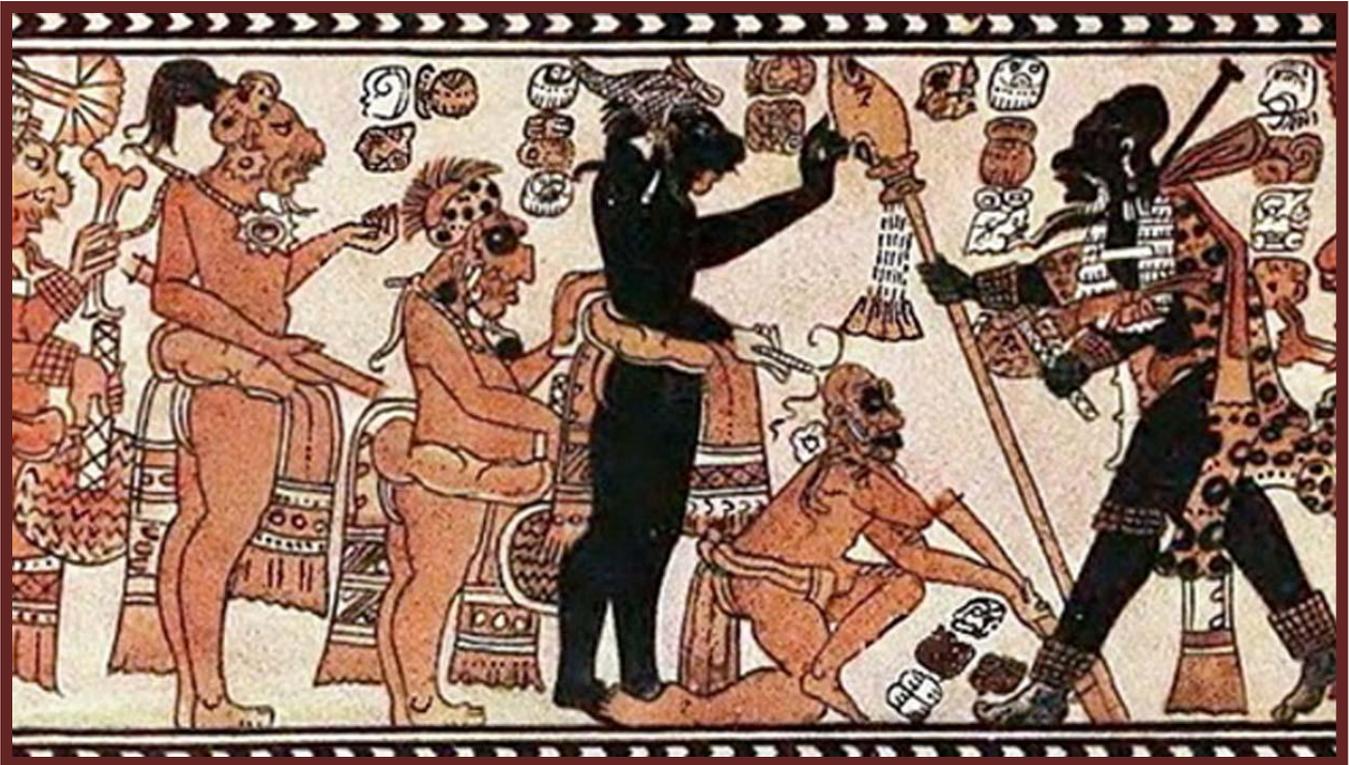


Can the Mayans be Dated to the Younger Dryas Ice Age?

