PLATE LXI

Joya Hairs

SIR ERIC THOMPSON

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JOHN ERIC SIDNEY THOMPSON

1898–1975

SIR ERIC THOMPSON, the leading Maya archaeologist of his generation, died on 9 September 1975, at Cambridge. His distinguished career in Maya studies parallels the growth and development of that field over the past 50 years, and, indeed, its present form may be attributed to him more than to any other Maya scholar.

John Eric Sidney Thompson was born on the last day of the year 1898, the younger son of a Harley Street doctor, George Thompson, FRCS. He entered Winchester College in 1912, leaving it a few years later to join the British Army, in which he served with distinction, emerging as an officer in the Coldstream Guards. Subsequently, he went out to Argentina where he worked as a rancher on a family *estancia.* He returned to England in the early 1920s and matriculated at Cambridge University (Fitzwilliam House), studying anthropology under A. C. Haddon in 1924–6. In the latter year he joined a Maya field expedition in Yucatán, and from that time forward, virtually up to the time of his death, his great energies and abilities were devoted to Maya archaeology and ethnohistory. In 1930 he married Florence Keen. Lady Thompson survives him, residing at Ashdon, near Saffron Walden, Essex. They had one son, Donald E. Thompson, also an archaeologist, now a professor at the University of Wisconsin.

When Thompson entered Maya archaeology in the mid-1920s the field could be described as being in a phase of professional consolidation. For a long time it had been in a tradition of *belles lettres,* linked to romantic explorations in a tropical jungle, although a base of data and some important findings had resulted from these early travellers who had pursued archaeology as an avocation. Actually, some of the Maya ruins had been discovered by early Spanish explorers and crown officials in the sixteenth century, but then they were largely forgotten. Rare visits to, or notes upon, them occurred or were published in the 18th century, and then in the early 1840s John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood brought out their famous books of travel and illustrations of the abandoned Maya cities of Yucatán and Central America. These works captured

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the imagination of a reading public in Europe and America. By the 1880s Alfred Maudslay began systematic surveyings and reportings of Maya remains, providing careful drawings and high quality photographs of Maya sculptures and carved hieroglyphic texts. This established a corpus of reliable field information which was to be the basis of the first partial translations of Maya hieroglyphic writing and the beginning of an understanding of the Maya calendar by such library scholars as the German Ernst Forstemann and the American J. T. Goodman. Archival research into native manuscripts and early Colonial Mexican documents was also carried on through the nineteenth century, led by such persons as the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg who established the field in an official academic sense by giving the first course in Mexican and Maya archaeology at the Sorbonne. This academic establishment of Maya archaeology followed soon after in the United States at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. In 1914 S. G. Morley, a student of Alfred Tozzer's at Harvard, was engaged by the Carnegie Institution of Washington to carry out Maya explorations and further the development of the field. He did this by excavating at Chichén Itzá in Yucatán and directing his Carnegie colleagues to do the same at Uaxactún in the Guatemalan Petén, operations carried out or begun in the 1920s.

As of that date, Maya archaeological studies had developed a knowledge of the Maya Long Count calendar and had indicated how this time counting system correlated with the Christian calendar. These discoveries led to the knowledge that most of the great Maya cities had been abandoned to the jungle some 500 years or so before the Spanish arrived on the scene. Aside from glyphs connected with calendrics and dates, however, little had been done with the larger portion of Maya hieroglyphic writing. Only three native pre-Columbian Maya paper manuscripts had survived the Spanish Conquests, but these were supplemented by the numerous texts carved on stone in the old Maya cities. There was abundant material, but there appeared to be no reliable 'Rosetta Stone' to expedite Maya translations. A fair amount was known about Maya architecture from a study of its temples and palaces although little was actually known about the true functions of buildings, the terms 'temples' and 'palaces' being applied in a very descriptive way. The study of Maya art and iconography had attracted both Old and New World scholars. Similarities and relationships between Maya symbols and those of other Mexican

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pre-Columbian cultures had been pointed out, and ethnohistoric source materials as applied to these allowed for some interpretations of the meanings in Maya art as a way toward understanding ancient Maya religion. The Maya Long Count calendar gave archaeologists a great advantage in the Maya area for it allowed them to project an archaeological chronology back to about AD 300, but chronologies in the sense of architectural or ceramic sequences were little developed. In general, the view of the former Maya civilization that archaeologists had fashioned by the 1920s was one heavily weighted on the side of the amazing Maya intellectual and aesthetic achievements. It was a sound beginning but a narrow one. Eric Thompson was to broaden this perspective enormously and, at the same time, to delve deeper into such things as calendrics, hieroglyphics, and art.

