

# 2012

Science & Prophecy  
of the Ancient Maya



Mark Van Stone, Ph.D., G.F.



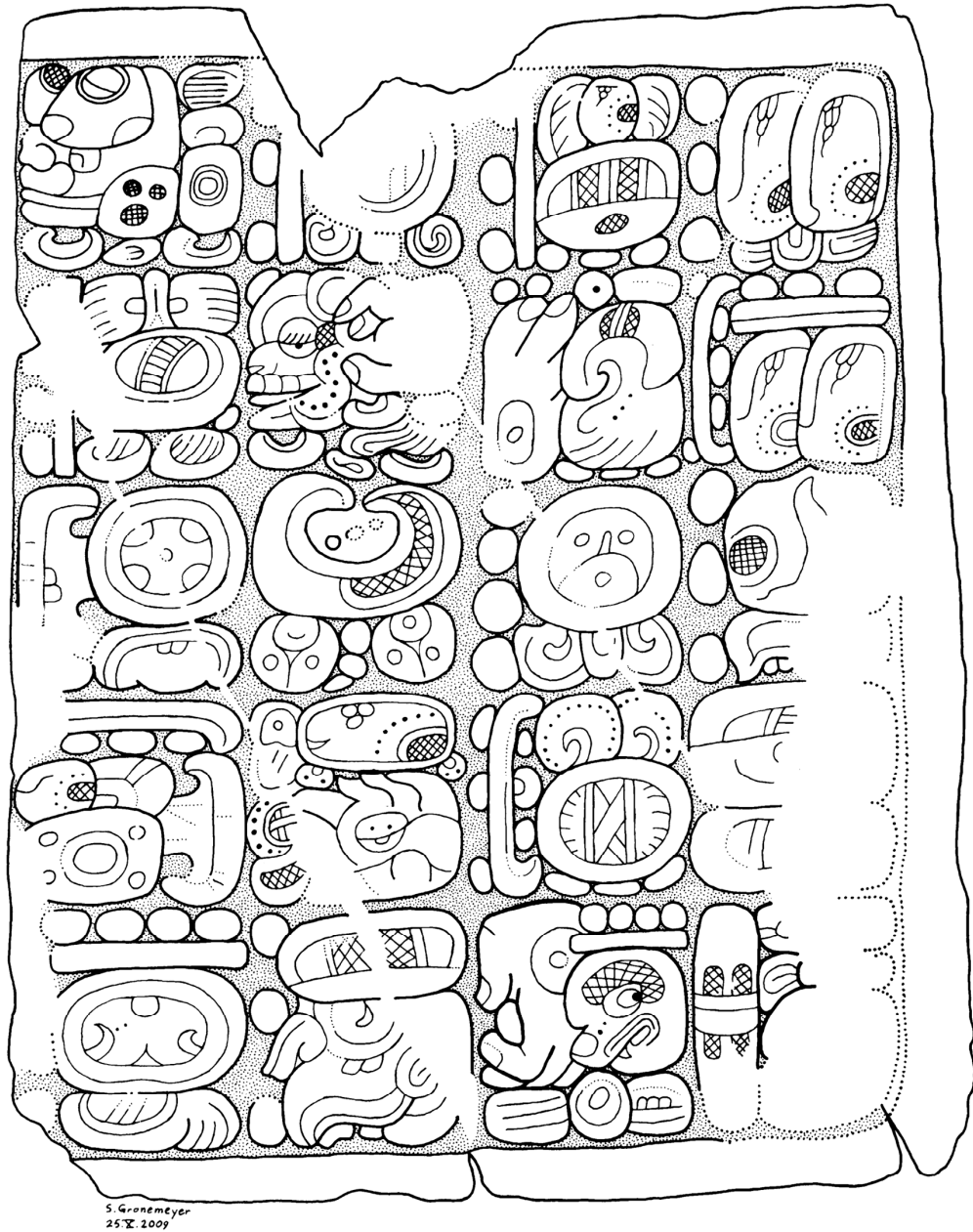




# 2012: Science and Prophecy of the Ancient Maya

by

Mark Van Stone, Ph.D., G.F.



Drawing of the final passages of Tortuguero Monument 6 by Sven Gronemeyer, mentioning the 2012 event  
Cover by Paul Johnson, utilizing photos by Sven Gronemeyer (Villahermosa Museum) & Donald Hales (private collection)

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# Prologue:

## The Maya Cosmic Prophecy: From Sensation to Sensibility

Maya Scholars, in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and the rest of the world, have been watching with amusement and dismay as self-styled experts proclaim that ancient Maya prophets foretold earth-shattering events to occur December 21, 2012. The predicted phenomena are described in contradictory but often cataclysmic fashion — as an ecological collapse, a sunspot storm, a rare cosmic conjunction of the earth, sun, and the galactic center, a new and awesome stage of our evolution, a sudden reversal of the Earth's magnetic field which will erase all our computer drives... . Some predict humanity's initiation into a Galactic Federation, whose elders have been accelerating our evolution with a "galactic beam" for the last 5000 years. In sum, the world as we know it will suddenly come to a screeching halt.