Jim Willis



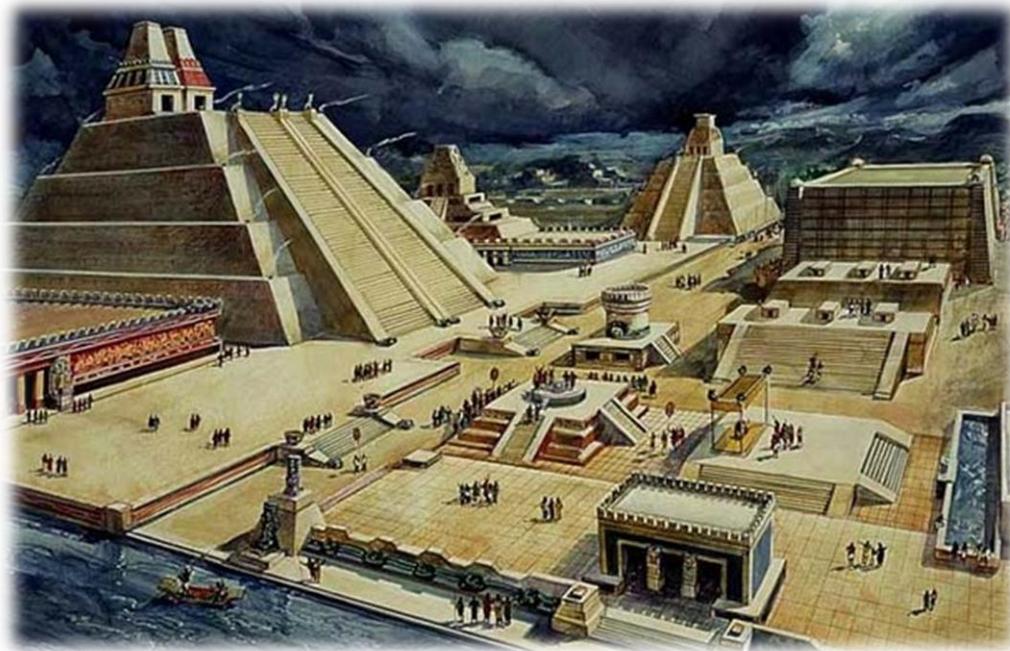
How does a story that is told, or that one has read in a textbook become irrefutable historical fact?

Everyone knows the Mayans were a terrifying civilization, steeped in long range calendars, ballgames, pyramids and human sacrifice. They inherited many of these traits from a culture called Olmec, frequently called the 'Mother Culture' of Mesoamerica, because they gave birth to what became the Mayans, the Aztecs and the Toltecs. The Mayans flourished between 300 to 950 AD and were followed by the Aztecs, who were in power when the Spanish arrived. This is the traditional story, but how much of it is factual?



Tikal
National Park
- Petén
Basin, Flores,
Guatemala
UNESCO
World
Heritage Site
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Mayan architecture is, indeed, spectacular. Tourists flock to be overwhelmed at the sight of the long, steep stairs and monumental extravagance of ruins such as Tikal or Ceibal. When carbon dating and other methods were used to date those structures, traditional history was cast in stone. Even now, if one looks up these magnificent temples in any standard text or Internet site, one will find authoritative statements listing date of construction and occupation, purpose, general description and date of demise. It sounds so official that it is hard to argue about whether or not it is all true.



Drawing of what part of Tenochtitlan may have looked like (Public Domain)

Digging Deeper Professor Inomata

But Takeshi Inomata, a professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona, had problems with the traditional story. Pyramids as complex and sophisticated as these do not just spring into existence. A civilization does not wake up one fine morning and say: "Let's build a pyramid!" So, Inomata decided to dig deeper. He began to excavate under the visible remains at Ceibal to see if there was evidence of earlier building. What he found was that his predecessors - the ones who wrote the textbooks and composed the traditional story - had drawn their conclusions much too quickly. There was a more complex story to be discovered. Inomata decided to ignore what he had been taught and assumed that what one sees on the surface is simply a later construction built on the remains of a much earlier ritual site. Inomata found signs of an earlier complex that dated to at least 1000 BC. But that work, also, was too complex to have just sprung into existence overnight. There were hints that a larger civilization, much more sophisticated than anyone had previously thought, preceded the earlier one as well.

The 'Classic Mayan' civilization now gave way to the 'Pre-Classic' Mayan civilization, a complex time that features evidence of agriculture on a huge scale, complex architecture and complicated, ritualized daily life. A diet of turkey, corn, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, beans and squash originates from the Mayans. They were the first to cultivate all of these produces. Chocolate bars containing peanuts, both come from Mayan culture, so do chili peppers, vanilla, sunflower seeds and papaya. A cotton shirt is a Mayan invention. Likewise, so is smoking tobacco of any kind, which was cultivated first by the Mayans.

