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IDENTIFYING THE MAYA THROUGH A STUDY OF THEIR THEATRICAL PRACTICES

A TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL DRAMATURGY OF THE MAYAN CULTURAL PERFORMANCE HERITAGE

ANN C. WRIGHT

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts The University of Montana 1999

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ABSTRACT

History and theater attempt to re-present significant occurrences of the past by interpreting human performances. Although we can never hope to actually recreate the past, when attempting to interpret multi-cultural interaction (i.e. the Maya and the Spanish at the time of the initial encounters), both cultures' perspectives, cultural heritages, and worldviews - not simply the interpretation of one of the participants - must be explored if a viable interpretation is to be initiated, and possible synthesis explored.

The story of this cultural collision, from the Maya point of view, is yet to be written, but a solution for developing a more viable history than currently available is suggested in the contextual/textual dramaturgy of Maya theater. The Mayan culture of Yucatan and Central America evolved from a significantly different set of original values, hereditary experiences, and resultant worldview than those experienced in Europe. Their unique form of life was a theatrical production - a cyclical re-enactment of their creation myth - encompassing all aspects of their daily life, and all community members - a lifestyle.

Key to understanding the Maya worldview is their original concept of Kinh, an encompassing philosophy of Pan-chronotheism. This philosophy is outlined in the various uses of the calendar systems, and translated into any number of expressions of the use of space, and understanding of reality. Because the Maya experienced no differentiation of sciences, arts and morality, to interpret their culture as it had evolved by the time of the initial encounters, one must willingly suspend disbelief in an alien worldview, and submerge themselves in the cyclical, holistic philosophy and way of life of these people as exemplified in their theater.

The various expressions and uses of personal (behavioral) and theatrical performance mediums, examined through the lens of contextual/textual dramaturgy, helps clarify the essential humanity and philosophical intent of these people. It offers a basis for initiating a more viable historical interpretation of their interaction with others, and a deeper appreciation of their unique cultural performance heritage.
PREFACE

A performance history of the indigenous cultures of the North and South American continents is absent from the most respected works on theater history, due to the fact that it has long been assumed that theater, in its traditional definition, was not present in the cultural expression of these civilizations.

I contend, however, that it is a “forest-for-the-trees” issue. The performance heritage of the Maya culture, based in a unique concept of time as a literal and circular dimension, results in a theater experience and *dramatis personae* unparalleled in Western experience. In addition, the disciplines of science, art, and morality, so fragmented in what has evolved into modern Western thought, were not only integrated in the base philosophy of this ancient civilizations, but that unity was also continually expressed in the scripted re-enactments of their original creation myth. These re-enactments were repeated, again and again throughout the course of their history, in specific, calculated patterns based on their understanding and expression of the art and morality of their sciences within time. All members of society were included in the cast of characters necessary to completely re-enact this initial drama, and any individual’s deviation from the scripted performance text was believed to adversely affect the people, and their environment, as a whole.

This study of individuals and groups, who were the product of an ancient and alien culture, an encompassing theatrical heritage, seeks to provide a more inclusive identity for the Mayan people and rediscover some of the mysteries of their ancient wisdom. We place those who performed in this past within a context in which they again assume a presence, and can once again speak for themselves. Through discovery a more complete identity for our subject, we begin to recognize what we may be missing in our own philosophical thought processes, or have lost along the way.

The performance heritage evident in the cultural makeup of the Maya, as exemplified in the results of their various behavioral performances - their artifacts, documents, and arts – translates into a view of the
human experience they may have actually enjoyed. It is a contextual and textual dramaturgy of a segment of humanity performing on their particular stage of experience.

In this thesis I propose that in the beginning, for the Maya, there is a nebulous, intangible notion - a concept, an initial thought or idea - that came to be shared and embraced by the members of this indigenous community. Performance (in its various guises) is the primary manifestation of this original notion at the human level - our primary source for defining or witnessing that idea. Performative action is taken in a multitude of manners, based on the individual attempting to express that shared notion. Some perform the concept through language and documentation, others through song, weaving, creation of story, ritual, dance, mathematics or astronomy. These various actions - these personal performances - result in the creation of secondary sources - tangible and semi-permanent artifacts that are an expression or interpretation of the original performance inspired by the original notion.

Artifacts and documents, if maintained by a culture and preserved over time, can eventually be re-discovered and studied by contemporary researchers and scholars. They offer a semblance of the nature of intent of the original performers. They must then be interpreted in a manner most closely representing the original intent of the creator if they are to offer even a reflection of that initial notion.

I have selected the Maya civilization as a model for an initiation of the creation of this type of history. By focusing on the development and performance of various aspects of their cultural heritage, I begin to arrive at an identity for these people as they had culturally evolved to the time of their initial encounters with the Spanish in 1517, and have continued to function into the present. This identity proves significantly different from that portrayed in the interpretations of the Spanish alone - the Spanish documents that have served as the primary sources for much of the work conducted on the history of this important collision of cultures - or many other respected studies viewing the Maya from an essentially Western viewpoint. The Maya, however, interpreted only through the eyes and the philosophies of the West, fails to offer an accurate picture of the actual identity of these people, and can hardly offer a balanced view of the events that subsequently occurred in
any supposed cultural synthesis.

It is the purpose of my initial model work to attempt to uncover a more valid historical identity for the sixteenth-century Maya as it evolved through their own cultural development, and was demonstrated through their various means of personal performance. I show that Maya attempts at communicating their identity to the Spanish in 1517 were all based in a theatrical heritage which encompassed their entire existence.

In order to initiate this identification and re-introduction process - perhaps achieve a foundation for the re-construction of the *great story* - I must address several specific questions. First, and foremost, what are the responsibilities and capabilities of the historian in the making of meaning and re-creation of a presence for individuals of the past? Who were the Maya players in this extraordinary drama - where do I search for the information that can be assembled into a viable character analysis, an identity, for them, both as individuals and as a cultural unit? What philosophical and psychological pre-conceptions, or original cultural notions, would cause specific performance choices to be made by these actors as they attempted to introduce themselves to the *Other*? How did these choices read - what misunderstandings and misconceptions led to the ultimate frustration of both parties? As the two cultures began to form a life together, what happened to the Maya’s leftover choices - the alternative possibilities for communication - why were they discarded or suppressed? Where are they hidden today, and do they have resurrecional value to modernity? What do these choices tell us about the worldview of the Maya as they struggled to make meaning of their collective lives? And, how can I fulfill my responsibility in communicating a portion of their truths, in the most effective way, within my chosen discipline?

To accomplish my goal it is necessary to focus as closely as possible on Maya documentation and artifacts, as they represent the action or performance of those practicing original concepts, and form the basis for the cultural development studied. It is also invaluable to deeply explore the pockets of trace cultural survivals in which many of the ancient concepts are still being performed in various disciplines to this day. I hope, in some small manner, to re-introduce the Maya to world history through studying their own
interpretations of themselves.

Spanish sources, on the other hand, serve as excellent vehicles for comparison - for discerning differences - and are valuable after initial research of indigenous sources has been completed. This comparative work serves to validate certain aspects of philosophy, action and cultural foundation in the primary subject, and helps allow for the expression of a more balanced, valid history of the events in question, as well as any reference to a supposed synthesis in modernity.

In the course or this dissection of cultural performances, I shall occasionally focus on specific issues and areas of performance theory and criticism, as well as the role of specific social groups, or institutions, involved in the study. I may investigate the phenomenon of these consensual or conflictual relationships as they express themselves within particular agenda settings. I shall, in some ways, evaluate the evolution of these groups as new elements are added to the social equation. I shall sometimes include the role of the state in the development of major projects and fulfillment of prime objectives, the use of gender as a category of analysis, and the weight of various political and economic elements that account for change in the society over time.

I shall also explore the ramifications of the recent discoveries of several other disciplines vying for inclusion in a specific body of historical research material. In an effort to fully flesh out this study of the method in which performance is used to communicate culture, I will include investigation of the societal influence of ecological factors and environmental influences on the events occurring during the eras discussed. I will openly criticize the types of documentation and use of specific source material utilized by the various authors to support their thesis. I will investigate the fundamental humanitarian responsibility assumed by the author for communicating societal models and issues for use by contemporary culture.

But I will always be discussing cultural performance – the various manners in which members of a group have chosen to communicate their common beliefs - constructing a basis for a history, as truthfully as possible, from the sources closest to the participant=s original performance.
I believe that the value of study of this type goes beyond the mere recreation of valid history, and leads to a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage performed on a daily basis by these indigenous Americans, shedding invaluable light on the resultant cultural development in Mexico and Central America. The unique Maya point-of-view, as expressed in all aspects of their personal performance, offers humanity an alternative notion for cultural development and personal performance, which may prove valuable in the reconciliation of the fragmented, Westernized world in which we struggle for our own balance. It has certainly altered my way of perceiving my own personal performance, my cultural heritage, and my worldview, as well as my understanding of the presentation of history.
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THE CAPABILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HISTORY IN THE MAKING OF MEANING

In 1502 Christopher Columbus encountered a Mayan trading canoe off the coast of Guanaja in the Bay Islands, Honduras.

In 1511 Friar Jeronimo de Aguilar and seaman Gonzalo Guerrero were cast ashore on the Quintana Roo coast after their ship went down. Mercifully they were not killed by the Maya but, instead, enslaved. Guerrero later took a native wife, raised a family and became a member of the Maya community, refusing escape with de Aguilar who eventually made his way to the island of Cozumel to meet up with Hernan Cortes in 1519. Later Guerrero fought against the Spaniards, and their God, when the Maya people he had grown to love and respect were threatened. He died in his efforts.

After the fall of Mexico, Spanish eyes turned to the Maya world, particularly the coasts they had first explored in 1517, 1518 and 1519. After years of Mayan resistance, the Spaniards finally gained a foothold in the Yucatan, and Francisco de Montejo founded the city of Merida in 1542. Merida became a center of Spanish power, and the Maya were subjugated and forced to follow the will of their new masters. Some managed to escape beforehand and establish a stronghold in northern Guatemala from where they waged war against their oppressors.

They were finally defeated in a bitter battle almost 150 years after the arrival of the Spaniards.

The Spanish Crown confiscated the lands of the Maya, and the indigenous people were relocated, offered an environment conducive to acculturation, taught to build Catholic churches on the sites using the very building blocks of their own temples, and converted to Christianity. Accustomed to pomp and ceremony in their own rituals, the Maya began to blend their old beliefs with the teachings of the Spanish priests.

Mestizaje, or cultural fusion of European and Mayan culture, had begun.

Or had it?

We strive for truth in our histories - our theaters - our interpretation of life's dramas. Our texts imply, after all, that our carefully selected source materials are based on factual records. We prepare our narratives assuming we offer a clear, definitive, and objective picture of past events, endeavoring to join the sensibilities of our own time to the historical-ethical continuum that preceded it, so that in this brilliant technological age we do not trample what was seeded for us - and ceded to us - not so very long ago. Both theater and history attempt to follow historical pathways just as they actually may have been traversed in
identity - based in and on opposing performance heritages, alien worldviews, and cultural performance techniques - were incomprehensible to the Other. The most we can say is that both groups stood on two legs, made sounds, gestured appropriately to the best of their pre-conceived abilities, and eventually found that their attempts at communication deteriorated into frustration and anger. Furthermore, subsequent attempts to fuse the two cultures have proved less than successful.

While much documentation of these early encounters, from the Western point-of-view, is available to us, the Maya version of this history - compiled from strictly Maya source documentation - is yet to be written. No complete story, therefore, is available, and our version lacks the elusive truth we seek. Initiating the development of a foundation for a more comprehensive history is the goal of this work, and could be the basis for documenting inter-cultural communication at any level, in any given circumstance. The prime objective is to ferret out a starting point - a common ground on which one may begin to flesh out some portion of the great story along the spine of documentation.

It is the argument of this thesis that this common ground can be found in the behavioral or performance choices surrounding a culture's primary idea (a concept, or cultural intent, not yet confined to words). It is the uncovering, identifying, interpreting, and communicating of this primary idea that allows us to understand witnessed performance or behavior, and achieve a communion between even the most oppositional of cultures.

The initiation of the search for basic ideas, or concepts, upon which the cultures of this study base their performance heritages, presents many traditional difficulties. Highly respected accounts and historical ethnographies of the initial encounters continue to espouse a primarily Western perspective, and, therefore, consistently fail to offer a balanced interpretation of the occurrences.

Inga Clendinnen (Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570, 1987) sets out to present both Spanish and Maya viewpoints of the conquest, but she focuses her discussion on Diego de Landa and his persecution of the Maya in the 1560's, using Spanish-language sources ... leaving her Maya section considerably shorter than her Spanish one in her attempt to analyze Maya viewpoints without the support of Maya-language sources.
Similarly, Nancy Farriss' monumental monograph (Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival, 1984), although it does come much closer to the Maya, especially on religious matters, is partly defined by her reliance upon Spanish (especially ecclesiastical) sources.

Both scholars recognized the limits of the Spanish interpretations: Clendinnen concluded that what characterized Spanish-Maya contact was a lack of mutual understanding. Farriss remarked that the "Spanish observed only part of what the Indians were up to, and understood even less." These conclusions may also be a reflection of how far our understanding of post-conquest Maya society has to go.¹

How do I prepare to write history as if it were true, and therefore perform it, through the telling, with the greatest possible degree of actuality in my particular discipline of theatre history and performance theory? In answering this question, I find that I must first examine the actual capabilities of history to make meaning, and then redefine the responsibilities of the historian within those parameters.

History, according to Victor Turner in From Ritual to Theater, is concerned with ultimate causes that are unknown and unknowable. The result of the creative process of reinterpreting and recording the Past, shows that all are exaggerations - not replications - of simple processional patterns of social drama.¹

Furthermore, Johan Huizinga points out in Homo Ludens, that history is "the manipulation of images and imaginative reality".² He argues that through language, myth and ritual we view the world as we believe it is, by attempting to capture nature in verbal sounds, interpretative stories, and organized structures. As historians we play with these texted interpretations - or interpret these interpretations - as we deem necessary to communicate meaning from the Past.

Wilhelm Dilthy's delineation of the Five Moments of Erlebnis, as described by Victor Turner, beautifully outlines the steps in re-interpreting interpretations:

... noticeable beyond routine, we (1) explore a perceptual core of experience, (2) create images of past experiences, (3) invent and interpret feelings of past experiences revived.

(4) generate meaning through comparisons of past and present experience, and finally (5) we create expression - communicated in terms intelligible to others - creative retrospection in which meaning is shown as restored experience. 6

We can certainly agree that neither theater, nor history, is the past. Both are rumor. Both are the experience of our performance in the Present expressed through the interpretation, textualization, and re-presentation of our Past. Both re-present the past - transformed into something else: memory and artifact.

The Past survives only in its relics, only in its inscriptions. Inscriptions are the expression of what has happened. Inscriptions are written down, or they are committed to memory made social and public, or they are caught in the shapes and forms of environments in buildings, in landscapes, in artifacts. The Past, when it survives, is phrased in some message. It is also encoded in its symbolic forms ... Institutions at work inscribe lives in those dimensions of living that they touch - birth, death, tax, crime, membership. Storytellers, myth-makers, gossips sculpt events with choice words and fine dramatics and pass them on by word of mouth so that their histories are embellished by each occasion of their telling, and in the end get caught by being written down. Participants in the event choose a genre - a diary, a letter, a poem, a newspaper - to clothe their interpretations of what has happened ... These relics of experience - always interpretations of the experience, never the experience itself - are all that there is of the Past. Historians never confront the Past, only the inscriptions that the Past has left. History is always interpretation of interpretation, always a reading of a given text. 7

We can agree that these inscriptions and artifacts are not the Past itself. Historians know full well the ambivalence of calling something primary that is always after-the-event. Based on culturally ingrained behavior, as well as inward reflections, historians are often confounded in their attempt to describe and elucidate the meanings behind cultural contact, and resultant misunderstandings that precede change, if relying solely on the outward appearance of information recorded in historical documents. Historians must go beyond the word and explore the physical, artistic, and moral notions upon which these words were created to express any given philosophy.

Labeled as a primary source, a document or artifact assumes the character of authenticity and immediacy. They often seem to become the past themselves, suggestive of originals, of springs of real meaning, and allow us to feel as if we have confronted the past directly. Hence, we can certainly say yes to

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7Greg Dening, Performances (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 53.
the archive, but must carefully evaluate the cultural baggage present in those individuals who created what, for them, seemed truth. Regardless of our efforts to accurately present the ramifications of any given historical event, we change the past constantly through our present understandings. That is history's realism - theater's honesty - art's humility.

For this reason, I have, for the purposes of this study, redefined both primary and secondary sources. Idea (a concept not yet limited by words) is the primary experience and source of any initiation of behavior; performance its only physical manifestation. In order to examine the source of a behavior, we must study the performance (behavior) of those whose performances represent a continuation of practices still bound to the primary source (experience or idea). These performances in turn initiate the creation of artifacts and documents, and carry something (such as a process) to a successful conclusion. This is what makes trace cultural survivals among indigenous natives living in Mexico and Central America today so important in our work, as their current behavior and performance practices are still linked, in some ways, to original cultural notions.

Language, documentation, and artifacts become secondary sources, removed from the initial idea by at least two steps - imitations of imitations of form - as described by Plato in his criticism of both art and history. Ideally these secondary sources include the inscriptions least intruded upon by interpretation and organization subsequent to the inscription's original making - as near to the Past notion and experience as any physical documentation or trace cultural survivals that exists. But, we must remember that they remain interpretations of performance, rather than realities of the past.

When initiating a performance history of the Maya culture, this secondary source information is found in the trace cultural survivals mentioned above. It can be recorded in the glyphs of the ancient stelae, in the pre-Columbian codices, and in rigidly protected post-Conquest documents such as the Popol Vuh and Chilam Balam. Artistic and architectural Maya references to various physical or cultural phenomenon provide a third type of source material. References to issues regarding Spanish philosophy for treatment of indigenous North Americans, recorded by both the Spanish and their Maya clerics offer an interesting
approach to recording history. Approaching the Mayan idea from a purely Western perspective (using documents created and amassed by the early Spanish clerics) completes the tetrahedron of source materials. They are of value in this study, not only for their interpretations, but also as a reference point on which to recognize additional differences between the two cultures. The often-amusing interpretations of colonial events created by the Spaniard’s Latin-trained indigenous students, who continued to communicate Maya perception through their work on colonial records, offer another view of perceived reality at the time. They demonstrate interesting variations in the use of words to record events versus initiate change.

I seek, as a contextual dramaturge, as full a view as possible of the situations surrounding the performances I study. I approach cultural performance, therefore, not only from the evidence provided in traditional documentation and artifact, but also from a great number of inter-related disciplines whose science or scientific interpretation may shed some light on the resultant performance of the players in question. These sources include the arenas of geography, linguistics, audiology, ecology, agriculture, medicine, et al. – areas in which other scholars have performed their particular roles in the overall description of a cultural environment.

History, like theater, becomes then a collection of fragments of information, interpreted through educated deduction, intended for distribution to an audience of interested individuals intent on exploring and perfecting their own abilities to communicate with their pasts, and bring some portion of that reality into their own presents.

Neither theater nor history concern so much bringing the past into the present, as returning to the past those qualities that it once possessed - the immediacy and passion. To give back to the past its present, regardless of the multitude of resources available for study, one has to be a little humble about what one can know. As Des McAnuff points out, “Trying to recreate an historical event is like trying to understand the way a cat thinks.” If history is never truth - only an interpretation, a compilation of possibilities -

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viewpoints - memories of one out of every one million breaths that were actually breathed - and its theater speaks with the humility of one who knows the impossibility of accurately recapturing any given moment at all, then none can be completely reiterated. We exist, then, in a realm of true lies - albeit, white ones - made comfortable within our illusion that we are meeting our obligations for truthfulness.

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthromorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer coins ... We do not know where the urge for truth comes from; for as yet we have heard only of the obligation imposed by society that it should exist: to be truthful means using customary metaphors - in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all. ...9

This definition seems to imply that History is a performative art in its own right. It is, therefore, necessary to re-evaluate the traditional notion of the historian as a documenter of facts and presenter of truths, and re-define his/her responsibilities within the parameters of the creative artist - the interpreter of rumors. This was not a difficult transition. "If the world were clear, art would not be necessary. Art helps us to pierce the opacity of the world," states Camus.10 Investigating history, of which the arts are a symptom, as well as a mirror - albeit somewhat fractured in their inability to reflect any totality - becomes performance, in the act of performance, thinking about itself.

It seems that a Western historian is someone caught in the liminality between the expression of the poet and that of the scientist. S/he approaches the craft, using a scientific method of charting documented facts and their resultant proofs, while exercising the very point-of-view proposed for defining all creative art making. We agree to look at an issue in a different way, from a multitude of vantage points, none of which are complete, ideal or completely truthful; and, through the interpretation of these varying viewpoints, attempt to recreate what actually happened, if unable to offer what really happened.

10 Bartow 109.
In assuming the responsibility for compiling and re-presenting this information, an historian, therefore, is charged with the creative responsibility of reformatting this interpretation of information into a form which allows their audience to identify with an individual’s or culture’s presence in the ways of life they actually experienced. In order to arrive at this presence, it is necessary for the historian/creative artist to willingly suspend disbelief in another’s worldview - sacrifice some measure of self - and report with unbiased accuracy, the issues as they would have been viewed and acted upon, through the perceptions of the subjects themselves. Historians who are capable of skillfully re-interpreting and re-presenting the past, with the passion of a possible present, and an objective view of possible futures, offer readers what they deserve - important resonances with which to pursue the approach to human understanding of humanity.

Victor Turner describes both theater and history as "nothing less than performed ... restored experience ... in which meaning emerges through reliving the original experience ... given an appropriate aesthetic form. This form becomes a piece of communicable wisdom assisting others to better understand themselves ... the times and cultural conditions which compose one's general experience of reality."¹¹

Bound to interpret, as truthfully as possible, the essence of the individuals and events occurring within any given situation, the historian creates something new, approached from a variety of entirely different angles - an art form to be performed for, and reinterpreted by, an audience equally burdened with cultural baggage. The histories we develop are not just documentation and personal memory, but documentation and personal memory made artifact in its own right - external, social, cultural, public. They are available to be seen, read, heard, re-interpreted. They are not locked away, but presented, performed, absorbed into our cultural fiber. The function then of theater - of history - is to reveal, in its story telling, a culture’s subconscious. Those that are successful touch in some way the audience’s image of themselves and their world, or reinforce some value that they hold, rather than simply illustrate a particular event.

¹¹Turner 18.
In order to explore an identity for the Mayan culture, encountered by the Spanish in 1517, and to offer it within the context of two differing worldviews, I have divided my study into two distinct sections. In the first section, following a brief review of the performance heritage of the indigenous culture of Yucatan, I delve into the Maya idea of Kinh - their Philosophy of Time - and the means by which they translated this core philosophy into space and physical reality.

The Maya, isolated from all forms of Western thought and performance heritage, had developed a culture based on what we of the West conceive as an abstract. For the Maya, the idea of time was seen as a material reality, which developed into a *pan-chronotheism*. It was the philosophical force that drove this culture, manifesting itself in a cyclical integration of all areas of Mayan performance and cultural construction. By functioning in an entirely reciprocal manner with their pantheon, and all its material manifestations, and devoting the bulk of their search for knowledge to the scientific and mathematical explanations for the phenomena of Life as they understood it, the Maya integrated scientific method with morality, and created their artifacts to reflect that unity, as all moved as one through three dimensional time.

They had spectacle, ritual, and other entertainments, but no *theater* in the Western sense of the word, for all their cultural functions were dramatic presentations of a present that encompassed the past and the future. Their reality - their truth - was their theatre. The point-of-view of the indigenous population, living amid the reality of their pantheon within their concept of time, can be uncovered and defined only by delving deeply into Kinh, the philosophical basis for the development of their particular cultural performance heritage. Trace cultural survivals emphasize the depth and pervasiveness of the original idea as it continues to demonstrate itself to this day.

In the second section, turning to the Spanish, I briefly scan the specific theatrical performance heritage brought to the Americas in the early sixteenth century. While not re-presenting a great deal of the traditional history already available to us in respected and recognized documented Western histories, I concentrate, in this section, on examples of their exposure to theatrical performance as a church controlled,
manipulative tool. I point out ways this performance medium was used for influencing, and often subjugating, not only an European population, but also the indigenous peoples of the New World.

Western thought had already created a philosophical dilemma for modern man - the dissociation of science and religion - and affected, to some degree, their communication attempts with the Maya who practiced no such differentiation. The European inheritors of Western conceptualization of existence - based in the differentiation of physical matter, artistic creativity, and religious morality - perceived their existence as originating in matter, and progressing, in a linear manner, to a god-head. Time, for them, was also linear - having a beginning and an end. (Thomas Aquinas referred to an eternal Nunc - an eternal Now - but it remains a cosmological tease for Western mortals.) They viewed life, as we do today - fragmented - pigeonholed - with science denying much of the truth-value of the interpretative arts and morality. And, vice versa. Their theater, arts and expressions of morality were rapidly being separated from their understanding of the power of the sciences. Through both history and theater we attempt to bring some unity - bridge the abyss - between this scientific manner of assembling facts, and the creative, interpretative, moralistic opportunity for interpreting, defining and assessing them.

In conclusion, I confront the improbability of a true cultural synthesis and explore the ramifications of this discovery for modernity. The underlying, almost genetic, ideologies of the two cultures remain essentially incompatible. Not only was synthesis unlikely in the sixteenth century, but I believe that the ramifications of surviving under that delusion for five centuries has led to much of the discontent still visible in Mexico and Central America today. Both groups, as they met, had encountered a phenomena totally alien to their respective worldviews and, quite possibly, to their cognitive genetic make-up. They were at an impasse - one that remains unresolved to this day. Differing cultural groups, each originating from a totally unique conceptual base, can survive in a parallel existence at best - with negotiated compromises the ultimate result.

