for example, there are better than two hundred churches.
To these men, as to the soldiers, anything that could be done was perfectly all right. After all, were these people not in the very grasp of Satan himself: Priceless treasures were lost. Records and art work which would have given history invaluable knowledge, were wantonly destroyed.

A case study in this was Fray Diego de Landa. Landa appeared in the Yucatan area not long after the original conquest. He was imbued with all the religious impetus of his day. Perhaps we can safely say that he was a bit overzealous. He set out with the intention of destroying every last vestige of Mayan civilization. Shortly before 1549, the year of Landa's arrival, the last of the Maya had surrendered to the conqueror. The Tutul Xiu family, one of the mightiest, had been among the last to fall. The family headquarters was at Mani, in the Yucatan peninsula. When Landa arrived at this city, he found a huge collection of codices which we can only imagine treated of a wide variety of things. He immediately branded them as works of the devil, and burned them. In his own words at the time, as quoted by Gallenkamp:

The books "contained nothing in which there was not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all...." An archaeological treasure, the recorded knowledge of centuries which had permitted the Maya to achieve unparalleled eloquence among the high civilizations of the New World, lay ruined in the smoldering embers of Landa's terrible deed.

To this day, it is impossible for us to translate the vast majority of Mayan written word. We have found no Rosetta stone. No simplified alphabet has come to light. I cannot help but blame Landa for his foolish acts. And yet, at the time, who would have denounced him? Probably no one. It was
a time for destruction of the old, and imposition of the new.

After the preliminary wave of conquerors had subjugated the land, Spain began the process of truly organizing it. To the mind of the Spanish, this new land was to be a Utopia. It was to have none of the ills of the old world. If the streets of the old world cities were crooked and narrow, then the new cities would have straight and wide ones. Each town was to be formed on the gridiron plan with rectangular blocks and spacious central plazas where the power of the town could be centralized. If the natives of this new land lived in small farms, dispersed across the land, then let them be gathered together in towns where they could be instructed in the one true faith, and in the ways of civilization. So it was to be, for the most Catholic Monarch of Spain had so decreed.

The feeling of creation was in the air. Every Spaniard who landed on American shores felt that he was taking part in something big. He felt as though he were truly a part of the Spanish Empire. The feeling bound men together, soldiers and scholars, priest and farmer. New ideals arose. Men were determined to be what they never could have been in Spain. It suddenly had become possible for even a foot soldier to become lord over thousands of men, and many square miles of land. The ideal of the mounted lord could now become a reality to many men. The one nice thing about utopian ideals is that they ask nothing of reality. But who, at the time, could really call all this reality? Here was untold wealth in minerals and land. Here were souls crying out to be saved from
eternal Hell's fire.

As the spiritual and the temporal had combined to conquer the new lands, so they combined now to rule over them. The Indians were gathered together on communal lands. They were to live in towns with a pre-determined number of priests among them, in order that they might more easily be instructed in the ways of the Catholic Church. As a tribute to the zealotry of the founding fathers, so to speak, we see today that in many Indian towns, all traces of the temporal power imposed from the external have vanished, while the church and priest are as yet present.

But, as I have mentioned, Utopias ask no questions of reality. The little dream of the Spanish conquistador apparently did not extend far enough to encompass the Indian. The Indian emerged at once as the single most important element, and also the greatest grain of sand in the beautiful little machine. Institutions arose which enslaved him, took his lands, and robbed him of his heritage. He had lost, in the space of a few short years, his socio-religious life, and had become a total stranger in his land. The new lords of the land had brought other things to the New World beside their dream of a Utopia. Diseases for which the Indian had no resistance, measles, smallpox, and yellow fever, decimated the population. Such was the gravity of the situation, with the combination of the total disruption of his life scheme and the million and one influences exerted upon him, that by roughly one hundred years after the conquest the Indian population had fallen to 6/7 what it had been at the time of the conquest.
The institution of the "mita," a service tax served in work hours by the Indian, and the "encomienda," a system whereby a conqueror was allotted a given number of Indians to work his lands, totally disrupted the system of agricultural subsistence that the Indian had known for hundreds of years. Attempts were made by the more humane friars to eliminate at least the more brutal forms of imposed labor, but one can only imagine that life was, at best, miserable for the Indian. In reference to the situation, Wolf states:

Thus the Indians suffered not only exploitation and biological collapse but also deculturation - cultural loss - and in the course of such ill use lost also the feeling of belonging to a social order which made such poor use of its human resources. They became strangers in it, divided from its purposes and agents by an abyss of distrust. The new society could command their labor, but it could not command their loyalty. Nor has this gulf healed in the course of time. The trauma of the Conquest remains an open wound upon the body of Middle American society to this day.

As a further example of this, we might look at the fact that the Spaniard insisted that only Christianity was to be practiced among the Indians. He now learned that it was "evil" to worship his deities. What an effect this must have had upon him. The Indian, who had a god to control and oversee his littlest act, suddenly found himself alone in the world, with a totally new set of deities acting upon him, deities whose very names he did not know, and whose functions he did not understand. Perhaps herein we might discover the reason why it was relatively easy to make the Indian a Christian in such short time. We can only imagine that when the Indian was violently suppressed for practicing his own faith, he became all the more eager to take on the new faith being imposed upon him.
He had seen, with great disillusionment, the fall of his own deities before seemingly stronger ones. Would it not be wise, then, to be on the winning side as much as possible? What we see among the Indians of today is what we might call the "best of both." By no means is the Indian the true Catholic he professes to be. Neither is he totally pagan in his beliefs. He is, in fact, a mixture of the two.

The subject of Mayan conversion to Christianity is an interesting one. It seems, at a first glance, that the Mayan would be very difficult to change. In almost every other aspect of his life he remains roughly the same as he was hundreds of years ago. And yet, the fact remains that he apparently accepted Christianity with relative ease. The reasons for this are many. We have already mentioned one, and that is that he must certainly have wanted to take on the religion of his conquerors, believing it to be more effective than his own. But there is another reason which seems even more realistic than this.