Maya stucco glyphs displayed in the museum at Palenque, Mexico. ([Public Domain](#))



The Mayans practiced advanced astronomy and mathematics. They were one of the five civilizations in the world to develop an independent written language on their own, and their calendar skills were surpassed by no other civilization of their time. Nomads do not build the kind of megalithic masterpieces found in the Mayan pre-classical period. That takes more than a village. It takes a thriving, organized, highly technical civilization. Such a civilization does not arise out of nowhere. It takes a long time to grow. Once again, the dates have to be pushed back. Once again, lost secrets arise.

Although archaeologists prefer to stick to information they can dig up, measure, date and photograph, this new evidence reinforces the need to listen to the people themselves. What does their oral tradition say about the founding of the Mayan empire? Sadly, although the Mayans had developed an elaborate written language, most of their texts were destroyed by the early Spanish, who considered them works of the devil. Luckily some of them survived, smuggled away by Catholic priests who maintained a sense of historical importance.



Painting of Tlaloc (left) and Huizilopochtli in their temple, with the skulls of the people the Aztecs sacrificed to these gods. Juan de Tovar Codex circa 1546 - 1626 ([Public Domain](#))

Dresden Codex

One such text is called the Dresden Codex, so-called because it was found in Dresden, Germany. This priceless codex, the oldest surviving text from the Americas, now resides in the Saxon State Library. It is 12 feet (3 and 1/2 meters) long, folds out like an accordion, and contains references to the original text upon which it is based, which was 300 to 400 hundred years older still. When finally translated, it was found to relate local history and a complex set of astronomical tables. Three other such texts are known today, two of them named after the cities where they were rediscovered. They are called the Madrid and Paris Codices. The fourth is called the Grolier Codex and resides in New York City.



The Dresden Codex, first redrawing by Humboldt in 1810 ([Public Domain](#))

Popol Vuh Text

All other texts were destroyed by the Spanish Inquisition's zeal to stamp out any religion that was considered heretical, but some of them were translated before they could be burned. One that survived is the Quiché Mayan Popol Vuh. Although undated, it seems to have been copied down in its final form between 1554 and 1558 AD. Similar to many religious texts, its subject matter is far more ancient. The Popol Vuh even echoes some of the familiar words of the book of Genesis when it describes the creation of the world. Here is a condensation of a translation by Allen J. Christenson:

“This is the beginning of the ancient people of this place called Quiché. Here we shall write. We shall begin to tell the ancient stories of the beginning, the origin of all that was done in the citadel of Quiché, among the people of the Quiché nation.

First the earth was created, the mountains and the valleys. The waterways were divided, their branches coursing among the mountains. Thus the waters were divided, revealing the great mountains. For thus was the creation of the earth, created then by Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth, as they are called. They were the first to conceive it. The sky was set apart. The earth also was set apart within the waters. Thus was conceived the successful completion of the work when they thought and when they pondered. Then were conceived the animals of the mountains, the guardians of the forest, and all that populate the mountains - the deer and the birds, the puma and the jaguar, the serpent and the rattlesnake, the pit viper and the guardian of the bushes. She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons then asked: “Shall it be merely solitary, merely silent beneath the trees and the bushes? It is well that there shall be guardians for them,” they said. Thus they considered and spoke together, and immediately were created the deer and the birds. Having done this, they then provided homes for the deer and the birds”.

In many ways, these words recall the first chapters of the book of Genesis. Indeed, the early Spanish priests, upon hearing these words, wrote about God revealing his truths even to the heathens. Adam and Eve, in the Mayan version, have different names. But their stories are similar:

“These are the names of the first people who were framed and shaped: the first person was Balam Quitze, the second was Balam Acab, the third was Mahucutah and the fourth was Iqui Balam. These, then, were the names of our first mothers and fathers”.