What actually occurs, due to the mating of two individuals from differing cultural backgrounds, the mixing of blood, is the introduction of a third cultural group which will prosper only through the
performance of its own unique idea or original concept. Hence we have today in Mexico and Central America (among other groups), remnants of the original Maya culture, remnants of the sixteenth-century Spanish culture, and a new race of Mexicans, Guatemalans, et al, attempting to perform their own particular notions of existence, within the parameters of modernity. It is an uneasy cultural amalgam - a sort of metaphysical cold war - in which individuals volley back and forth between hereditary Maya and European philosophies in their efforts to identify and define themselves to themselves, and to the rest of the world.
A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY
IN CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

You can't do Shakespeare without understanding the history of the Tudors.

At the time of the initial contacts and the early colonial period in Mexico, two distinctly different cultures met, formed a life together, and gave birth to a new consciousness in the Americas. The history of this period is punctuated with dramatic fireworks, as well as nearly silent, but effective, strobes of repercussion, sporadically lighting for us some semblance of truth surrounding the collision and possible synthesis of these two groups of players.

Our main difficulty in creating a viable history of these events is the intensely opposing identities of the players. Not only their spoken languages and physical appearances, but also their basic cultural intentions seem to have been at odds during these initial encounters and the ensuing colonial period. Without the message, the hint, the clue to definition of existence, and the real ability to communicate these notions, there occurred no conversation, no intercourse - only frustration and deepening animosity. To this day, without this definition of existence, a recognition and understanding of the identity of each of the players, we can hardly hope to synthesize their histories.

As we initiate our search for a broader cultural identity of the Maya of the sixteenth century, the disciplines of history and theater, in their liminal capacities for bridging gaps, defining nuances, and interpreting behaviors and occurrences, become spotlighted on the stage of performance theory. They join to become the co-narrators of this drama, and it is through their mutual attempts to approach truth that we begin to recognize the past, reflect upon the present, and note ramifications for the future.

As a theater historian, I am fascinated with the notion that "Theater has a responsibility to push against the imaginary walls surrounding sanctified classic plays," as Andrei Serban states. The basis of a production then becomes those issues we at first resist - the repetitions, the obscure passages, the detours.

12Bartow 289.
Assuming, particularly with the classics, that our playwrights are perfectly lucid - could be crystal clear and hopelessly linear if they wanted to be - it is in those passages that we must search for meaning, intention, and message. In these repetitions, obscure passages and detours we discover the emphasis intended. We, like archeologists, must dig for the playwright's soul (and further, the souls of those characters s/he is attempting to communicate) - interpret these vibrations through our own subconscious reasoning - and clarify them for our audiences. We must make our own educated assessments - regardless of what is traditionally expected. We can only re-create this immediacy by digging deep into the baggage of the playwright and unpacking the work - breaking the canon, if necessary, with the passion of possibilities.

As a student of pre-Columbian performance history, I am presented with the same responsibility - to take what was, apparently a perfectly clear set of performance exercises for the original performers, documented in a manner that was perfectly lucid to the original audience, and seize the opportunity to attempt to unpack the mysteries, obscurities and essential differences as viewed through my own cultural history glasses. I perform a dramaturgy of Maya cultural performance heritage, exploring the same obscurities, repetitions, nuances and detours that I worry so much over when analyzing a script - where the identities I seek lie.

Both theater and history, are concerned with the interpretation of performances - the identification of characters. Each, by exercising their particular knowledge of craft, contributes essential information regarding the struggle of humanity to become human. The performances we study are the primary manifestation of the basic idea or concept that drove the evolution of the culture we seek to identify - they define intent. The responsibilities and capabilities of the disciplines of Theater and History, therefore, provide the key tool for gathering evidence regarding this manifestation of the primary source - performance.

The sources we select as puzzle pieces for inclusion in our construction of the hologram we aspire for, therefore, must by carefully chosen and fully explored. If we follow the canon, we first attack the archive. A culture's identity, after all, is stored in the memories, the documents, and the artifacts created
through its performance process. And the meanings inherent in these memories and artifacts are the 
elements that combine to re-present that identity. Without a deep and defined knowledge of the 
multitudinous ways realities are perceived, stored, interpreted and communicated, performances, theatrical 
creations and historical texts are mere shams - shallow gesticulation for the vapors.

But, it is vital that we recognize immediately, lest we find ourselves inescapably trapped in the 
traditional methods of search, that the worded text is only a portion - and often a small one - when 
presenting an interpretation of performance. Worded text alone is not sacred - can never provide more than 
a guideline for this interpretation - because this type of text is re-interpreted yet again by each reader, from 
their own inherited comprehension of meaning buried in the words themselves. In fact, linguists, who 
study writing systems, point out that “there are a great many ways of communicating ideas and many of 
these ways are notational ... writing is not among them. Writing is typically used to refer to the 
representation of language, not ideas. This is the reason that most (linguists) no longer use the term 
ideograph to refer to a particular style of writing, but rather prefer the term logograph, believing that the 
word that is written is in fact the representation of a word, not an idea. Language is a means of 
communicating ideas - writing is a representation of language.”

Our work must be denser than the written, encoded text alone ... visually, sensually, contextually 
larger than language. “What the audience most immediately receives from actors is nonverbal,” as Andrei 
Serban points out. We tell stories - but it is not the story - which contains, by necessity, only individual 
perceptions - that is as important as the concept - the cultural myth.

We desperately need to hear the words spoken - to see the speaker speak them - to see the speaker 
prepare to speak - to witness the formation of the notion within his mind that leads to the initial action that 
is reinforced, only in part, by his spoken word - and, later, possibly, transcribed - a reconstruction of a 
memory - in the form of a document or artifact.

\[13\]William Clay Poe, ATZLAN@ULKYVM.LOUISVILLE.EDU, March 3, 1999. 
\[14\]Bartow 288.
This awareness of responsibility presents a rather terrifying prospect for the historian, accustomed to relying on the archive as our primary source material. Written texts can, it seems, often be grossly misinterpreted when viewed strictly from the point-of-view of an opposing cultural and philosophical heritage. Even language, the spoken word, has its pitfalls as a primary source. Language serves only as a vehicle to transport the fire. In order to protect and maintain that fire we must delve beneath the information in the archive and attempt to connect with the original intent expressed in a culture - the communication of its subconscious through its arts - its soul. It is this sub-text - that of original idea - that must be ultimately understood - creating a dissonance - a vibration in the perceiver’s psyche - that indicates comprehension.

An example of this phenomenon of misunderstanding involving words, whether written or spoken, presents itself in the issue of Time. The Western understanding perceives time as an abstract. In a linear manner, events occur, and we move on to the next. Time passes - it never comes to stay. We can learn from our experiences, through our judgments of good and evil, but we will never have the opportunity to replay the original event - only at a later date can we correct our mistakes, make another choice, or select to alter our path. The past becomes then only an influence, buried by the present, and frozen in time. Cultural performance audience members watch and imitate the movers and shakers, in order to, themselves, climb out of the abyss of their present, and set foot on the road to the future.

The Maya, on the other hand, conceived of time as a three-dimensional physical reality, which, cyclical in nature, continually repeated itself. As will be shown in documented material throughout this work, characters in the present - reincarnations of their own ancestors - replayed historical events over and over as they repeated themselves and their history within the Maya concept of Kihm. They had more than ample opportunity to experience and experiment with varied aspects of any given event, but due to their belief that good and evil were both necessary to provide a balanced existence, they never recognized an opportunity, or made an effort, to correct what we would term mistakes. Events were just what they were - pre-ordained by powers greater than themselves - and one functioned within them in the manner required to
fulfill one's responsibilities to the whole. The audience watched each player - god and human alike - carefully to see that they did fulfill those responsibilities, because each individual's actions reflected directly on the next if the event was to replay itself with accuracy, and provide the security of history that the Maya craved.

If relics, documents, and artifacts are the only remainders of the past, how can we gain closer approach to the actual intent of our subjects as performed in real time? It is from within the relationship between performer and audience, in both cultural cases, that we will unpack the ultimate message. And for this aspect of History we must turn to Theater - to performance theory - to discover the underlying reasons why certain actions were chosen in early communication attempts, why documents were documented, relics revered, artifacts created, words invented, spoken, and scripted. For from the original notion comes the initial action which defines all subsequent material creations.

Making History becomes then, for us, like making Theater - it can require a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of, not only the documenter, but also the audience, as we all open our minds to the often alien perceptions of Others in order to grasp the Truth they attempt to present to us. Richard Foreman points out, *The Historian crafts a Past some see as impossible to prescribe - as symbolic and interpretative as a painting - as incomplete as a piece of dramatic literature - as one-dimensional as a photograph. In some ways we function as mediums - letting all of these messages through. The task is to make some kind of harmony out of them, to eliminate part of the noise so that something is perceptible.*

Only through the arts (of which Plato and I consider History a viable candidate) can we begin to approach the bridge across the abyss from truth to Truth.

*To make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases, but to generalize within them ... is usually called ... clinical inference,* and this, frankly, is often the best an historian can hope to

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15Ibid. 133.
accomplish in his struggle to communicate the cultural ambiguities of the Past. We endeavor to support our inferences through the interpretative use of available documentation.

But, due to the nature of the beast we call the historian, we never stop there. We continue to dig deeper - always striving for the next question, the next surprising piece of the enormous puzzle we have set out to construct - stretching the envelope even as we may contradict previous findings. Each new angle requires an additional interpretation in order to properly place it - aid in the clarification of the whole.

Through our open-mindedness and our questioning we approach understandings, and encourage collaborative colleagues to do the same. Nothing is as we alone can perceive it. Your truth will always differ from - may complement or contradict - mine. This is the engine that creates movement and progression. Answers cause you to stop dead in your tracks. Without a battery of questions and an increased awareness as objectives, why do it at all?

Puzzle pieces are contributed from innumerable disciplines - varied and seemingly obscure sources. One cannot begin to comprehend the Maya without incorporating information from such highly specialized disciplines as astronomy, archeology, linguistics, ethnography, agriculture, ecology, geography, medicine, anthropology, sociology, economics, political sciences, art history, architecture, dance history and theory, chemistry, biology, physics, astrology, to name only a few. The list for fully comprehending the sixteenth-century Spaniard is the same. It is our responsibility, as artist/historians, to place our own perceptions next that of another and another, to return some clarity to the fragmented findings of specialization, until the various parts of the puzzle meld, and the shadow of Truth begins to emerge. Only through the union of various perceptions can new interpretations be made, new levels of meaning discovered.

To add to the difficulty of our task, performances of the Past - be they manifested in documents, artifacts, works of art, memories, or reconstructions - are encountered without context, out-of-order, much like a geneticist encounters a double helix. We construct our histories in order to develop a context for our understanding; to sort out the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent in the information presented in the
various viewpoints; to take them as closely as possible back to their originating idea and subsequent performance.

We construct our histories in order to meet the individuals who originally performed the script we are attempting to re-create. We seek the human with the intensity and concentration of a bird-dog or a master detective - and we conduct our search very carefully.

We construct our stories based upon our own interpretations of the signs, the signifiers, and the signifieds we believe we discover, in a manner as realistic and believable as possible. We know full well that our facts are not facts, that our documentation is of an interpretation, but we strive to place names and dates within a landscape that causes our readers to appreciate, as representational, what we believe to be the essence of a Past. The besetting sin of interpretative approaches to anything ... is that they tend to resist, or to be permitted to resist, conceptual articulation and thus escape systematic modes of assessment. You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not. Imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail, it is presented as self-validating, or, worse, as validated by the supposedly developed sensitivities of the person who presents it; any attempt to cast what it says in terms other than its own is regarded as a travesty - as, the anthropologist's severest term of moral abuse, ethnocentric.17

In addition, theater and history are about sharing ideas, not merely discovering or creating them. We both perform, not in a vacuum, but for an audience. In our search for, and ultimate presentation of what we believe to be honest identities, we offer the audience an opportunity to see and feel what we believe the historical participants were actually seeing and feeling. Within this rigor the dedicated, artistic Historian becomes a creative, performing artist, entertaining his audience through the execution of his work, from within his own expanded arena. Our audiences fill in the gaps with their own ironies, their own pre-conceived notions, their own histories, and their own theater.

Finally, we are reminded that each action - each performance - once enacted, becomes a memory - a history. Through examples from related traditional Maya histories and associated interdisciplinary studies, as well as the collection and presentation of similar materials for late medieval Spanish cultural development, we note that these performance histories align themselves to form culture as these individuals knew it. We have constructed a present within the re-presentation of the past.

17Ibid. 24.
I am forced to recognize that, in the Western sense, much as we can never recreate a past, we can also never recreate an identity - only an essence. And yet, I desperately encourage each of my characters to tell their own story - I want to hear their whispers, their truth, through the documents, artifacts, and relics I touch, through the cultural survivals I witness. I want them to speak through me, directly to my audience. For that is history making as I understand it - theater in its broadest definition - as close to truth as man is capable of standing. Through these efforts, with the ancient's cooperation, I will, hopefully, arrive at identities (or, at least more viable essences) that will allow us to approach a more comprehensive history of the collision and possible synthesis of these two great cultures than those currently available to us in traditional sources.
THE PERFORMANCE HERITAGE OF
THE INDIGENOUS MAYA CULTURE IN YUCATAN, MEXICO

Theater is for me an ongoing illumination of man, his problems, his dreams, his visions, the society that lifts him, and his relationship to God. This is what theater is about, always has been about. It is also a celebration, communally, of the values that a society holds. To be truly human has to be learned, and has to be relearned over and over again. And one of the places where we learn about being human is in the theater.¹⁸

John Hirsch

The Maya cultural identity had been developing for over 4500 years at the time of the initial encounter with the Spanish, and although highly effective in communicating perceived truths among themselves, their cultural performances presented an enigma to the uninvited guests who first visited the Yucatan in 1517. The society and culture encountered by the first Spanish explorers, priests and colonizers performed itself, and, therefore, attempted to communicate their cultural heritage, in a manner highly alien to those possessed of Western thought process and modes of understanding.

The practiced reciprocity between themselves and elements of nature and the supernatural - recognized, if misunderstood, by the first explorers and colonizers - the indivisible connection the people felt to the land, and the cyclical nature of their history, were ancient beliefs in the early 1500’s - seems almost as much a matter of genetics as culture. These nearly intuitive mores bound the Maya in behavior patterns and modes of performance far deeper than those surmised by the first Spanish explorers or representatives of the Catholic Church.

Whether their performance is of what we consider an artistic or personal nature, the thoughts and actions of the Maya defending their beaches in the early sixteenth century are the direct result of the performances they witnessed, the lessons they internalized, and the messages they handed down to their successors during their own long history. Time-honored worldviews, the unquestioning reliance on the notion of reciprocity and community, the cyclical nature of Time, and the resulting personal performance of

¹⁸Bartow 161.
each individual within their accepted role, combine to create the manner in which the Maya attempted to introduce themselves to these Others.

All aspects of Maya activity were a part of their theater - there was no division between the science, the drama, or the spirituality of their lives. Many aspects of their cultural, therefore, need to be examined to gain a full picture of their performance strategies within their web of existence.19

To begin to experience this culture's presence, it may prove easiest to work our way backwards - or, more literally, start just below the surface, dig down to the origins, and then return to cultural survivals in order to validate our discoveries, or place them in a proper context. We perform as an archeologist who, after carefully removing the Present, in order to arrive at the site itself, digs down to the Past, layer by layer approaching initial activity, and then, changing hats and becoming the historical ethnographer, works their way back up in an effort to organize meaning - collecting the artifacts of performance in order to attempt to understand and reproduce it.

Fortunately we have a pre-conceived order with which to conduct our research - a playbill, if you will, to guide us through the performance of this drama. Joseph A. Tainter's The Collapse of Complex Societies outlines the various periods of Mayan cultural development. As we work ourselves back through the production beats of this culture, it is noteworthy that Tainter's listing of historical eras in Mayan cultural development is considerably broader than most historians. The additional depth provided in Tainter's discussions of the various categories does much to help define not only the characteristics of the Postclassic, but also the Maya worldview carried into the period of the conquest. We will use Tainter's outline, in reverse order, as a template - a perspective for our dig:

19It would be extremely valuable for the reader to review, at this point, the myths of creation and origin offered in the Appendix. It is recommended that you keep these histories in mind throughout the course of this paper, as it will become clear that Maya cultural performance, in all its aspects, reflects in some way the events described in these stories. Their plots were enacted and re-enacted thousands of times, in hundreds of circumstances throughout Maya history.
The Classic period ended with a general political collapse in much of the Maya region, although in some areas, such as northern Belize and Yucatan, many communities survived without a break until modern times. Events during the last decades of the Classic period became the legends of origin for Postclassic kingdoms. Events during the last decades of the Classic period became the legends of origin for Postclassic kingdoms. The final phase of pre-Columbian history - the Postclassic - lasted until the Spanish conquered Guatemala in 1524 and Yucatan in 1542.

In the north, after the apparent abandonment of Chich'en Itza, the area was dominated by an alliance centered in the city of Mayapan. Although the population of the southern lowlands never again achieved the levels surmised for the Classic period, large alliances centered on Itzamk'anak and Tayasal, the capital of the Itza, endured into the century after the conquest. In the south, the Quiche Maya forged an empire by conquest and diplomacy that dominated most of the highlands until late in the fifteenth century. Although the capital cities of these empires and kingdoms may seem unimpressive when compared to the great Classic cities, "these Postclassic kingdoms exercised political and economic dominance that was at least as effective as that of their predecessors."21

Unfortunately the Spanish destroyed most valuable records of this period in their efforts to protect possible converts from exposure to the utterances of the Devil.

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These people used certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in their books about their antiquities and their sciences; with these, and with figures, and certain signs in the figures, they understood their matters, made them known, and taught them. We found a great number of books in these letters, and since they contained nothing but superstitions and falsehoods of the devil we burned them all, which they took most grievously, and which gave them great pain. (Landa, ch. xli)

It is not surprising that the Maya suffered tremendously over the loss of their sacred books. As will be demonstrated repeatedly in the course of this work, the destruction of the history represented, not only the desecration of hundreds of years of careful recording of events and discoveries, but also the actual elimination of the people. Without a history they had no Present. Time had been destroyed. It was as if they, as a people, had never existed - save for the remaining shreds of information and, therefore, the surviving human identity, contained in the volumes (three have been discovered to date) that survived this intellectual and spiritual holocaust.

Of the three codices that remain (the Dresden, Madrid, and Paris), none provide a complete history, or representation of the massive amount of accumulated knowledge, originally available. We can study them today via facsimiles. The information contained in the more recently scribed Chilam Balam and Popol Vuh provides the only continuous record of Maya philosophy and cultural intent. These were produced by sages (often disguising themselves as simple feather workers and visual artists) who, due to the book burnings, had been denied their source and reference materials. They represent an attempt to reconstruct thousands of years of Maya history and accumulated knowledge in less than a few generations. Fortunately for us, less destructive attention was paid to writings carved in stone and painted on pottery, which had very wide use and significant social functions.

Through the interpretative skills of these scholars in various disciplines, we are provided with an assortment of clues regarding their late history, for events which occurred during the last decades of the Classic period, and were recorded in their few remaining annals, became the legends which dictated performance of the Postclassic kingdoms. Through comparisons of these with trace cultural survivals we can begin to piece together, as in a great cultural quilt, the patterns that made up their lives.

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22Boone and Mignolo 223.
Archeologists and anthropologists date the end of the Terminal Classic period of Maya culture somewhere around the publication of the last stela in 899 AD. This date marks the erection of the last known historical monument or ancestral shrine, commissioned by a Maya lord, which has currently been discovered and translated in modernity. Accumulated knowledge, however, continued to be recorded after this date in the codices, which had always represented the most sacred and complete representation of their history. With the destruction of this massive body of work during the early sixteenth century, the nearly fifteen hundred years between this final carved inscription of societal activity and recorded history, and the arrival of the Spanish explorers on the beaches of the Yucatan, provide few traditionally documented examples of the causes for the apparent decline in the political power and majesty that was evident among these early cultural giants during the Classic periods of their cultural evolution.23

In Tainter's fascinating study of both the setting, and his interpretations of the evolution of Maya civilization, however, we are confronted with a number of startling possibilities regarding the development and presumed collapse, or radical change, in the manner of they conducted their lives. His study shows how both their society, and the physical manifestations of their earlier architecture, mythology, and art, sharply exploded and then appear to have crashed, causing the culture to deteriorated to what the early sixteenth-century Spanish perceived of as little more than random communities and tiny villages. This perception of a crumbled culture has remained to the present day, as demonstrated in the works of most contemporary historical ethnographers, but may be slightly right of truth if viewed from other angles.24

Evidence of the impact of disease during the Late Classic period almost matched the small pox invasion, and could be held accountable for much of the change in lifestyle. The overall effects of this disaster are evident in the archeological remains of the era. Much information on this fascinating topic

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23 There is some evidence that, rather than a decline or collapse of the culture, the Maya simply turned to more sophisticated forms of government, economics, and religious practice, leaving behind the grandiose displays of power and wealth that typified the earlier periods.

24 I do not intimate here that the Maya encountered by the initial explorers and their immediate followers, represented the full glory of the Maya of the Classic period - only that their cultural performance may not have deteriorated to the degree presumed, and that it was the actual interference of the Spanish which caused what we could term collapse. (See Farriss and Restall)
regarding the dangerous health climate of the Americas prior to the initial encounters (as well as after the
arrival of the small pox laden explorers, colonists, and conquistadors), is included in Robert S. Desowitz's
Who Gave the Pinta to the Santa Maria? Torrid Diseases in a Temperate World.25

Climatologists and geographers affirm archeological findings that show that resource-devastating
hurricanes pounded the area during this period. Medical studies of the remains of citizenry cause us to
believe that these severe storms carried disease. It is presumed that the malaria-carrying mosquito
population was introduced from the Caribbean on hurricane winds. Other devastating diseases and
parasitic enemies crossed the Bering Strait, arrived on Pacific currents, and road the wind from Asia and
the South Pacific in ancient times.26

After-effects of scarcity, disease, and lack of sufficient nutrition are shown in the remains of Maya
citizens discovered in various types of gravesites throughout the area. Carbon-dated to the Late Terminal
Classic Period, male bodies, devastated by overwork and lack of proper nutrients, show a diminishing of
stature by a 7cm average. Anemia, bone deterioration, scurvy, bodily parasites, enamel hypoplasia of teeth,
increased instances of adolescent death, and shortened apparent life expectancy were among other
debilitating pathologies that, on a long-term basis, would have impaired normal human functions. Female
skeletal remains, interestingly, do not reflect this deterioration - presumably because they were viewed, as
in other complex societies, as the preservers of the race, the breeders, and must have enjoyed preferential
treatment in times of nutritional crisis.27

There is also a significant body of evidence pointing to increased warfare - probably the result of
resource depletion, hunger, and general fear among the populace attempting to restore balance to their
cosmos. One of the major effects of these wars was a series of migrations, probably consisting in large part
of male nobles and soldiers displaced by the wars or seeking their fortunes elsewhere. One such migration,

25Robert S. Desowitz, Who Gave the Pinta to the Santa Maria? Torrid Diseases in a Temperate World
26Ibid. 18-22.
27Ibid. 23-62.
from the southern to the northern lowlands, eventually led to the founding of Chich’en Itza. In AD 800, these outsiders, who were called the Itza, and the older kingdoms in the north, established a confederation. These migrations may also have affected central Mexico and the establishment of kingdoms like Xochicalco and Cacaxtla in the wake of Teotihuacan’s destruction as early as the mid-seventh century.

Repeated internal conflicts, however, seem to have weakened their infrastructure. Warfare and militarism intensified in the Late Classic, and the art of this period shows greater emphasis on captives and conquest (but often for surprising reasons). Without large standing armies, some signaling system was needed to communicate relative strengths to deter aggressors, and to facilitate conflict resolution without violence. In order to make their strengths known to their potential enemies, they resorted to what their visual art describes as great shows of their ability to mobilize large numbers of people. Monumental architecture, painting, and sculptural art would have served such a system.

While not suggesting that this was the sole reason for the development of artwork, massive, labor-consuming investments in public display would communicate quite effectively the relative strength of political centers. By engaging in architectural display a center could signal to potential competitors the relative population numbers that it could mobilize. It could also, in effect, convey the message that a polity which could squander so much wealth and labor on something as inconsequential as architecture, could certainly mobilize vast resources to cope with an external threat. Sculptural and painted art fit squarely into such a signaling system. Mayan sculpture regularly depicts military themes, the rulers shown judging, even standing on, captives. At a center displaying such art, emissaries and visiting elites from potentially competitive centers would constantly encounter sculpture and painted surfaces showing the military prowess of their hosts, and the harsh manner in which they treated prisoners. Such visitors could not help but receive the correct message from art. The Romans maintained a powerful standing army, and their art does not concentrate on the mistreatment of prisoners. Classic Mayan states did not have standing armies. Their art depicts terrifying treatment of enemies. Without real strength, propaganda was the next best thing.

The Hiatus Period (550 – 600 AD) serves as sociological precursor for the eventual collapse, or discontinuation, of certain practices during the Terminal Period, with its rash of building activity and increased economic confusion. The most significant difficulties seem to have been created within the

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28 Tainter 164.
29 Ibid. 508.
30 Ibid. 172.
31 Ibid. 172-3.
society itself, rather than from outside influence. Depleted resources, indicative of internal problems inherent in the physical location of the cultural centers, would certainly have affected the manner in which the sacred practice of reciprocity, previously discussed earlier in this work, could have continued. Decline of the agricultural infrastructure would also have limited trade ability, and both Rathje (1973) and Sharer (1982) indicate loss of trade in the Mayan collapse.32

C. W. Cooke proposed in 1931 that the collapse was caused by soil erosion and land scarcity, and the resulting encroachment of grasses. Defoliation of great portions of rain forest contributed immensely to the decline in usability of the land. Even agricultural intensification techniques and the introduction of sophisticated hydraulic engineering could not compensate for the silting of lakes with consequent destruction of water transportation, or a decline of water supply in dry years. The swidden agriculture practiced in the Lowlands lead to soil nutrient depletion, weed competition, and savanna formation. In addition to obvious destruction encountered due to severe weather patterns of the area, weather patterns created by the unique geographical setting of the culture itself added to the difficulty of maintaining adequate arable land.

