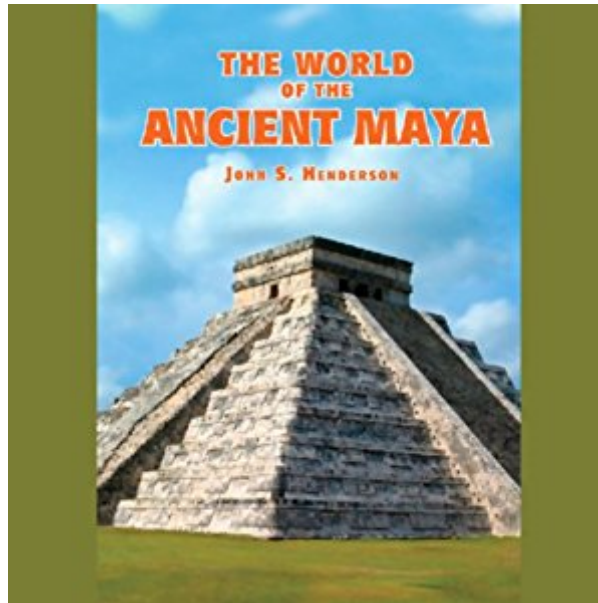




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# The World Of The Ancient Maya: 2nd Edition



## Synopsis

The ancient Maya were the only fully literate pre-Colombian people in the Americas. Superb scientists, they developed highly sophisticated mathematics and an intricate and accurate calendar system. There was one of the few complex societies to emerge in and to adapt successfully to a tropical-forest environment. Their architecture, sculpture, and painting were sophisticated and compellingly beautiful. In this comprehensive survey, updated for this new edition, Henderson explores the entire Maya cultural tradition, from the earliest traces of settlement through the period of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. His wide-ranging account treats diverse aspects of the Maya world, from religion and philosophy to the environments of the various Maya peoples, using deciphered Maya texts to reconstruct the ancient societies. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written by a college professor, it has endless details about the people, their locations, their languages, and their social hierarchy. Great information but it starts to obscure the overall development of the Maya civilization. The book contains a lot of good information, you just have to pick your way thru each chapter to find it. A more enjoyable read if done in segments over a period of time, thus allowing you to digest what you have already covered.

I was looking for a book which would introduce me to the Maya society and thoroughly explain every facet of it. It does not keep only to religious matters, but explores maya economy, politics and other

aspects of its culture (such as architecture). I did not find the reading at all boring, simply informative. I recommend it greatly to anyone who wants to fully understand the Maya.

Arrived when scheduled - item just as described. Very pleased.

I acquired an earlier edition of this book about 30 years ago, and this is the last of four books about Mesoamerican civilizations which I have re-read in the past two years. I suppose, on the first reading, and because my life was focussed on making a living, my aim, then, was to get a quick overview of this civilization of eastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras. This time around, my purpose was to get a more complete understanding of the details, which required a considerably longer period of study. The author, John S. Henderson, has 25 seasons of experience focusing mainly in Mexico and Central America, and his most recent excavations have been the uncovering one of the earliest pottery-making villages in Mesoamerica along with evidence that shortly thereafter the area became part of Mesoamerica's first civilization, the Olmec. *The World of the Ancient Maya*, apparently, is considered by many to be the best introduction to ancient Maya civilization currently available and, according to the author, "it is a survey of the Maya cultural tradition: an introduction to the societies that make it up and an exploration of their contrasts, connections, and linked historical development." In my edition of this absorbing book, there are 10 colour plates and 133 photographs and illustrations of some of the more important Maya sites such as Tikal, Copán, Palenque, Chichén Itzá, Tulum, and Zaculeu. There are 11 excellent maps of the principal sites for each period, which I found very helpful, because I always like to know the geographic location and time frame of such places. The book includes an extensive set of notes for each chapter and a 19 page bibliography of published works by more than 200 scholars. The large majority of these were produced after 1965 by such renowned Maya experts as Gordon R Willey, Robert L Rands, Joseph W Ball, David H Kelley, Robert J Sharer, Michael D Coe, J Eric S Thompson, Ralph L Roys, and Tatiana Proskouriakoff. Here is a review of the contents of each Chapter: CHAPTER ONE The Discovery of The Maya, This chapter reviews the Spanish Conquest, and the rediscovery of the Maya. The first hand observations of the 16th century Diego de Landa, Bishop of Yucatan in his "Relación de las Casas de Yucatán" first published in 1566, as well as The Annals of the Cakchiquels (1571), and The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel (18th and 19th centuries) are very important sources for the study of the history of the Maya prior to and during the conquest period. Landa's work, which was rediscovered by Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg in 1862, was the inspiration for much of the work done on Maya studies in the later decades of

nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth.

