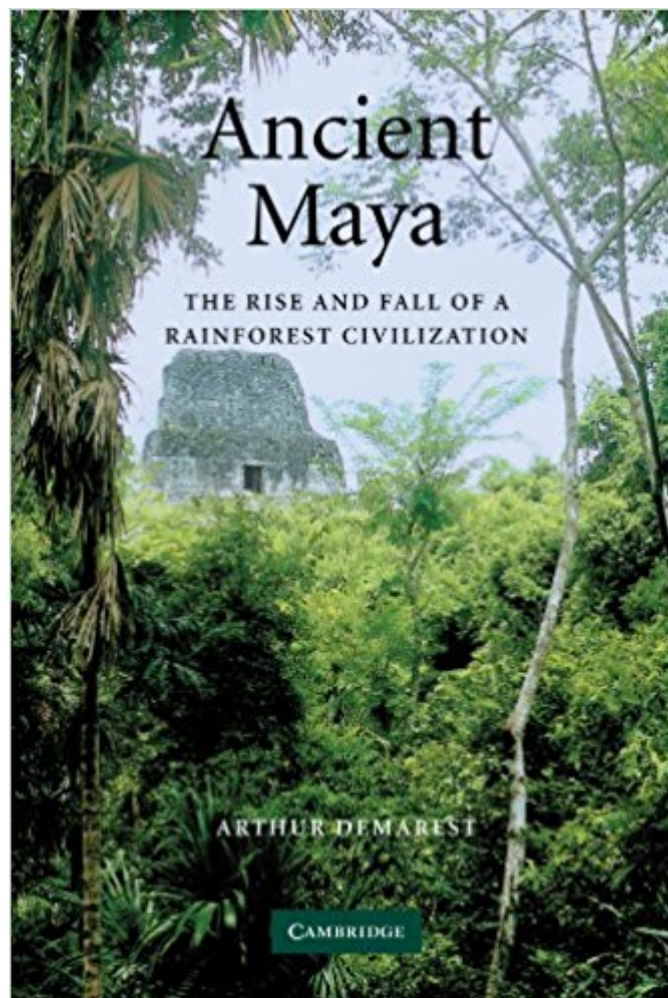


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Ancient Maya: The Rise And Fall Of A Rainforest Civilization (Case Studies In Early Societies)



Synopsis

Arthur Demarest brings the lost civilization of Maya to life by applying a holistic view to the most recently discovered archaeological evidence. His theoretical interpretation simultaneously emphasizes the brilliant rain forest adaptations of the ancient Maya and the Native American spirituality that permeated all aspects of their daily life. Drawing on data from the latest significant archaeological research in Central America, this new study appeals to those interested in the ecological bases of civilization, the function of the state and the causes of the collapse of civilizations.

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Customer Reviews

'In Ancient Maya, Arthur Demarest, an authority on the Olmec and Maya civilisations, applies an holistic, theoretically-integrated perspective to this study of archaeology, paleoecology, and epigraphy, as well as to his evaluations of fellow scholars. The resulting interpretation covers both practical and spiritual aspects of Classic Maya life from the first to the eighth centuries, including their adaptations to their rainforest environment (agriculture, arboriculture, hydraulic works, and so on), economics and trade, religion and ideology, and politics.' British Bulletin of Publications

By applying a holistic view to the most recent evidence from archaeology, Arthur Demarest brings the lost civilization of Maya to life. His theoretical interpretation emphasises both the brilliant rain forest adaptations of the ancient Maya and the Native American spirituality that permeated all

aspects of their daily life. Drawing on data from the largest ongoing archaeology projects in Central America, this new study will appeal to anyone interested in the ecological bases of civilization, the function of the state and the causes of the collapse of civilisations.