Political competition between Mayan centers favoring resource intensification was also a factor.33 The issue of warfare, planned and led by members of the noble family and their generals, rather than a quest for land, seems to have revolved around access to food stuffs, raw materials for community production, access to slave labor for their production facilities and construction projects, and sacrificial victims for their ceremonies. A specific set of results of the competition for territory, resources, and tribute was a cataclysmic series of wars between the competing alliances led by Tikal and K'ak'mul that began in the sixth century. "While the Maya kingdoms enjoyed a high degree of sovereignty, their political fortunes often depended on the alliances to which they belonged. From the sixth century onward, this system of alliances and the rivalry between them dominated Maya politics and economics."34

32Ibid. 46.
33Tainter 291-5.
34Schele and Mathews 18.
Kingdoms that won wars during these conflicts show enormous growth in population, in wealth at all social levels, in access to foreign goods, and in extensive building programs. “Tribute to a victor in battle could include goods and services, but in addition artists, and artisans, sages and scribes, as well as laborers and captures warriors could become commodities that benefited the winners.” Losers usually show the reverse, but being a winner or a loser was rarely permanent. Reversals of fortunes and the resulting change in economic status were commonplace.

Shackled with both the agricultural cycle and the lack of beasts of burden (not to mention the absence of the wheel), warfare for the Maya had advantages for centers with a policy of further population growth, offering greater security and safety from attack in the future. The majority of the conflicts undertaken by the Maya would have involved raids on enemy’s fields as crops neared maturation, and on peasant villages and storage complexes selected for nucleation around secure, regional centers, rather than full-scale, mobilized assaults on major fortifications. Possibly it was not so much that they were cowardly - as they were later accused by Spaniards - as they were sensible and clever. By AD 700, however, these wars had escalated into the multiple sackings of major cities like Palenque and Tikal.

It is during this time that many of the major building projects of the Classic Maya were carried out. The rash of great building projects undertaken during this period, and the magnificence of their cities and ceremonial centers exceeded anything being accomplished in Europe during the same period. Although, in many cases, not as large as those buildings constructed under the direct influence of the Olmec (during Preclassic times), this period does offer us an interesting window into the Maya attempt to re-establish the order of the earlier Classic periods. It seems to have been believed that by constructing more buildings, temples, stelae, waterways and roads - indicative of the manner in which they interpreted that the Maize Gods had originally directed that civilization was to be laid out - that they could restore the balance that seemed to be deteriorating in their culture.

35Ibid. 18.
Experiencing Maya architecture can be disconcerting for people who grew up with the European tradition all around them. "European architecture focuses for the most part on interior space. In Maya public architecture, the operational spaces are plazas and courtyards that are surrounded by buildings." Artists decorated each facade to carry messages to the specific audience that would inhabit the court space in front of it. "The internal coherence of a building was less important than the effectiveness of each facade as a dispenser of political and religious information." The small dark interiors, especially of the temples, were places where the gods, ancestors, and a few authorized lords visited. Even in the palaces, the public stayed in the courtyards, where they were the audience for dances and processions that were at the heart of Maya rituals and festivals. Maya architects designed their buildings to encompass motion and performance so that they operated like stage sets in which drama and ritual unfolded.

Religious buildings usually had between one and three rooms and emphasized the vertical axis with towering roof combs. Residential and administrative buildings often had multiple courts, many rooms opening onto the courts, and a horizontal axis. (For definition of the significance of the vertical and horizontal axis, please refer to both the Myth of Creation and the Spatial Image of the Universe, Fig. 6, in the Appendix.) "The Maya signaled these identities of sacred place and function through sculptural compositions. They controlled access, funneled movement, used architecture as backdrops, and placed close attention to vistas in order to integrate architectural space and to enhance the effect of drama." Buildings and spaces reproduced sacred places that played a role in Creation, so that rituals conducted in them remade the space and time of Creation in elaborate public dramas. Reproductions of the original Place of Reeds and Snake Mountain (located in the area of present-day Veracruz) were still the main elements of this mise en scene.

Both temple-pyramids and temple groups on top of individual pyramids could be clustered to form architectural landscapes. The most sacred and ancient of these arrangements was the triangular form that

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36Ibid. 23.
37Ibid. 31.
38Ibid. 27.
echoed the three stones of the Cosmic Hearth constructed by the gods to center the world as noted in the Creation Myth. Four-sided arrangements, also referred to in the Creation Myth, generated the square - the other form that the Maya tied to Creation. This four-sided arrangement (four sides and four corners that gave shape and order to the universe) also included an altar or tree in the center that the Maya called *Wakah-Kan*, the *raised up sky*.\(^{39}\) The Maya repeated these world-building activities by placing an altar or a tree at the center of the four-cornered, four-sided plaza. The resulting form is called a *quincunx* by modern researchers.\(^{40}\)

As in other Maya arts, builders valued subtle and refined execution of sacred activities more than they did individual creativity and novel results. "Traditional and conventional definitions of space and form were powerful elements in Maya aesthetics. They provided a language of meaning that oriented the Maya to everything in their world."\(^{41}\)

During the Hiatus Period, however, there seems to be slightly more desperation in their attempts to interpret their history in a manner that would please the gods - some evidence of individual creativity is apparent, particularly in the construction of ancestral stelae. These public shrines were often larger-than-life, and constructed on raised platforms. In time many of these raised altars became the terraced, pyramidal platforms with the small temple-house on top. The terraces served as the place for dancing and ritual performances of all sorts for audiences located in the courtyards below.\(^{42}\) Even inanimate objects such as the stelae *performed* in a very real way for their audience:

The Great Plaza of Copan is a unique monument, consisting of seven very large, exquisitely carved stelae commissioned by a single king and executed by a generation of extraordinary artists. In Copan's artistic history, the sculptors of these stelae took the art of portrait representation to a new level of subtlety and volumetric veracity. Moreover, these artists executed this new deeply cut manner of carving without losing the power of symbolic detail. If the Maya wanted their stelae to be portraits of rituals as well as portraits of their lords, this extraordinary group of stelae has succeeded admirably.

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\(^{39}\)The Lakota Sioux word for Great Spirit, holy center of all spiritual being, is *Wakan Tanka*, and a tree is raised at the center of ceremonial locations to support this Sky Father and connect him to the earth.

\(^{40}\)Schele and Mathews 26-27.

\(^{41}\)Ibid. 28.

\(^{42}\)Ibid. 26.
Waxaklahun-Ubah-K'awil created a heritage that carried his name forward into the future and preserved his conception of the cosmos and his place in it. Waxaklahun-Ubah-K'awil linked himself and his ancestral past by joining them to the imagery and symbolism of Creation and the myths surrounding the patron gods of the kingdom. He enacted moments of these myths surrounding the patron gods of the kingdom. He enacted moments of these myths in his person as he materialized the gods for the duration of his ritual performance. He created a progression of ritual enactments beginning with the k'atun-ending and marching forward in time by five- or ten-tun intervals. He focused on the time-posts that allowed the Maya to perceive the symmetry and cosmic rhythms of nature and to associate their lives with cosmic frameworks.43

We do not know for certain if skilled laborers of this period, whether master builders or sculptors, operated within a lineage system, or were organized in groups like guilds. The archeology and anthropology show evidence of both systems. "We do know that the best of the craftsmen and artists traveled around their kingdoms to work on different projects, because we have their names on artworks. We also know that the Maya gave artworks by master artists as gifts and received them as tributes."44

Maya artists made the golden mean using cords to lay out buildings and organize artistic compositions. According to legend, the measuring of the square with a cord was the first action of the gods when they created the cosmos. "It is the fundamental shape of Maya geometry - the module from which all creation was generated."45 Through their unique use of the cord, the Maya discovered the rectangle, the basis of the golden mean distribution of elements within an artistic work - much represented in nature and seen as sacred by the Maya. Cord measuring is also shown as a critical part of land-establishment rituals in the codex Mixtec Vindobonensis and in the Yucatecan Book of Chilam Balam of Chumeyel.46

As we have seen, in an increasingly competitive environment, faced with population pressure and a strained resource base, the Maya employed two solutions: agricultural intensification and increased socio/political/religious complexity. To recap this important period of Maya cultural development, we will

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43Ibid. 173.
44Ibid. 29.
45In 1993, Christopher Powell, an MA student at the University of Texas, showed how the Maya used the cord to measure geometric shapes and to determine proportional relationships. He found that the system is still widely used throughout the Maya area, and that it played a crucial part in the ancient story of creation. Red lines on temple floors under the Acropolis at Copan proved to be the smoking gun showing how the ancients laid out the plans for their buildings. The same red lines have been discovered at Tikal, and reflected exactly the geometry he had detected in his study.
recall that many factors have been cited as the causes of the decline of this complex: political
decentralization, resource depletion, natural catastrophes, failure to adapt, decrease in necessity for tasks
historically required, inefficiency in the adjudication of disputes, intruders, internal conflict, as well as
contradiction and mismanagement by an increasingly irrational elite. "Most Maya scholars agreed that
decaying marginal returns on investment, and declining productivity of complexity, clarify the collapse
process, eliminate the Maya myth, and place this society in tandem with the collapse processes of other
complex societies (Rome, Teotihuacan, Monte Alban, Peru, and the Chacoan society of the American
Southwest). 47

During the height of the Protoclassic and Early Classic periods, the Maya enjoyed the most
successful replication of the balance devised by the Maize Gods at the time of creation. Situated in and
around holy sites, temple structures were constructed, with accompanying municipal facilities required to
handle the management of spiritual and societal responsibilities. Spiritual intermediaries, a noble and
priestly elite, performed here amid the splendor appropriate to their role in a reciprocal relationship with the
culture's major gods. Except during specific religious activity, the bulk of the population remained in small
communities, administered by satellite centers, circling the outskirts of the ritual areas.

Each of these communities, although linked to the main holy site by matters religious, political
alliances, and a need to support both the intermediaries and the gods, functioned autonomously from their
neighbors. They developed individual linguistic patterns and local customs that were religiously guarded
as properties of the various village communities, creating significant ideological differences between them
and their neighbors. The leaders of these satellite centers and individual communities concentrated their
efforts on structuring and regulating both the agrarian and artesanial activities of their respective communal
groups, as well as providing for the needs of local gods. Regular tribute was made to the ritual center, and
surplus goods were actively traded, often up to great distances.

46Schele and Mathews 329-330.
During these early Classic periods the number of kingdoms grew rapidly, to as many as sixty at the height of lowland Maya civilization in the eight century. Beginning in the fifth century, these kingdoms had organized themselves into great alliances headed by the kingdoms known today as Tikal and Kalak'mul. Some of the great cities of the Preclassic period, such as El Mirador, had collapsed, while others, like Tikal, grew into political and economic dominance.

The Maya of Tikal, and other cities, came into powerful contact with the central Mexican city of Teotihuacan during the early part of the Classic period. The mechanism of this exchange is still a matter of debate, but the effect is not. The Maya adopted imagery and an artistic style from the Teotihuacanos that became intimately associated with warfare and the symbolism of the Place of Reeds, one of the central elements in myths of origin that dominated Mesoamerican history. But they also provided it to the Teotihuacanos, as many of the archetypes for construction, including the pyramidal replications of Snake Mountain, were in use in Maya architecture long before the construction of Teotihuacan.

The ballcourt, situated at the base of the replicated Snake Mountain, was a significant element of Maya culture from the earliest recorded history, and is well documented in any number of classic source materials. The pomp and ceremony with which they undertook the sacred performance of the ball game is evident on the ancient stelae, in the codices, on pottery and fabrics, and in the art work which decorated the palaces, temples, and public buildings. The Maya defined the ballcourts, through their original creation myths, as the crack in the top of the mountain or in the carapace of the Cosmic Turtle, because they were also conceived as rebirth places of the Maize Gods. People went down this crack to contact their ancestors and consult oracular deities. The Maya and other Mesoamericans negotiated and sealed alliances in the ballcourt, and captured kings died there by sacrifice. The ball game also often functioned as a substitute for warfare and communal violence - the fates of entire communities often balanced on the performance of a single player.

As we have seen, unlike Rome or any of the other major complex societies in world history, there is little evidence of a Mayan Empire in the modern sense of the word, but rather a conglomeration of highly
specialized communities. Each group maintained their own community identity - their own specific political and economical thrust - based on hereditary kin groups, with autonomous agriculture, mercantile, and political apparatus in place. They formed alliances for mutual protection, accumulation of population and wealth, and religious superiority. One could compare this structure to a loosely constructed modern corporation, with the various departments within the alliance working autonomously to fulfill an overall goal of providing for the various needs of all.

That goal, for the Maya, was co-existence and reciprocity with the mysteries of the cosmos, managed by their corporate officers - or Board of Directors - in the temple areas and satellite centers. Ironically, the development of a reciprocal relationship with the gods and the land, as well as each other, initiated in the Middle Preclassic, necessitated the development of the hierarchical system, and led to its eventual demise. Awareness of this phenomenon contributed to the worldview of the Yucatec Maya who encountered the early Spanish explorers, and were later confronted by the colonizers and the Church.

During the culture's prime, however, this system of reciprocity formed the economic basis upon which the culture flourished - a reciprocity that mirrored that accorded the various gods of the gigantic Maya pantheon. Maya nobility and members of the priesthood performed various tasks in service to their overall culture. Through personal prayer, induced trances, sacrificial bloodletting, and monument construction, they fulfilled their most significant responsibility of interacting, on behalf of the people, with the major gods of this pantheon. In return for this important service to the people, these religious leaders received a respect from the populace akin to parental love. Items that provided for the needs of the nobility and priesthood, in return for their acts of personal sacrifice and intervention with the gods, were produced and offered as tribute to the ritual centers and their caretakers, and included such items as foodstuffs, artisan's wares, physical and financial support. Farmers might pay tribute through goods they produced, but even more likely, through labor on building projects in the urban centers, service on the farms of their

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48 Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, The Blood of Kings (Fort Worth: Kimball Art Museum, 1996), 175.
kings and lords, or in military service. These internal tribute items, similar to taxes, provided for both their personal consumption and the conducting of ritual banquets to honor the gods, other intermediaries, emissaries, and dignitaries.

Local milpa farming provided for the dietary needs of the communities, and certain amounts (including surplus) were stored in the ritual centers for redistribution, by the priests and nobility, as required during periods of emergency and need. These surpluses also served as societal insurance in the event that a community was defeated in any of the numerous battles waged between the various communities. They could then be used as tribute payments to the victors without causing undo hardship for the populace.

Trade flourished, as various areas of artesional specialty evolved, and items of universal need or desire were redistributed throughout the various communities. Long distance trade, carried out by individuals who performed not only as merchants, but also as both emissaries and spies, surely alerted younger, more avaricious, cultures to their presence and sites for habitation. Merchants operating beyond the borders of their kingdoms became economic and political extensions of their kings. They could function as state ambassadors bearing gifts to royal neighbors and allies, or spy out the land in preparation for conquest. They could also arrange for trade of commodities.

Long-distance relationships were of crucial importance to the economic well being of every state. Maya kings gathered prestige through the successful acquisition of goods, not available locally, from distant places and distributing them among their vassal lords and allies. These commodities were used as money, and were often worn as jewelry and clothing to display the wealth and enterprise of a family. These lesser lords in turn distributed the goods to their constituents in the form of gifts or exchanges. A portion of these commodities could filter down into the general everyday transactions of the villagers and farmers.

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49Ibid. 18.
50Their patron was God L, a powerful god who destroyed the previous creation by flood, sat on the first throne to be set up in the present Creation, and operated as a god of warriors and merchants.
51Schele and Matthews 19-20.
evolution from pre-creation humanity, through the intervention and cooperation of the gods of maize, into their modern man as the combination of the two?

Due to its overall importance in the maintenance of the balance of the cosmos, as viewed by the Maya, rituals and traditional feasts, conducted in the major ceremonial centers, were granted all the spectacle which would be expected when insuring the survival of the gods that provided for them. Human society and the gods functioned in a reciprocal manner on the earthly plane, and it was the responsibility of the people to support and maintain those gods, in an appropriately pleasing manner, in return for their gifts, guidance and protection. Solemn ritual was conducted almost daily along side various entertainments, including spectacular dances and processions, rhetorical competitions, the ever-present ball game, juggling and gymnastics, great banquets, profuse drinking for the elite and the elderly, and comic and satirical interludes for all. The Maya, it seems, were all about performance - whether of a ritualistic nature, or as a means of honoring tradition and experiencing a balance in their existence - highly prone to exaggerated displays of wealth, political and military power, and cultural intelligence - if often adverse to actual confrontation.

Enactments of ancient myths, practiced within not only the ceremonial and ritual arenas, but also as a part of their educational repertoire were not seen as re-enactments in the Maya concept of cyclical time (as will be discussed at length in a later chapter), but as an expression of the actual present. They provided the common community with an artistic and immediate history of their culture, while teaching valuable lessons for the continued development of their belief system through definition of their concept of time and space. These enactments, performed within the unique Maya concept of cyclical time, actually became their present, reflections of their past, and their future foretold at one time. Knowledge gained through these stories, their impact on human life, and the interaction of the various other aspects of nature upon the overall existence of reality, were essential to the continuation of the Maya worldview.

In addition to dramatic enactments, music, dance and visual arts were key to the Maya communication of their culture. As evidenced from our source material, poetry and rhetoric were also
A significant advantage of a healthy trade arrangement was that it provided the Maya with the means to acquire the elements needed to create the elaborate costuming and conduct performance theatrics to further reinforce their show of power. Fashions, and costuming, were truly a statement within this culture - a statement of religious beliefs, history and philosophy.

Additional costume elements, added for ceremonial purposes, depicted the various animal and vegetal aspects of the people's connection with their cosmos, and allowed them to symbolically become one with their universe. Magnificent costumes allowed the priests and nobles to assume identities of various gods - not in the sense of a costumed actor, but as a reality. Costumed monsters literally became transformed beings for the Maya - terrifying, powerful, and omnipotent. In many ways it appears that the Mayan psyche responded to this type of demonstration as another substitute for actual physical violence. These costumes were created not only to appease the gods themselves, but also to instruct the populace in the necessary lore of the culture in which they participated. These transformed beings allowed the common people a modicum of participation in the rituals and ceremonies by providing them an opportunity to literally commune with their history and their future, and terrify their enemies.

Seeing themselves as originally the children of the maize plant, most of the elite population chose to re-design the heads of their children to more closely resemble an ear of corn. During birth many baby's heads become elongated during the difficult journey down the birth canal. This phenomenon was taken by the Maya as a sign that these children were gifts, and products, of the Maize Gods themselves. Through the use of binding boards, the infant's head was pressed into an attractive slope aligning the forehead with the nose, perpetuating the belief in their maize heritage. The resultant elongation of the skull completed the process, and was permanent. These re-defined/re-designed heads were then adorned with fabric and feathers that resembled the husk and tassels common to the growing maize cob. The peasant, noticeably, was not permitted this luxury. Was this because they were not deemed holy enough to do any more than cultivate the holy crop? Or, was it due to the fact that their particular holy position within the great Maya scheme of things allowed only them to undertake the very serious business of demonstrating the Maya
highly valued skills, on an equal plane with the integrated scientific skills of astrology, divination, architecture, acoustics, mathematics and philosophy of space and time. The combination of all these elements provided the Maya with an educational curriculum structure regarding their existence within their universe, and guidelines with which to pursue their future.

The Preclassic saw the rise of the Olmec, the first great civilization that modern scholars recognize in Mesoamerica. Occupying swampy lowlands surrounding the Tuxla volcanoes in southern Veracruz, the Olmec built the first cities in a landscape that can be described as mountains surrounded by swamps. This extraordinary people created the first kingdoms and developed templates of worldview and political symbolism that formed the basis of all subsequent societies in Mesoamerica. In a real sense, they invented civilized life in this region of the world.

By 1000 BC, the Maya had begun to build villages in the mountainous highlands and lowland forests of eastern Mesoamerica - in direct imitation of the Olmec style. These early villagers built houses that were much like those still used by their descendants today. They used pole frames and thatched roofs to construct houses with a single room. In some regions villagers favored houses with oval floor plans, while in others they preferred rectangular forms. The center of the house was always a hearth made of the traditional three stones set in a triangle to allow wood to be fed into the fire while cooking. The hearth was the center of family life, where women prepared food and did the work of the household. Men worked in agricultural fields called kol, where they planted maize, beans, squash, and chili. They planted fruit trees of many kinds around their houses and near their cornfields.

Households consisted of several related adults, and could include couples with young children, adolescents, young adults, and grandparents. Large families provided the people required for farming, a labor-intensive activity that involved yearly cycles of preparing the fields, planting cultivating, and harvesting. Moreover, large families could help with other activities, such as the building and refurbishing of houses, kitchens and storerooms, the collection of firewood, the preparation of food, and repair and maintenance of tools. More specialized crafts included weaving and decorating cloth, the manufacture of
tools and household objects of all sorts, and the making of pottery. The Maya could use these products in their households or exchange them for other goods and services within their community. As their families grew, villagers built additional houses around courtyards to form compounds. Four houses around a courtyard became one of the characteristic forms of Maya architecture.

Like other Mesoamerican peoples, the Maya appear to have adopted Olmec innovations in symbolic imagery and social institutions. By 500 BC, the Maya began to build cities in lowland forests and in the highland mountains. They amplified the traditional layout of the family compound into a square plaza surfaced with plaster and surrounded on three or four sides by pyramids with temples on top. They used tamped earth to build their pyramids in the highlands, and earth and rubble in the lowlands. Some of these early structures are the largest ever built by the Maya. People flying over them today often think they are natural hills rising above the forest canopy. In fact, the ancients did conceive of their pyramids as mountains rising out of the surrounding swamps and forest. They began to surface them with imagery modeled in plaster to give them meaning and to create sacred environments in which history, politics and urban life unfolded.

Early kings, called ahaw, also began to portray themselves on stone monuments erected in the plazas at the feet of their pyramid-mountains. These ancestral shrines, depicting the reincarnated genealogy of their subject often back to the Maize Gods themselves, served to provide reference points in time for those who viewed them. During the last third of the Preclassic period, the idea of writing developed as a way of describing who was shown on these monuments, as well as when and where the actions occurred. “This was the beginning of history for the Maya.”

In indigenous America, visible speech was not often the goal of their developed writing systems. Art and writing in pre-Columbian America is largely the same thing. They compose a graphic system that keeps and conveys knowledge, or, to put it another way, that presents ideas. Using the work of past scholars, Linda Schele and Peter Mathews had available to them, as they initiated their efforts to break the

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52 Ibid. 16-18.
Maya code and decipher the ancient glyphs, knowledge of how the Maya used their glyphs to spell words. They also knew that the Maya recorded history as their main subject matter, and used the writing system to record spoken language, as well as a mnemonic device.

The unsurpassed calligraphic elegance of this writing system derives from its origins as a painted script. No matter what medium they used - whether limestone, jade, shell, bone, wood or paper - Maya scribes never lost the original painterly grace of their hieroglyphs. They played with the graphics of the system always looking for new and innovative ways to write their words. They had many signs to record the same sounds, and each of these could be written in a plain form or personified as a human or animal. Michael D. Coe has observed:

Maya hieroglyphs are obviously highly pictorial. Because of these factors, the Maya calligrapher was basically a painter, and probably both professions were joined in the same man. This is reminiscent of China, of course. As in China, brush pens of various sizes were used. It is likely that for the relief carving of a text the master calligrapher would first brush on the characters, the rest of the job being finished by the sculptor. In the case of carved pottery, the calligrapher himself may have incised the damp clay.

There has been much study, and argument, regarding the level of literacy of the Mayan people. David Keightley has observed that "Literacy in China involved not only a profound knowledge of the written classics but also the ability to wield a brush effectively, either to paint a landscape, usually with a poem ascribed at its side, or to write Chinese characters in their meaning but also their aesthetic vitality and the taste of their composer. If indeed the Maya were fully literate, to be literate in such a society meant something different than being literate in the European Middle Ages. There, if you could read the words, you could read the book. The material aspects of signs, of communicative interactions and the discourse about them, had a different configuration."

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53 Schele and Mathews 22.
It is currently believed that Maya glyphs can be read on a number of levels. The general populace could, apparently, decipher the names and dates recorded on the monuments, on pottery, and in the codices. Numerous examples of graffiti speak to the probability that citizens could not only read at some level, but also write via the glyphs. They do not, however, seem to have been privy to the mnemonic capabilities the scribes encoded in their work as they varied the configurations to depict slightly differing points-of-view - to express notions deeper and ideas broader than the single word would provide in Western culture. These sacred and scholarly underlying meanings and messages, preserved in the memories of the educated nobility, the priests, sages, and story-tellers provided the oral history so vital to the concept of cultural performance. The codices were their prompt books as well as their histories, their Bible, and their sciences - all preserved within the capabilities of the arts.

We have now arrived at the foundation level of the evolution of the ancient Maya culture. The myths regarding creation and origins of civilized life offered in the Appendix provide archetypal symbolism that the Maya and other Mesoamerican people used to create the sacred centers of their cities and to charge their buildings with the energy and symmetry generated during these mythic times. For Mesoamericans, history, ritual, the arts and governance unfolded within these charged environments. Gods of defeated communities were incorporated into the pantheon of the victors - provided with new homes and positions of honor served by the nobility and priesthood. Tribute was either extracted or given, depending on the outcome of each battle. Farmers rotated their fields, and wives tended their three-stone hearth and bore elongated-headed children. The sun rose and set demonstrating the continued procession of the yearbearers carrying their burdens across the stage of Time. And life went on ...
In order to fully understand the manner in which the Maya communicated this cyclical cultural philosophy, and thus facilitated their own cultural development, it is necessary to delve beneath the physical manifestations - the artifacts and texts - of their culture and study the root philosophy - the idea and physical manifestations of time - which orchestrated their lives.
A comprehensive philosophy of time undergirded the thought and worldview of the Maya civilization. Priests and wise men of the Classic period were neither the first nor the only ones in Mesoamerica to be concerned with the subject of time. Inscriptions on the early stelae of the danzantes of Monte Alban in Oaxaca, as well as evidence from Teotihuacan, the Nahua, and the Zapotec indicate the use of a 260-day count in use some centuries before the birth of Christ. The endeavors to compute temporal cycles originated, and were diffused, in Mesoamerica prior to the flourishing of Classic Maya culture, scholars believe from as far back as the ancient Olmec civilization. Although the Maya were neither the first, nor unique, in concentrating on the theme of time, evidence indicates that they were certainly the most obsessed with it.