Thompson's Maya field career began in 1926 when he joined Morley's Carnegie party at Chichén Itzá. His general interests in archaeology had led him to resume academic studies at Cambridge. While there he became interested in Maya hieroglyphics, and like virtually all Maya glyphic scholars he was largely self-taught in this exacting speciality. It is difficult to explain the development of such scholars, although great intellectual curiosity, a humanistic bent, stern self-discipline, and industry are certainly all parts of the equation. Thompson obviously had all of these and coupled them with an imaginative intelligence. He had written to Morley, explaining his interests, and had been invited to come to Chichén. He spent the 1926 season there, making an important side trip to Cobá, in the north-eastern part of the peninsula, which resulted in the discovery and dating of several important Maya monuments or stelae. At the close of that season he accepted his first American post, as an Assistant Curator at the Field Museum in Chicago. However, in 1927 he went with Thomas Joyce, the distinguished Americanist of the British Museum, to Lubaantún, a major Maya ruin in southern British Honduras, and he also explored the nearby ruin of Pusilhá on this trip. These two men, Morley, the indefatigable discoverer and recorder of Maya monuments and inscriptions, and Joyce, the generalist and synthesizer of so much pre-Columbian Americana, were thus Thompson's first two direct mentors in Maya field studies. From the outset he often disagreed with them both, but they were to remain long-time friends and colleagues.

Thompson returned to southern British Honduras in 1929,

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excavating in the southern part of the Cayo District at small, previously little known Maya sites. He undertook this work, as well as that instigated at San José, in the northern part of the Colony, in 1931, to broaden the data base of Maya studies by examining smaller sites or centres. Previously, work had been concentrated in the largest and most spectacular ruins. In 1935 he left the Field Museum, joining Morley, Kidder, and others in the Carnegie Institution's Department of Archaeology. Under their aegis he continued with field explorations, going to the Rio Bec country of Central Yucatán, again to British Honduras, and also making a foray into the Maya country on the Pacific slopes of Guatemala. This last led to his discoveries and interpretations of the Cotzumalhuapa culture and style (perhaps non-Maya).

The 1940s and 1950s were spent largely in the Carnegie offices in Cambridge, Massachusetts and at his home in the nearby village of Harvard, and were devoted to writing which covered the whole range of Maya archaeological and ethnohistorical topics, including major works on Maya hieroglyphics and calendrics, on Maya religion and history, and in various works of general synthesis. The Carnegie Institution disbanded its archaeological department in 1958, and Thompson and his wife, their son now grown and launched on an academic career of his own in the United States, returned to England to settle in Essex, at Ashdon. This retirement, however, was a nominal one, for his scholarly productivity continued as it had over the previous two decades and was to continue up to the end of his life.

Such, in brief form, is the chronological outline of Sir Eric Thompson's career in Maya archaeology. Let us turn now to the significance of this career to the discipline. A review of his bibliography presents a most wide-ranging variety of topics in both articles and monographs. He was, insofar as it was possible to be, the complete Mayanist, attending to details of exquisite specimens, researching the abstruse intricacies of the Maya calendar and Maya astronomy-astrology, compiling basic catalogues of hieroglyphics, addressing himself to problems of Maya agriculture, both past and present, and writing culture-historical accounts that could weave all of this together. All was done with verve and style. I shall select several themes that draw together Thompson's achievements in both enriching and redirecting the course of Maya studies.