Toward the end of the Mayan hegemony in the Yucatan peninsula, we have seen that he underwent several hundred years of inter-city warfare and the cult of the family grew in prominence. No longer were there universal gods for all Mayans to worship. Dynasties grew, and whole families of rulers imposed their will upon the populace. Many of these families of rulers imposed their very own religious cults, and demanded that their subjects adhere to the same faith. The common Indian must have felt somewhat confused when faced with all of this. In a general sense, the Mexican
intrusion just prior to the year 1000 had brought with it
a religion demanding a great many sacrifices. In previous
times, it had been only under the most extreme cases that the
Mayan had been forced to sacrifice a human being. But the
Itza invaders believed that this ultimate form of sacrifice
was to be offered on a more regular basis. Wars were fought
in which the main objective was to capture men for purposes
of sacrifice. But when there were no wars, the demands
were met among the local populace. As years went by, it
appears that more and more people were called upon to be
sacrificed. One can only imagine the effect this had upon
the "lower men." Somehow it does not seem strange, then,
that they should accept with relative ease, a faith which
preached mercy to all men and the sanctity of all living
things. Such was the effect of this new faith, that perhaps
the Mayan thought that the new lords had gone too far with
all of this, and felt that a certain amount of sacrifice was
a good thing. This would account for the frequent sacrifices
of chicken and other animals that we see today in the
Mayan faith.

Perhaps we might find yet another reason for the apparent
ease with which the Indian of the Mayan area was converted to
Christianity. The two faiths have many areas where they seem
to be on common ground. In principle, of course, they are
radically different, but the outward manifestations of them
bear striking similarities. I shall mention several of them
here.

In a general sense, we may begin by saying that both
beliefs had a structured universe. Both included unseen and unfathomable deities, with lower helpers (priests) to aid in the attempt to understand these deities. Both faiths contained idols (which in one case were wooden effigies of saints), and both faiths contained magic and omens. Both faiths had rites surrounding baptism and the naming of children. Confession was a big part of both. Transubstantiation rites were prominent in both the pagan and the Christian beliefs. There was a frequent use of incense in both. Each had set aside designated areas in which celibate virgins lived, and the religions both held a belief in a supernatural mother. Finally, both faiths believed in the idea of the virgin birth, and both used the cross.  

There were psychological similarities also. Members of both faiths felt themselves the avengers of them. This is to say, that the members of each faith felt that their's was the one true belief, and that all others must be eliminated. Along the same line, we might add that both faiths breached no deviation from the norm. Both, in other words, demanded absolute subservience on the part of the believer.

Let us, then, return to the central plaza in the town of Coban in northern Guatemala, and see if we can now better understand the happenings in and around the church. We mentioned earlier that a group of women, dressed in their finest, entered the church and took up positions in a line along the wall. These women are members of what is known as the "cofradia." This is an honorary group of people, selected to serve a specific length of time. It is their job to keep
the church in good order. They sweep it out, and do general work to keep the statuary clean and bright. These women are chosen by the principales of the village, since it is often impossible for a priest to be present all the time. Normally the period served is one week in duration.

As was mentioned above, the priest takes on a somewhat superfluous nature in the rural religion of the Indian. It is only at times of momentous happenings, such as marriages and deaths, that the priest is needed at all. The Indian people have, among their own kind, members who perform many of the rites of the church. These people are, of course, self-ordained, but serve the Indians as functionaries of the Catholic faith. These people tend to take on the aura of witch doctors, and many of their practices include magic and incantations. They assist in such processes as the planting of the first seeds of corn, and the birth of children. As an example of the superfluity of the priest in many towns, I should like to use the example of the town of Coyotenango. I was on a ranch near this town during the week celebrating the patron saint of the area, San Juan. The man I was with called in a priest to administer a mass to the Indians of the area who were unable to reach Mazatenango, a larger town some distance away. The priest arrived in a jeep, wearing khakis and a sport shirt. He was an Italian and spoke very little Spanish. He gave the mass in the barnyard of the ranch, and quickly left. During the days before his arrival, and for several days thereafter, one of the Indian men of the area had been in the process of instructing the younger children in
the basic precepts of the faith. This man had not been assigned to do this, but had undertaken this task by his own will. He knew the sacraments well, and apparently had time to teach basic doctrine, and so he did. The priest, then, as we have seen, was the only necessary to celebrate the more important events of the church.

An important thing to point out, I believe, is the tremendous flexibility which the Catholic Church has demonstrated in the lands once held by the Indian. It was obvious to the early friars that it would be impossible for them to clarify fully their ideas to the Indian. While they were zealous in their enforcement of what we might call "basic" church doctrine, and prohibited any return to outright paganism, they were also somewhat lax in strictly enforcing the letter of Catholic law. They certainly must have seen the two faiths merging into one. It was made obvious enough by the Indian, and examples of this are many. The Indians of Chichicastenango, for example, pray before an altar to their pagan gods which is constructed directly in front of the church. They then enter the church and pray to Jesus Christ. There is a chapel on a hill outside the town of Coban. Long staircases lead up the side of the hill. At the landings of these staircases, one is likely to find the dried blood of chickens which have been sacrificed to the Virgin Mary. In one town, it is very common to see the Christ figure dressed in cotton pants and a straw hat. In a certain sense, I believe, it is a tribute to the church that they have not tried to enforce exact doctrine. It would serve no purpose
and would only serve to alienate the Indian. The Indian is basically devout, and the church is potentially a potent force throughout his lands. As yet, however, it has not taken any really active part in any sort of reform programs aimed at improving the Indian's lot. There are many reasons for this, and to explain them would be futile here, but one of the main downfalls of the church in these lands is that it has always favored the conservative elements in the society, and has consequently been hesitant in adopting any sort of reform programs. In times past, the church has, in fact, been responsible for halting programs which had already been implemented, for fear that these might endanger their position (an extremely privileged one) in the community.