What was perhaps the original nucleus of the Mesoamerican worldview, traceable through all the ancient cultures of the New World, forms the common substratum in which the Maya flourished. The Maya concept of Time (and its manifestation in performance in space) is deeply imbedded in symbolism and forms of conceptualization. In spite of the radical sum of differences from Western perceptions, the performances of the Maya offer the possibility of an approach to original and extraordinary concepts concerning age-old themes, reality and truth, through their immediacy.
The first known k’atun histories, recorded on the magnificent inscription panels of the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque and on Hanab-Pakal’s tomb, were the prototypes of the later k’atun prophecies of the Books of Chilam Balam, the famous books written by Yucatan scribes after the Conquest. Because of the subject matter of texts like this one, scholars used to think that the Maya had an obsessive fascination with time, almost a worship of time itself. With rare exception, however, later discoveries have shown that Maya scribes focused not on time itself, but rather on the rites enacted in association with the time posts that gave regularity and symmetry to the passage of time.

It was the physical performance of time, as exemplified by the activity of the Maya yearbearers with their various burdens, which fascinated the Maya.57 The original idea, notion, or intent, conceived by the Maize Gods at the time of Creation, is manifested in the performance of Time - it was the Maya’s primary physical and intellectual activity, and our primary source. Time is the active framework of Maya history, and their fascination with its nature came from appreciation of the symmetry inherent in the cosmic fabric woven by the gods when they created the world.

Pakal is less interested in the k’atun-endings (the last date of a particular period of time) for their own sake than he is in describing the actions that Palenque’s ancestral kings did for the patron gods on those period endings. He performed, through the inscriptions and artwork developed by his scribes, the actions of his ancestors in order to give meaning to his own actions. By creating affinities between himself and a supernatural being from the remote past, through this artwork, he declared himself to be made of the same stuff as the gods. Much of his ability to do this, in a manner that communicated itself to both the gods and his people, resulted from the scientific practices of his sages, priests, and mathematicians.

It is well known, through a retracing of the main chronological pursuits of the Maya, that among their sages, outstanding features of mathematical knowledge were applied to calendar computations and endeavors in astronomy. Regardless of the fact that the Maya were restricted to arithmetic and geometry, they nonetheless produced two extraordinary and closely related discoveries: the concept of zero.

57 See Appendix: Table 2.
(fundamentally as a symbol of completeness), and a counting system in which unities acquired value according to positional functions. Their computations were based on various calculations with reference to the solar year, the synodic revolutions of Venus, and to the lunation periods, and achieved such high levels of precision that they favorably compare to those created by today's most sophisticated computer systems.

These intense calculations conceived of time as something tangible, without beginning or end, and allowed for calculations farther and farther into the past, as well as the future. They established reference points within this infinite continuum, based on especially significant events in their past. All calendar reference on their stelae is computed with reference to a point that corresponds to August 13, 3114 BC in terms of our own calendar. This point, according to Thompson, "could supposedly be regarded as the last creation of the world - i.e., the age and sun in which men were made from corn, according to the narrative given in the Popol Vuh," and offered in the Creation Myth in the Appendix. Time was calculated from the moment the Maize Gods first spun the sky into movement, creating the basis for time perception for all human beings.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions, representing systems known as the Long Count or Initial Series, appear (reading from left to right and continuing from top to bottom) representing the various unities in the following order: first, the baktuns, cycles of 360 x 20 x 20 days = 144,000; then, the katuns (360 x 20 days = 7200); the tuns (360 days), the uinals (20 days); and, finally, the kins or days. The tuns (360 day years), the approximate years of 365 days (occasionally called haab), the lunations and synodic revolutions of the planets, were coordinated with the typically Mesoamerican count of 260 days. Known in Yucatec as tzolk'in, these were coordinated by using multiples common to said cycle and to other astronomical measurements. The count of 260 days, used by all high-culture peoples of ancient Mexico and Central America, had, through cultural dispersion, come to be the fundamental element in Maya computations.

The Secondary Series, or *distance numbers* were then developed and used by the Maya, through a system of addition or subtraction, to indicate the place corresponding within the Long Count to one or various dates that indicated a termination of a specified period. Their time measurements, as compared to ours, referred not to the beginning of a new cycle - day, month, and year - but to its total reality already elapsed and completed.

The significance of this manner of computation and expression allows us to begin our investigation of the deepest meaning of what must be called the prophetical and astrological obsession of the Maya. The prophetical implications of the *tzolk'in* affected the entire people, and outlive the Spanish Conquest, as is proved by the celebrated Yucatec books of *Chilam Balam*, among other texts.

Formulating a science of time, in which they attained more than exceptional precision, the Maya used their knowledge for both ceremonial organization and astrological prediction. Their knowledge about the cycle of *Noh ek* (Venus), the "great star", is demonstrated on pages 46-50 of the *Dresden Codex*, as is an indication of computations regarding lunar cycles on pages 51-58. Maya chronological and astronomical knowledge indicates the enduring fascination of this people in the exploration of the mysteries of the universe, discerning the significance and measurement of its cycles.

Even errors of forward displacement were adjusted based on repeated observations. "No other ancient culture was able to formulate, as they did, such a number of units of measurement and categories, or so many mathematical relations for framing, with a tireless desire for exactitude, the cyclic reality of time."® Concerning the degree of exactitude achieved by the Copan sages in their calculations on the duration of the tropical year, John E. Teeple offers the following comparative list:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present duration of the year</td>
<td>365.2422 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the year about AD 600</td>
<td>365.2423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian year:</td>
<td>365.2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregorian year:</td>
<td>365.2425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya year at Copan</td>
<td>365.2420</td>
</tr>
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The mention of some of their achievements - witnessing their obsession (over and above that of their cultural predecessors or successors) with matters involving time and precision of calculation - leads us to question the significance of time and computation of its cycles within Maya mythology, and the worldview distributed to the people by its priests and sages. Their intense study of this issue, offers invaluable insight into the manner in which they performed their culture, purposes for specific ceremonial and secular events, manners in which they identified with their cosmos, and interpreted and imitated it in their daily lives - in truth, the position they believed they held within their universe, and their unique manner of communicative expression.

Creating a listing of the sources of principle symbols and concepts having temporal connotations, demonstrates the richness of Maya thought about time - above and beyond the strictly calendrical, chronological, or computational. The following list shows instances in which Maya scholars have been known to delve into this rich philosophy, and possible forms of meaning in the theme of time, throughout the evolution of their culture, within the context of its mythology and religious thought:

a) Those which express periods or cycles of time: *kin* (day), *uinal* (month), *tun* (year), *katun* (twenty years), *baktun* (four hundred years), and so forth.
b) The numerical glyphs and their variants.
c) Glyphs of the twenty-day series.
d) Glyphs of the eighteen months and of the five days at the end of the year.
e) Glyphs of the cosmic directions within their temporal relationship.
f) Symbols and attributes of the gods who bear the burdens of time.
g) Glyphs of the divisions of the day and the night.
h) Glyphs of the patron deities and protectors of determined periods or cycles.
i) Expressions of strictly astronomical character as related to computations of cycles of the sun, Venus, the moon, eclipses, and so forth.
j) Symbolism of the fiestas, ceremonies, rites, determined by the calendrical computations.
k) The late texts, especially those related to prophecies of the diverse *katuns*.

For studying this accumulation of expressions so rich in temporal significance, there exist various categories of sources, four of which are of a totally indigenous origin:

a) The chronological inscriptions on the stelae and monuments starting at latest in the third century AD and present in more than ninety sites during the stage of florescence of the Classic

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period up to the moment in which stelae were no longer erected, toward the end of the tenth century. Sources are also other forms of symbolism of the Classic period and to a lesser degree of the Postclassic. Representations of the various deities associated with certain points of time - those who carried the burdens of time - offer us a view of the universal *dramatis personae* as envisioned by the ancient Maya, and those who functioned reciprocally with humanity to insure the continued passage of time and reality. Glyphic representations of specific human individuals - rulers, noblemen and women, certain warriors, craftsmen, slaves and so forth - offer us invaluable clues as to how members of this culture functioned and performed within the overall reference to time, and evidence their reciprocal relationships with the deities in the preservation of time, space and reality.

b) The three extant Maya codices of pre-Columbian origin (from the Postclassic period), the *Dresden Codex* being the oldest, preceding the *Madrid* and *Paris*.

c) The various late writings redacted in Maya languages, but in the Latin alphabet, by native sages and priests who survived the Conquest: the books of *Chilam Balam*, the *Popol Vuh*, and other texts.

d) The cultural traits which have survived in certain isolated indigenous groups, and exemplify to a greater degree than with more absorbed cultural clusters, remnants of the evolved belief systems and their supporting performance issues.

e) Other sources of information, often erroneously referred to as primary sources for the study of Maya culture, include the works of the Spanish chroniclers: Diego de Landa and Diego López de Cogolludo as regards Yucatán, Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman in respect to Guatemala; as well as the *Historia* by Father Francisco Ximenez; and finally, various geographic accounts of the sixteenth century and other writings such as *Informe contra Idolorum cultores* by Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar.

As we have seen, Maya culture was not organized in the form of an empire, but consisted of loosely connected city-states sharing elements reminiscent of earlier common origins. These city-states each produced their own unique forms of language and writing. Hence, we are presented with variations of many single ideas when they are translated into glyph form. The various forms of the notion of *Kinh*, however, appear repeatedly in all - this concept was universal among the Maya, and seen as a sacred uniformity among all the Maya. (See Appendix: Figure 1) As Thompson has demonstrated in his studies and resultant catalogue of Maya hieroglyphics, the *Kinh* sign ranks among "the four most frequent glyphs of noncalendric use".

Linguistics shows us, furthermore, that throughout the Maya culture the use of the word *Kinh* refers to "sun-day-time". The *Kinh* morpheme in various Maya tongues also has secondary meanings or derivatives such as *fiesta* (festal day), *destiny* (the fate or attribute, fortunate or unfortunate, of the day as

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63Leon-Portilla 15.
indicated by the tzolkin, the astrological calendar). This constitutes a first form of evidence of the numerous relationships linking Kinh (sun-day-time) with symbols of religious, mythological, or ceremonial content in the multiple inscriptions on which it appears.

The significance of the use of this four-petaled flower design, with its characteristic tail or beard, in the carved inscriptions and the codices is emphasized in the hieroglyphic variants of Kinh when the solar god becomes apparent as the carrier of the burdens of time (indicated by gods carrying packs on their backs). In Maya thought the day was a solar presence, and time was the limitless succession of all solar cycles. This presence could also be indicated in the form of a god, whether of human or animal (usually snake, jaguar, macaw or monkey) origin, but the symbolism used, by its attributes and other forms of connotation, is always related to solar symbolism.

We note, therefore, that the concept of Kinh itself is firmly embedded in Maya mythology and worldview. The maker of days, the sun, the day itself, and time as a whole, are already thought of as something divine. As evidenced in the codices, these divinities with solar attributes, and even sporting the glyph of the sun, interrelate with other deities to constitute a kind of rich theological complex with antecedents in the inscriptions and symbolism of the Classic period.

The second page of the Dresden Codex exhibits a god, who on the forehead and hieroglyph carries the sign of Rosny, already recognized as that of the sun and as an emblem of Kinh. For this reason, Schellhas in his study of the hieroglyphic signs of the deities in the Dresden Codex identifies him with Kinich Ahau of the historical sources. The solar god is also the god of war. Thus we see in the upper part of page 26 of the Dresden a priest as a year bearer (actually Chac, god of rain), with an animal head instead of that of a god and a symbol displaying traits of a balam or jaguar...

Further comments, made by Eduard Seler, relating to the appearance of the personification of Kinh as they appear on some pages of the Madrid Codex, are as follows:

On page 20, on referring to the year IX, where Itzamna should appear, on the lower left side, we see the god that bears the Kan glyph. He represents Itzamna, but with closed eyes. In front of him, on the lower right side, we find the solar god with a sort of mask.

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64 Thompson 22.
65 See Appendix: Figure 2.
in the form of a bird showing the eye of the old god Itzamna. This is an extraordinary concordance with what Landa tells: in the years IX, apart from venerating the patrons corresponding to the year, they also feted the Lord of the solar countenance, the god Kinich Ahau Itzamna.\(^{57}\)

Since Classic days Kinich - sun-day-time - was not an abstract entity but a reality enmeshed in the world of myths, origin of the cycles that govern all existing things. Time is an attribute of the gods: they carry it on their backs. Kinich appears as the heart of all change, filled with lucky and unlucky destinies within the cyclic reality of the universe and most probably inherent in the essence of divinity itself. For more than four and a half millennium - from the beginning of the Preclassic period to post-Conquest times, when the wheels of the katuns were transcribed and continued - Maya time symbolism has endured.\(^{68}\) This has occurred in spite of obvious innovations and outer influences through the centuries. Maya computations of and concern for time doubtlessly reveal a penetrating mind. Its study, notwithstanding the difficulties involved, can open a door for us moderns of a unique way of reason.

The post-Conquest collection of chants from the town of Dzitbalche in Yucatan, studied by Alfredo Barrera Vasquez, contains a hymn with a solemn and profound declaration of what the primordial reality of time may have meant to priests and sages. Though the date of the composition of this hymn is undoubtedly late, the ideas expressed reflect ancient tradition.

> Only Thee
do I trust entirely,
here where one dwells.
For thou, oh great Kinich,
providest that which is good,
here where one dwells,
to all living beings.
Since Thou abidest to give reality to the earth,
where all men live.
And Thou art the true helper
who grants that which is good.\(^{69}\)

\(^{57}\)Ibid. 386.
\(^{68}\)See Appendix: Figure 3.
\(^{69}\)Alfredo Barrera Vasquez, El libro do los cantares do Dzitbalche (Mexico: Institutional de Antropologia e Historia, 1965), 46-47.
The inscriptions, carved in stone, dating back to the Classic period, best reflect the ancient philosophy about the interminable succession of godly faces and figures carrying the deified time cycles. We have already touched upon, through the example given earlier of Pakal at Palenque, the actual performance these inscriptions were presumed to have enacted for their viewers. The Maya considered even what we perceive as inanimate objects, such as stone monuments, alive. They possessed a soul given them at their dedication ceremony, and spoke to the people in very real ways. Throughout the cosmic ages life is reborn thanks to Kinh. Man recognized, and thus approached, the gods as bearers of the different periods: their faces were living portraits of time. The Maya sages thus dwelled in a universe tinged with mythological meanings and relationships. Every moment was the manifestation of forces, favorable or adverse, but always both living and divine. As on a revolving stage, the gods of day and night, those of the months and numbers, the deities of all the cycles of time, were the actors in this universe. Their appearances and exits determined men's fates as they brought life and death, good fortune and loss, feast or famine with them.

In computing periods of time, the priests endeavored to predict what would be the acts of the gods, to predict the nature of each deified moment based on their ability to calculate cycles into both the distant past and the future. Indeed, the identification, manifestation, and attributes of the period-of-time gods constitute the \textit{dramatis personae} in the universe of the ancient Maya. Man functioned as bit players, stage crew and technical assistants in this world drama, providing the primary characters with the stage environment required as they carried out their never-ending roles in the march of time.

The temporal universe, created again and again by the ancient face of the solar deity, makes possible through its cycles the arrival of all the other god-periods. Maya wise men did not simply relate the gods to moments of time falling under their special protection and in which it was necessary to celebrate rites and sacrifices in their honor. The sages conceived of time itself as the primordial reality, the deity of multiple countenances, periods, cycles, which in alternating journeys and with the possibility of return in a never-ending flow, communicates his burdens to all the planes and quarters of the world. It was, therefore, Kinh, the most obvious of the time-countenances, who acquired supreme rank.
The worship of the gods was to be essentially linked with the computations that led to the discovery of the cycle of action, the arrivals and departures, and the conjunctions, of the countenance-deities. To measure time, to hit upon the multiplicity of its cycles, to know the relationships between these, to compute its moments in the past (no matter how remote) became the supreme form of wisdom, the one which drew man to the mysteries of divinity. Mythology interwoven with calendrical computation crystallized into what may be designated as a unique form of mathematized religion and mythology - ciphers accompanied by symbols, mathematical units that are to be computed in order to propitiate and worship the integral reality of the universe of Kinh. For this reason, among the forms of worship during the Classic period, particularly significant was the erection of the stelae, and the recording upon them of the precise computations that were also measurements of the journeys of the divine bearers of time.

The chronological inscriptions were also in themselves great chapters in which were described the history of a universe whose essence was time. Through them the wise men related the memory of the most significant moments in the perennial becoming of Kinh within the spatial world. Their knowledge of time, tinged as it was with religiosity, myths, and astrological applications, meant also a profound effort to understand the ultimate reality, omnipresent and cyclical, which determines the events of a history that is at once cosmic and divine - present, past, and future.

The feasts and ceremonies, according to available evidence from the Postclassic period, were often occasions on which the ah Kinob, priests of the sun and time, made public their prophecies. For instance, during the feast of the month Uo, as described by de Landa, the priests:

... took out their books and spread them out on the fresh boughs which they had for this purpose, and invoking with prayers and devotions as idol names Kinich Ahau Itzaman, who they say was the first priest, they offered him gifts and presents ...This having been done, the most learned of the priests opened a book and looked at the prognostics of that year, and he manifested them to those who were present. And he preached to them a little, recommending to them the remedies for their ills ...

\footnote{Leon-Portilla 96.}
These same priests were the ones who indicated the days favorable for ceremonies such as the giving of a name to a child, the admission of a youth to a school, the celebration of a wedding, the consecration of a ruler, the healing of a patient, the days for selling and buying, and those for sowing and reaping.

The entire life of the Maya thus presented itself oriented by a cultural pattern manifested in their institutions essentially related to the theme of time. Thus the religious cult prospered, and with it, symbolism, art, and their unique kind of science - in a word, life, and the great and small actions of every day. Obsession with time, therefore, came to be a unifying factor in this culture.

Leon-Portilla provides an excellent recap of the Maya obsession with time in Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya:

The concept of time, an abstraction arrived at through experiencing the cyclic action of the sun and of the day that is its creature, was universally present among the Maya at least from the appearance of the first inscription of the Classic period. Proof of this is the ancient word *Kinh*, having identical meanings in the diverse groups, as well as the existence of its glyphic variants exemplified in the codices of Postclassic times.

*Kinh*, sun-day-time, is a primary reality, divine and limitless. *Kinh* embraces all cycles and all the cosmic ages. That is why it is possible to make computations about remote moments hundreds of millions of years away from the present. Also, because of this, texts such as the *Popol Vuh* speak of the "suns" or ages, past and present.

The divine nature of *Kinh* is not thought of as something abstract and shapeless. In it can be distinguished innumerable moments, each with its own face, carrying a burden that displays its attributes. Among the faces appearing in the diverse periods are those of the solar deity in all its forms and those of the gods and goddesses of rain, earth, corn, death, sacrifice, the great star, the moon, and hunting. These faces constitute the most significant nucleus of the Maya pantheon.

The time universe of the Maya is the ever-changing stage on which are felt the aggregate of presences and actions of the various divine forces that coincide in a given period. The Maya strove, by means of their computations to foresee the nature of these presences and the resultant influences at specified moments. Since *Kinh* is essentially cyclic, it is most important to know the past in order to understand the present and predict the future.

The faces of time, mystical reality prompting the Mayan obsession, are the objects of veneration. They determine and govern all activities. Thanks to them man knows the norms for agricultural labors, cycles of festivals, everything in life. The priests register the symbols and effigy of the time-gods as they arrive. They erect stelae, compose their
books, and set the katun stones in place. Man sees his existence colored by time, presence, and action of all countenances of the divinity.\(^2\)

Priests often donned the garb and masks of the various gods in an effort to make their divine presence a reality to the common man. These en-acted interpretations were not seen as imitations or mere portrayals, but as manifestations of reality - the priests literally became the characters they portrayed, and through the sages' expertise at divination, the gods spoke to mankind of all manners of truth. These performances, and the corresponding responses of the populace - through physical, emotional and material support for the gods by their human representatives and familiars - constituted not a separate form of religion, but rather an integrated way of life for the Maya community. These acts were the reality experienced by the Maya people, as time was the ultimate source and provider of their way of life.

In the Maya consciousness of time were joined and reconciled (as one could know the sequences of the cycles) the universe of the gods and the world of the colored directions where men lived. In adverse, and even fatal moments, the chronovision of the wise men always permitted discovery of meanings. Perhaps, because of this, with the hope of recovering the ancient meaning of existence or finding a new one in its stead, some Maya groups surviving the Conquest continued or remade the wheels of the katuns and the books of the prophecies. Clinging to the theme of time in order to save themselves, they also bequeathed to the world a last testimony of the ancient chronovision that, with all its variants, was the soul of a culture that lived for almost forty-five hundred years ... The Maya art and science of measuring time, probably born before the beginnings of the Classic period, extraordinarily elaborated through the latter, and with diminished strength even in modern isolated communities, integrated a cultural pattern, the basis of many other institutions. In this pattern the Maya found norms for everyday life, for astrological knowledge, for the order of the feasts with their rites and sacrifices, for their economy, agriculture, and commerce, for their social and political systems. But, above all, their passion for time came to produce their chronovision, the conception of a universe in which space, living things and mankind derive their reality from the ever-changing atmosphere of Kinh.\(^3\)

The Mayan attempt to cultivate their obsession with the performance of time was not only a quest for knowledge, but also a concern with salvation. Through their attempts to discover the supreme order of things they conceived their myths, created symbols, used the zero, invented new systems to adjust and correct their computations as they worshipped the primordial reality, omnipresent and limitless. To

\(^2\)Leon-Portilla 54-55.
harmonize with that reality was the most precious aim of life, and they followed the directives of their priests in their attempt to discover their place on earth, and also to spy on the mysteries of the divine rhythms of the universe. To pass over the chronovision of the Maya would be to deprive this culture of its soul.

Ibid. 111-112.
To understand the man you must understand how his experiences and his acts are shaped by his intentional states ... the form of these intentional states is realized only through participation in the symbolic systems of the culture.74

Jerome Bruner

Now that we have identified the dramatis personae in the drama of Maya life, we can turn our attention to the mise en scene. By exploring the Maya conception of space and reality within their concept of time, through in-depth study of the culture artifacts and demonstrations of concepts that remain, we uncover valuable evidence of a significant connection within Maya thought with the visible and tangible world of spatial reality.

It is simple to equate rite and ceremony with the reciprocal enactment of humanity with their gods - practiced within space, and aligned with the philosophy of time - by the ancient Maya. As seen in the striking example of the holistic nature of Maya theater through the solstice ceremonies at the Pyramid of Kukulcan in Chichén Itzá, time, associated with space and reality, enjoys a practical application.

High atop the pyramid, which faces the south (the place of ancestors) and the Great Cenote (the home of the chacs or rain gods, and of the plumed serpent himself - one of the most significant gods with time attributes) stands the high priest, the Halach-Unic (true man - governor - priest). It is the day calculated as the fall equinox. The priest claps his hands, and an echo resounds throughout the plaza area - a chirping echo which sounds, due to the particular configuration of the temple complex, surprisingly like
the call of the sacred Quetzal bird (another variation of Kuk’ulk’an, the plumed serpent). The audience joins in the clapping, and chirping echoes fill the plaza area. Slowly, as the well-calculated position of the sun dictates, shadows begin to creep from the cenote toward the pyramid. The god has heard the people’s call.

A stone sculpture of the head of the plumed serpent, located on the balustrade at the base of the pyramid, catches the rays. Its shadow begins a slow and deliberate crawl up the steps of the pyramid, which has been designed, through additional mathematical, architectural, and astronomical calculations, to welcome this shadow play on this very day. The shadow reaches the top of the pyramid - drawn by the apparent wishes and requests of the priests, and the encouragement of the witnesses in the crowd of ceremonial celebrants. The god is present for the people. He remains in his home at the top of the pyramid, where he has dons the plumes of the Quetzal. From there he will provide rain and good growing conditions for the people during the next six months.

His presence demands sacrifice. He must be fed, honored with bloodletting, provided with gifts of specially crafted fabrics, pottery, and precious green stones and obsidian. The people know their various roles in this drama, and perform them willingly, until the spring equinox, when the Great Serpent appears to crawl, in shadow form, down the steps and back to the cenote. The performance responsibilities of all cast and crew is complete - for another year, anyway.

It is difficult to underestimate the reaction of the people to this phenomenon. As far as the common man is concerned, the gods are present in their actual reality - living actors on their world stage. Reciprocity between the people and the gods has been established. The sages and priests have confirmation that their calculations are valid - the predicted presence of the gods is proof enough. Technically it is pure spectacle, but to the Maya it is representative of the drama they considered life - reality in its most reassuring form, ever repeatable as determined by the scientific calculations of the sages - cyclic - without

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75 *Halach-Unic* of Chichen-Itzá may very well have been the custodian of the very plumes of *Quezalcoatl/Kuk’ulk’an*. 
beginning or end. Is it not now understandable how the Maya could have felt such security in their universe? All was pre-ordained, predictable, calculable, ordered and repeatable.

Whereas performance can be seen as the manifestation of idea, space, as evidenced on the stelae and in the codices, was seen as the physical manifestation of time in a geographical sense. Within the Maya view of a world distributed in four immense sectors - with several celestial levels, abodes of the gods, and lower planes, the region of the shades - the relationship between cosmic space and time, also filled with symbols, becomes clear. Time and space were different aspects of the same primordial reality.

