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The Maya (4th Edition)



Synopsis

This edition has been enlarged and entirely revised. Professor Coe places new emphasis on the pre-classic period and an additional chapter highlights evidence for overpopulation and deforestation as the prime causes of the catastrophic southern Maya collapse in the 9th century AD. However, the focus remains upon the classic period, with its magnificent art and architecture. In a new final chapter Professor Coe pays tribute to the six million or more contemporary Maya, guardians of so many of the ancient traditions. Michael D. Coe's many other books include "Breaking the Maya Code" (Thames and Hudson, 1992). --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Because of the wealth of new archaeological data and breakthroughs in the translation of hieroglyphs, Coe's updating of his classic synthesis of Maya civilization provides a valuable service to both informed lay readers and specialists wishing to apprise themselves of the current state of understanding of this most intellectually sophisticated and aesthetically refined pre-Columbian culture. Although the vast majority of the text may be found in the prior edition, the work is transformed by significant interpolations and deletions and is augmented by a new section of color plates, a useful guide for travelers, and a listing of Maya rulers. As it now stands, this refreshed and renewed little masterpiece merits a place in collections serving students of ancient Mesoamerica. Continuing a tradition of massive exhibitions and concomitant exhibition catalogs, the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, has at last discovered the New World. This initial incursion wisely focuses on the

most accessible of the great pre-Hispanic cultures, the Maya. In this daunting but unfocused potpourri, some 29 essayists broach nearly the full range of Maya historical, societal, intellectual, political, and artistic traditions with varying degrees of competence. As is common with collective efforts of this sort, one finds both a certain redundancy of elementary facts and a not infrequent inconsistency about the facts themselves. Crammed into the last hundred pages of the volume is the catalog of more than 500 well-illustrated but only perfunctorily documented and analyzed objects. Aside from its value as a remarkable gathering of some 1400 excellent color reproductions, this ill-balanced and ultimately superficial tome has little to recommend it. A Robert Cahn, Fashion Inst. of Technology, New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A clear and intelligent description of the development and organization of Maya civilization. -- Natural History[Coe] has shown an outstanding ability in selecting and organizing his material. . . . A pleasure to read. -- Antiquity --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For several years I have used this edition and its three predecessors in a small, introductory college seminar on Maya archaeology. Students and I both liked it. It is sensitive to developments in all areas of Maya research and to the growing knowledge about interactions between the Maya and other ancient peoples of the region. (In this it complements Coe's companion book, MEXICO.) The sixth edition nicely takes account of recent exciting developments in deciphering Maya script, which is a useful addition, since these are headline grabbers that correspond well with what is likely to bubble over into the news media. As a balanced, archaeologically responsible, continuously updated account, with lots of maps and pictures to amplify the text, this is a really useful book.

I have been deeply interested in the Mayan civilization for decades, and have long known of Dr. Michael Coe. I'm now in my late fifties, and over the decades have seen just about every television documentary about this most fascinating of all Mesoamerican societies (two of these, 'Breaking the Maya Code', and 'Cracking the Maya Code' were based on Coe's book of the same name as the former). This is my first foray into Dr. Coe's written works; he is widely acknowledged as one of the foremost experts in the world on the Maya. If one wants to learn about the Maya from scratch, this book is the place to start-just be aware that Dr. Coe has more than a thousand years to cover here, and the Maya were a very complex and enigmatic society. He also weaves the story of how the Mayan civilization was discovered by Westerners and how the writing and numerical systems used

by the Classic Maya were deciphered (which is still an ongoing process) into the narrative of this book. Other reviewers have complained about Coe's extensive descriptions of Mayan artifacts and architecture as 'dry' and slowing down the narrative. While it is true this can get a bit tedious, a great deal of what we know about the Maya comes from these very items--the Classic Maya put their glyphs everywhere, including on their pottery, murals, stelae (upright rectangular stones), and buildings. This most recent update of what has become a series of books is the most comprehensive yet, encompassing new discoveries such as the gigantic Pre-Classic Mayan complex in the El Mirador basin in Guatemala, as well as the discovery of a new set of Pre-Classic murals at nearby San Bartolo. The latter has been compared in significance to the famed Classic-period murals at Bonampak; the Danta pyramid at El Mirador is the largest yet discovered at any Maya site, and is comparable in total volume to the Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt. These discoveries show the Maya were building on a vast scale centuries before the Classic Period began around AD 300. Dr. Coe has somehow managed to pull off the considerable feat of covering the whole of the known Maya timeline, from their Olmec-influenced beginnings to the present day. Contrary to what some believe, the Maya didn't disappear after the 'Great Collapse' that ended the Classic Period Golden Age at the end of the 9th century; they moved and adapted. The Maya people did the same after the Spanish Conquest, and continue to do so today. The story of the Maya is something one easily gets addicted to; catch the bug, and you'll want to keep digging.

I purchased this book in anticipation of a visit to various Mayan sites after I retire (which has not yet occurred). This is the first such book I have bought or read on Mayan culture, and thus I am not able to compare it to other works on the subject. However, I find this book very helpful and informative. The text is in professorial style and a little difficult to assimilate, but the book is relatively short, being less than 300 pages with many photos and diagrams interspersed throughout. As a result, it is not, as I had feared, a mammoth project to read through this work. The explanation of the decipherment of the glyph system of writing is definitely beyond my ken, but I gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the system and the work of those who contributed to "cracking the code". The work was helpful with regard to determining which sites might be considered the more significant and how they related to other sites in Mayan history and culture. In my opinion this work would be useful to the scholar as well as the most casual tourist, and I would highly recommend it to either.

As a curious amateur (I have no training in anything remotely related to anthropology or archaeology) I have been fascinated with the native peoples of the North, Central, and South

American continents. This book is well written, the structure easy to follow, and the diagrams and photos well done. After reading this book, I feel as if I know about the Mayan people, how they lived, and what they left behind. I appreciated that everything was well grounded in serious research (there are a lot of hokey Mayan books) and that the book talked about the people and processes behind that research. I recommend anything by Michael Coe.

Coe has done an outstanding with presenting the obscure world of the Maya to the armchair historian and reader. Studying Maya history is complicated due the intricate network of city-states, multiple falls and re-arisings and indigenous adaptation to the scarcity of resources that the Yucatan and Southern Occidental Mountains provided them. With the recent advent of Maya Hieroglyphics becoming understandable to the modern eye, there is much to be gained from this book (and its other editions) towards the limited understanding we have today of the people called the Maya.

Good overview of ancient Maya. My major criticism concerns the amount of pages devoted to describing buildings and artifacts at the various Maya sites; I would have preferred more information on the overall cultural significance rather than a physical description. Overall, this book was informative.

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