Religion, as we have seen, takes a powerful position in the life of the Indian. His life is almost totally oriented toward it. He is brought into the world by it, and he is laid to rest by it. The order of his life is derived from it. Life is, in fact, a series of holy and non-holy days. One can only hope that at some future time, this powerful force in his life can be exerted toward his improvement. It has not seemed fit to truly involve itself as yet, except in a very external sense, but it had better if the Mayan is to survive and be able to overcome the tremendous problems which the modern world has thrust upon him.


2Thompson expresses this feeling throughout his work.

3Eric Wolf has shown great insight into this area in


7Ibid., pp. 213-214.

8All this is amply covered by most authors in this area. Thompson and Gallenkamp do it best.

9Wolf, op. cit., p. 169.
The Mayan Nature

I believe it only fair to point out that a great deal of what I will say in this section will derive from personal experience. It is difficult to find material dealing strictly with what we might call the "Mayan nature," but I feel that some description of "what makes him tick" is invaluable if we are to truly understand him.

The Mayan has demonstrated himself to be perhaps the most earth-oriented human being alive. Throughout history, it has been seen that the one thing that is most important to him is his field. This pertains not only to the Mayan, but to other pre-Columbian Americans as well. During the siege of Cuzco, when the Inca chiefs and their soldiers had the small Spanish force under Pizarro bottled up without food or water, we see a manifestation of this sort of feeling occurring. The siege lasted many weeks before the planting season arrived. When it did, not even the Inca chiefs were able to keep the army together. Slowly, the besieging army dwindled away to nothing and allowed the Spaniards to escape. The soldiers of the Inca had simply found it more important to be at home tending to the planting of their crops.¹

The Mayan were no different than the Inca. Throughout Mayan history we see that the single most important possession of the Indian was land. Land provided him with a place to grow his crops. During the epoch in which the Indians of the Mayan
area flourished, we may see that there was at no time a standing army. The idea of the soldier-farmer was the only one tolerated. Relatively few people in the society were not involved in food production. Public works were undertaken only after the crops had been attended to. In a maize agriculture, the farmer finds himself with many weeks in which he has very little to do. It was during this time that he was willing to undertake the work imposed upon him by his superiors in the area of road building, temple repair work, etc. I believe that the greatest mistake the invading Spaniard made was to take the Indian from his lands. We have seen that his population fell to 6/7 of its original number, shortly after the arrival of the Spaniard. We may say that all of this was due to the constant wars which were being fought, and to the many new diseases which the European brought with him. The greatest reason, I believe, is the one mentioned above. The Mayan had a desperate fear of losing his land, a fear which he still holds, and when the Spaniard took his lands from him, moved him from his accustomed routine of life, and told him that in the future he would live where the Spaniard told him to, one can imagine the result. The Mayan was then faced with a loss of deities, a loss of all personal dignity, and a loss of his ancestral lands. One cannot help wondering how those who did survive were able to do so.

Today, the situation is essentially the same. The Mayan has a great fear of losing his land, and any man who he feels will help him preserve it, will receive the Indian's support. This has been the reason for much political turmoil within the
countries of the Maya. It would not be wise, however, for the reader to gain the impression that the Indian would actively support anyone. When I mentioned "support" above, I meant that the Indian would tend to be in favor of that particular candidate.

Much of what were once Mayan lands are now owned by large landowners. In most cases, an equitable situation has been worked out. Let us say, for example, that the landowner decides he wants to raise cattle on his land. To do this he must have many herdsmen. He must, therefore, hire the local Indians and supply them with horses and whatever else is needed for their work. The Indian, when he comes to work, brings his wife and family with him. During the period in which the Indian works for the landowner, he and his family will live on the land of the landowner. He is supplied with a plot which he will use for raising corn for his family. The point here is that the Indian's ties to the land are so strong, that no matter what manner of employment he seeks, he still insists that he have some area in which he can grow corn. In a sense, the landowner does not hire men, he hires families. The idea of the man of the house going off to work and bringing home money with which to support his family does not apply in the case of the Mayan. He must have land with which to farm. This whole process tends to slow down, or deter, the amount of work that can be extracted from an employee, but to change this aspect of life would be to lose the employee altogether.

The Mayan is not, by nature, a pragmatic person. For
proof of this point, we need only to look at his history. The great temple-cities are an example of this lack of prag-
matism. The Mayan built a fifteen thousand square foot base
and placed a fifteen cubic foot structure on top of it. At
the very time of his greatest advances in science and math-
ematics, he still used the same rudimentary farm implements
he had always used. Even today these have not essentially
changed. He has exchanged his fire-hardened planting stick
for a machete, but in just about every other area he remains
unchanged. He never used the wheel in any form, which makes
us admire all the more his beautiful pottery and cloth work.
The lack of this simple implement (the wheel) must have caused
him untold hardships. He starved in draught years, for lack
of a simple bucket and wheel to haul water out of the deep wells
which were frequent in the land. And yet, at the same time,
the toys he constructed for his children often took the form
of small carts with wheels on them. Why he could not relate
the toy to a more practical use, we probably will never know.
The only thing which can be validly stated is that he lacked
the pragmatic point of view necessary.

A few years ago, a team of experts went into the mountains
to make a study of fertilizers and crop increase. In the town
they chose, they rented, for the period of one growing season,
a plot of land. They used their modern implements and fertili-
zers, and the crop yield was double anything else in the area.
The Indians were duly impressed. They said that they would
adopt the methods shown to them. The experts had built two
small shelters by the side of the field, to enable them to
protect their implements and fertilizers from the rains. The
next year it was seen that every Indian had adopted the method
shown him. In effect, each had constructed two miniature
shelters next to his fields, in the hopes that whatever magic
the strangers had possessed would pass on to them. It is this
sort of thing which makes aid programs lose impetus.