What we ultimately witness when we study ancient Maya cultural performance is the unity of theater and the drama of daily reality. Never can it be seen as more true - "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts ..." Even the individual gods played many roles, making their entrances and exits on the physical stage of reality, as dictated by the endless cycles of Time, and playing many parts are they proceeded across space. Maya performance - whether considered theatrical, spectacular, dramatic or simply (by contemporary standards) the reality of daily life - was nonetheless one encompassing event for the Maya. Their belief system, their philosophical view of time and space, their encompassing worldview, would not allow for distinctions present in modern concepts of these various forms of communication. Their theater was their daily life, it was their reality, as was their daily life their theater, and the space in which they found habitation, their stage. It is my speculation that the theater of the ancient Maya achieved, with little or no additional effort, that elusive characteristic so sought by contemporary Western thespians - immediacy and truth. And, it was truth because it was their life - not simply a Platonic imitation of an imitation - a form of a form.

The sacred relationship of Time and Space was not reserved for ceremonials and religious ritual alone. As mentioned before, even inanimate objects were considered to possess a life force, and were awarded personified presence in the Maya cosmology. The Maya, conceived the earth itself at the time of

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76Shakespeare, *As you Like It*, II: vii: 138-141.
Creation, as a great monster (a crocodile or dragon) that was transformed into four parts (exactly as indicated in the glyph for time). Each of the four regions was tinted with their own color (red, east; white, north; black, west; yellow, south; and green at the center). In each sector grew the primeval ceiba tree, which housed its corresponding bird, and served as a support for the celestial levels above. As recorded in the encoded texts of the Yucatan, there reside in the four regions the pahuaun (gods of the wind), the chac (Lords of rain), the balam (protectors of the fields), and the hacab (the supporters of the heavens). Other deities also maintain a close relationship to the earth - the horizontal plane upon which man dwells. Among them are the young maize god, the jaguar, the god of death, and others who are also associated with different temporal periods.

Both the Dresden and the Madrid codices offer fine visual examples of this fourfold distribution of the world. (See Fig. 2 for one of many examples offered in the Dresden Codex.) The Maya thought of the earth in terms of their peculiar complex of symbols: the image of the monsters from which life springs, and the fourfold distribution which, parting from a center, extends full reality throughout regions of colors, populated with gods and primeval forces, cosmic birds and trees, and also human beings who live and die there.

But an illustration of the horizontal earth surface does not itself achieve their universe's fullest meaning. Its overall existence is further explained by the unceasing flow of time, and by the presence of the gods that live on an upper and lower plane, thus completing the image of the spatial universe. This ancient manner of conceiving time as something continuously permeating space is reinforced by the fact that the countenances of time are the same as those of the deities of the earth's surface.

It is interesting to note that the contemporary North American Sioux also utilize colors to represent the various directions (as do most other indigenous groups in the Americas), albeit in a revised order: black represents the west; red the north; yellow the east; and white the south. Green again represents the center, the Earth Mother, and blue is added to represent the Sky Father. Teepees constructed at ceremonial centers always face east, and residents sleep with their heads to the north (wisdom) and their feet to the south (the home of the ancestors). As with the Maya, the Sioux place the sacred world tree at the center, and various eagles represented the different directions. One wonders at the extent of cultural diffusion in the awareness of such similarities.
In spite of differing elements, occasionally betraying external influences or different patterns of evolution in some Maya groups, there is a kind of common denominator in the symbolism and traits typical of what was at the core of their vision of the spatial universe. Ceremonial centers were aligned on an east-west axis honoring the solar deities and their journey across the heavens, through the underworld, and back to the point of rebirth each day. In addition to imitating aspects of the landscape in the design and placement of significant structures, these centers served to provide convenient pathways for the gods during their daily travels across the earth.

There are (as alluded to earlier), in addition to the horizontal earth plane, thirteen heavenly levels, inhabited by various god forms, above the earth, and an additional nine levels below, inhabited by the shades. The Maya pantheon was enormous - each aspect of perceived reality deified and personified - with man only a small figure in the overall scheme of things. Humanity maintained its right to live on the earthly plane only by honoring and serving the cosmos in their humble way. Knowledge of celestial movements, as well as information regarding the nature of the underworld, which brought, among other opportunities for humanity - volcanic eruptions and earthquakes - were imperative to their ability to ascertain exactly what was required of them by the various gods in return for favors and good fortune. And, Time was the most important aspect, as all elements of the universe followed its cycle and moved within its parameters.

On the residential level, many city planners designed the community into a formation resembling the four-petaled flower we have already identified as the symbol for Kinh (sun-day-time). The four sections of the city supported, as was the world itself, by directional pillars honoring the four cardinal directions. Colors appropriate to the various directions were assigned to each of these residential areas, as they were to larger worldviews of the terrestrial-horizontal. It is often possible to identify in codices the regions toward which specified time cycles are oriented based on the colors present in the artwork.

This method of structuring residential life in line with the universe is another phenomenon that has survived Conquest and is practiced among indigenous communities to this day. They built their stage - the
performance area on which they communicated their cultural way of life - in strict accordance with the nature of the universe as they perceived it. And, they performed their various tasks and responsibilities - named their children, planted their crops, played their ball games, fought their wars, offered their personal sacrifices, enjoyed their fiestas, scheduled their ceremonies, sang, danced, created visual, literary and theatrical art - within that cosmos housed in the area appropriate to their specific responsibilities to the whole, protected and served by honored gods specific to those particular quadrants.

As time advanced through the predictable cycles, each moment becomes not only the presence of one god, but also the sum total of many presences within time, as manifested by space and reality, within the Maya concept of Kinh. At the precise moment in which one of these periods comes to its completion, another deity takes up the burden and anew directs the flow of Kinh. Understanding thus the measures of time as repose-completion, one of the roots from which the idea of cycles is derived may be perceived. The result of their forces colors reality with multiple tints.

These are unending series of periods with moments that are at once ends and beginnings. Examples of these deities, aging and changing as they pass from the start of their own particular cycle to its close, are prolific on the ancient stelae. Expressions about the faces of gods with burdens of time - entering and being installed in order to perform their appointed action during determined periods - continue to appear in the prophetic books for many years after the Conquest and occasionally up to relatively recent times. If space exists as the handiwork of the gods and has in itself divine meaning, all the deities present and acting in space are changing countenances of time. Isolated from time, space becomes inconceivable. Such was the universe in which the Maya lived and thought. This was the result of the deep-rooted Maya concern with time - a pan-chronotheism. The chronological systems were their instruments of grasping the mysteries of Kinh whose essence consisted of the divine countenances bearers of good and evil.

When the Spanish first met the Maya and began their exploration of the Yucatan, the number of abandoned cities they encountered apparently shocked them. Assuming that the indigenous population was nearly defunct, based on the mere remnants of population they encountered in so many cities, they were
shocked when they came upon rather large pockets of humanity. These sites were ancient when the
Spanish arrived, and seemed to hold only remnants of their former glory as were evident in the cultural
practices of the few small clusters of people who lived around them. And, yet, brilliant artwork, similar to
the murals later discovered at Bonampak, continued to exemplify the notion of propaganda as a substitute
for real strength. Are we to assume that old habits die hard, or could there be another explanation for this
confusing lack of cultural activity?

Throughout the course of this study I have wondered about this particular phenomenon, and now
believe it is one more instance of miscommunication of culture through the performance attributes of the
Maya themselves. To answer this question we can now review certain aspects of Maya belief concerning
the use of space within the reality of Time.

Theories are afloat, among lettered scholars who frequent the ATZLAN Internet group for
Mesoamerican studies, that the Maya may have actually migrated from city-center to city-center as a direct
result of their calendar and conception of time (and nature of the gods who inhabited or personified time
itself). Much as they rotated their fields, and as is represented by the manner in which they rotated the
mound sites of the yearbearers as they assumed primary responsibility for the burdens of the current year, it
is interesting to speculate that the population may have rotated among the various ceremonial centers in
order to acknowledge the various gods honored in each, as time, calculated by the sages, dictated.78 We
must remember that the Maya owned all land (except for that specifically allotted to the gods of each
ceremonial center, and the noble and priestly intermediaries) in common. They would not be leaving
possessions if they migrated to another city area, but simply re-locating to another commonly held
agricultural or trading area, presumably for the purpose of honoring the specific gods who resided in
different quadrants of the known world.79

78See expanded reference in the chapter on Cultural Survival.
79ATZLAN@ULKYVM.LOUISVILLE.EDU, February 2-17, 1999.
Confirmation of this theory would answer many current questions regarding the ability of the land to support a population that filled all ceremonial centers at all times, the limestone soil of the Yucatan, being extremely fragile, has been deemed incapable of sustaining an intensive farming operation that would be required were the population as large as originally assumed. Cultural migration would have allowed the fields of several areas to lie fallow for an extended period (possibly up to 52 years), rejuvenating the fragile soil for the next cycle. It would explain the use of artistic propaganda in lieu of the ability of a community to amass a viable standing army, again because the population was not as large as full-time occupation of all the city-centers at one time would indicate. It would discredit currently presumed population figures, for which archeologists can find no remains, and reduce, to some extent, the magnitude of damage presumed done by the introduction of the European microbes. A 52-year-cycle would help to explain the layered pyramids that would have been reconstructed for each major attendance cycle, trapping the residual energy of previous spiritual encounters within the new structure. Most importantly, based on the evidence, a migration theory would support the Maya's cyclical nature as they moved around their terrestrial-horizontal to honor the presiding gods and yearbearers of any particular era.

The implications regarding the manner in which the Maya may have extended their cultural performance to include their actual living arrangements around various ceremonial sites - moving from theater to theater as their fellow performers (the gods) required - are immense.
CULTURAL SURVIVALS
OF MAYA IDEOLOGY
AND PERFORMANCE HERITAGE

Time passes - it never comes to stay - but, it circles back upon itself, like some gigantic cosmic Slinky, to remind us where we have been, and point the way to where we may be going.

What goes around - comes around.

Hell’s Angels, Los Angeles, CA

During the Terminal Classic period, the carved faces and sculptural bodies of many elite, whose visages adorned the ancient stelae and other carved, or painted, decorative walls and stairways of palaces and temples, were systematically destroyed - hacked to pieces by some ancient’s hammers. The portraits of common craftsmen and general population members were not harmed. In addition, during this period, it appears that the elite disappeared from record - dead of disease, assassinated, victims of suicide, or simply retreating to the jungle as they faced impending revolution. Some palaces of this period, according to archeological studies, show that they were inhabited by people who did not practice maintenance, who littered the rooms and stairwells with refuse, and who, while continuing to create art, installed it incorrectly by traditional standards, in inappropriate locations, and even upside down.\(^{80}\)

By comparison, Nancy Farriss describes destruction of Catholic artistic and architectural artifacts, as well as the death of some members of the priesthood, as the means of expression of discontent by the Colonial Maya population.\(^{81}\) We find no shifts to mass murders or equally violent actions, which may have

\(^{80}\)Tainter 189-90.
proved more effective in the long run. Just destroy their faces and their stuff, and their power was destroyed - removed from Time - a rather naive assumption, but one that appears to be based on ancient Maya tradition. Furthermore, the destruction of the Maya body of sacred books, destroying not only their history, but, in their view, time and identity, was perceived by the Maya as the greatest tragedy their culture had ever undergone. In this instance, the havoc the Maya commoners had wreaked on the elite during the Terminal Classic period, and that later destruction which they inflicted on the Catholic priesthood and sacred artifacts of Catholicism, returned to haunt them.

Cultural inheritors of the ancient Maya culture still locate themselves within the parameters of ancient philosophy, and help us understand the importance of the marriage of Time and identity within the Maya philosophical heritage. Examples of cultural survival assist us in understanding the manner in which the old ones faced life's challenges and performed their heritage within their unique concept of cosmos. Trace survivals help bring us to a better understanding of certain pre-Colonial concepts, as well as a more satisfactory comprehension of the acculturative process through which Maya groups have passed.

The examples given above, regarding efforts to reestablish balance within a community by destroying inscriptions and therefore eliminating unwanted elements from time, demonstrate one cultural survival, having origins recorded as early as the Terminal Classic period, re-manifested during the Colonial period. The evidence of peasant uprisings among the Maya during that earlier time can be viewed as a traditional means of expression of discontent, and uniquely Maya manner for reestablishing community balance, that survived into the Colonial period. The actions indicate the continued belief of the Maya that not only humans, but also artifacts possessed life. Their destruction destroyed the time-continuum and all reality within it. The physical results of these ancient insurrections make for interesting comparison, no
only with peasant uprisings in the Yucatan, but also with the grievous reaction of the Maya, when the tables were turned, to the sixteenth-century burning of their books.

The vitality of the ancient cultural traits (including settlement patterns, social structure, kinship system, political organization, ancestral deities, and other reminiscences of pre-Colonial life) varies markedly from one region to another. The acculturation process has developed at diverse tempos in different places within the area. Generally it is accepted that the lowlands, with more modern communication capabilities, have been the most acculturated and as a consequence live closer to the modern way of life. A contrast is offered by the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, where multiple mountain barriers have contributed toward maintaining the isolation and conservatism of Indian groups. The Tzeltal and Tzotzil, live in the highlands of Chiapas in great numbers. In the mountainous country of Guatemala, are enclaves of communities speaking Chuj, Ixil, Jacaltec, and Mam, all languages of the Maya family. Among these groups one still finds, with a highly pronounced vitality, the most conspicuous survivals of ancient tradition.

Sourcing the Present for clues to the Past, however, is no easy task. Five centuries of contact with ways of life, imported with and after the Conquest, have given rise to hybrid, though coherent, cultural systems that are neither an exact replica of the pre-Hispanic pattern nor even less an exact copy of the European one. What exists today is a *sui generis* product constituted of elements of both origins that have managed to accommodate themselves in a functional whole.

As we move closer to our current century, Alfonso Villa Rojas, in his Appendix to Leon-Portilla’s *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*, provides us with valuable information regarding the depth to which the original ideas were rooted in the pre-Hispanic patterns of thought, and how many of them have persisted in their basic lines among the indigenous of Middle America. His essay, *The Concepts of Space and Time Among the Contemporary Maya*, reiterates the basic tenet that we are indeed dealing with a unique conception of reality:

The ancient Maya image of the universe ... offers the opportunity of perceiving in its essential traits the vast complexity of that world of ideas, a framework for the sages and
priests of that part of Middle America. Their conception of time as something divine and
eternally flowing, without beginning or end, distributed in recurrent cycles saturated with
burdens or determinants of the destiny of man and the universe was united with their
religious system and with their particular manner of conceiving the spatial structure of
the universe. This constitutes one of the most elaborate creations of the human mind in
its eternal desire to penetrate the secrets of existence.\footnote{Leon-Portilla 113.}

While there do not exist today uses or customs of Maya origin completely identical to those
practiced in pre-Columbian antiquity,\footnote{Ibid. 114.} there are significant traces of cultural survival evident in certain
areas of Mexico and Central America least acculturated by Spanish influence.\footnote{See Appendix: Figure 4.} According to Rojas,
ancient practices, conducted in these areas, show evidence of Maya activity that reflect a continuation from
pre-encounter to the present.

One aspect, for example, which "... makes the Maya community model unique ... is that they alone
seem to have hit upon a permutating time count as a kind of automatic device to circulate power among kin
groups of the primitive state ... The yearbearer's orientation determines even now the order of transmission
of political and religious powers among the chiefs of the districts or divisions in the community."\footnote{Coe 112.} These
pockets of humanity still reflect a great deal of the ancient philosophy in their daily lives. The ancient
knowledge of Time, with all of its ramifications, was incorporated into all aspects of the socio-religious and
political structure of the Maya community, and to this day offers confirmation of the universal incidence of
the essential time-space relationship.

Evan Z. Vogt points out that pre-Columbian survivals are specially obvious in respect to material
culture but also are noticeable in concepts which even today are present in their peculiar image of the
world.

All Maya today consider themselves Catholics (except for insignificant minorities here
and there which have joined Protestant churches), but this certainly does not mean that
their Catholicism has obliterated aboriginal cosmological ideas. We have found a
number of ancient Maya concepts about the nature of the universe and of the gods in
nearly every community in which the ethnographic research has been penetrating ...
The deification of important aspects of nature continues as a crucial feature of the religious symbolism: the sun, the moon, rain and maize are all prominent in most contemporary Maya belief systems. There are also usually one or more types of underworld earth gods. The sun is often associated with God in areas where Catholic influence is very strong in the theology. Even more common is an association of the Virgin Mary with the moon goddess, as in Zinacantan.\textsuperscript{86}

The Virgin Mary, in the personification of the ancient moon goddess, is believed to have introduced the skill of weaving to Maya women. Many secrets regarding symbolism are passed between generations, and many of these symbols relate to those present on the stelae and in the codices for the same or similar concepts.\textsuperscript{87}

Linda Schele recalls a wonderful story shared with her by Gene Stuart when she was writing her part of The Mysterious Maya. She had been working with Chip Morris, a specialist on weaving in the Chiapas highlands, about the tradition of weaving and the work of master Tzotzil weavers. In her article, she quoted Chip's description of a very special huipil:

> The weaver has created a huipil which describes the whole universe in a way so subtle that even fellow weavers won't notice, but so repetitious that the gods cannot help but see. She has described the complex relationship of time and space, and placed the gods of fertility in positions of power in order that all life may flourish. Later when she was talking to us about the sarcophagus (Pakal's tomb), she made the leap of understanding that linked the seventh-century tomb to the twentieth-century huipil. With excitement alight in her voice, she described the huipil to us and then said that Chip had asked the weaver why she had made the design so complicated, especially since no one could see the whole design when the huipil was worn and folded over at the waistband. "Ah ha!" the woman said. "God sees the pattern." In astonishment Gene realized that the woman placed herself at the center of the cosmos when she pulled the huipil over her head, just as Pakal put himself in the center of his orchard of ancestors. Both artists created messages with a complexity that exceeds casual comprehension. Both generated art works that were never meant to be seen full or at all - because their audiences were not human. Yet both put a person at the center of the cosmos, as if human comprehension of the subtle symmetry of the cosmos honored the gods who had created it.\textsuperscript{88}


\textsuperscript{87}www.artemaya.com/traje.html.

\textsuperscript{88}Schele and Mathews 125.
This phenomenon of creating art for the gods, and surrounding the body with that art is reminiscent of an earlier, yet similar, undertaking achieved in stone carving. Earlier in this paper we spent some time discussing several aspects of Palenque, and the tomb of Pakal. This tomb was covered with extraordinary carvings and glyphs that provided much of the information required to initiate a decoding of the glyphs in general. But, it was noted, not only by the original archeologists, but also by later anthropologists and ethnographers, that much of the information carved on the tomb would have been inaccessible to a viewer in such confined quarters. Here is an example of another artist exhibiting philosophy and technique that has survived the centuries, and even translated itself into another discipline. Expressions such as this are integral to many of the creative endeavors of these people - they are a part of their artistic heritage that is still performed to this day.

Another cultural survival reflecting ancient tradition and deification of nature involves weather. "Rain is believed to be controlled by various types of essentially aboriginal gods - for example, Yahval Balamil (the Earth Lord) in Zinacantan." Although Hunab-ku (the supreme god of the ancient Maya) has been replaced, at least in name, by the true God of the Christian faith, the chacs (benevolent spirits in charge of rainfall for the fields), although appearing to change their allegiance, continue to perform as a living reality in the worldview of contemporary indigenous groups. Natives in the Yucatan maintain, to this day, an inordinate fear of stepping on snakes in the night. In their attempts to avoid offending these manifestations of the honored and invaluable chacs, they instead stay close to their home fires during the night. (An interesting example of reliance on ancient religious belief systems, but could it also represent a socio-political way in which to control the population, and avoid types of human treachery that can occur in the darkened hours?)

Eight additional instances in which practices, customs and concepts dating from pre-Spanish antiquity are practiced today, and reflect the aboriginal concepts of time and space, are outlined below. By

*Vogt 599-600.*
examining the manner in which these practices have evolved into contemporary cultural patterns, and are currently communicated in cultural practice, we validate some significant aspects of the history translated from the original glyphs and codices. The incidents of cultural survival that I will explore include: the earth crocodile and the concept of space; the fourfold image of the universe; the corners of the world; the vertical dimension of the universe; the persistence of methods for measuring the passage of time; the computation of time, the gods and the rites; the burdens and fates of the days in the tzolkin, and; the cult of the yearbearer. In all instances the emphasis of my discussion will be upon the ways in which contemporary natives perform these aspects of their cultural heritage, rather than the fact that they are simply aware of it.

One of the oldest Maya concepts concerning the spatial image of the earth's surface was that of a monster with the jaws and claws of a crocodile, or with the form and head of a fantastic reptile or dragon. Among the Yucatec Maya, the supreme god Itzamna was usually conceived of as having the form of an alligator or, a serpent with two heads. Memory of it has endured until relatively recent times in which the Books of the Chilam Balam were still consulted. In the Perez Codex (1949: 231), which contains part of the Chilam Balam of Mani, there is a reference to the way the earth's surface was formed from the body of Itzam-Cab-Ain, the monstrous alligator. Apart from texts such as these, the mention of the earth-alligator and the peten, or province, region, district, or island his fragmentation created, is almost forgotten. At present Itzamna is not mentioned at all in the life and beliefs of the Yucatec Maya.

Further to the south, however, there is a specific instance of a cave, located high atop a mountain next to the lake of Petha, which has, at its entrance, a carved two-headed alligator, which the natives say was carved by the original inhabitant of the cave. Pilgrimages to this cave are conducted to this day. Natives perform rites deep in the interior of the cave, considered to be the home of Alligator-Great-God.

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90 John Pastore, ATZLAN @ULKYVM.LOUISIVILLE.EDU, January 29, 1999.
91 Viewing these cultural aspects form the point of view of the originators, rather than through the Western interpretation so far removed from the conceptual idea. The manner in which the early Spanish, or, in truth, contemporary historians, anthropologists and ethnographers have interpreted these phenomenon is of less importance to this study than the actual existence of the phenomenon themselves.
and use the depths of the cave as burial chambers for their dead, much as has been done for centuries. The bones of notable ancestors, found deep within this cave, are revered by the natives as sacred artifacts for a number of other ceremonial pursuits.

The *Mams*, deities of the underworld (gods representing mountains, valleys, thunder, lightening, rain, as well as fishing, hunting, and agriculture), closely resemble the *chaacs*, who have survived in the belief systems of the Yucatec Maya. They are said to resemble the great earth-crocodiles of ancient times. These gods, venerated in Belize, are consulted, for example, near the time of planting. Natives listen carefully, during ceremonies designed for this very purpose, for the interior rumblings of the earth, believed to be the movement of the *Mams*, in order to discern the start of the rainy season, and proper times for sowing to begin. These same natives advise these earth gods, "I am going to wound your breast", prior to turning the soil during the planting season.92

Contrasting with the idea of the monstrous earth-crocodile that forms the earth's surface, which has practically disappeared from the cosmogony of the modern Maya, there exists the concept of the fourfold image of the universe and its relationship to the ancient calendar as surviving elements throughout the entire Maya area. Contemporary Maya continue to have a fourfold vision of the world in which the terrestrial surface is divided into four great sectors that part from an imaginary center and extend toward the four points of the compass. Each of these has its own gods, colors, fates, and moreover, specific connections with the diverse cycles which form the aboriginal calendar.

A tangible consequence of this continuing belief may be found in the model corresponding to the layout of the home, the placement of the ancestral altar, the establishment of the hearth, the village, the cornfield, as well as in the ritual of diverse non-Christian ceremonies. To this day Maya homes and kin-group compounds, in many areas of Mesoamerica, are laid out in much the same way as they have been for centuries. *Xanil nah* (thatched house) is the name modern Yucatec Maya call the houses used by ordinary villagers and farmers. The Maya build these houses on platforms raised only slightly above ground level.
Four posts carried roof beams and determine the alignment of the structure. Stick walls enclosed a single room. They imitate the original template from which specialized architecture for political and religious ritual developed.

The triangular interior created by the slope of the interior beams is recreated in the arrangement of the three-stone hearth. All parts of the house have special terms associated with them, usually likening them to parts of the human body. Houses were and are living beings to the Maya. In their dedication rituals, the Maya, as their ancient predecessors, place offerings under the floors. These offerings contain materials defined as *k’utel*, the living soul-force that imbues the universe. Thus, in dedicating a house or building, the Maya give it a soul.  

Although a child’s umbilical cord is always buried in the hearth, and a still common way of asking a person’s place of birth is “Where is your cord buried?”, other monuments honoring ancestors are present in the home or compound. Family compounds, constructed of four houses around a central courtyard, usually have an ancestral shrine, reminiscent of the stelae constructed by the ancient Maya Lords in the plazas of the great cities, to energize their history and maintain the connection to their genealogy.

It was the custom in all the towns in Yucatan that there should be two heaps of stone, facing each other at the entrance of the town, on all four sides of the town, that is to say, at the East, West, North and South. These four entrances in modern times are thought of as the *four corners* of the villages. It is believed that four supernatural beings, called *balams*, arrive at nightfall and set themselves at each of the corners. Their function is that of guarding the quadrilateral formed by the village, preventing the entrance of malevolent spirits that might alter the well being of the inhabitants. In the center of the community is set a fifth *balam*, known as *thup* (little one), who, in spite of his small size, is considered to be the most powerful. These five supernatural protectors are called *balamob caob* (guardians of the town). Human

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92 Leon-Portilla 120-121.
93 Schele and Mathews 26.
94 Ibid. 26.
assistants, or, as we have seen in the past, humans who actually assume the personae and physical traits of
the gods, today assist the gods with their protective tasks. In the center of some remote communities one
can still see the great tree of abundance - the ancient tree of life, venerated today as it was in the past -
represented by the always green and leafy ceiba. The same idea is applied to the cornfield. *Balam col*
guardians of the cornfield) prevent the entrance of animals and adverse forces that could damage the crop.
Even today, farmers establish the *four corners* prior to seeding the field.