To begin with what might be considered the archaeologically more 'routine' of Thompson's accomplishments, he realized

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early that Lowland Maya archaeological chronology would have to be carried by something other than the Maya hieroglyphic dates. For one thing, dated stelae were found only in the larger centres; such monuments and other inscribed dates were rarely, if ever, encountered in smaller ruins. Even in the big sites it was often difficult to date buildings, walls, floors, tombs, and other features by the Maya dates because of the ambiguities of association. The Maya had a disconcerting way of resetting stelae so that these monuments and their dates were not always contemporaneous with particular constructional features. Also, in coordinating a Maya archaeological chronology with other regions of Mesoamerica a ubiquitous dating medium was necessary. The standard 'dirt archaeological' medium for this purpose was pottery. It was only beginning to be studied in the Maya archaeology of the 1920s, and Thompson was one of the pioneers. In that first field season at Chichén Itzá he met and made friends with George C. Vaillant, then a graduate student at Harvard, who was later to write a doctoral dissertation on 'The Chronological Significance of Maya Ceramics'. At the time, there was virtually no stratigraphic information available from Maya excavations. Vaillant, however, was piecing together a chronological series of pottery phases from some structural and tomb superpositions that had been recorded over a decade before at the site of Holmul. This work offered stylistic clues to chronology, and Thompson pursued this in his Mountain Cow and Tzimin Kax fieldwork in British Honduras. This was published in 1931 in his monograph *Archaeological investigations in the southern Cayo District, British Honduras* issued by the Field Museum. He was later to duplicate this ceramic chronological work, but in more detail, in *Excavations at San José, British Honduras*, a report brought out by the Carnegie Institution in 1939. In these works a sequence running from an Archaic or Formative Period through several Classic Periods was set out. This, together with Vaillant's Holmul sequence, demonstrated the presence of a Formative or pre-Classic Period in the Maya Lowlands. These earlier levels lay behind the stelae-dated Classic Periods in time, and in those pre-radiocarbon days no absolute chronology could be assigned to them; however, the relationships of this Formative Period to early cultures in other parts of Mesoamerica, as distant as the Valley of Mexico, were recognized, thus laying a groundwork for a general developmental picture of pre-Columbian civilizations throughout much of Mexico and northern Central

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America. Thompson never pursued ceramic studies in any intensity of specialization; this was to be the contribution of his Carnegie colleague R. E. Smith who began work on the Uaxactún pottery in the early 1930s; but he worked with ceramic collections for purposes of relative dating in subsequent studies in British Honduras and elsewhere. With his striving toward a holistic view of ancient Maya culture, Thompson saw ceramics as important, as a means to an end, but not, in themselves, of overwhelming interest; and he tended to be a little impatient with latter-day exercises in pottery classification and taxonomy. In this connection he once remarked that 'while it might be necessary to count all of the pebbles on a beach it isn't really desirable to give them all separate names'.

The need for chronology building was closely linked to the more general interest in extraterritorial Lowland Maya relationships, and Thompson was one of the first to treat this in over-all perspective. In an article published in 1940, in the volume *The Maya and Their Neighbors*, Thompson linked the earliest Maya Lowland ceramic horizon then known, the Mamom, to the Guatemalan Highlands and then went on to say that he believed many of the elements of the later Lowland Classic Periods—including those of calendrics and monumental art—might have had their origins elsewhere. In so saying, he alluded to the then recent Olmec discoveries in southern Veracruz and to the early 8th Cycle stela found in that region. In the next year, however, he backed away from this prophetic intimation in an article entitled, 'Dating of Certain Inscriptions of Non-Maya Origin' (1941), and aligned himself with those opposed to Olmec origins for Maya and much of Classic Mesoamerican civilization. The problem was a knotty one and not to be resolved for almost another two decades, when sufficient radiocarbon dates finally demonstrated the chronological priority of Olmec to Classic Maya; but Thompson's early tackling of it showed his awareness of the complexities of Maya interrelationships. Moving up a little later in the Mesoamerican chronology, Thompson was the first to note Teotihuacan influences in Early Classic Lowland Maya contexts and to effect this chronological equation. This was based on his observations of artefacts from his San José dig but was put forward in his important article of archaeological–calendrical consequence, 'Maya Chronology: The Correlation Question' (1935). Other works of Thompson involving foreign influences on the Maya include his monograph, *An archaeological*