Reading a carefully researched, painstakingly compiled academic book is always a pleasure for me. As a former academic myself, I know what it takes---the hours, the millions of details, the checking and cross-checking of facts, the gathering of bibliography and weighing the arguments of all the authors, the mental absorption of months and years. You can never get free until it's done. So, when I find a fine book like ANCIENT MAYA, I'm always glad, but I hold a respectful admiration as well. OK, so Demarest's work may not read like some best seller or pop history. If you don't like references scattered thickly on every page, you won't like his book. You've got to get the sequence of Maya culture's stages [archaic, early preclassic, middle preclassic, late preclassic, classic, postclassic, colonial, modern] firmly in mind in order to follow a lot of the text, and if you don't want to be consulting the maps (good ones) every five minutes, it would be good to have some idea of the geography of the region too. It's not bedtime reading, but if you are interested in a wonderful overview of Maya civilization, you've come to the right place. The first five chapters don't really discuss the Maya, but "how we know what we know" and "theories about the practice of archaeology" if I may put it like that. The reader gets a crash course in the history of Maya archaeology, various weird theories that have been propagated over the years, modern archaeological techniques, and the beginnings of Maya civilization as dimly perceived through archaeology. The description of Classic Maya society begins with chapter six, on agriculture and ecology. Many of the "old chestnut" theories about the Maya are put to rest here. Drought and erosion were not major causes of the "collapse" of Maya classic culture. The Maya secret was to know how to build an advanced civilization in a rain forest environment. In short, they used techniques that mimicked the diversity and dispersion of species in a rain forest. They used many styles of agriculture, no one predominating. The subsequent chapters deal with the overall economy, ideology and power, the political units and history, and the idea of "collapse". There wasn't a real collapse....it was more a transition to other types of society after a period of intensive wars and overpopulation. He calls this period a "rapid decline in complexity". Actually in some parts of the Maya world, new, vibrant political units sprang up after the end of Classic Maya times. You can learn in great detail about Maya agriculture, trade, statecraft, religion and ritual, mathematics and astronomy, and the glyphs from which we have learned so much about them. You will encounter interesting sketches, photos, and charts. In short, ANCIENT MAYA is a compendium of

modern knowledge about that fascinating ancient civilization. I will not tell you it's easy reading, but it's probably the best book on the subject these days.

Decided to add this to our home collection after booking a cruise to visit Mayan locations in several countries. Was an excellent reference.

Much of interest here, but it's a dated cursory review that fails to linger long enough on fascinating topics to satisfy the general reader or avocational Mayanist, and is old hat and/or tendentious in various ways to scholars. In common with other titles in this series, it suffers from careless editing: e.g., "phosphate isotopes", soils "leeching", "Wataklajuun", some awkward and sloppy language. Not the best investment in a comprehensive book on the ancient Maya.

Most beautiful pictures and wonderful information. Gave as. Gift and was well likes

This book is a great overall view of the ancient Maya and their rich history. The author does an amazing job outlining the geographic setting as well as the historical aspect of the Maya. Its an easy interesting read from start to finish. This book is the type of book that makes you want to read more on the subject, and more from the author.

This is a must read for anyone interested in the ancient Maya and why their advanced civilization that had achieved so much under such harsh conditions suddenly collapsed and disappeared for parts unknown. Demarest argues that the collapse was political rather than the most widely accepted paradigm that it was ecological. He concludes that the collapse was due to a proliferation of royal elites competing for power, similar to the present situation in Saudi Arabia. Warfare between these competing elites caused a collapse during a 100 year period that resulted in a depopulation of major cities and a drastic reduction of palace and temple construction. The book is worth reading if only for Demarest's description of the Wizard of Oz type power structure where Mayan royal elites held power through fantastic ritualistic displays that captivated the masses. He describes the Mayan royal elites as a combination of rock stars, evangelical preachers, and circus performers that dressed in elaborate costumes with feathered head dresses, lit fires with pyrite mirrors, and engaged in public displays of blood letting. Demarest even relates the Mayan architecture to theater with temples high above plazas where the masses could observe rituals. The book is easy to read for layman.

book was in excellent shape...felt brand new. Good informative book...my daughter is loving it. She is using it as a reference book to write a college paper.

I just loved all the interesting things I learned about this culture of which I am very fond of. I have enjoyed it very much

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