This lack of pragmatism enters all walks of life. The
Indian sees the things he thinks represent progress. Unfortun-
ately, what he sees are just that - representatives of progress.
He aspires to adopt the outward manifestations rather than
the values which produced them. It is not that he is "showy,"
but simply that he does not understand. It is paradoxical to
think that men like these created one of the most perfect
calendars ever known to man, and were able to calculate
numbers into the millions. Men like these had grasped the
concept of infinity. It appears that the Mayan reached a
certain level in one area, yet chose to remain unchanged in
others.

The Mayan rarely feels the urge to travel very far from
home. To the Indian, the concept of the town is all-important.
He is what we might call a town-centered individual. This is
involved with a great deal of Ethnocentricism. The town, and
its immediate environs, are society to the Indian. The
projects of the nearby town constitute the sum total of the
interests of his life. The structure of the society, and the
maintenance of it, are of great interest to him. He does not
aspire to achieve wealth, but to maintain his status in the
community. He competes, to be sure, with his fellow Indians,
and wants to have money, but he is likely to give it all to some town project, such as the celebration of a given Saint's day. The Indian town, as a consequence of this, is a self-perpetuating body of individuals, whose main interest is the preservation of that body. To achieve the status of a principal, can be considered to be the ultimate achievement to the Indian. With this position in the community, a great deal of respect is acquired. It is this respect which gives the Indian the dignity and pride which he could never achieve outside of his own area. Buying the Indian's produce serves to perpetuate the closed aspect of his town. He does not sell his goods in order to achieve enough money to leave his home, or even to improve it. The money he makes is most often spent on rockets, whiskey, and crepe paper. These are needed for every religious celebration. If a man is able to provide this for the town, then he has achieved a great deal of honor in the eyes of his community. An important thing to stress here is that the Indian needs this type of respect. He does not dote on the praise of other individuals, but his only security is found in the town itself. In its environs, he is a man among his own kind. Outside of the town, he sees himself as nothing. We see at once, then, the importance of maintaining the town intact. I am not sure whether it is original ethnocentricism which makes him lean toward the maintenance of the town, or whether it is the other way around. Be it as it may, the Indian is always far more content with his own race than with any other. In recent years, the Guatemalan government has published much literature on the subject of the overcrowding of the capital
city. The problem, ironically enough, is that too many people are coming to the city without any means of support. Most of these are Indians. While the problem may be great, it is significant to note that the vast majority of Indians never leave their home areas and never feel the desire to leave.2

Perhaps as an outcome of the above, we see that the Indian is very regionalistic in nature. Regionalism is a hard thing to define no matter where it exists, but one might safely say that, in the case of the Indian, it is the tendency on the part of the individual to regard his own immediate area as the most important in his life. He sees his area, in a sense, as the center of the universe. All other areas are outside his realm of real interest. This feeling of regionalism has a long history among the Maya. It has also had some detrimental consequences. In Mexico, as I am sure in Guatemala, there are areas where white men have never set foot, and would be extremely unwelcome if they did. These areas are, needless to say, totally outside the mainstream of national life. Even in places where "outsiders" are quite welcome, such as the Coban area, the regionalistic nature of the people has caused the town to remain not only unchanged in hundreds of years, but also to remain outside of the national picture of the country. Ask an Indian woman where she is from, and the answer will not be that she is a Guatemalan, but rather that she is a "Cobanera," or an "Antigüena." In effect, most Indian towns are in the nation but not of it.

This regionalism has caused serious problems in the past, and doubtless will cause many more in the future. At the time
of independence from Spain, the lands which had been Mayan were populated sparsely. Towns were great distances from one another, and communications were extremely poor. Add to this the regionalism of the Indian, and a real problem is evident. Latin America has an age old custom known as "caudillismo." It is manifested in a single human being. The caudillo is not exactly a dictator, though he may become one. He is certainly not a president, though this too he may become. He is a man with tremendous popular support in a given area. He is a person who is able to control the hearts and minds of an entire region. He may stir them up and force them to fight for some cause he may espouse. Regionalism produces this man, for it is only the regionalistic person who is blind to what we might call the national scheme. Incidences of caudillismo are countless, but I think it might be wise for us to look at several in an attempt to understand the idea a bit better.

In 1910, Porfirio Diaz had been ruler of Mexico for three decades. While the nation starved, a select few sat in splendor in the capital. The national treasury had untold wealth at its disposal. Foreign economic interests were at a peak. To the outward appearance, the nation was basking in progress and wealth. When the storm broke, it did so from a thousand places at once. For me to discuss the Mexican Revolution would be superfluous to our main interests. But it was a classic example of the sort of thing mentioned above. The Mexican Revolution was a perfect manifestation of the regionalistic interests exercising their influence over the
nation as a whole. Caudillos were everywhere. They personified
the revolution in their flamboyance and daring. Not the least
of these men was Emiliano Zapata. He was the "favorite son"
of thousands of starving Zapotec Indians, who would have gone
to the ends of the earth had he so commanded. When the Madero
administration took office, and old don Porfirio had retired
to Paris for the remainder of his days, Zapata demanded the
immediate division of land for his followers. He would main-
tain his "troops" at arms until such time as these demands
could be met, he said. It is not in the character of the
caudillo to be patient, however, and when the Madero govern-
ment seemed to be dragging its feet, he revolted again.
Eventually, Zapata was murdered. To his dying day, he
attempted to force the government to divide the land won from
the "hacendados" (large landowners) among his followers. His
name is revered to this day among the people he attempted
to help.³

Another example of a regional caudillo is Rafael Carrera.
In 1830, Morazan, from Honduras, made himself president of the
Central American Provinces. He was a liberal, and consequently
felt the need for drastic reforms in the area of education,
the press, the right to vote, and, in general, what we might
consider the more basic freedoms. The conservative elements
hated him, and sought some method of ousting him. Rafael
Carrera was a humble, illiterate Indian at the time. He had
a tremendous local following. He was inspired to lead a
revolt against the regime of Morazan. At about this time,
an epidemic of cholera broke out. The conservative elements
in Guatemala spread the rumor that the liberal regime had
poisoned the water. Carrera, the popular hero, played right into the hands of the conservatives. His Indians rose in total revolt and overthrew the regime. Carrera became president in 1835, and remained in that office until 1865, making his rule one of the longest and most ruthless that Guatemala has ever seen. 