**CHAPTER TWO The Maya World** This chapter reviews the different Maya peoples, their languages, and their neighbours, with a geographical overview of the various sites in the Maya area. The author has conveniently broken down these into separate zones: the Northern Lowlands, primarily the Yucatan Peninsula and northern Guatemala, the Southern Lowlands of Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras, the Highlands of Eastern Mexico and Guatemala and the Intermediate Zone of the Pacific coast and slope of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

**CHAPTER THREE The Maya World on the Eve of The Spanish Conquest** This chapter reviews the organization of the major Maya communities in the early 16th century of major centres in northern Yucatan, Acalá, Tayasal, Naco, the Sula Plain in Honduras, and the highland states of the Quiché.

**CHAPTER FOUR The Maya Universe** This chapter reviews the Maya concept of time, the Maya Calendar (Long and Short count), and their concepts of space, their gods, divination and prophecy, and iconography and writing.

**CHAPTER FIVE Origins** This chapter reviews the sites of earliest Mesoamerica, the transition to village farming in the Archaic period (7000-2500 B.C.), the first village farmers of the early Preclassic Period (2500-1400 B.C.), and the development of the Olmec and Olmecoid centres in the middle Preclassic period (1400-400 B.C.).

**CHAPTER SIX Foundations of Maya Civilization** This chapter describes the evolution of Maya village societies in the middle Preclassic period and the rise of aristocracies and regional civic centers of the late Preclassic Period (400 B.C.- A.D. 250) with a focus on the evolution and comparison of various Izapan culture centres in the Highlands and Intermediate Zone with those of the Maya lowlands.

**CHAPTER SEVEN Classic Maya Civilization** This chapter describes the development of Maya centres during the Classic Period which was ushered in around the time of the disastrous eruption of the Ilopango Volcano in El Salvador. The early Classic (A.D. 250-600) is the time of the great Central Mexican civilization of Teotihuacán, while the late Classic Period (A.D. 600-1000) is the time of the aftermath of the collapse of that civilization which occurred in the 7th and 8th centuries. There is a lengthy discussion on demography and settlement, subsistence practices, economy, society, politics, and regionalism in the major sites such as Tikal, Copán, La Sierra, Palenque, Uxmal and Chichén Itzá, and the chapter ends with a review of the mysterious decline of the major centres after 800AD.

**CHAPTER EIGHT New Orientations: The Postclassic Maya** This chapter describes the development of Maya centres during the Postclassic Period (A.D. 1000-1525). The earlier period (to AD1200) covers the development of Chichén Itzá during the period of the Toltecs of Tula. The latter period starts with the rise of Mayapan after the fall of Chichén at the hands of the Cocom family, and ends with the aftermath of the fall of Mayapan in about 1400AD until the arrival of the Spaniards. Major sites described in this chapter include

Chich'ŋ Itz' , Tulum and Zuculeu

## CHAPTER NINE Perspectives on the Maya

This final chapter is an essay on the unanswered questions of "this first fully literate native American people". The author discusses the contributions of population growth, warfare, and trade to the rise of the Maya civilization, but while agreeing that these were indeed major factors, his position is that interaction among communities and regions was more important of any of these.

Did I achieve my objectives in reading this book and was the time I spent worth it? The answer is a resounding yes, and if you are looking for an overview of the Maya, then this very readable book is an excellent place to start. The fact that my edition was published in 1981 is the only reason I am giving it only a four star rating. The latest edition (2005) probably merits five stars.

I bought this to prepare for an excavation in Belize Valley as was required by the field school. I didn't know what to expect from it but after reading this textbook, I found it to be an excellent read for any aspiring archaeologist or for anyone who really wants to learn about the ancient Mayans in more of an in-depth level. Like the previous post said, it's not for people who are just merely curious but for someone who wants to really study the subject. There are A LOT of technical terms so that may tend to bore people. But I would highly recommend it to anyone wanting to understand more about the Mayans and their history!

Tough to review this book since I really don't think I should have been reading it in the first place. Possibly what I say can allow others to decide for themselves if this book is worth reading. What I mean, is that this book is not a casual history of Maya civilization. Basically if you're like me and you liked Apocalypto and you heard about the Mayan calendar ending in 2012, then this book will not sate your curiosity. If you're an archaeologist, you may find this book a treasure trove. It's thick on the archeology presumably because we don't have too many other resources to learn about the Mayans. I guess it's amazing what they 'learn' from pottery. High point for me: learning about the Mayan calendar. Though the 2012 date is not explicitly mentioned, you learn enough about the calendar to see what 2012 actually does signify. Low points: A lot of names. A lot. A lot of descriptions of artifacts (which I found boring, no offense). Not enough analysis (maybe there's not enough knowledge) about things like human sacrifices, Mayan science, Mayan number systems etc. I learned the basics of Mayan history but could probably be done more concisely for my purposes.

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