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reconnaissance in the Cotzumalhuapa region, Escuintla, Guatemala (1948), which was based on his own field survey and excavations on the Pacific slopes of Guatemala. This is not Lowland Classic Maya country, but related Maya-speaking peoples occupied parts of the Guatemalan Highland–Pacific Coastal zone, at least at certain times in the pre-Columbian past. The Cotzumalhuapa sculptural style, however, is an oddity. Iconographically it appears to be non-Mayan. While its general affiliations seem to be Mexican, these have never been explained to everyone's satisfaction. Thompson made a systematic start on the problem by describing and analysing the style and demonstrating that it was of Classic date and associated with a certain Late Classic pottery style. He was inclined to associate this archaeological manifestation with the Nahua-speaking Pipil, a people believed to have migrated into Mayan Guatemala from somewhere in Mexico. More recent investigations have thrown doubt on the Pipil attribution and have also indicated that the Cotzumalhuapa art style may have earlier beginnings in time than those assigned by Thompson; however, his Late Classic placement of at least a part of the style stands as a solid finding, as does his insistence on its 'foreign' qualities.

These ceramic, chronological and external relationship studies of Thompson's have been recounted to indicate that he did early service for the Maya archaeological field in such matters of time-space systematics, but it is fair to say that, while he recognized these as necessary research tasks, they were not his primary concerns. Thompson was, above all else, interested in the nature and quality of ancient Maya life. How did its institutions function? What were its values? How was society organized? He approached these questions in many ways. One of these is reflected in his interest in Maya settlement. He did not use present-day archaeological terms such as 'settlement pattern' or 'settlement system', but he realized the importance of knowing the Maya past from sites other than those of the great temple and palace centres. This was one of his objectives in the late 1920s when he excavated at Mountain Cow in British Honduras. He deliberately explored in two site units that were of small size and appeared to be residential units, and he also dug nearby in what he believed to be the 'small ceremonial centre' components of the same community. Later, he chose the site of San José because it appeared to provide a centre of the 'middle size range', something between the little 'ceremonial centres' of Mountain Cow and a truly

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great centre of the order of Uaxactún or Tikal. In so posing the problem Thompson was forming a hypothesis—and one that still guides us—in Maya settlement study. This is that the Maya social and political world was organized on some sort of an hierarchical basis, with major centres, medium-sized centres, small centres, and that these were foci of community activity and authority for surrounding populations living in building components of still smaller size or residences. Thompson coined the term 'ceremonial centre' for it was his belief that these aggregates of temples and palaces were not urban centres or cities in the general sense of those terms but were, in effect, places of relatively small year-around populations, run by an aristocratic priesthood, which served as gathering places on religious or ceremonial occasions. While three decades of field explorations have challenged some of this, especially in that many large Maya centres appear to have had urban dimensions and urban functions, Thompson's model of an hierarchical arrangement of 'capitals' and 'sub-capitals' is still a working one, with Maya archaeologists currently engaged in attempting to plot out such political spheres in settlement.

Above all else, Thompson was interested in the Maya mind, in the ideological essences of Maya culture. The most complex, brilliant and tangible evidences of ancient Maya ideology are preserved in their calendrics and hieroglyphic writing. Maya time-counting was intimately bound up with religion and a view of the cosmos. Its purposes were also partly secular and historic. It was based upon centuries of astronomical observations and upon a sophisticated mathematical system. With their astronomical data the Maya priest-scholars could perform such feats as the prediction of eclipses years before the event. Their vigesimal mathematical system allowed for place-enumeration in the writing of numbers and dates. There was a concept of and a sign for zero. The Maya were, indeed, virtuosos in the matter of time-recording, maintaining several calendar systems. The most important one of these from the archaeologist's standpoint is the one known as the Long Count. This was a system of counting individual days since a mythical point in the past, a day in the year 3113 BC. We say 'mythical point' for no such early date, or any date for the two-and-more millennia after that, has ever been discovered. The system worked with a set of time periods or intervals. The largest such period, the Baktun or the Great Cycle, was 144,000 days; the next largest, the Katun, consisted of 7200 days; the Tun was 360 days; the