The regionalism and the cult of personalism which produces the caudillo has been responsible for some of the worst iron-handed dictatorships that the world has ever seen. We can only hope that modern communications and a continuing process of social evolution will eliminate the causes which produce such men. Outright power tends to corrupt the individual. We have seen that Zapata had a good cause. One can only wonder, however, what might have happened had he gained complete control of Mexico. 

Up to now, we have been dealing with the broader aspects of Mayan character. I should now like to bring our discussion down to the Indian "man on the street" and attempt to formulate for the reader some idea of what he is.

The Indian is basically an honest person. He is trusting of his neighbor. As proof of this, we need only look at the situation in most rural areas of the Mayan lands. By far the majority of Mayan homes have no doors at all. It is not unusual for the entire family to pick up and go to a nearby town for as many as two and three weeks at a time. At such times, the home is left virtually without protection. Normally, a string of some sort is left across the doorway, signifying that the owner is not at home. I believe that the degree to which one
trusts his neighbors is a good indication of how trustworthy he is himself. The Indian trusts all men, and is easily duped. He plays easily into the hands of unscrupulous men. The legend of the Indian being a liar is simply that, a legend, a myth. It is only when he comes into constant contact with the mestizo and the white elements of his country that he becomes a liar. When he does become this, he is such a poor liar, lacking practice, that his lies become obvious, and the myth is created. The Indian leaves his crops unguarded for days on end, and his animals roam far and wide, with no worry of thievery. A man rode three miles through the tropical sun once, to return a pack containing two cigarettes to me.

The Indian is not afraid to work many hours a day. He is not a shirker. If we often see him asleep beneath a tree, let us remember that he arose at five, and has probably been in his fields, under the burning tropical sun for hours. His intestines are riddled with parasites which will eventually kill him. He is probably suffering from any of a number of consumptive diseases which sap his strength, and lower his resistance to other diseases. It is not strange that we see him asleep beneath a tree. During the planting season, he will spend as many as fourteen hours a day in his fields. Life itself is hard work for him, and he does not shirk it.

The Indian is polite, by nature, and rarely does he attempt to offend. Especially in the case of outsiders, he is an impeccable host. He is a good father to his children, and realizes that he is directly responsible for their well-being in the community. He realizes that the instruction he
gives them will serve to orient them in their journey through the world. I have never seen, however, a Mayan father actually sit down and explain anything to his child. The youngster is expected to learn by imitation, and usually does.

In the area of man-woman relations, we might begin by saying that the Indian is by no means a lover. We can safely say that the Indian has no idea of what we might call romantic love. Normally, we will still find that marriage takes place by agreement between the families involved. All this is not to say that he does not participate in the sexual act with great frequency. Indian children play erotic games at an early age, and it is not strange at all that there should be pre-marital sex among them. Men are usually faithful to their wives, but a transgression in this area is not roundly condemned; it is accepted as part of life. In the marriage, decisions concerning the entire family are shared between the husband and wife. Outside the home, however, the man dominates the conversation, and a wife will rarely speak in a public place when she is with her husband, unless the party spoken to is a close friend, or unless she is spoken to. The Indian is capable of being a good friend, and will show a great deal of faithfulness to a person he feels to be a friend. Under circumstances too intricate to explain here, an Indian who hardly knew me once saved my life. This was done only because he considered me his friend. He expected me to feel no obligation to him whatsoever. Friendship to the Indian is not a slap on the back affair. He treats his friends with dignity and respect at all times. One never sees any physical contact.
between two people, of whatever sex, in public. The hand-
shake is given, of course, but the affectionate "abrazo" in
a public place is a mestizo custom, and does not carry down
to the Indian.

The Mayan is a man of great dignity. This dignity
must be preserved at all times. It is the thing which makes
the Mayan, in my opinion, a truly admirable individual.
Despite the poverty under which he must live, and the
wealth he sees around him, he does not whine or curse his
fate. He seeks, always, to find some equitable path to
follow. This leads us to the point I wish to make here.
The Indian does not seek to dominate life, but to come to
terms with it. He is not a manipulator, but only a man with
the idea that since life is hard, then man must not fight
against it, but rather accept it, and live around the
hardest parts. Perhaps this idea of acceptance has caused
him trouble in the past, but at the same time it has given
him a quality which all too few human beings have anymore.

The Mayan was living by the Protestant Ethic before
Martin Luther was born. Hard work is the keystone of his
life. He believes in moderation in all things (with the
possible exception of children) and maintains himself with
a great deal of self-discipline. Perhaps we can demonstrate
this aspect of his character by looking, once again, at his
past. When the ancient Mayan was called upon to build great
temples and construct long causeways, he did so voluntarily
and was paid nothing for his services. Only the thought
that he was performing a necessary task enabled him to
continue. He worked hard because he thought that, in this way, he could benefit his society as a whole. If he received no tangible remuneration, what did this matter, if a man were truly able to perform his assigned task in the society? When the Mayan greatness decayed, after the year 1000, I believe it was because the leaders of the society lost this sense of equanimity and acceptance of life. When they became greedy and began bickering among themselves over territory pertaining to each, the true end of Mayan greatness had begun. It was discipline, and acceptance of the difficult, which had enabled the Mayan to carve out of the most forbidding corner of the world, a truly astounding culture. It was this which enabled him to build cities which lasted hundreds of years in a land where modern technology has been, in great part, unsuccessful in constructing so much as a road that will last through several rainy seasons. When the Mayan leadership lost sight of that which was of ultimate importance, when they forgot wherein lay the true greatness of their people, then the inevitable result, self-destruction, had to occur. Eric Wolf, in his book, Sons of the Shaking Earth, has called the mestizo the "hope of Latin America". I cannot help disagreeing. I firmly believe that if Latin America is ever to drag itself out of the doldrums, it will be because the Indian, with his tremendous personal values, his inherent sense of dignity and honesty, and his acceptance of hard labor as one of the compromises of life, regains hegemony in his own lands.
The Daily Round

In this section, I should like to tell the story of one day in the life of an Indian. There is no such thing as a "typical", or "average" person, but I hope that we will be able to relate many of the things we have seen in previous sections to the life of one family. This will be the family of Domingo Perez. The story will take place during several days of his life. It will be strictly biographical in nature.