Dwarfs were important members of royal Mayan courts. They are portrayed serving food, playing musical instruments, holding sacred objects for the ruler, and as diviners and scribes. Walters Art Museum ([Public Domain](#))

Unlike Adam and Eve, however, these ‘first people’, seem to have been endowed with superhuman powers:

“Their frame and shape were merely brought about by the miraculous power and the spirit essence of the Framer and the Shaper, of She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, of Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent...They were able to speak and converse. They were able to look and listen...Perfect was their sight, and perfect was their knowledge of everything beneath the sky. If they gazed about them, looking intently, they beheld (everything) that was in the sky and that which was upon the earth. Instantly they were able to behold everything. They did not have to walk to see all that existed beneath the sky. They merely saw it from wherever they were. Thus their knowledge became full. Their vision passed beyond the trees and the rocks, beyond the lakes and the seas, beyond the mountains and the valleys.”

First page of the Popol Vuh (Public Domain)

Anyone who watches television today can identify with the ability to instantly be: "able to behold everything. They did not have to walk to see all that existed beneath the sky". But, just like their Biblical counterparts, these 'first people' had ambitions of being like God. And, just like Adam and Eve, they got into trouble because of it when they said:

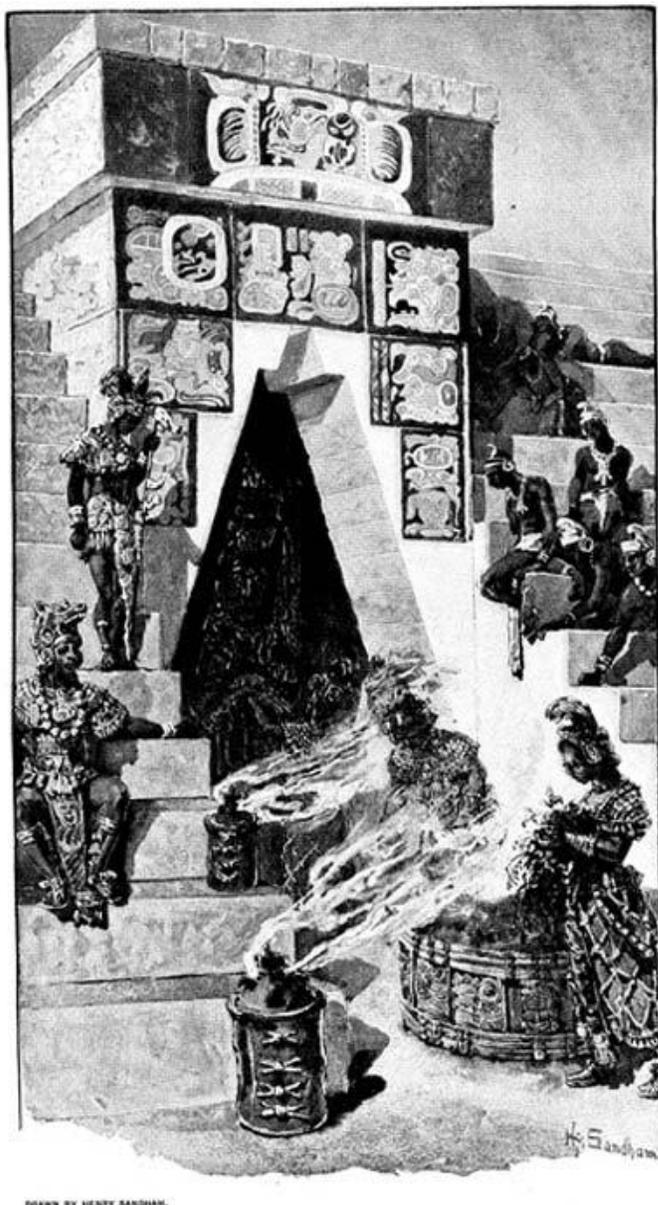
"We have learned everything, great and small."

In the Popol Vuh, just as in the Bible, gods do not like it when humans try to emulate them too much. The powers of the first people brought about their downfall:

"Thus their knowledge was taken back by She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons: "What now can be done to them so that their vision reaches only nearby, so that only a little of the face of the earth can be seen by them? For it is not good what they say...It is a mistake that they have become like gods. Thus their eyes were blinded. They could (now) see only nearby; things were clear to them only where they were. Thus their knowledge was lost".

This is nothing short of amazing. Who were these ancient Mesoamericans who suddenly seemed to have magically sprung into existence? Where did they come from? A civilization such as this needed a long time to develop on its own. Did they have help?