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Uinal 20 days; and the Kin a single day. The earliest Lowland Maya Long Count dates now known, from stelae at the Petén ruins of Uaxactún and Tikal, pertain to the 8th Great Cycle. The latest known Long Count dates pertain to the earlier part of the 10th Great Cycle. This is a span of a little over 600 years. A major problem of Maya archaeology has been the correlation of this great native calendar with the Christian calendar. At the turn of the twentieth century, J. T. Goodman advanced such a correlation. Subsequently, this was challenged by other scholars. Thompson, in one of his most closely reasoned and brilliant papers, that of the 'Correlation Question', referred to above, argued, from a consideration of Colonial historical, archaeological, and astronomical lines of evidence, for a correlation that essentially supports Goodman's. This correlation, widely known as the Goodman–Thompson, or the 11.16.0.00. Correlation, is the one used by most Maya and Mesoamerican archaeologists. According to this correlation, the earliest Lowland Long Count monuments, those of the 8th Cycle, fall in the third century of the Christian era while the last dates, those of the early 10th Cycle, are just before AD 900. After that time the Maya recorded dates in a 'Short Count' system, omitting the Great Cycle or Baktun notation. The correlation problem, then, hinged on just where a sixteenth-century 'Short Count' date would have fallen in a projected Great Cycle tabulation. In working with these data Thompson produced another landmark paper, treating of these later centuries, 'A New Method of Deciphering Yucatecan Dates with Special Reference to Chichén Itzá'.

Maya hieroglyphics are closely associated with calendrics, with glyph signs standing for the different periods of the Long Count and for other supplemental calendric information. In addition there are extensive texts, most of which are still untranslated or about which there is considerable debate as to proper translation. If Thompson had done nothing else in Maya archaeology he would have been famous for his hieroglyphic research alone. As noted, this was the particular aspect of Maya studies which had first engaged his attention while a student at Cambridge. He pursued it for virtually a half-century and became the world's most eminent scholar in this field. Numerous short papers on hieroglyphics were brought out in his earlier years. In 1950 he published the monumental *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction*; while hardly a primer in the subject, it is a starting point for all those who are seriously

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interested in ancient Maya writing. Similarly, his *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs* (1962) is the basic reference for the glyphs, as these are found in manuscripts, sculptures, and on lesser artefacts. As of its published date, it contained virtually all known or recorded hieroglyphic signs and their affixes. This catalogue, the on-and-off work of a lifetime, was completed after his retirement to England; and in his last years after this he published a half-dozen additional papers on the hieroglyphs, including a major study, 'A Commentary on the Dresden Codex, a Maya Hieroglyphic Book' (1972) and a popularization of the subject (if such a term may be used for any serious address to such a complex matter), 'Maya Hieroglyphs without Tears' (1972).

In his hieroglyphic investigations, as in all of his other Maya research, Thompson was a stern and outspoken defender of his own views. On occasion, however, when he was convinced that his critics, or those whose interpretations differed from his own, were correct he would graciously concede his errors and accept their opinions. One such example concerned the subject matter of hieroglyphic texts. Thompson had always held to the view that such texts were largely religious and prophetic, dealing with the gods and the passing of time on a cosmic scale. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Heinrich Berlin and Tatiana Proskouriakoff put forward evidence to the contrary in arguing convincingly that certain glyph signs pertained to the badges or symbols of Maya cities and ruling lineages and that glyph clauses could be read to record the accessions of new rulers to the thrones of city-states, to dynastic marriages, and to inter-city wars. Thompson gave ground on these important discoveries and interpretations, incorporating these ideas into his own research. On more systematic glyphic translations, as these might be based upon phonetic principles, Thompson remained unconvinced. This was an old argument in Maya studies. To what degree were the glyphs phonetic, to what degree ideographic? Thompson leaned strongly toward the latter interpretation as had most Maya scholars. In the 1950s the question was revived by the Russian expert on early writing systems, Y. V. Knorozov, who was willing to place more reliance on the sixteenth-century Landa 'alphabet' than was Thompson or most of his European or American colleagues. The matter is by no means settled although a number of younger students of Maya writing are now convinced that phoneticism is not entirely lacking in the Maya system and that it probably

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combines both ideographic and phonetic elements. The goal of full or extensive translations of the Maya hieroglyphic texts —at least to the satisfaction of the majority of well-informed Maya scholars—would still appear to be some distance away at the time of writing.