Many of the cultural survivals that remain are primarily concerned with material aspects of
cultural performance. Although metal tools, for example, have replaced original farming implements,
many of the old rites and beliefs still accompany agriculture, including the basic structure of the fields
themselves. In the ceremony of the *Chac-Chaac*, which takes place in the brush, natives ask for rain from a
four-sided rustic altar constructed of tree trunks representing the terrestrial plane. Embodiments of the four
great *chaacs* are created, as has always been the custom, through impersonation by native leaders. A fifth
positions himself some ten meters from the eastern gate. All these personages carry as the emblem of their
office, a wooden machete with which they pretend to produce lightning. They also carry a calabash filled
with water for sprinkling on the altar.

The most common function of the continued use of the ancient calendar, apart from its ceremonial
significance, relates to agricultural. A description of the activities associated with the various months of
the Tzeltal calendar in the Appendix, in order to demonstrate how the performance of daily life is still
conducted around the ancient calendric methods. The twenty-day periods, accompanied with their
equivalents in our calendar, indicate the tasks corresponding to each period or month, according to
information the natives of Yochib at Oxchue gave Rojas.

By reviewing this data, taken directly from Rojas' 1943-1944 field notes, we can see how a
contemporary culture still refers to the ancient calendar periods to help regulate their work. *Sanchez de*
Aguilar, grandson of conquerors and one of the first chroniclers of Yucatan, in referring to the same calendar states:

This count of the eighteen months plus the six canicular days (sic instead of five\textsuperscript{97}) is the same as our solar year of 365 days. It was highly useful to them, particularly for knowing the times in which to cut down the brush and burn it, and to await the rains, and to sow their wheat, maize and other legumes they sow at sundry times. And, as the tillers of Spain observe such and such days and say "Come October, make bread and cover," and other adages, thus, neither more nor less, was the usage and is the adage of these Indians in their sayings concerning these eighteen months and six canicular days for sowing and looking after their health and curing themselves, as we do in the Vernal, Estival, Autumnal, and Hibernal season.\textsuperscript{98}

In addition to using the ancient calendar to regulate their work, contemporary Maya demonstrate a faint reminiscence of a more complex ceremony to honor the gods presiding over the period or month of Chin-uch, by making offerings to him and entreaty him to care for the cornfields. This offering, today, is simple and held in private. Each family hangs, at the entrance of its hut, a small bundle of the following articles in reduced size: a ball of pozol (dough) wrapped in a banana leaf, a red chili (saja-ich), a tortilla, an ear of maize, and a small stick similar to those used for planting and later for removing ears of corn from the fire when toasted. This offering must be made on any of the five days preceding the beginning of the month or, at the latest, on the first day of Chin-uch. If it is made later it is useless since it reveals that the farmer did not know how to comply adequately with his religious obligations. No prayer is said; it is sufficient to hang up the bundle.

In connection with this rite, the indigene anxiously await the passing of this month, for, if on the last day a sort of smoke appears in the atmosphere, it is believed that “Chin-uch burned its house” and that, as a result, there will be sufficient sun for good growth in the cornfields. If the smoke does not appear, the future becomes ominous because there will be too much moisture and the crop may fail. Although Rojas' group attempted to clarify the meaning of the phrase “Chin-uch burned its house”, they found that the

\textsuperscript{97}Error made due to Western method of calculating the day as beginning at midnight versus the Maya method of considering the day to begin at noon.

\textsuperscript{98}Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, \textit{Informe contra Idolorum Cultores} (trans.) (Merida: 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition, 1937), 142-143.
natives could not give them more details. It could refer to the ancient custom, shown on many occasions in the various codices, of burning the temple house of the god at the top of the pyramids as a sign of surrender or victory in battle, and is one more trace of cultural survival to add to our list.

Closely related to these and other factors intimately related to human destinies, contemporary Maya continue to consult the burden corresponding to the diverse dates of the aboriginal calendar to help maintain the static position of their quadrant guardians, for it is believed that the slightest movement out of quadrant of any of the balams, guarding the home, village, cornfield, or altar, will produce tremors and earthquakes.

Akin to the balam, but of a significantly different purpose, are the exact positions known as the corners of the world. The importance awarded these geographic points is related to the support and balance of the heavens, and continues to be honored to this day. Located at spots corresponding to the positions of the sun at its extremes (as demonstrated by positions occupied on the summer and winter solstices), these positions, when connected, form a rectangle rather than a square - the intercardinal points. Even today there are traces among some indigenous group of a preoccupation with the extreme points marked by the sun at seasonal changes. The sun's passage through the zenith is the subject of great interest to the Tzeltal Indians of Chiapas since it lends support to their contention that their land occupies the center of the world. The Mams of Guatemala share a common belief, and both groups have constructed churches that enjoy specific periods during which the sun rests for a while directly above it as a way of honoring these intercardinal points.

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100 See Appendix: Table 2.
The sacred capital of X-cacal, in the southeast of Yucatan, in which a *talking cross* was venerated, was oriented in a highly significant manner, according to Rojas in his essay on space and time among the contemporary Maya:

Generally the natives called the place *Santo Cah* (sacred town) instead of X-cacal, its proper name. The principal temple there, built of palms, wattle, and daub, occupied the center of a large plaza. Next to it was a large edifice of the same material, used for public meetings, feasts, and large communal gatherings. In its function, it was very similar to the *Popol-na* (town hall) of the ancient Maya villages in which, according to the *Motul Dictionary*, the people gathered to discuss issues of common interest or to practice dances for the village fiestas. These two buildings were enclosed within an imaginary square of fifty meters per side, the corners of which were indicated by four crosses on top of small mounds of stone. The space thus delineated was protected in this way from evil winds and other adverse elements that roam the world. These four crosses correspond to the intermediate points on the compass. Upon inquiry about the meaning of that spatial distribution, the native priests informed us that the church and the crosses around it were ordered according to the model established by God when he set up the first holy place here on earth. The central point (now occupied by the temple) was called *Xunan-Cah* (Virgin village) because the altar of the virgin had been there. The points where the crosses were presently located received the respective names of *Belem-Cah* (Bethlehem-village), *Cah-Paraiso* (Paradise-village), *Cah-Jerusalem* (Jerusalem-village) and *Xocen-Cah* (Saint Joseph-village).

The ancient cosmic pattern of five points, as well as the guidance of the old gods in their description of the first holy place, is perceptible here, though mingled with Catholic ideas and beliefs. The Maya cross is the physical representation of this cosmic concept as manifested in the World Tree - it is not a Christian symbol, but a direct descendent of the *Yaaxche*, the tree that demands water in order to flourish - the tree of life. This symbolism is also represented in the crosses we see in their dwelling or huts, and has often been confused with Christian symbology.

Raphael Girard recorded data based on information obtained from an indigenous Chorti priest in which he noted that even today Chorti priests record the movements of the sun in order to establish the points of the solstice with precision. Villagers construct stone markers at the corresponding corners of the town to then indicate each angle of the world where the sun pauses, thus showing the limits of the cosmic
plane. The idea that the Maya took both the cardinal and the intermediate points into consideration, as shown through contemporary sources, is defined through glyphic design in both the Dresden Codex and the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, among other early sources.

Another Maya spatial concept, now beginning to emerge from ethnographic studies, recognizes only two cardinal points, east and west, while north and south are merely said to be the sides of heaven.

This concept of *the route of our Divine Father*, according to the natives (of Chenalo and Zinacantan, Chiapas) has a structural replica in the meal accompanying some ceremonies. The meal must be served on a long table, rectangular in form and oriented precisely along the east-west axis. On the end corresponding to the east is placed a bottle of liquor to indicate that this is the head of the table. The other end is left bare. The partakers of the meal may only occupy the remaining sides corresponding to the *sides of heaven*.

This idea seems to hold considerable importance since it is also found in isolated places in Guatemala.

These aspects of the surviving Maya groups concerning horizontal space are only beginning to be known. A greater amount of information will be required in order to grasp all its implications.

When investigating trace remnants of the ancient concepts of the vertical structure of the universe, two cosmological visions have endured to the present, and contemporary ethnographers have encountered them among various groups in both the lowland and the highland areas. Images from *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya* quickly illustrate these concepts.

Each of the celestial floors noted on the drawing in Figure 5 of the Appendix is governed by a special group of gods. In contemporary interpretations of this symbol system, the Christian God resides on the top level (read: renaming of classic Maya supreme god or sun symbol). The other levels, from the top down, are ruled as follows: sixth floor, Great Lords of the Rain; fifth floor, Guardians of the cornfields and the Guardians of the woods; fourth level are the Protectors of animals; on the two levels immediately below dwell the four gods of the wind (each designated according to his corresponding cardinal point). On the first plane above earth level are the *Yum-balamob*, gods who protect the Christians; it is said that there are...
four of them located at the Cardinal points. Apparently the souls of the dead climb up these ceiba branches, or scale ladders made of vines, according to their merits. In addition, suicide victims were not always relegated to the area below the earth level, but were at one time considered worthy of taking their place upon one of the heavenly levels.

Much can be said of the ceiba tree, because this tree had, and still has great mystical significance. It is said, in the Chilam Balam, to provide the support for the four cardinal points of the terrestrial world, and also occupies a position of importance at the center point. It is believed to be the first tree of the world, and the tree of life, and was endowed with great powers against demons. We must remember that the Maya cross is representative of this tree.

The ceiba is a tree that grows in all the village plazas within sight of the town hall. And under it they elect their mayors. And they offer it incense in braziers, and they believe firmly that their lineage came out of the roots of the ceiba and thus they have painted it on a most ancient canvas.\textsuperscript{104}

The world tree is in many ways a universal symbol, one worshipped extensively in the Northern Europe of the Middle Ages, which carried over into the Christian rites of the Spanish at the time of the initial contacts. This symbol may have been one that the Spanish clerics found more comprehensible than many other Maya symbols, for it is evident that in their efforts to understand their subjects, they made numerous references to the Maya use of the cross. It is now apparent, however, that they confused the Maya reference to the four corners of the world, and the raised up sky of the central tree, with their own Christian symbolism.

The stepped or pyramidal version of the heavens and the underworld, as shown in Figure 6 of the Appendix, is currently in use in such communities as Tzotzil of Larrain, Chiapas, and anthropologist William R. Holland has obtained information regarding its significance directly from local natives themselves:

\textsuperscript{104}\textsuperscript{Nunez de la Vega, Constituciones diocesanas del Obispado de Chiapas Roma: 1701), 9.}
In the mind of the Tzotzil the earth is the center of the universe, being a square, level surface, held up by a bearer in each corner. This people envision the sky as a mountain with thirteen steps, six on the eastern side, six on the western, with a thirteenth in the middle forming the summit of the heavens. From below, the heavens resemble a dome or an upside down vessel placed on the surface of the earth. A gigantic ceiba rises from the center of the world toward the heavens. Imagined from outside of the earth, the heavens are an enormous pyramid or mountain. This concept of the mountain of the heavens is symbolized many times in the ancient codices. Under the earth is located the lower world, olontik, the abode of the dead. Life is a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil.  

Stepped pyramids were often constructed with each step representing a heavenly plane. The highest level, where the stone of sacrifice stood, corresponded to the hour of the zenith or midday. On the feast of the sun, a man who represented the sun itself ascended the eastern steps slowly until he arrived at the level of the zenith. He was then sacrificed. Fray Diego Durán, who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century, has left a record of this ceremony in the following paragraphs:

On the next day a second feast was celebrated by the warriors and knights of the sun, called Cuacuahcin, that is to say “eagles”. This was the feast of the sun, Nahui-Ollin, “four motion”, during which a man painted red was sacrificed in the name of the sun. They handed him a staff and shield, and placed on his back a bag filled with pieces of red ochre and soot, together with eagle feathers, paper and many other things. These were the messages he was to carry to the sun, reminding the Lord of Created Things that his warriors still served him and thanked him for the great benefits with which he had favored them in their wars ... The victim, carrying the bag of gifts to the sun together with the staff and shield, slowly began to climb the steps of the pyramid. In this assent he represented the course of the sun from east to west. As soon as he reached the summit and stood in the center of the Great Sun Stone, which represented noon, the sacrificers approached the captive and opened his chest. Once the heart had been wrenched out, it was offered to the sun and blood sprinkled toward the solar deity. Imitating the descent of the sun in the west, the corpse was toppled down the steps of the pyramid.

There are still small wooden pyramids, of the type representing the solar steps, to be found among the modern Huichol of Western Mexico. They are placed in temples on special festive occasions.

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106 See Appendix: Figure 6.
Also in Huichol, the tzolkin, or 260-day count, and the idea of the *yearbearers* continue to govern the destinies of the people. In one of the most interesting and pervasive survivals, also evident in the Yucatan, we note the ancient custom of counting the day starting at noon, and not at midnight as is done in the West. The natives of Chan Kom, for example, begin their work in the cornfields at midday on Sunday, since they consider that it is already Monday. The Indians there, although consulting a Catholic almanac in order to know the saint's day on which a child had been born, and thus to give him a name, insisted that the name of a baby born after the hour on noon should be corresponding to the next day. In present times the inhabitants of Tusik in the Yucatan, of the Tzeltal and Tzotzil speakers of Chiapas, the Mixe of Oaxaca, as well as some of the Ixil of Nebaj, Guatemala, follow the same pattern.

The *chay kin*, meaning the *fiesta is lost*, or the five extra days (which make up the 365 day count) are still considered unfortunate - times for staying at home in order to avoid accidents or encounters with underworld beings - and are also still recognized in these areas.

Although some forms of expression have changed, altered with time, the ancient attitude toward the temporal dimension of human existence continues to operate as a determinant factor at all levels of daily life. In Guatemala the ancient calendar forms are so greatly preserved that it has come to be called the "land inhabited by the yearbearers' men". It is from this isolated region of central Guatemala - specifically the municipalities of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chapul - that the best opportunities for study of the survival of the ancient Maya calendar with its wealth of rites, beliefs, ceremonies, and divinatory practices which exercise such a profound influence on the life and fate of the natives, can be studied.

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109 Villa Rojas 143-144.
J. Steward Lincoln, the author of a remarkable work, *The Maya Calendar of the Ixil of Guatemala*, died before he was able to finalize his draft, but J. Eric S. Thompson, the foremost authority in this field, realized the task. The following is a quotation from Lincoln's original text:

This chronological register, which preserves many old Maya and old Quiche features not found in other current calendars, is not only a measure of annual solar time, with the exception of the leap-year calculations, but a religious, ceremonial, and divine director of man's destiny. It controls his daily life in the spheres of worship, agriculture, domestic and social relationships; and influences his behavior in connection with birth, love, death, and livelihood. The days, which are also deities to which he prays, exert favorable and unfavorable influences on all his activities. Although some of the features of this ancient calendar are almost lost, it still endures as the core of the Indian religion/way of life after 400 years of Spanish effort to suppress native custom, and in spite of the fact that the Gregorian calendar now marks the Catholic holidays, which follow a separate cycle from the native calendar celebrations.\(^{112}\)

Further data accumulated by Lincoln outlines the 260-day, fundamentally ceremonial and divinatory calendar, showing each day's *burden*, good or evil, believed to affect the destiny of human beings. A compilation of meanings and corresponding burdens recognized by the contemporary Ixil at the time of his study is shown in the Appendix.\(^{113}\) The Ixil attribute the greatest importance to the days noted there in bold type. These *yearbearers* hold the most meaning for the natives and are the recipient of numerous ceremonies. Furthermore, the natives always show deep interest in these particular divinities when having the calendar diviners and priests solve an enigma or special problem. The questions most frequently heard refer to: the identity of the day - the fate of the same, the *nagual* (animal companion) which corresponds to a child born on that date; the diagnosis of an illness; seasons for sowing, harvesting, and performing other tasks in the cornfield; days favorable for an ill person to confess to his family (an ancient soul-cleansing ritual performed with a family member in private prior to death); whether a trip will be lucky or not, as well as other problems. Sometimes the specialist uses some red beans or fragments of rock crystal for his divinations. Depending on the attributes of each day, the specialist may also disclose


\(^{113}\) See Appendix: Table 2
the particular fortune corresponding to each person; thus, someone born on the day *Aj* (reed) will be poor; those born on the day *Tehii* (dog) will be lustful and sinful, and so on.\textsuperscript{114} 

Rojas further defines the significance of the cult of these highlighted yearbearers:

... the name of *yearbearers* is given to those days with which the *haab* or 365-day year, can begin ... there are only four, and among the Ixil they are called *E*, *Nof*, *Ik*, and *Teche*. When the year commences there is a grand celebration in honor of its *bearer*. Because of the structure of the calendar the same yearbearer day name must appear 260 days later. Then another solemn feast will take place. The latter are the two most important yearly celebrations. The ceremonies are begun after sunset on the day preceding the *haab* date, since the natives consider this the first hour of the day ... In Nebaj, the principal Ixil town, many of the yearbearer ceremonies occur in front of the crosses distributed toward the four cardinal points of the four corners of the world. At each of these points there is a cross placed atop an archeological mound. These four sites are ordered in a rigid hierarchy, according to the following list:

1. *Tii Cajal*: "In front of the mound where blood flows."
2. *Tii Cuishal*: "In front of the mound where they danced."
3. *Cuchulchim*: "Where the kings assembled in ancient times."
4. *Chaxbatz*: "The green monkeys."\textsuperscript{115}

... In front of these mounds, the ceremonies corresponding to the yearbearers are held by turn. Thus to cite a case observed in 1939, the first day of the year corresponded to the day *E*, for which the ceremonies were celebrated in front of the most important mound, *Tii Cajal*. The other three potential yearbearers, inactive in that year, had their respective ceremonies in front of the mounds as follows: *Noh* in front of the cross of *Tii Cuishal*; *Ik* before the cross of *Cuchulchim*; and *Teche* in front of the cross of *Chaxbatz*. The following year they jumped one place, and *Noh* came to occupy the site of *Tii Cajal*, *Ik* that of *Tii Cuishal*, and *Teche* that of *Cuchulchim*, leaving the last place to the bearer *E*. As is obvious, in the course of four years, the rotation is complete ... There also exists among the Ixil, although with little vitality, memory of the fifty-two-year cycle intimately connected with the concept of the yearbearers. It must be remembered that each yearbearer advances one place each year. As the yearbearers are four, four periods of thirteen years go by accompanied by as many numerals, thus giving origin to the fifty-two-year cycle well known in Central America.\textsuperscript{116}

In addition to the material affecting the personal performance of the contemporary Maya native (those indicators of agricultural, socio-political, divination and mysticism), which continue to manifest

\textsuperscript{114}In a list of days collected by Harry and Lucille McArthur (pp. 33-38) in Aguacatan (near the Ixil) will be found a more detailed description of the fortune associated with each day and its corresponding ceremonies.

\textsuperscript{115}It is unfortunate that the cardinal direction corresponding to each cross and mound are not indicated in this study, but I would venture an educated guess that 1 is east; 2, north; 3, west; and 4, south, based on the previously noted importance of the various directions from the Maya perspective.
themselves in ritual, ceremonial, and daily personal performance, it is also interesting to investigate some
current examples of traditionally defined theatrical performance. These performances also relate back to
the original concepts of the ancient Maya, and demonstrate the Maya notion of personification of time
deities, as easily as humans, in the conducting of their lives.

Among the plays performed in Mayan communities since the European invasion, there is one
whose characters and plot belong entirely to pre-Columbian times. This play is one of a very few whose
dialogue is entirely in a Mayan language, rather than in Spanish. The language is Quiche, which has a
million speakers today, and the play is Xajoj Tun, Dance of the Trumpets, also known as Rab 'inal Achi,
Man of Rabinal. It has only recently been translated into English.

In the 17th century, when plays with the same plot as this one were popular in Maya communities,
missionaries tried to forbid them. By the mid-19th century, only one example survived, in a mountain
valley north of Guatemala City. There, in the town of Rabinal, the play still sees occasional performances.
The main characters are two warriors, one of whom is taken prisoner by the other, and a lord who has the
captor in his service and presides over the sacrifice of the captive. The man who is captured is Man of
Quiche, called Cawek of the Forest People in the dialogue, and his captor is Man of Rabinal, who serves
and protects Lord Five Thunder. The other characters who speak, briefly, are a man slave and woman slave
in the court of Lord Five Thunder. Also present at his court are his Lady, who sits beside him, and a
maiden called Mother of Quetzal Feathers and Mother of Glistening Green, who stands at his side and later
dances. In the courtyard before Lord Five Thunder and the two women are Golden Eagle and Golden
Jaguar, who dance with the captive and then sacrifice him. Other dancers may include as many as 20
warriors and slaves.

Lord Five Thunder rules from a fortress on Red Mountain, near the eastern frontier of the ancient Quiche
kingdom. His people are members of the Rabinal nation, long-time allies of the Quiche nation, and he
owes fealty to that nation. Their capital is a city called Quiche Mountain, Quiche Valley, at the center of
the kingdom. Both the fortress and capital are ruins today, one on a hilltop immediately north of the town
of Rabinal, and the other on the western edge of the town of Santa Cruz del Quiche.

Villa Rojas 158-159.
The tragic twist of the plot is that the characters are put in a position of having to sacrifice a warrior who was sent originally to save them from their enemies. That warrior is Cawek, born into the nobility only to become a landless renegade. Man of Rabinal, the captor, was awarded his own noble title and land for distinguished military service. Lord Five Thunder muses that if things had gone differently, Cawek might have been a suitable husband for his maiden daughter. Among the last requests he grants Cawek is to dance with her before the court.

Cawek admits his mistakes, but is defiant to the end, raising the specter of revenge by subtly likening him and the maiden to characters in a myth. Here the play links up with the sacred Quiche book known as the Popol Vuh, which tells the story of an avenging hero whose father (read: Cawek) was sacrificed by an evil lord (read: Five Thunder) and whose mother (read: the maiden) was the lord's own daughter.\(^{117}\)

Bartolo Ziz of Rabinal dictated the play's script, first published in 1862, to Brasseur de Bourbourg in 1856. Ziz knew the entire play from memory, but it later turned out that he possessed a manuscript, which has since been lost, written in Quiche (using the Roman alphabet) at some time during the colonial period. Dennis Tedlock's translation is based on Brasseur's text, on a more recent handwritten copy produced in Rabinal, and on Tedlock's own tape recordings of recitations by Jose Leon Coloch, who produces the play in Rabinal and teaches the actors their parts.

Although not strictly of Maya origin, I felt it interesting to include a brief review of a book, Holy Wednesday, by Louise M. Burkhart, that shows the use of reinterpretation of Christian text into the language and sensibilities of the not-too-distant Aztecs. It is hoped that similar translations were being accomplished by the Maya clerics, as the philosophies of the Catholics and the Maya collided, and that we will be fortunate enough to discover extant examples. The fact that we do have extant examples of so many attempts at fusion and redistribution of the Catholic saints to accommodate the structure of the existing Maya pantheon, would lead us to believe that similar interpretations would be made regarding Catholic theatrical texts from within the Maya community.

About seventy years after the conquest of Mexico, a native scholar recast a Spanish Holy Week play in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. Like its extant Spanish model, the Nahuatl text dramatizes Christ's departure from Mary on the Wednesday before his crucifixion. But the Nahuatl version is a far different play from its European model - a nativist document written by a master of oral-poetic style, a much-expanded work that subtly revises the message of Christ's Passion to fit the author's own aesthetic sensibilities and his interpretations of Christian teachings.

\(^{117}\) Pat Donovan, buffalo.edu/news, March 20, 1998.
Identified only in 1986, the Nahuatl Holy Week play is the earliest known dramatic script in any Native American language (other than The Man of Rabinal noted earlier). In *Holy Wednesday*, Louise Burkhart presents side-by-side English translations of the Nahuatl play and its Spanish source. An accompanying commentary analyzes the differences between the two versions to reveal how the native author altered the Spanish text to fit his own aesthetic sensibility and the broader discursive universe of the Nahua church. A richly detailed introduction places both works and their creators within the cultural and political contexts of sixteenth-century Mexico and Spain.

(Considered by many academic reviewers to be) the most in-depth analysis of a Nahua-Christian text ever published, Burkhart’s *Holy Wednesday* explores both the art of translation and the process of evangelization under Spanish rule. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to witness, as if from within, an early moment of colonialization and cultural appropriation.\(^\text{118}\)

It would be unworthy to imply that the Maya use of performance during this late period was merely for educational, religious, or sociological use. This population had always been extremely fond (if records on the stelae, in the codices, and also post-Columbian indigenous documents are to be believed) of a rather biting form of satire. They employed groups of comedians, as well as jugglers and acrobats, for the enjoyment of both the noble and common classes. The utilization of this alternative form of performance allowed the populace to view their world from a variety of philosophical positions, noting the reality expressed by both, and emphasizing the need for balance in their existence. De Landa was to address this comic aspect of Mayan culture in his treatise of 1633:

> These Indians have very agreeable amusements, and especially have players who act with a great deal of wit ... The Spaniards hire them for no other reason than that they may see the jokes of the Spaniards which pass between them and their maidservants, their husbands or their own people upon the manner of serving well or ill, and afterwards they act this with as much skill as clever Spaniards ... they have especially two dances which are very manly and worth seeing ... they also sing their fables and ancient lore.\(^\text{119}\)

The Maya seem to have maintained their ancient gift for light-hearted mimicry and biting satire in performance. This use of humor and satire was highly evident in other of their later dealings with their Spanish conquerors per Matthew Restall in his discussion of the *creative record keeping* of Spanish-trained Maya clerics. (Records, by the way, that Farriss lists as primary sources.) This unique sense of humor is evident in many indigenous cultures of the Americas to this day. Why should we assume, as we

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contemplate cultural survivals (or collapse), that they lost other, more important, skills and philosophies of their former way of life that originated in the decades they lived unencumbered with European invaders?