In the semi-tropical forests near the town of Coyote-nango, the dawn is heralded by the singing and chirping of a thousand birds. At five o'clock in the morning, it is still perfectly black. In the "rancho" which belongs to Domingo Perez and his family, there is already activity. Margarita, Domingo's wife, has risen, and is now in the process of fanning the dying embers of last night's fire back into life in the three-stoned hearth. One of the children, the youngest, is beginning to whimper for his mother. Domingo now decides that if he is to accomplish all he has planned, he had best rise. He rises and begins dressing, white cotton shirt and pants, straw hat, and thong sandals known as "huaraches" or "sandalias". By now, Margarita has warmed the corn tortillas for the morning meal. Domingo goes to the river to bathe. Donning his clothes once more, he returns to the "rancho" for breakfast. The rains are about to begin, and Domingo and his son, Juan,
must hurry if they are to clear the land for this year’s crop of corn.

As his ancestors did a thousand years ago, Domingo takes some fire from the hearth and carries it to the area he wishes to burn. Several of his neighbors are present to help him burn. One of them is the "chilan", or native priest, who will bless his fields the first day of planting. Before he lights the fire, however, Domingo must cut down the larger trees and the heavier underbrush. Once this is done, the fire is lighted. This process is known as the "slash and burn" method, and is as old as the Mayan. The ash produced from this process will serve to fertilize Domingo’s fields for one year. This process has taken Domingo and his neighbors the better part of the morning, and it is now time for the noonday meal. This is brought to him by one of the younger children. It consists of tortillas and some local fruit, such as tomatoes or avocado. This is usually washed down with water. After the fire is well under control, and the neighbors have left, Domingo tells one of his children to keep watch over the dying fire, and he too leaves for home. It is imperative that he do so, for today is market day, and he must take some goods to market. Domingo’s wife makes pots from clay found locally and sells them on market days. She has already left for the town, shortly after Domingo left for his fields in the morning. Margarita left her oldest daughter in charge of the smaller children when she left for the town, and it is this girl who has prepared Domingo’s lunch. She has also found
firewood for the evening fire, fed the chickens, milked the cow, and washed some clothing in the nearby stream.

When Domingo enters the town, he is weary from the heavy burden of pottery he is carrying. The market place is across the street from the cathedral, and it is toward this that he now makes his way. After lowering his load, and arranging the pots in symmetrical order on the ground, he makes his way across the crowded plaza to the church. He enters and removes his hat. He has brought a candle, and now lights it and places it on a sort of shelf which contains many similar candles. This is his prayer candle, and, to his way of thinking, his prayers will not be heard without it. He now drops to his knees and begins his prayers. He prays that God, and the Blessed Virgin, and all the Saints might provide his crops with rain. He prays that his yield of corn might be great, and that the sale of his pottery might go well, for it is he who has volunteered to supply his rancho for the ceremonies celebrating the patron saint of the area, San Juan.

When Domingo has finished his prayers, he leaves the cathedral and strolls on to the plaza. His wife is as capable a salesman as he is, and so he has no worry that if his pottery is to be sold, she will do so. On the plaza, he runs into a friend. The friend tells him that the government has sent officials into the town. To Domingo, this spells trouble. He has never served in the national army and is afraid that these men might have come to "enlist" him. A sound truck passes slowly around the plaza, announcing that there is to be a census. This immediately strikes fear in the
heart of every Indian in the marketplace. Whenever the government becomes involved in the affairs of this town, someone has suffered for it. The man in the truck proclaims loudly that all the Indians must be true and loyal citizens, and tell only the truth to the people who come to their ranchos and ask questions. But the Indians have heard such men before. They are afraid. Domingo makes a mental note of all this, and thinks that, when he returns home, he must remember to hide his livestock in the forests behind his home, lest the government take it from him. He, also, is afraid. He does not know really why, but whenever outsiders have come to his area, they have caused an upset of some sort in the scheme of things.

Further on, he meets an old principal. The old man carries his age with great dignity, as is the custom of the Indian. All people who see this man tip their hats in deference to him. Domingo has known him for many years, and so they talk. The old man is anxious for tomorrow, for that is the day when Domingo and his family will be hosts to the priest from Mazatenango, and all the farmers for miles around. A mass will be given, and crops will be blessed. The old man tells Domingo that the people of the area are grateful to him for providing them with a place to celebrate their patron saint. That a priest should come to bless them is all the better. Domingo is happy, for to him, true wealth is counted in the respect of others, not in money.

Evening is closing upon the town, and the Indians begin to leave the market area. It has been a good day for
Domingo, and he is glad that he came to town. All that night, he and his wife make the preparations for the celebration. She prepares a type of corn-based mash which she will mold around pieces of meat. This article of food is typically eaten at times of celebration and is called a "tamale". Domingo spends the night spreading soft leaves and a certain white seed in a soft mat, so as to form a path where the priest will walk. In to this path of seeds and leaves, he forms a design as ancient as the Mayan himself. He decides where he will fire off the rockets, and where he will hang the crepe paper.