Another path that Thompson followed into the Maya mind and world view was that of ethnological study of present-day descendants of the old Maya. Many such groups still exist, in both Yucatán and the Guatemalan Highlands, and there are also some Maya still living in parts of British Honduras (now Belize). Thompson came to know some of the latter, the Mopan Maya from the village of San Antonio and others from the community of Socotz. Many of these Maya were employed by him as workmen on his archaeological expeditions, and some became fast and lifetime friends. His discussions with them and visits to their homes are reflected in Thompson's writings. There is his ethnological monograph, the direct result of these first sojourns among the Maya, *Ethnology of the Mayas of Southern and Central British Honduras* (1930), and there are the passages and sections in his archaeological writings, such as the reconstructions of everyday Maya home life, as these are incorporated into his well-known general book, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization* (1954). For Thompson was aware, from his first contact with the Maya field, that one of the keys to the understanding of the Maya past lay in the Maya present. This was no simplistic view of archaeological–ethnological continuities. He was fully cognizant of the pitfalls of such untested assumptions, but he also knew that some of the past always carries to the present and that a consideration of both was necessary to any valid archaeological reconstructions.

This interest in the Maya continuity from pre-Columbian past and present naturally encompassed history and ethnohistory. He was well versed in Mesoamerican ethnohistoric literature as a whole, as well as in writings and documentary sources pertaining to the Maya. His bibliography lists many reviews of others' works and edited editions of such great native-Hispanic documents as the *Popol Vuh* and the *Florentine Codex*. A sampling of his own writings in history and ethnohistory includes such diverse subjects and titles as: 'Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Reports on the Chol Mayas' (1938); 'Canoes and Navigation of the Maya and Their Neighbors' (1951); 'John Hawkins' Ships' Boys in Mexico' (1961); 'Trade Relations between the Maya Highlands and Lowlands' (1964);

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'The Maya Central Area at the Spanish Conquest and Later: a Problem in Demography' (1967); and, above all, his outstanding monograph on *Maya History and Religion* (1970). In many ways, this last work, one of those written in his Cambridge 'retirement', is Thompson's greatest. One feels the author to be particularly 'at home' with the approach as well as the data. The skeletal structure of much of archaeology—the stones, bones, and potsherds and the chronological sequences of these—left Thompson unsatisfied. The hieroglyphics and calendrics were more to his liking, but even these did not recreate for him the texture of life that he always sought. In *Maya History and Religion* he was to come as close to his goal of a holistic reconstruction of the Maya past, or a part of that past, as such could be permitted by the data. In this work he begins with the story of the Putún, or Chontal, Maya. These were a people living on the eastern edges of the Maya Lowlands. Their beginnings can be carried back in the archaeological record to the Classic Postclassic transition (*c.* AD 800–1000), and their travels and activities go forward from this point into the Usumacinta and Pasion River drainages of Tabasco, Chiapas, and the Guatemalan Petén and, chronologically, up to the Spanish Conquest. This 'history' is a skilful interweaving of archaeological, native legendary-historical, and Colonial ethnohistorical data, and there can be no doubt but that Thompson enjoyed the writing of it. This is especially so as this Putún Maya history provides a background for aspects of Maya life such as long-distance trade and its functionings in Maya society or the uses of tobacco among the Maya and the way this commodity was involved in so many other facets of Maya existence: war, religion, divination, curing. All of this leads on into Thompson's favourite subject, Maya religion, and a considerations of its forms and concepts, rituals, gods and creation myths.

This theme of religion runs most steadily and consistently through all of Thompson's Maya studies. By their very nature Maya hieroglyphics, calendrics, art, and much of architecture were expressions of it; and Thompson was particularly sensitive to this pervasiveness. He was, himself, a deeply religious man, devoted both to the form and content of his own beliefs in the Church of England. There can be no doubt that this predisposed him to be sympathetic and understanding of the beliefs of his Maya associates, such as the excavation foreman and village leader in Socotz, the late Jacinto Cunil, who was his highly regarded friend for many years; and perhaps it is not

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going too far to speculate that his observations of the Maya, both on the living level and as regards their past monuments, further reinforced in Thompson the importance of religious faith. A citing of Thompson's articles on Maya religion would be virtually impossible for almost everything he wrote touched, to a greater or lesser degree, on this unifying force in Maya life. The book, *Maya History and Religion*, is a fitting summary of this very deep current that runs through all of his work.