In a final example of Maya traditional theater, community members still perform themselves every Wednesday, for the edification of Western tourists, in the small chickle gum community of San Juan, in the Yucatan. Detecting the arrival of newcomers on the border of their dense jungle, traditional watchmen (with conch shells ablare) signal the incoming van, with its tourist guests, to a halt. From the head of the path a community member appears to announce Co 'onexx - "follow me". Visitors are led through the Yucatan jungle, along a well prepared path which surveys the community's domain, to a community of individuals who, for the next several hours, perform themselves, and communicate their culture, via this intensely theatrical, and yet undeniably truthful, method. The tourists witness ceremony, the creation of visual and spatial art, and the manner in which the Maya educate their young - their specialists. They witness traditional farming techniques, recreational aspects of story-telling, manufacture and trade, all against the resonant background of the white noise of the jungle itself. Language barriers are overcome by the vivid use of other performance devices such as movement, gesture, vocalization techniques, costuming, make-up, lighting and spatial manipulations, music, dance, visual art, and so forth. Following a meal, provided by the actors, and symbolic of the sacrifice and honoring of gods celebrated through feasting and fiesta to this day, these tourists are allowed to ask brief questions before they retire to their van for the trip back to their vacation residences.

Termed Wilderness Theater by Venture-Out, the eco-tourism group who discovered (?) and promote the concept in the Yucatan, this event offers tourists the drama of Maya life within real time, real space. The tourist audience agrees that their perceptions of this ancient culture have been enormously expanded beyond the traditional worded texts that we traditionally consider a tourist's primary sources of information regarding history, ethnography, anthropology, the humanities.

119 Tozzer 93.
We tend to refer to this type of performance as Performance Art - life itself as theater - but the
difference rests in our Western belief system and our inability to interconnect all aspects of our lives into a
cognizant whole. We perform parallel lines - the Maya perform living cycles. Ours begin and end. The
Maya version is limitless.

In addition to these examples of local theatrical performance, an extraordinary contemporary
Mexican indigenous theater company, called Coatlicue Theater Co., now based in New York City, is only
one of many contemporary indigenous groups interested in developing links with Chicano study centers,
activists, and students around the country. The group's performances, although based primarily in Aztec
mythology, mix traditional stories from all around Central and Latin America with contemporary issues, in
provocative and unexpected ways. Groups such as this continue the tradition of communication of culture
through performance venues, producing work appropriate for theaters, conferences and classrooms.
Although they do not represent encompassing theater as described for the pre-Columbian Maya, they do
represent an example of a revival of ancient stories, albeit in a modern genre, that formed the basis for the
ancient's way of life. Coatlicue Theater Co. has enjoyed critical success, as well as many performance
awards, with its original theatrical productions: Chicomoztoc-Mimixcoa-Cloud Serpents; A Traditional
Kind of Woman - Too Much, Not Nuff; Open Wounds on Tlaltecutli; 1992: Blood Speaks; and, Huipil.

The preceding examples of cultural performance survivals and theatrical efforts demonstrate some
of the most relevant aspects of the continued use of the aboriginal calendar, and its far-reaching
ramifications for humanity, as demonstrated among modern Maya peoples. They show, in addition, a wide
variety of ways in which the contemporary Maya have clung to the ancient concepts, guiding them in their
quest for the meaning through the exploration and expansion of the original idea of time and its physical
impersonations, as a basic reality at the foundation of all Maya thought. The ancient wisdom of the Maya
was not totally destroyed; the revelations of time are still tied to the destiny of man.
DID A SYNTHESIS OF THE MAYA AND SPANISH CULTURES EVER OCCUR?

In order to effect a social change, the old values must be replaced or destroyed and either new values set up or an open space of no values created for the wind to blow through. This destruction of old values is The Revolution of Cultures.

Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Paradise Now, The Living Theater

The Past and the Other, two of humanity's, and history's, main preoccupations, present significant problems for the artist/historian. The Past renders significant what has happened as a daily, seasonal, celebratory, generational activity, done in private and in public, personally, institutionally, and socially. The concept of the Other marks the boundaries of difference, while constantly defining self, role, class, culture. History, in this context, divides young and old, living and dead, human and divine, native and stranger. No one, individually, socially, culturally is without a signified Past or a signified Other. But both the Past and the Other are more than present. They are presented in the dramaturgies of our inventions.

It is, by this point, clear the variant paths a culture's histories may take - the meanings that may be derived from phenomenon as viewed through differing sets of eyes. Western capability for understanding the ancient Maya culture could be compared to a human observing activity from across a wide canyon. Western sensibilities (with its inherent roadblocks along such important philosophical avenues as those marking the separation of the sciences from the artistic/religious) are viewing, albeit from afar, a culture in which the two were supremely joined in all aspects of historical truth. The realization has confounded scholars in their attempts to describe and define the cultural synthesis of the two when they collided across that sandy Yucatan beach in the early sixteenth century. Is it philosophically/genetically possible to wed the two? Or do they remain parallel ideologies that are not fusible?

Western man may as well have traveled to another galaxy for the alien mind set and worldview he encountered on that day in 1517 when he ventured onto what would become known as the North American shore in search of potable water and encountered an Other civilization. The Maya, in turn, whose culture
(and that of all indigenous Americans) had evolved along a completely different religio-scientific path than that of the Western visitors, were equally confounded by the strange beings confronting them.

Columbus and his entourage arrived in the Americas on the back of Western science, at the very point at which it was inaugurating its schism with traditional religious thought. In the explorers' attempt to prove that the world was round, they sailed west to locate the east in great ships designed to combat the natural forces of wind and water - space and time - in one of many physical attempts to disprove the tenets of the Church they maintained they represented. The warriors and colonizers took full advantage of their superior technological position. Their sciences had already provided them with advanced weaponry, additional mathematical capabilities and technical equipment, established social structures with which to subdue the natives.

These early visitors to the New World were the product of their time, intent on forcing the spiritual envelope: on the one hand, elevating the deity (or denying him, if necessary) by acquiring some comprehension of the natural rules of order required for their journeys and the successful operation of their war machine; and, on the other hand, preserving and expanding the Catholic domination in world religion. In doing so they encouraged the schism, unwittingly begun by the Jews, and continued by the Greeks, of elevating man - celebrating the great separation between scientific thought and the sensibilities of the arts and spirituality. At the same time, the visiting clergy held to time-honored Western religious concepts that denied, in part, the very technologies that cleared the path for them in their conversion efforts.

Before we can attempt to construct a rough bridge - before we can forge some manner of goat track down the side of this cultural canyon - we must approach, once more, for a clearer view, the manner in which these isolated American cultures had achieved what so many of us seek to this day within Western ideology, and how they interacted with the Spanish representatives of that ideology during the period of initial contact, conquest and colonialism.

Western society tends to look at the Maya system of cultural stratification as a feudal arrangement - a peasant class which provides the bulk of the labor and goods, and an elite, who manage by one means or
another to elicit a surplus from the peasantry to support themselves and a small number of dependents who serve them in specialized ways. The Maya did not appear to have judged their system, at its height or at the time of the initial contacts, in this way.

If examined objectively, the remnants of this great society - the cah - and its particular structure and function, does much to alter initial Western concepts regarding the foundations and unique characteristics of Maya culture. The cah, representative and indicative of the Maya concept of reciprocity and collectivity, continued to function, if not flourish, during the initial exposure to, and eventual colonial period, under Spanish rule. It can be assumed that the Maya of the Yucatan, possessing the worldview that their cultural heritage had provided, expected a similarly reciprocal relationship with their propheced Spanish visitors - and it can be acknowledged that they were sorely disappointed.

Nancy Farriss, among other Latin American scholars, addresses the Indian question, at the time of first contacts and during early colonialism, from the point of view of a historical ethnographer. Her Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival (1984) explores the native world of Yucatan, Mexico from late preconquest times through the end of colonial Spanish rule (ca. 1500-1820) in a comprehensive fashion which addresses a wide variety of vantage points. She examines political evolution among the indigenes as it bears on issues of class, revolution, cultural authenticity, and national identity, and demonstrates an incorporation of ecology and modes of subsistence into the resulting social forms and belief systems. She joins Gonzalez Casanova (1965), Warman (1981), and Wasserstrom (1983) in making these issues central to her study, showing the practices and beliefs of a modern Indian society in the Yucatan as representing the evolution of culture based on pre-colonial ideology, ramifications of conquest and cultural synthesis, and instances of resistance.

Other historians, such as Matthew Restall (1997), criticize her sources as non-representative of the culture in question, since she prefers to rely on Spanish accounts rather than mine the layers of written work produced by the Maya themselves.120

120Matthew Restall, The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550-1850 (Stanford: Stanford
... this problem of approach (maintaining a Spanish approach to source material) has been acknowledged - most notably by Inga Clendinnen and Nancy Farriss - as a methodological challenge posed by the use of Spanish-language colonial documentary sources to reconstruct certain aspects of the Maya historical experience. Recognizing that Spanish texts treat the Maya as "objects", these scholars have attempted to reinterpret the sources emphasizing the Maya as "subjects" - that is, scholar's subjects ... The results of this reinterpretation are mixed. Clendinnen sets out to present both Spanish and Maya viewpoints of the conquest, but she focuses her discussion on Diego de Landa and his persecution of the Maya in the 1560's, using Spanish-language sources ... (leaving her Maya section considerably shorter than her Spanish one in her) attempt to analyze Maya viewpoints without the support of Maya-language sources ... Similarly, Farriss' monumental monograph, although it does come much closer to the Maya, especially on religious matters, is partly defined by her reliance upon Spanish (especially ecclesiastical) sources ... Both scholars recognized the limits of the Spanish interpretations: Clendinnen concluded that what characterized Spanish-Maya contact was a lack of mutual understanding; Farriss remarked that the "Spanish observed only part of what the Indians were up to, and understood even less." These conclusions may also be a reflection of how far our understanding of post-conquest Maya society has to go ... Farriss succeeded in doing for the Yucatan what Gibson had done for the Valley of Mexico, and just as Gibson left for Lockhart the opportunity to approach the same subject from an indigenous perspective, so did Farriss provide future scholars with a similar opportunity. Farriss' work is Gibsonian in scope, in its historiographical significance and in its comprehensive attention to every aspect of the indigenous experience under colonial rule ... regardless of whether new evidence confirms, qualifies, or contradicts her conclusions.

Farriss presents the Spanish explorer, Catholic priest and Conquistador juxtaposed against a crumbling Maya culture (an initial point of view which is currently being questioned by some scholars, including Restall). The individualism emphasized in the Spanish way of life (as interpreted through its religious dogma, as well as its very human use of technology) clashed head-to-head with the community within time which was the over powering worldview of the Maya. Nationalistic spirit, the belief in land and capital as wealth, and the belief in their own ethnic superiority, influenced the activities of the Spaniards in the New World.

The importance of specific ecological influences, as demonstrated earlier, affected the Maya cultural evolution. The Yucatan itself provided few products that the Spanish would have deemed of exportable value when compared to the vast amounts of gold and silver available from the Valley of Mexico. From the beginning the value of the area seemed more that of a staging area for war and conquest
of the interior than for anything producible on its own. The area's main resource, beyond the mere expanse of soil, was its humanity and conversion possibilities. Therefore, the Church became the primary mover and shaker in the Yucatan.

The colonial Maya were seen as primitive communities - small groups of family related individuals pursuing a relatively autonomous existence. Their initial stance of implied military superiority (propaganda?) is the result of their many years of conflict resolution and warfare between communities, predicated on the need for resources, labor, and sacrificial victims, rather than wealth in land. But their subsequent actions of relatively non-violent surrender may have been predicated upon their historical belief system and the proclamations of their various priests and diviners. These groups, divided by kinship and local cultural attributes, lacked the nationalistic spirit required to militarily defeat even the small number of technologically superior Spanish. In many ways their very cultural beliefs, and inherited performance heritage, defeated them from the onset, and changes called for later were thus more difficult to achieve.

The traditional tendency of colonial Yucatec historiography to treat the Maya as a hidden and silent culture, devastated to the point of anomie by the conquest - after which they sullenly harbored thoughts of resistance and revenge for three centuries - is rooted, however, in the perspective of the colonizers themselves. The Spaniards, in imposing their worldview and religious beliefs upon the indigenous people of the Yucatan, created what might have appeared to be a consensual arrangement. The apparent simplicity and timidity of the natives allowed the Spaniards and their Church to create a work force for themselves, extract tribute, and foster their own religious and cultural beliefs. While the native Maya initially appear to accept these conditions as a matter of fact for a defeated culture (as viewed historically and through their means of divination), they were able to maintain vestiges of their former cultural construction.

\[12\] Ibid. 7-8.
Nancy Farriss has suggested that the parish unit was "the one exception to the total fragmentation of Maya society into separate and equal communities." Restall argues for a slightly different emphasis, based on three considerations:

First, the traditional centrality of the cah as a socio-political unit and the lack of evidence for well-developed multi-cah units before the conquest suggests greater continuity, calling into question any "total fragmentation" ... Second, the cabecera structure was as much a unit of provincial government as it was an instrument of the church ... Third, the evidence that this structure neatly correlated with preconquest "provinces" is circumstantial, as Farriss has shown in her attempt to match parishes to Maya provinces ... The fact that some correlation can be made is easily explained by the existence of certain communities that were larger (and therefore wealthier, more important to the Maya, and more influential among Spanish authorities) than others both before and after the conquest; the number and regional power of these dominant cahob would not have been static in either preconquest or colonial times.

The maintenance of indigenous community leaders to act as liaisons with the Spanish victors was a necessity due to the few Spaniards in power and the great number of indigene requiring supervision. Many discrepancies occur, however, in the manner in which the indigenous leadership was established, and the manner in which it functioned within the community under Spanish rule. Examples of discrepancies of this type occur in the works of both Farriss and Ralph Roys, considered by many the two major authorities on Yucatan's colonial Indians. Each points out, to varying degrees, the prestige and functions of the batab-gobernador in a way that shows batab and gobernador as separate sixteenth-century offices, but as a single seventeenth-century office that, by the eighteenth century, is termed only batab.

Restall disagrees in that his research shows no instances in which the cah ever had separate governors and batabs. "The annual election of indigenous governors, which became established in central Mexico from the late sixteenth century, never took root in Yucatan ... if the batabil and governorship were ever separate offices, it was for a brief moment at the onset of colonial rule - a moment for which there is slim documentary evidence."
Discrepancies of this sort, documented in Spanish-language sources, make it extremely difficult to ascertain the real influence of indigenous leadership as viewed by the Maya themselves, and contributes to the class differences both between the conqueror and the conquered, as well as with the classes themselves.

In Yucatan - indeed, wherever Spaniards ruled indigenous peoples - colonial rule facilitated rather than depressed class differences in indigenous society. By the same token, it was clearly more advantageous to the Maya nobility to provide a facade of stability, behind which the new system could be reconciled to the old and traditional privileges could be maintained as much as possible.\(^{125}\)

The first explorers and their accompanying priests, misunderstanding the alien ideological basis of Mayan culture, believed that the Maya were like little children - ready and anxious to be shaped into individuals capable of Christian salvation. In some ways the apparent quiet manner in which the Maya succumbed to Spanish rule also demonstrated the initial Spanish ideal of simply incorporating these people into a Spanish life scheme, for their own personal glory and that of Spain. The Spaniards believed that when Christianity was offered to these people they would joyously reject what the Catholics saw as inferior religious ideas, and immediately convert to the new religion.

Whereas the Maya did adopt many of the Catholic patron saints, they incorporated them into their own notion of pantheon, and served them from the standpoint of traditional Maya reciprocity. The saints were honored, dressed, and fed in full expectation of protection and guidance - exactly as they had honored their own gods before them - and with exactly the same expectations. They even held ceremonies for them on the newly installed Christian altars. The Maya maintained a deeply embedded view of their place in the cosmos, and while they adopted some aspects of the new religion (as was common for a conquered Maya people) they also maintained elements of their previous belief system and spiritual community structure.

Over time the attitudes of both the conquerors and the conquered began to change. The missionary-Spanish, discovering the golden wealth of the Aztec empire to the west, were overcome by greed. Explorers and colonizers became Conquistadors, validated by the Catholic representatives, and

\(^{125}\)Ibid. 87.
devastating destruction of entire cultural groups occurred as these avaricious Spaniards reached out for material wealth. The native loss of this carefully collected material - representing a portion of the balance maintained by Maya humanity within their view of cosmos - coupled with the devastation of the culture due to the introduction of Western disease, left the indigenous population in all areas of contact mere shadows of their former organization and cultural maturity. This is also true of situations in the Yucatan where cultural disintegration had already appeared to have been underway prior to the encounters.

The focus of the Spanish imposition in the Yucatan changed to a pattern resembling precapitalism. A great number of human workers were still available, providing labor for new Spanish capitalistic endeavors, as well as a viable community for conversion to Spanish Catholicism. Land, historically held in common by the Maya population, was distributed among the new elite - Spanish soldiers were rewarded for their participation in the conquest, and the Catholic Church for financial support of their conversion programs. Conquered peoples, already burdened with tribute requirements, were recruited as laborers - serving as construction workers on the destruction of their own temples and the subsequent building of Catholic churches and Spanish haciendas. They were also required to work as household servants and field laborers on the great Spanish estates, as well as those smaller enterprises belonging to the new mestizo class, and if they were provided with a wage, it was quickly eaten up by increased tribute requirements.

As well as emphasizing points of view of the new group of mixed-bloods emerging on the scene, Farriss also accounts for change over time in the groups that compose this society in the areas of economics, culture, popular resistance, and in changes within the Spanish state, groups of Spaniards residing in the Yucatan, and changes within the structure and power of the Catholic church. In short, the Maya were no longer able to perform in their accustomed manner.

True to their heritage of subterfuge and intellectual warfare, the indigenous population soon began to quietly initiate subversive measures to provide some traditional show of discontent regarding their inequality. Plagued with unequal access to economic resources, they initiated, village by village, a covert
means of attack on the Spanish system. They surreptitiously continued some form of their own religious
beliefs - often within the confines of the Christian churches themselves. They took advantage of the
Spaniard's lack of knowledge, and/or real interest in, their beliefs, language, and ritual practices. They took
advantage as well of the Spaniard's limited numbers, and the difficulties they encountered in maintaining
adequate supervision over great expanses of territory. And, they incorporated their own beliefs and ritual
into what outwardly appeared to be Catholic ceremony. They cleverly allowed themselves to appear lazy
and stupid as they eased off work responsibilities, causing much consternation, and re-focus of energy,
among the Spanish. As nursemaids they spoke to their charges in the Maya tongue - even told them ancient
Maya stories - in a general effort to indoctrinate the young into a more pluralistic way of thinking. The
Spanish-educated, indigenous clerics falsified and exaggerated reports and records in order to eliminate
specifically difficult supervisors and churchmen. And finally, when atrocities became too great, they
attempted physical revolts, in which they defaced and destroyed many Catholic artifacts and structures, as
well as killing several particularly offensive clergymen. Their rebellious and defiant acts were certainly in
contrast to the much more violent Spanish.¹²⁶

A number of disputes involving batabob have survived on paper, and most, if not all, seem to be
factional to some degree. Farriss convincingly discusses two of them - the so-called rebellion of Tekax of
1610, and a successful 1670 campaign by a faction in Tzotzil to have their batab removed - in the context
of social strain and class struggle, but also elite factionism. The nuances of these disputes escaped the
Spaniards, who exaggerated the element of popular unrest because this was a chief concern of the colonists.
Farriss also appears to side-step the underlying issue in her emphasis on the perspective of largely Spanish-
language sources, when she argues that the Maya use of titles of nobility became increasingly hollow and
removed from social relations.¹²⁷

¹²⁶Restall 13-109.
¹²⁷Farriss 231.
The electoral process, then, was often far more Machiavellian than a simple election record shows. In the vast majority of cases, the machinations of the selection process, and consequently any factional battles that may have occurred, were hidden from Spanish officials (and future historians); in cases such as Xcupileucab (1812), the Spaniards were either fooled or oblivious; in cases like Tekanto (c. 1700), the colonial powers are obliged to step in and re-impose the *pax hispania*.

While these disputes, and the paperwork they generated, tend to give the impression of instability, the colonial-era Maya political system was notably stable, especially compared with the similar indigenous system in central Mexico. The *leveling process* - in which colonial rule equalized and compressed indigenous class society, therefore making it easier to meld the conquered into the dominant society produced a situation, desired by the Spanish and discussed at length in Farriss' work - one which, according to Farriss, failed to close the gap between nobles and commoners entirely.

There are many arguments that indicate that the Spanish settlers may not have had the same agenda as the Spanish crown - nor the Catholic Church the same methodology as that perceived by the Catholic hierarchy in Europe. Regardless, the *state* was never able to win an overwhelming support among the indigenous people. Justifying its projects as civilizing, developmental and progressive, the Spanish conventions remained in opposition to the basic ideology of the natives.

Farriss discusses the experience of both men and women, showing how masculinity and femininity are defined by both the Spanish and the Maya culture. She alludes to the adoption and development of latent *machismo* tendencies (introduced by the Spanish soldier and colonizer, based on their imitation of what they believed to be the ideal expressed by performance of the more noble classes in Europe) among the Maya men, as one of the few gender associated attributes that could make a difference within the existing, problematic situation. Their natural behavior - their attention to the intellectual over the physical, and their reliance on traditional manners of performing their history, caused them to appear weak to the Spaniards. On the other hand, Maya women, seen in a uniquely equal/separate position within

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128 Restall 82.
their own society, were not granted the protected, esteemed status of Spanish women by the colonizers. Serving as household servants, they functioned as property rather than idealized women in their roles of cook, housemaid, nursemaid, and occasional mistress. “Only Indian women were capable of the arduous work of grinding the maize by hand because, it was explained, they were used to it.”

Referring back to the manner in which Maya chose to propagandize power, and avoid unnecessary violence when it did not appear politically or economically advantageous, versus the decidedly militaristic, nationalistic cargo of the Spaniards (fresh from an internal war with the Jews and the Moors), we are made further aware of socially accepted gender attributes which manifested themselves so differently in the two cultures. We reach a gut-level knowing of the depth of misunderstanding between these two cultures - the impossibility of significant communication - and an interesting view of this aspect of the conflict.

Racial mixture, created by some Indian offspring passing into the mestizo and pardo castes, brought relief from the tribute and labor obligations, but not necessarily anything else. The undeveloped local economy offered few intermediate positions, such as shopkeeper, small-time trader, craftsman, or foreman that would have required and rewarded new skills and attitudes. The Maya were not slow to choose these alternatives when available, but the opportunities were rare. The implication of the caste system, and the manner in which it may have been manipulated to the advantage of the indigenous community, is convincingly presented in one of Farriss' main arguments regarding the survival the indigenous culture:

The Indians of colonial Spanish America are sometimes seen as having encapsulated themselves from the larger colonial society in order to prevent conquest from being followed by inner disintegration. The encapsulation of the Maya of Yucatan, to which they indeed owed their survival as a distinct social and cultural group, was less a self-designed protective device than a barrier imposed by the rigid caste system resting on a primitive tribute economy.

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129 Farriss 52.
130 Ibid. 114.
I find it of significant interest to note the performance aspects evident in the entire situation - the
Maya emphasis on collaborative, collective endeavor that I have indicated as essential in the production of
both effective art and effective history. Based in the manner and types of mythologies which formed a part
of each culture's communicative heritage, the aspects, as recreated in the theaters, celebrations and fiestas,
religious rituals, courtly behavior, and the personal performance of daily political and social interaction,
performance history obviously had distinct affects on the behavioral patterns of both the Spanish and the
Maya players. Farriss devotes extensive space to the discussion of fiestas, dancing, feasting, inter-
community links, mock battles, story telling and social integration through participation in dramatic events,
as well as the role of the cofradías in controlling ritual, and the support of fiestas and ritual activity. Restall
also emphasizes the role of the cofradías in the management of matters religious (the essential foundation
of Maya existence) within the society and culture of the natives.

Any synthesis, which may have occurred, was based on these various issues of cultural
performance, amidst the encapsulated populations of both Maya and Spanish. Each cultural group watched
and learned certain things from the other - some language was traded and/or incorporated (at least from
Maya to Spanish), some aspects of entertainment adopted, and certain aspects of religious practice were
traded. But the Maya effort to maintain autonomy was largely successful regardless of the Spanish intent
to absorb these newly created peasants into an European system. The degree of interchange and real
synthesis is dramatically represented by the fact that, over the entire colonial period, not a single, Spanish-
influenced grammatical change was ever incorporated into the existing Maya language. That simple fact
screams when considering the notion of presumed synthesis.

The Maya (as most other Amerindian groups) did not separate church and state, or church and
individual. There was, essentially, no religion - society functioned as a very real expression of the spiritual
beliefs of the people, and certain individuals maintained specific responsibilities within the expression of
that spirituality - just as others grew food, produced pottery, wove fabric, produced fine stone work or

\[131\] Restall 293.
intricate jewelry, painted, scribed, or served as laborers or warriors as the need arose. Reciprocity, plus the undeniable fact that Time was seen as both three-dimensional and cyclical - bound to recycle itself back to times when the ancient gods would again look favorably on the steadfast - continued to permeate the mind set of the Maya. Based upon the ancient accumulated wisdom regarding the manner in which the universe functioned, and functioning within a detailed cyclical calendric system of divination and prophecy, each member of the community was accountable for his own responsibility toward insuring balance. They believed that by maintaining this balance, favorable times would return. Even Spanish colonial records show that the Spanish alternative often rang distinctly false or incomprehensible to these collective-minded individuals.

The function of performance in this particular contact ideology played a significant role in the mutual accommodations of Spanish conquerors and acculturation of the indigenous conquered, if not an actual synthesis. Although recorded contemporary history offers numerous examples of the mestizaje, or presumed fusion of the two cultures, I believe that the basic differences in the worldview make a true synthesis impossible. The ideologies of these two powerful cultures exist parallel to each other in modern Mexico and Central America. According to Farriss' monograph, they exist in some strange breed of Mayan Catholicism, exemplifying tenets that remain basically incompatible at their base.
A CONCLUSION THAT RESEMBLES A BEGINNING

Performance continually recreates reality because it is based in Time
- each stillpoint engaging synchronicity - initiating the dance
- inseparable from the momentum of the changing physical context of the world. ¹³²

Dawn Hartman, The University of Montana - Missoula, 1999

Both the Maya and the Spanish cultures were established and deeply reinforced through the expression of their cultural performance heritage. Throughout the course of this work I have sought clarification on several key issues involving the collision of the sixteenth-century Maya and Spanish cultures in the Yucatan, as viewed through the cultural performance heritage of both groups.