By early the next day, people are beginning to arrive. The men, friends of Domingo, walk first, while their wives and children trail behind. As each guest arrives, he pays his respects, hat in hand, to Domingo and his wife. The arrival of the priest signals the true beginning of the ceremony. Domingo has constructed an altar in the dooryard of his rancho, and the path of leaves and seeds leads to this. The priest is a stranger in town, and Domingo notices that he is ill at ease. Many times, Domingo thinks, there have been priests who spoke very little Spanish. They come from far away, and seem always to be aloof and a little frightened among the Indians. In any case, the priest now gives the mass, and blesses the people assembled before him. He pays his respects to Domingo and his wife, but says that pressing matters in Mazatenango force him to make an early departure from the rancho. He asks if Domingo understands. Domingo understands.
The rest of the day, Domingo and his friends celebrate the patron saint's day with much food and more whiskey. By the end of the day, most of the men are thoroughly drunk. Domingo is normally a sober man in all his dealings, but at such times as these, well, who would expect a man to celebrate truly without an ample portion of whiskey? At the end of the day, when the guests have gone, Domingo falls upon his bed, heavy with drunkenness. He must rise early the next day, for it is to be the day of planting.

At sunrise the following morning, a "chilan" comes to the door of Domingo's home. He is to assist in the planting. Domingo takes his machete, and goes with the chilan to the fields. As the sun appears on the horizon, Domingo and Margarita sacrifice a chicken, and sprinkle its blood over the cross which the chilan has brought. While the chilan gives the proper incantations, Domingo digs a small hole in the earth and drops a few seeds into it. Somewhere a dog barks, and sound temporarily obliterates the murmur of the chilan's voice. The holiest of all rites has now been performed, the rite of planting. To Domingo, and men like him all over the Mayan lands, corn is life. He has provided himself and his family with the gift of life for at least one more year.

Domingo, and his wife may never live to see another sunrise. Their children stand a good chance of dying before they are five years old. Domingo will probably die before he reaches the age of forty. But, somehow, when the first hole is dug, and the first seeds dropped into it, one has the idea
that he, or men like him, will go on forever. One feels that he is truly witnessing the beginning of a new life. Domingo, and the seeds in his leathery hand, represent a multitude. They represent a changeless, timeless sequence of human life and death. In this there is beauty. Domingo is the Mayan.

I quote, once again, from Eric Wolf's work:

Empires and conquests sweep over the land, cities arise, new gods announce salvation, but in the dusty streets of the little villages a humble kind of life persists, and rises again to the surface when the fury of conquest is stilled, when the cities crumble into ashes, and when the new gods are cast into oblivion. In the rhythm of Middle American development we recognize phases of great metabolic construction, followed by catabolic processes which gnaw at the foundations of temples and citadels until they collapse of their own weight or vanish in a fury of burning and destruction. Yet until today the community of cultivators has retained its capacity to turn in upon itself and to maintain its integrity in the face of doubt and disaster - until today and perhaps not much longer, because the modern world is engaged in severing once and for all the ties which bind people into local unity, in committing them to complete participation in the Great Society.

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Conclusion

We have seen that the Mayan Indian of today needs help. But this is nothing new. The Mayan Indian has always needed help. He seems to have stood still while the world progresses around him. He is an enigma to those who know him well, and a nuisance to those who do not care to know him. He has been called a hope for the future, and a curse to Latin America. Millions have been spent in his behalf, yet one sees no essential change in his life. Aid programs have come and gone. Peace Corpsmen fear him, condemn him, ridicule him, and are frustrated by him. The Alliance for Progress spends vast quantities of money on him, with no tangible results. He still needs help, but the difference is that now, with the rising population, the need is more desperate than ever before.

I do not presume to be the ultimate authority on the Mayan Indians. Neither do I feel myself to be the only qualified person to decide how progress should be brought about. If, however, love of these people is in any way a prerequisite, then I could not be more prepared. I will suggest merely a concept, an idea, perhaps it is only a feeling. I feel that true progress among the Indians can only be brought about when we are able to bring the idea, or feeling, of progress to the Indian. Until now, all aid programs have appeared to the Indian to have been externally imposed upon him. The Indian has always felt the need for
progress, and yet has always stopped short of the real goal. Robert Redfield points this out in his description of the town of Cham Khom. The Indians in this town decided to make a sincere effort at progressing. They revamped the status of the town, and attempted to take on the physical characteristics of progress. To this day, however, the people still maintain essentially the same way of life as they have always had, albeit behind the walls of modern homes, and under the guise of progress. Essentially, the problem is one of security, and the lack of it. The day when the Indian does not feel as though he must turn inward upon his society for security, then we will see the day when he is willing to broaden his own horizons. The problem is one which can only be changed from within the society. Until now, aid programs have attempted to help the very external aspects of life, such as the problem of poor crop yields, and the devastating health situation. I believe that we can draw an analogy between this sort of program and a dam with a hole in it. When the dam has a hole in it, the engineer does not simply stop the hole with a cork stopper, he reconstructs that portion of the dam which is faulty. It is our job, in the case of the Mayan, to inculcate into his way of thinking the desire to broaden his own horizons, and not seek security and protection among his own kind. I feel that through a very real effort in the area of education, with real and tangible chances for success because of it, the Indian will be able to attain the desired end. Once his horizons have been broadened in this area, he will begin to truly, rather than superficially, accept the
help of the outsider in many areas. We are like the
engineer. We can continue merely "to stop holes", by merely
repairing the external aspects of his life (curing his
diseases, etc.), or we can, in a sense, reconstruct that
portion of his society which is presumed to be faulty
(i.e., the feeling on his part that he must stay within
his own society for purposes of security). Above all, we
must preserve the essential qualities in the Indian which
are good. If he can see that his honor, dignity, and his
lack of fear of hard work will be appreciated, then our
chances of bringing him out of the tenth century are that
much better.

Somewhere, perhaps this very hour, an Indian turns
his face to the morning sun, shoulders his machete, and
starts off for his fieldas. Somewhere, tortillas are being
patted into existence, and a small Indian baby cries to be
fed. Let us never forget these people. Let us never forget
that they have, inherently, qualities which this world would
do well to imitate. Let us, then do our best to alleviate
the major miseries of their lives, not because we pity them,
but in the hope that someday, the things which made the
Mayan great, will make all of Indian Latin America great also.

