



# Mesoamerican Newsletter

## Anthropology

The ancient Maya believed in recurring cycles of creation and destruction and thought in terms of eras lasting about 5,200 modern years. The previous cycle is believed by the Maya to have begun in either 3114 or 3113 B.C.E. of our calendar, and to end in either 2011 or 2012. Therefore our current era began in 2013 and will not end until 7213 C.E. I doubt anyone reading this will be around to go through the next era.

Maya creation myth can be read in the Popol Vah, though most writings were destroyed by Friar Diego de Landa, only three codex, and a fraction of a fourth survived [according to Landa, 27 books and approximately 5000 Maya cult images were burned.] The remaining books are collectively known as the Maya codices.

The Maya believed the Earth was flat and four cornered. Each corner was located at a cardinal point and had a color value; white was north, red was east, yellow was south, black was west and in the center was green. The corners and the center were held up by trees. Heaven had 13 layers, each had its own god. The underworld had nine layers, each with its own Lord of the night. The underworld was a cold and unhappy place. It was believed to be the destination for most Maya. Heavenly bodies such as the Sun, Moon and Venus were thought to pass through the underworld after they disappeared below the horizon every evening.

Based on research and reading of the relevant literature, it is theorized the civilized traditions shared by the Mayan-speaking peoples have existed in the Mesoamerican region since at least the middle Pre-classic Period (ca. 500 B.C.E.), and these traditions and languages have been reconstituted in many forms down to the present. Alongside sociocultural endurances there have been major transformations of the Mayan traditions, in part the result of changing social contexts as the collapse of the Classic Mayan states (ca. 900 C.E.), the subsequent formation of more militant Mayan states (ca. 1200–1500 C.E.), the reorganization of colonial Mayan societies under imperial Spanish rule (ca. 1500–1800 C.E.).

The pinnacle or Classic period in the history of Mayan civilization took place in the central lowland areas of southern Mexico and northern Central America, and is usually dated to (ca. 300–900 C.E.). During this period, the Maya, numbering in the millions, created a multitude of kingdoms and small empires, built monumental palaces and temples, engaged in grandiose ceremonies. The social basis of this exuberant civilization was a large political and economic network extending throughout the Mayan region and beyond, to the Mesoamerican world including most of present-day Mexico and Central America.

The Maya with roots in the underworld, trunk on the earth, and branches in the heavens, this tree of life served as the world tree between the sacred and profane, living and dead, light and darkness. The world tree was closely associated with vegetative regeneration and the solar cycle; as seeds regenerate plants, so the sun is sown under the earth only to dawn again, just as the dead are buried in the earth and then regenerate as sparks of light. Mayan kings and other rulers became symbols of this sacred living god, designed to inspire awe, respect and obedience.

### **This Newsletter Feature City**

## **Kabah**



The Codz-Poop (Palace of Masks) - The visitor can admire one of the most beautiful buildings erected in the Maya area, particularly with respect to the components of its extensive facade. The pieces were cut, shaped and smoothed with such precision and finesse that they do not seem to have been fashioned with rudimentary and primitive tools. Any one who carefully looks at the magnificence of this extraordinary facade has to agree this is one of the more notable architectural marvels of the ancient Maya.

Today, Kabah sits silently, its days of intrigue and influence faded into the depths of history. But the visitor willing to sit among the ruins, to cast an inquisitive eye over the glyphs and carvings and to picture the color and life of a past millennium will be well rewarded by this compelling reminder of an ancient age.