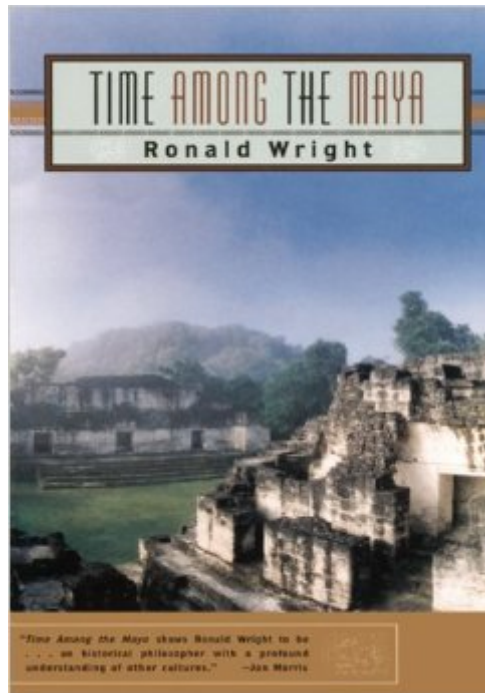


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Time Among The Maya: Travels In Belize, Guatemala, And Mexico



Synopsis

The Maya created one of the world's most brilliant civilizations, famous for its art, astronomy, and deep fascination with the mystery of time. Despite collapse in the ninth century, Spanish invasion in the sixteenth, and civil war in the twentieth, eight million people in Guatemala, Belize, and southern Mexico speak Mayan languages and maintain their resilient culture to this day. Traveling through Central America's jungles and mountains, Ronald Wright explores the ancient roots of the Maya, their recent troubles, and prospects for survival. Embracing history, anthropology, politics, and literature, *Time Among the Maya* is a riveting journey through past magnificence and the study of an enduring civilization with much to teach the present. "Wright's unpretentious narrative blends anthropology, archaeology, history, and politics with his own entertaining excursions and encounters." -- The New Yorker; "Time Among the Maya shows Wright to be far more than a mere storyteller or descriptive writer. He is an historical philosopher with a profound understanding of other cultures." -- Jan Morris, The Independent (London).

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; 1st Grove Press ed edition (September 30, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802137288

ISBN-13: 978-0802137289

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (14 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #627,583 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Â Books > History > Americas > Central America > Belize #41 in Â Books > History > Americas > Central America > Guatemala #96 in Â Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Mayan

Customer Reviews

A travel book, with culture and politics woven in, but not too heavily. Geography, environment, and a collection of characters encountered along the way, a fascinating book on several levels. Also in the fabric of the book is a discussion of how the Mayans keep time, what happened to them as a culture and people, as well as what their future might be. But is it all done with excellent writing, none of it too academic or dry, all interesting, with great writing artistry. A very good book. Simple and powerful. A good read if you have any interest in this area of the world or the Mayans.

At first this book appears to be merely a travelogue of Wright's journeys through the Maya areas of Mexico and Central America. Sure, he gives us the goods on the ancient Maya ruins and archeological treasures, plus a lot of great historical coverage, but these turn out to be the background of a much larger narrative. Instead, Wright spends the bulk of his time visiting with the local people, both modern Mayas and non-Mayas who inhabit these regions today. Therefore we get an excellent sociological study on these peoples. I was surprised to learn of the large numbers of Maya that still exist, not just as an ancient fringe religious group, but as a sizeable portion of the populations of Guatemala, Belize, and Southern Mexico. Unfortunately these people still deal with the fallout of nearly 500 years of oppression, and continuing discrimination today. Their resulting hardships are a major focus of the book. Wright also has a flair for picking out offbeat and enjoyable characters among the people he meets, like the nearly-Rasta mestizos of Belize and a variety of befuddled and naïve traveling companions. Wright could stand to be a little less biased at times, especially in the portion of the book that deals with Guatemala. Wright gets really carried away in describing this dreary nation as a hopeless hellhole. This characterization is probably not too far from reality, but impartiality is missing at times in this book. (Note that this was written back in the mid-80's, though it's doubtful if much has changed since then). Also, pictures of the many fascinating areas Wright visited would be a nice addition to this book. You have to rely on Wright's descriptions instead, although he does a pretty good job. Ultimately, this book is less a standard travelogue than an entertaining and very enlightening sociological study on a people who are still going strong even though their culture "collapsed" (in Western eyes) centuries and centuries ago.

Time among the Maya, Ronald Wright This is a charming travelogue, particularly if you have experienced travel to some of the Maya Indian sites. Ronald Wright has given us an insight that could only be possible from someone who has spent considerable time and research into the politics and plight of the Maya people. There are some helpful maps for orientation. The writing is like a daily journal, which is charming in its observations and the attempts at a phonetic impression of the speech of the various populations that he encounters in his journey. There are references to some of the masterworks of more early explorers, such as John L. Stephens, with excellent drawings by Catherwood (Dover Publications), and the helpful translation of Popol Vuh by Dennis Tedlock. Ronald Wright gives us "food for thought" about the terrible things that have occurred in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico, as various political factions have battled for control.

Classic, essential, practical. Don't leave home for Maya lands without it.

Ronald Wright takes us to Belize, Guatemala and the Yucatan, visiting various archeological sites and people along the way. This is a great travelogue with lots of history included. It is well researched including a glossary, notes, bibliography and index for the reader who wants to delve deeper. Good reading if you're planning on going to this part of the world.

Wright has done the modern Maya a service by calling attention to their continued existence. However, he seems infatuated with antiquity and the signs of its persistence and fails, sometimes in serious ways, to account for the nobility of the modern Maya's grim and successful struggle to survive. Wright also can't help slipping in "green" comments and digs at multi-nationals, stupid governments (oxymoron), and exploitative ladinos. These targets are too easy. For example, he sloughs off milpa agriculture almost entirely and even comes close to lamenting the "death of the forests" that some misguided types think it causes. What causes over-farming is over-population and neither I nor Wright will convince the Maya to let infant mortality assert itself again since its virtual demise in the last two decades. Wright does, however, have a feel for the Maya and that makes his book a worthy contribution. His search for X-Cacal Guardia and the resultant events should lead readers to study Yucatan's Caste War and further consider the Modern Maya's view of themselves.

I purchased this book to learn a bit more about the Maya before I take a trip to visit ancient Maya sites this fall. The book does present some interesting information on the ancient Maya, particularly, their calendar and system of time. It spends more time discussing the problems faced by the Maya of today, which is enlightening, but I feel it spends too much time discussing politics and what is wrong with the governments in Maya lands today than what I need to prepare for my trip. I do feel that an understanding of the situation is important to have before visiting a third world country; I just find this a bit overburdening in light of what I need and want to know, especially since it reflects the situation in 1985. It does not tell me what to expect TODAY.

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