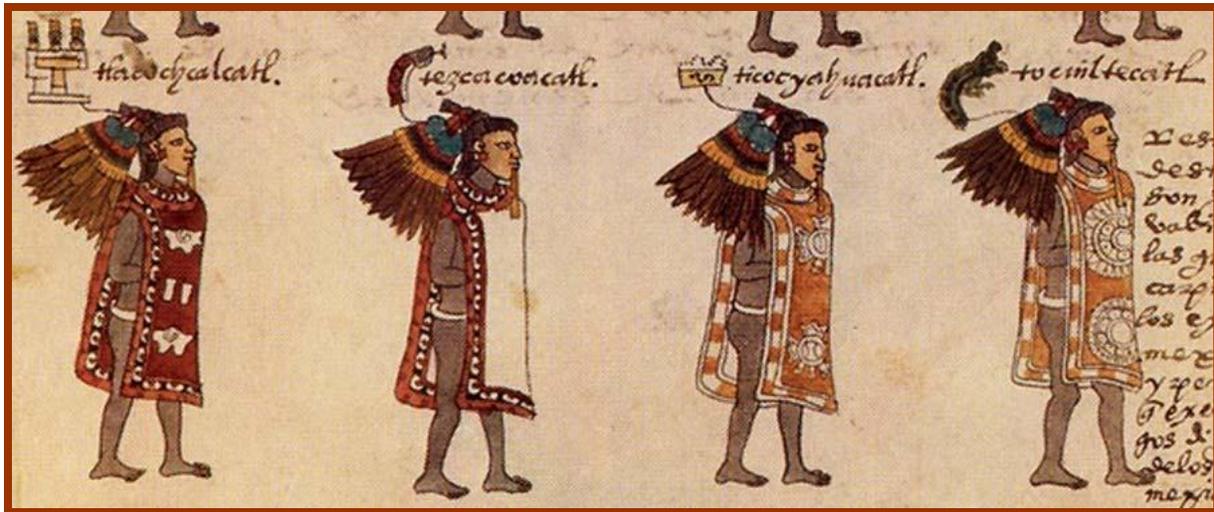
Artistic conception of Mayans at the Stela I and altar. Painting of 1898 by Henry Sandham. ([Public Domain](#))

Mayan Flood Myths

The Mayans, like so many civilizations around the world, remembered flood stories similar to those found in Genesis, and even earlier in the Epic of Gilgamesh. It might be said that stories of a universal flood are the glue that holds together the mythologies of every culture known today. The Americas are no different. Flood stories were told by indigenous people from Maine to California. Many deluge epics coincide with the tumultuous end of the Younger Dryas Ice Age, about 11,600 years ago. If the Mayan stories refer to this flood, their culture is old, indeed. And if their civilization began, as appears to be the case in places as far away as Göbekli Tepe, Mesopotamia and Egypt, when survivors of this cataclysm made their

way to Mesoamerica, there to kick start the civilization of yet another nomadic people, the Mayans suddenly become another in a long line of ancient people who benefited from the wisdom passed down from those survivors. Are the Mayans, too, members of what has been called the Atlantis tradition?

So are the Mayans a few thousand years old? Three thousand years old or more than 11,000 years old? Given this kind of time frame, what is called the Classic Mayan Period might very well be the end of a long and distinguished tradition that was in decline, perhaps because of drought or overzealous use of resources, and had been showing signs of failure for generations.



Aztec 'high lords', who were in the top social class. This is a portion of folio 65 of the Codex Mendoza. ([Public Domain](#))

Does this explain the ritual sacrifice that so tantalizes the imaginations of people today? Was that whole practice a corrupt, end-time tradition that somehow involved a conservative social elite that wanted to 'make Maya great again', no matter how depraved their methods? It might even have been the Mayans who, following the tenants of conservative social movements all over the world, found it expedient to rally the masses by declaring war on an outside enemy. Hence, the destruction of the Olmec empire. Would such a sacrifice of an enemy who was viewed as 'other' been that different from Hitler's sacrifice of six million Jews? Would marching into Olmec La Venta have been any different from sending tanks into Poland or the US Cavalry into Montana? History, it would seem, repeats itself more often than we would like to believe.

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