1Robert Redfield, A Village That Chose Progress; Cham Kom
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I think it necessary to point out that a great deal of the material included in this thesis is taken from my personal experience with the Indians of Mexico and Guatemala. Much is also taken from notes received in class lectures at the University of San Carlos, Guatemala. I am indebted to Dr. Jorge Luis Arriola, ex-Minister of Education of Guatemala, for a great deal of material, especially in the areas of present day Indian society.
Abstract of the Senior Scholar Topic, *The Maya: Five Hundred Years Later*

by

Thomas A. Donahue
I will admit that few subjects fascinate me more than the Indians of this hemisphere. To me, the Indian has always been a living fossil, a symbol of the past. He has always seemed a simple, yet unfathomable thing. In him one sees the hopes and aspirations of a bygone era. I suppose that one of the main reasons I have for being interested can be correlated with the interest most of us have in what has gone before us. But such an interest normally takes the form of a general, and somewhat disinterested, discussion on a rainy afternoon when not much is going on. When one comes face to face with history, in windy gorges, in steaming jungles, and on age-old paths across barren hilltops, the impression is much deeper, and far more lasting. In short, I am impressed with the Mayan Indian.

Few of us realize the greatness which the Mayan were able to achieve against incredible odds. Buildings of every sort remain to this day in a land where modern engineers are hardpressed to build so much as a road which will remain negotiable during the tremendous rainy season. Gods were worshiped with fantastic ceremonies, and society in general had reached a remarkably advanced level of culture. But I have not chosen to write my thesis as a documentary of bloodthirsty deities, broken potsherds, and mortal sacrifices.
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Few of us realize the greatness which the Mayan were able to achieve against incredible odds. Buildings of every sort remain to this day in a land where modern engineers are hardpressed to build so much as a road which will remain negotiable during the tremendous rainy season. Gods were worshiped with fantastic ceremonies, and society in general had reached a remarkably advanced level of culture. But I have not chosen to write my thesis as a documentary of bloodthirsty deities, broken potsherds, and mortal sacrifices.
This job, I shall leave to the arqueologist. I have chosen, rather, to look at the Mayan of today; the living, breathing Mayan. I have attempted to show how his past has worked upon him, and molded him into the creature which makes up nearly sixty per cent of the population of Guatemala alone, let alone Mexico and Honduras. To do this, of course, I have had to trace his history from its earliest times down to the present. To offer a recapitulation of this at this time would be impossible, but I shall try to mention the salient points of my study, in the hope of creating for the reader at least a general picture of what the Indian is, and why he is of vital importance in the lands in which he resides.

Man has inhabited this hemisphere for approximately thirty thousand years. The most common theory for his arrival here is that he came across what are now known as Bering Straits, and, by centuries of migration, reached nearly every point on this continent. The migration did not take place all at once. There were, in fact, many groups at many different times. The groups which were to make up the entity known as the Mayan Indians arrived from Asia relatively late.

By five thousand B.C., the Indian of Central America had stopped his nomadic life, and begun some crude form of agriculture. It is supposed that corn was developed, or, discovered, in Central America, and one can safely assume, I believe, that this early agriculture was corn-based. As the population became more stable, a religion developed. At first, this belief, or series of beliefs, took the form of omens and magic. Certain spots were noted for their 'magic'
qualities, and it became evident that certain people were en-
dowed with powers to communicate with beings of the supernatural. It was only natural, then, as the society progressed, that these 'chosen' people should find it wise to undertake to interpret, for their unenlightened brethren, the will of the allmighty (whichever one it happened to be).

Buildings grew around presumed holy places, and it was all the better if one of these holy areas coincided with one of the many natural wells (cenotes) which dot the jungle landscape of northern Guatemala. An entire class of priests emerged. Along with this flowering of religion, the society was also growing. While the Mayans were never ruled by any central government (except in the very final stages of decay) there existed many city-states, which were entities unto themselves. Such cities were ruled by a man known as the 'Halah Uinich', who was supposed to embody every manly virtue. Under him sat a council to advise him in his decisions. Beneath this level was a whole host of subordinates who were in charge of keeping the general law and order.

The story of the fall of the city-states, the migration northward, and the subsequent subjugation by the Toltec group from the valley of Mexico, is of such proportions that it is impossible for me to begin here. Suffice it to say that from the tenth century on, the Mayan lands saw almost constant warfare and bickering, silenced only by the Spanish conqueror in the early years of the sixteenth century.

By necessity I shall jump the five hundred intervening years between the time of the conquest and the present. We
may see that the social structure of the Indian community has not essentially changed from its form during pre-columbian times. The society is still based on the growing of corn. The elders of the community are the ultimate authorities on questions of good and bad, and acceptable and unacceptable. Religion still plays an enormous role in the daily life of the Indian. The essential difference is that now the religion is now Catholicism mixed with the remnants of pre-conquest paganism. It pervades nearly every facet of the Indian's existence, as it did before the coming of the Spaniard, and is well mixed with magic and superstition.

The Indian nature has not changed, as far as I have been able to surmise, since ancient times. He loves his cornfield, and is as strongly attached to it as he ever was. He is still the humble, hard-working, quiet person he has been for centuries. He values the idea of work as much as the product of it. He is inherently honest, and will often leave his home totally unattended for weeks at a time with no danger of anything being stolen, or any harm being done. He is strongly tied to his community, and will rarely live outside of easy walking distance to his nearest neighbor.

It is difficult to say a little about the Indians, and generalizations are dangerous. During the course of this year of study, which actually started when I went to Mexico at the age of eight, I have learned many facts. The sum total of these facts is hard to judge. I believe that the Indian is the hope of Latin America because of the character traits
which can be found in nearly every Indian. It should be the policy of all reform programs to better his lot, not by merely curing the existent ills, but by inculcating into the ideology of the Indian the idea of progress. He has seen too many 'outsiders' who have come only to harm, to accept heartily those who come to help. Simple, direct education, with real benefits shown for those who are educated (by way of better jobs, etc.), is the only answer. Without this, the Indian will continue to distrust, and accept the handout without accepting the hand.