From all that has been said to this point, it is obvious that Eric Thompson was a highly literate and deeply cultivated man. His interests ranged far beyond Maya archaeology, and this is evident in the reading of any of his longer works, especially the general or semi-popular books. *Maya History and Religion* is one of these, although veering a little toward the specialist's interests. His general book, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, first brought out in 1954 and reissued in a second edition a few years later, is a more popular presentation, highly readable but also scholarly and witty. Anyone would realize he is in the presence of the master on reading it. Thompson had had considerable 'practice' in the writing of syntheses before embarking on the book. Early in his career he had produced, with Thomas Gann, *The History of the Maya from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1931). Later, he prepared and published two key journal articles of synthesis, 'A Trial Survey of the Southern Maya Area' (1943) and 'A Survey of the Northern Maya Area' (1945). These were valuable groundwork for the later book, and they were also a godsend to those of us who were first entering the complex maze of the Maya field at about that time.

Some of Thompson's other writings are not only generally informative, but are especially a delight to read. One of these, *Maya Archaeologist* (1963), is a reminiscence and autobiography, relating the early days in the field in Maya archaeology. It is a highly amusing account. Another, is an edited edition of *Travels in the New World* (1958), by Thomas Gage, a seventh-century English Dominican monk who travelled through Central America, and whose account, therefore, is of interest to New World ethnohistorians and anthropologists, but who was also a very complex and interesting rogue. Thompson's introduction to the volume is done with a fine sardonic touch.

Thompson received many honours, most of these coming to him in the later years of his life. He was the recipient of various medals in archaeology and anthropology. The Rivers Memorial

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Medal came to him in 1945, the Viking Fund Medal in 1955, the Drexel Medal in 1962, and the Huxley Medal in 1966. Honorary degrees were conferred upon him by the University of Yucatán (1959), the University of Pennsylvania (1962), Tulane University (1972), and Cambridge University (1973). Foreign honours included the Order of Isabel la Católica from Spain in 1964, the Order of the Aztec Eagle (1965) and the Sahagún Prize (1971) from Mexico and the Order of the Quetzal (1975) from Guatemala. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1959; and in 1975, Her Majesty the Queen conferred a knighthood of the Order of the British Empire on Eric Thompson in recognition of his long and distinguished services in Maya archaeology, epigraphy, and ethnohistory. He was the first to be so honoured for work in American archaeology and anthropology. In addition to all these formal and official honours, there can be little question but that Thompson was accorded the informal accolade of doyen of Maya studies in the last twenty years of his life.

Thompson was in no way a showman, and the grand manner on the podium or in gatherings of colleagues was distinctly not to his taste. No one could be more severe on what appeared to him to be pomposity, excessive pedantry, or general academic obfuscation. He believed in the English language and in its skilled use as the only necessary vehicle for conveying the messages of archaeology. From this belief and from his deep humanistic convictions he rejected all of the terminology, or the jargon, as he would have had it, of what in the United States has come to be called 'the new archaeology'. I am sure that if he had been asked, he would have replied that archaeology was not, and could not have become, a science. To him it was too fundamentally concerned with the fascinating vagaries of human behaviour to be so labelled. But there are many definitions of science, and not all of these, as applied to human cultures and societies, would insist upon such things as the criterion of predictability for the future from a study of the past. If, on the other hand, a scientific attitude refers to controlled organization of the data, to strict standards of scholarship, and to imaginatively conceived but carefully carried out research designs and syntheses, Thompson's work shows all these to the highest degree. And he was certainly more than a narrator of facts or an historian so narrowly conceived. While I feel he would have abhorred the word 'process' in an archaeological or culture-historical context, Thompson was very much

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interested in 'how' and 'why' questions. This has become apparent already to a younger generation of archaeologists as they turn to his writings in the continuing effort to understand and interpret the Maya past.

Those of us who knew him personally will long remember the man—the compact, wiry, but sturdy body, young for its years and active right up until the last, the wry expression of humour with which he dispensed with what he thought of as academic nonsense, but, above all, the seriousness with which he addressed his profession and his colleagues. Although not formally a teacher, he gave willingly of his time and interest to his younger colleagues; and through them the profound effect that Sir Eric Thompson had upon the Maya field will be felt for years to come.

GORDON R. WILLEY

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