The results of my study, regarding the depth of belief in the existing performance methods of the Maya, their manner of handling their defeat by the Spanish, and the various examples of cultural survival in which ancient notions are still practiced today, indicates that synthesis of these two worldviews did not happen at that time, nor has it yet occurred. Regardless of any mestizaje theories regarding the fusion of European and Mayan cultures, mingling of bloodlines alone cannot but create a new demography. The mestizos, the new race, eagerly searching for their own identity, still revert, as individuals, to the dominant philosophy available to them in their own personal exposure to cultural performances through whatever education opportunities are open to them. Without cohesive idea, and with differentiation, as the basis, community members grow, through the educational tool of cultural performance, toward Western (European) thought and action. With cohesive idea, and integration of disciplinary philosophies, as the cultural foundation for evolution, these same community members, or their neighbors, remain strictly indigenous - pre-Columbian - in perspective. Both avenues of development produce unique and distinguishable cultural traits that are, by their very definition, incompatible and non-fusible.

¹³²Hartman, (unpublished manuscript: The University of Montana at Missoula, 1999), 2.
In searching for the identities of the Maya players, I have come to recognize that it is the basic philosophy, notion, idea, or intent of a group, manifested through action or performance, that constitutes the primary source for historical researchers of indigenous societies. Performance is experienced and witnessed in the moment, and, with its being, becomes history, leaving us essence - residues of meaning - in the documents, art works, and artifacts created during these various performances. Personal and worldviews, key to our comprehension of the original performer's identities, are revealed for us through our interpretations of these aspects of performances - those aspects that remain available to us in the form of secondary sources. And, specifically regarding the Maya, our capabilities, as Western historians, are immediately limited by our own pre-conceived understanding of time.

The postmodern Poststructuralist of any era does not just situate individual intentionality in background cultural contexts, they try to erase the individual subject altogether. Language has begun to replace humans as the agent of history. It was no longer the I, the human subject, who is speaking - it is nothing but impersonal language and linguistic structure speaking through me. It is the responsibility of the historian to break this canon.

It is the responsibility of the historian to present interpretations in a manner as closely mirroring the original intent of the subject as possible, within the symbol systems that can be understood by their audiences. Appreciating the ways in which the lessons of history impact the thick context below the text, we must be prepared to interpret potential consequences in light of current circumstances as idea manifests itself in cultural performance. From this tack we give our subjects a presence - give back to the Past a sense of Present. We present our subjects as they were - performing actions and events (through the pages of our own performances of document-creation) that may really have occurred - if recreating what actually occurred is an impossibility.

This difficult task requires a willing suspension of disbelief in another's perspective - one that may conflict with cultural heritage deeply rooted in the psyche of the researcher, and the audience - in an attempt to arrive at a point where the subconscious and unconscious motives, manifested in the subject's
original performances, and documented in cultural artifacts, will *read* across the aesthetic distance as *Truth*.

Difficulties in articulation, and subsequent communication of ideas, occur when the assumption is made that, as a performer, you are on the *same page* as your audience. Herein lies the foundation upon which all subsequent misunderstandings can be based when attempting to define the identities of the Maya and the Spanish at the time of the initial encounters, as well as any speculation on a synthesis of these identities into a common culture.

What is important is what survives when two cultures collide. Is a suggested synthesis the best of both worlds? Or simply the strongest, the loudest, the most obstinate? What has been lost, forgotten, or put aside in the name of progress? And, in that waste bin of forgotten philosophy, are there elements, suppressed by the clamor of modernity, which could be resurrected for the benefit of all?

Defining Western thought as it compares to that of the ancient Maya, we begin to see the ramifications for modernity - that elusive integration of sense and sensibility. Although our contemporary Western philosophies have failed to initiate an integration between the two in our own culture - and our romantic, idealistic and postmodern theories, products of the impact of the philosophical cold war between science and spirituality in the West, fail in their attempts - we now recognize that the Maya had it. In lieu of reinventing the proverbial wheel, I will attest - forewarning against literal and figurative stumbling blocks along the way - that even the slightest understanding of the way in which they constructed their culture around their particular philosophical *idea* brings us one step closer to an understanding of their worldview - one which we Westerners, in one manner or another, currently seek for ourselves.

From a traditionally theatrical perspective, Antonin Artaud, during the 1930's and 40's, sought what he called a *cruel theater of plastic immediacy* in which actors became like *victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames - a spectacle without spectators* - one that would occur *all at once* and consume itself without remainder. It has been deemed an impossible theater. But, I argue that it is exactly this theater - this unique manner of performance of cultural heritage - that was the actual life style of the ancient Maya, due primarily to their enactment of the idea of *Kinh*, and the lack of dissociation between
their concepts of science and sensibility. As a theater historian and performance theorist, this is where my particular story of the performance history of the indigenous Amarindians must begin.

The ideals sought by Artaud as he sought a theater of cruelty, or, Grotowsky as he embraced the notion of poor theater - even Brecht's concepts such as Epic Theater and alienation - relate as much to cultural performance as they do to theatrical performance theory. The visual aspirations of Appia and Craig, the fantastical embodiments of elemental notion present in the great puppets of The Bread and Puppet Theater or Sesame Street, the ritual communication of the Balinese dancers, the cultural shock of the 1950's Happening or the later efforts of Beck and Malina's Living Theater, all find their philosophical origin in Western humanity's desire to regain that presence and immediacy so easily available in the ancient Maya culture.

As I indicated toward the beginning of this paper, I firmly believe that Theater and History are one - both examples of humanity's efforts to interpret and make meaning of cultural performance. I have become further convinced, throughout the course of this study, that a deep science of the arts and humanities - as well as a deep art of the sciences - is required if we are to advance in our human quest for ultimate meaning in our existence. If, as the Maya demonstrated, a common idea could be located and acknowledged by Western mentality - forcing the combination of the various goat tracks of intellectual and sensual expression into a single avenue of comprehension and performance - the resulting marriage of deep science, sensibility and morality would allow us to reach our goals for living, meaningful, instructive representations of the drama of our existence in both our theater and our history.

The notion of this paper has far exceeded the initial concept of a simple initiation of the unpacking of a culture's performance heritage, and any resultant synthesis that may have occurred when that culture collided with and alien Other. It has grown, almost of its own accord, to embrace an internalization of a philosophical notion that directly impacts my understanding of a search for truth in Western history and theater.
Through my particular method of study, I battle against what I believe to be one of the greatest defects of modern research - that of the trend to know more and more about less and less. I humbly follow such significant and esoteric investigations as those of J. Eric S. Thompson and Miguel Leon-Portilla as they explored the mystic and emotional aura of the Maya philosophy of time within the broad context of their physical environment and artifacts. Here I endeavor to stretch the envelope by demonstrating how this philosophy impacted all manner of Maya performance, and, therefore, formulated the communicative ability of the people - a philosophy which endures, to some degree or another, in many areas of Maya cultural survival to the present day. And, in so doing, I endeavor to carry a part of this message to Western sensibilities.

Like the Maya calendar, and concept of time, my study has circled back upon itself. My best plan of attack is to continue constructing the model. The list, of pre-requisites and areas requiring deep investigation, is long and complicated, and many challenges await me in my quest. Inarguably, a single person cannot do everything, but if I could make some small contribution to humanity’s understanding of the need, not to dissemble and dissociate the various ways of knowing, but to reassemble them (more clearly defined and comprehended) into a re-renewed, inter-disciplinary body of philosophical and physical expression, I would be more than content.

This particular endeavor has grown from an academic requirement to the framework for a life’s work. I suppose I should get started. I can only hope that the Ah Beehob, those obscure Maya deities whose name means “They of the Road”, will clear the way for my travels - sweep a path for these exploratory footsteps.
APPENDIX
EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Throughout the course of this paper I use several common terms in what may appear to be an unusual manner. This short explanation clarifies my intent in the use of these terms.

I refer to both the discipline of History and that of Theater, as well as individual personal performance, as creative, interpretative art forms. I establish performance as the only primary source with documentation, artifact, and inscription as secondary sources.

When referring to the institution of Theater, as it relates to the West, I refer to the pre-conceived re-presentation by actors of a pre-existing text, in a specified space, performing for a recognized audience; whereas, I interpret drama as a series of vivid events performed by actors on the world stage (read: Life). If, as in the case of much of the Maya performance, both terms appear to define the same event, they are used interchangeably.

The Other is primarily understood as the human being in his or her differences. Use of the term Other tends to create a sense of superiority and privilege within Western-thought systems that will not allow the Other to be encapsulated within the thought-forms of our philosophy without reducing the alterability of that Other. "The problem of other minds is usually taken to be a question about evidential criteria for other-person ascription of mental states and attributes."^ As both cultures viewed the other as Other, the term is used interchangeably.

By idea, I refer to concepts not yet restricted by language. From the Maya point of view, these nebulous notions, granted a reality of their own, become physical realities on a celestial level. They were then acted upon, or interacted with, through initial performance, to create matter on the terrestrial-

horizontal. These initial realities were eventually textualized through any number of performative techniques, surrounding the themes of science, theology, and history, including language, body language, orthodox or spontaneous dance, participation in ceremonies, rites and theatrics as well as the construction of artifacts through writing, music, and artworks. The idea refers to the basis, the creative force, of Maya philosophy - if the idea or thought existed, it was already material reality, named and/or personified, and, therefore, performed - even before it was approached by humanity. (In the Western view, idea was the result of man's ingenuity, emphasizing his place on the evolutionary ladder, and only by naming - employing the word - could any material substance or notion that resulted from that ingenuity became a reality.)

**Performance**, for the Maya, always manifested their original idea, and created their cultural performance heritage. Personal and theatrical performances were one and the same within the philosophy of *Kinh*. The past, present, and future were one for the Maya. Their performative expression was the result of their becoming their original creation myth in the Now, rather than acting it out as an imitation of some past event. For the Europeans, there has always been a greater distinction between behavior and performance. Behavior was the mundane, daily act of existence. Performance, on the other hand, was a direct result of an imitation of portions of their cultural heritage. It was usually considered theatrical (art-like) and separate not only from the scientific notion of man functioning within a physical realm, but also from the spiritual notion of being or soul.

**Personal performance** refers to an individual's chosen method of communicating, through behavior recognizable within his/her own culture. Each expression of behavior is a performance resulting from the need to communicate some notion of idea. Individuals communicating from differing intelligences (re: Howard Gardner), can express the same notion or idea in any number of ways, and/or personal skills. When enacted within a theatrical setting, these personal performances become theatrical.

Only a portion of any culture's performance of itself involves the particular qualities of **theatrical performance**. When I use this term I often refer to particular actions and deeds, sometimes called personal
performance, often deemed mundane, designed to execute intentions or notions of the originator in their daily life. Theatrical performance, however, is always the result of a scripted text rather than any spontaneous, creative action. Performance is the presentation of identity - the manifestation of idea - denser than text - more than story. We make sense of the present in our consciousness and performance of the past.

As I approach Truth, I am reminded of Antonin Artaud, in his seminal document for the rethinking of theater, The Theater and its Double. In this work he was attacking what he took to be the most basic premise of Occidental theater: that theater is the representation by actors of a text with a fully determined meaning, a meaning that it constituted outside the theatrical scene by the absent author. He sought a cruel theater of plastic immediacy in which actors became like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames - a spectacle without spectators - one that would occur all at once and consume itself without remainder. In addition he sought to present the underbelly of man's nature, in an effort to allow him to eliminate the necessity for its performance outside of the theatrical environs. It has been deemed an impossible theater, and reflects the same difficulties we encounter when attempting to create a viable history. It is, however, this level of truth that I discover in the encompassing Maya theater.
MYTH #1:

THE MYTH OF CREATION

Our knowledge of the Maya story of Creation comes from two sources: the Popol Vuh, a seventeenth-century book recording the history of the Q'eqchi' Maya, and inscriptions and imagery from the Classic period.\(^\text{134}\)

The story of Creation involves the activities of the Twin Maize Gods and their family in the Third Creation. When playing ball one day, the Maize Gods disturbed the Lords of Xibalba, the Maya underworld. The Xibalbans summoned the Maize Gods to the underworld to answer for their misbehavior, subjected them to a series of trials, and killed them when they failed. The Xibalbans buried the Maize Gods in the Ballcourt of Xibalba, after taking the head of the older twin and hanging it in a gourd tree next to the ballcourt, as a lesson to anyone who might tempt the wrath of the Lords of Xibalba. Ignoring the warning, the daughter of a Xibalban lord went to visit the skull, which spoke to her. The skull spat in her hand and made her pregnant. After escaping from Xibalba, she gave birth to a second set of boys, called the Hero Twins, who were themselves summoned to Xibalba after they found their fathers' ball-playing equipment. They also had made too much noise with their exuberant play, but unlike their forebears they were not fooled by the Xibalbans' tricks.

After a long series of confrontations through ball games, the Hero Twins, called Hun-Ahaw and Yax-Balam in the Classic period, defeated the Lords of Death and resurrected their fathers from the ballcourt. Reborn as infants, the Maize Gods grew quickly into adulthood to be dressed in their full glory by goddesses. With dwarf helpers, they woke up three old gods. We call two of them the Paddler Gods, because they paddled the Maize Gods to the place of Creation. The third oldster, God L, the patron of merchants and warriors, destroyed the Third creation by a great flood.

\(^{134}\text{Schele and Mathews 36-37.}\)
When the Maize Gods arrived at the place of the new Creation, they sprang up from a crack in the back of the Cosmic Turtle. The Maya saw this turtle as the three stars that we call Orion's Belt, and they also saw the crack in the turtle's back as the ballcourt. Once reborn (into the place of the new Creation), the Maize Gods directed four old gods to set up the first Hearth of Creation to center the new order. The hearth consisted of three throne stones - one in the form of a jaguar that was set up by the Paddlers at a place called Na-Ho-Kan or House-Five-Sky; the second in the form of a snake that was set up on the earth by an unknown god (possibly God L); and the third, a crocodile or shark monster that was set up in the sea by Itzamna, the First Sorcerer. The Maya saw this hearth as the triangle of stars below Orion's Belt, with the Orion Nebula as the fire. Today we call these stars Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel. The gods set up this hearth on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ahaw 8 Kumk'u, or August 13, 3114 BC.

Five hundred and forty-two days later, the Maize Gods completed the structure of this, the Fourth Creation, by using a cord to measure and set up the four sides and corners of the cosmos and erecting the center tree. The Maya called this tree Wakah-Kan, or raised up sky. They visualized it as a great ceiba tree in flower, because February 5, the day it was erected, falls into the flowering season of that great sacred tree. But they also saw the tree as the Milky Way arching across the sky with its roots on the southern horizon and its branches to the north.

The raising of this tree created the space in which we all live in this, the Fourth Creation. But the gods were not done. On the same day, the Maize Gods spun the heart of the sky in the motion used by weavers spinning thread. This spinning corresponds to the motion of the constellations around the north pivot of the sky, and is the basis of all time perception for human beings.

The gods gave symmetry and order to both space and time by their action in erecting the tree, setting out the four corners and four sides of the cosmos, and setting time in motion.
MYTH# 2:  
THE MIGRATION MYTH  

The second myth, concerning the beginning of civilized life, comes to us primarily from Aztec sources, although the myth was known in various forms throughout Mesoamerica. (Remember that the Spanish destroyed most of the scripted codices of the Maya, while several concerning this migration myth were preserved in Aztec translation.) This myth involves Snake Mountain and the Place of Reeds, or Caotepec and Tollan, as the Aztec called them, and was repeated throughout Mesoamerica in several similar forms.135

The Aztec left their original homeland and began a holy migration to the place where they would establish their state and capital city. Along the way they came to Caotepec (Snake Mountain), near Tollan (Place of Cattail Reeds). The Aztec built a temple on top of Snake Mountain for their patron god Huitzilopochtli. Huitzilopochtli then built a ballcourt at the base of the mountain, and in the center he placed a hole, called an Itzompan, or Skull Place. Under his directions, the Aztec partially dammed up the hole to create what was called the Well of Water. They cultivated plants in and around the hole, which was filled with fresh water creatures of all sorts. From this well, sweet water formed a lake and made the surrounding landscape fertile.

A faction of the migrants, the Four-Hundred Southerners, decided they wanted to stay in this fine new home to create their empire, instead of continuing on their migrations. This angered Huitzilopochtli, who came down from the mountain armed for war. He surrounded the Four-Hundred Southerners and their older sister, a goddess named Coyolxauhquiuhuatl, who is identified in this version of the myth as the mother of Huitzilopochtli. The Four-Hundred were his uncles. In the ballcourt, he killed Coyolxauhquiuhuatl by decapitation, then destroyed the Four-Hundred and ate their hearts. He destroyed the dam in the Well of Water and it dried up, forcing the terrified Aztec to resume their journey.

135 Ibid. 37-38.
In an alternative version, the Aztec found Coatlicue, the mother of Huitzilopochtli, living on Coatepec. When she became miraculously pregnant, her other children, Coyolxauhqui and the Four-Hundred Southerners, decided to kill their mother for her presumed transgression. Coatlicue gave birth to a fully adult Huitzilopochtli armed with his shield and spears. After hacking up Coyolxauhqui and throwing her down the mountain, he destroyed the Four-Hundred Southerners and forced the Aztec out of Coatepec.

The Aztecs generated important archetypes from this myth: the death of Coyolxauhqui and the Four-Hundred Southerners provided the archetype for war and sacrifice, and Coatepec provided the archetype for how to create the precinct of a city.

However, the Aztecs did not invent this myth. They reworked far older stories of origin. We have Snake Mountains at Teotihuacan, Xochicalco, Tula, El Tajin, Chichen Itza, Tikal, Waxaktun, Cerros, and other cites beginning as early as 100 BC. Many of the Snake Mountains have ballcourts adjacent to them.

The gods of the Aztec myth ... were peculiar to their version of the story, but all Mesoamerican cities had their own gods who were born at their version of this place of origin. While the names of the gods and the details of the myth changed through time and space, the core function of the myth to create archetypes for building sacred centers and for conducting war was valid for everyone.136

136Ibid. 38-39.
MYTH # 3:
THE MYTH OF THE ORIGIN OF CIVILIZED LIFE
AT THE PLACE OF CATTAIL REEDS NEAR SNAKE MOUNTAIN

The early Maya, followed by the Teotihuacanos and later the Aztec, built their cities to be replicas of the Place of Reeds and Snake Mountain.

It is believed today that the original Tollan was an Olmec city. Tollan was not only a reference for this legendary place of origin but also a general term for city. The Aztecs used this term to refer to their own city, Tenochtitlan, and also to Tula in Hidalgo, to Teotihuacan, and to Cholula.

Moreover, the term Toltec was used to refer not only to the original inhabitants of the legendary Tollan, but also to artisans and artists.

In their migration story, the Aztec stopped at Tollan, which was near Coatepec. The Aztecs described the Toltecs, the inhabitants of Tollan, as great sages who had invented the calendar, divination, astronomy, the arts, writing, medicine, monumental architecture, the institutions of government, agriculture, money, and all things civilized. They discovered jade and obsidian, and they found turquoise. They were especially pious and they were rich.

According to the Aztec, they were the ancestors of all people who spoke properly. For the Aztec that meant speakers of Nahua languages. In the rest of Mesoamerica, the proper language was locally defined.

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137 Ibid. 39.
Figure 1: *K'inh* glyphs: the four-petaled flower in carved inscriptions and the codices.\(^{137}\)

\(^{137}\)a) Uaxactun 26; b) Copan I; c) Foliated Cross at Palenque; d) Copan M; e) Quirigua P; f) Quirigua I; g) Deseden Codex 61; h) “Brilliant Sun” with the te affix, Dresden Codex 72; i) Kintun, “Burning Sun”, Madrid Codex 34 (Source: Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*)
Figure 2: The Solar God, hieroglyphic variants of K'inch.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{138}a) Yaxchilan; b) Piedras Negras 14; c) Quirigua, Structure I; d) Dresden Codex 55a; e) Madrid Codex 71a.
In the center appears the face of the god with the solar eye and prominent eye-tooth. In the lateral squares are two deities (probably the sun and moon) with scepters ending in masks of *kinh*. Below, and also on both sides, as if emerging from the strip of celestial symbols are two groups of three faces bearing the same portrayal of *kinh* (upper part of Stela 10, Yaxchilan). *León-Portilla*, p. 97.
Figure 4: The least acculturated zones in the Maya area.  

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140 Zone I includes the villages of Chan Kom and Tusik. Zone II shows the region inhabited by the Tzeltal and Tzotzil, and Zone III is the area of the Cuchumatan, where the ancient Maya calendar is preserved to a certain degree. Leon-Portilla, p. 144.
Figure 5: Image of the celestial levels and of the sacred ceiba tree, according to data obtained by Tozzer among the Maya of Yucatan."
Figure 6: Spatial image of the universe, preserved to this day among the Tzotzil Indians in the state of Chiapas.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{142}Leon-Portilla, 141.
**TABLE 1:**

**MONTHS OF THE TZELTZL CALENDAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BATZUL</td>
<td>26 December - 14 January</td>
<td>Authorities are changed in the villages. Chili is sown, and a little brush is cleared or cut away; it is not yet a time for much work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAKILAB</td>
<td>15 January - 3 February</td>
<td>The same as the previous month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGILCHAC</td>
<td>4-23 February</td>
<td>The Carnival Fiesta. Now commences the time for more work in clearing brush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>24 February - 15 March</td>
<td>Clearing the brush. Sowing is begun in the cold upland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLATI</td>
<td>16 March - 4 April</td>
<td>Clearing. The moment to sow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HULOL</td>
<td>5 - 24 April</td>
<td>The same as the previous month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAYKIN</td>
<td>25 - 29 April (five unlucky days)</td>
<td>No work is done. The <em>chaykin</em> period ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Activity Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| HOKEN-AHAU  | 30 April - 19 May  
Weeding is begun in the cold upland. Around here there still is not much work; some people spend their time scraping a little agave-fiber for making bag-nets and cord to be sold in Tenejapa. |
| CHIN-UCH    | 20 May - 8 June  
Weeding is begun in the cornfields around here.                                                                                                      |
| MUC-UCH     | 9 - 28 June  
Weeding and performance of other minor tasks.                                                                                                         |
| HUC-UINKIL  | 29 June - 18 July  
A little work in the cornfield clearing them of weeds. Houses are constructed. In the cold upland some brush is cleared.                                |
| UAC-UINKIL  | 19 July - 7 August  
Weeding is continued in the cornfields, for around here weeding occurs twice. The 6th of Uac-Uinkil is the exact date of St. James of Tenejapa.  
(Afterward ladinos of Tenejapa told us that the 25th is the date corresponding to his feast.)                                                        |
| HO-UINKIL   | 8 - 27 August  
Around here one is somewhat idle. In the cold upland they begin to clear the brush for next year's cornfield.                                     |
| CHAN-UINKIL | 28 August - 16 September  
Because it is not yet time to work here, some people go to earn daily wages of 25 centavos in the cornfields of the cold uplands or in the coffee plantations of the Soconusco region. |
17 September - 6 October

Just like the previous month. We have passed one hundred days of pure Uinkils, or idleness.

7 - 16 October

Many busy themselves making ropes and bag-nets in order to sell them and then buy the candles and other things needed for the Day of the Dead.

27 October - 15 November

Time for building houses and chicken coops, for making bag-nets and other things. The 1st of Yaxkin is the Day of the Dead. (The natives hold these celebrations during the last five days of October whereas the ladinos celebrate them on the last day of October and the first two days of November.)

16 November - 5 December

A little work is begun in the cornfields.

6 - 25 December

Perhaps the 10th day of Tzun falls on the day of St. Thomas of Oxchuc. (This is the only date that does not fit into our correlation, for in the Gregorian calendar, St. Thomas’ day falls on the 21st of December, which corresponds with the 16th of Tzun.)

141 León-Portilla 146-148.
TABLE 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY NAME</th>
<th>MEANING AND CORRESPONDING BURDEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td><em>Teeth.</em> Name of one of the <em>yearbearers.</em> It is a day favorable to administer justice and to pray.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td><em>Reed.</em> Appropriate for asking God to bless children. Firecrackers are exploded to beg protection for arms and shotguns. An auspicious day to pray for domestic fowl in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSH</td>
<td><em>Ear of maize bears grains.</em> Day favorable for sheep, and for begging for the multiplication of animals. Day of the Lord of the goats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZIKIN</td>
<td><em>Bird.</em> Favorable for chickens and for praying for money and other benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'MAK</td>
<td><em>Sinner.</em> Favorable for the cornfields, the <em>white cornfield.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOJ</td>
<td><em>Mayor.</em> One of the four possible <em>yearbearers</em> or <em>dominical day.</em> Appropriate for praying for small domestic animals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIJASH</td>
<td><em>Day of Sacrifice.</em> Favorable for pigs, cows, and sacrificial animals. It is the day of the Shepherd Foreman Cow-herd. (This is a deity frequently mentioned in prayers.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAUOK</td>
<td><em>Guardian of the World.</em> Favorable for compensating for damage done by one's animals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNAHPU</td>
<td><em>Name of a god.</em> Saints' day and, also, of the Holy Virgin. Favorable for offering candles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMUSH</td>
<td>Earth. Favorable for praying in behalf of the home and family in order that the world or earth not chastise them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IK</td>
<td>Wind. One of the four possible yearbearers. Lord of the wind. Day of the winds. Favorable for sowing corn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KATCH</td>
<td>Net. Bad. Day for harming others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAN</td>
<td>Snake. Favorable for requesting wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAMEL</td>
<td>Death. Favorable for the yellow cornfield.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCHE</td>
<td>Horse or deer. One of the four possible yearbearers. Very favorable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KANIL</td>
<td>Ear of maize. Day of the holy cornfield, favorable for all kinds of seeds and crops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCHO</td>
<td>Paid. Day for mitigating conflicts with others, used especially by sorcerers. Day for recognition of sins and faults.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Batz

Monkey. Day of celebrations. Favorable to augment all things.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{142}Ibid. 146-148.
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