These predictions are alleged to be prophecies by so-called "Ancient Mayans" whose "astronomically precise" calendar "terminates" on that date. These mysterious Maya geniuses appeared suddenly, built an extraordinary civilization, concealed clues for the more adept of us (shades of the *Da Vinci Code*), and then suddenly, inexplicably, vanished, as if they had completed their terrestrial mission. These same researchers claim special credibility for the Maya prophecies by asserting that the historic sages, with their possible extraterrestrial origins, had tapped into an astonishing esoteric wisdom.

### Could any of this be true?

The credibility of those claims deserves rational attention, which is what I intend to provide. Neither mystic nor prophet, I am a Mayanist. More specifically, I am a professional art historian and an *epigrapher* (less formally, a *glyph*). This simply means I can read and write Maya hieroglyphs. For over two decades, I have focused my scholarly research specifically on Maya writing and culture, making some surprising discoveries that can add some new perspective on the prophecies of the ancient Maya seers. As we approach the critical year, it is time to offer a more viable account of the Maya prophecy and expose both the fallacies and ethnocentrism tainting the current sensational accounts.

Here I intend to explain what we actually know about (1) Maya prophecies and expectations both ancient and modern, about the future; (2) the "end-date" 13.0.0.0.0, which we correlate to 2012; and (3) their many Creation stories and prophecies. I shall draw from recent decipherment, ethnography, interviews with Maya priests and knowledge-keepers, and especially from their surviving prophetic literature. That literature includes the *Books of Chilam Balam*, the *Popol Vuh*, pre-Columbian Codices, and ancient inscriptions. The evidence is difficult, fragmentary and often puzzling to us moderns (even experts), at least at first. But I believe the effort will be worth it.

First, let me affirm that the year 2012 *does* hold particular significance in Mayan scholarship. Those of us who study the ancient and modern Maya — anthropologists, archaeologists, art historians, linguists, historians, amateurs, curators, collectors — have been anticipating the end of the Maya "Great Cycle" for some time — as well as arguing just what that "end" denotes. We write it **13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in**. We have known for half a century that this date (probably) correlates to December 21 (or December 23) in the year 2012 in the Gregorian calendar.

### How to use this book:

This book is non-linear. Although arranged in a relatively logical progression, the approximately 38 articles and observations each stand on their own; they can be read in any order you choose. Feel free to skip around. Each essay is short but substantial, most from one to four pages. I designed these texts, this book, for grazing —take small, frequent bites. I do not expect *anyone* to digest it in a single sitting. (*Pace* James Joyce, It took me four years to write it...)

If you are a Maya calendar virgin, innocent of its workings, I recommend you acquaint yourself with Appendices 2 and 3, starting on p. 110.

If you have a digital version of this book, you can enlarge the illustrations to see greater detail. The rest of us can rely on an older technology: a magnifying glass.

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# THE YEAR 2012.

Maya prophecy?  
The end of an ancient calendar?  
The end of the world as we know it?  
Global cataclysm?  
Government conspiracy and cover-up?  
A sudden evolution of cosmic consciousness?  
The return of Quetzalcoatl?  
An Oscar for Roland Emmerich?

## What is this all about?

We're hearing a lot about what the ancient Maya prophesied for us, far in their future...  
...our year 2012.

The din is rising.

What did they actually tell us?

The short answer from the Maya is, **It's *not* the end of the world!**

Indeed, current debate about 21 December 2012 results from contemporary confusion from projections, assumptions, and misunderstanding about the science and beliefs of several ancient cultures of the Americas.

The Maya were one of many cultures of the Americas who employed a solar calendar of 365 days. However, while the Maya esteemed cycles of about 20 years, 400 years and 5125 years, other cultures focused on shorter cycles. For example, the Aztecs considered the most important long cycles to be 52 years and 676 years.

Although the Aztec adopted many aspects of the Maya calendar, the milestone of 21 December 2012 is significant only in terms of the long cycles of Maya time.<sup>1</sup>

The Maya Long Count notation for 21 December 2012 is **13.0.0.0.0**, which completes a cycle of 13 *Pik* (also known as 13 *Bak'tun*), which equals **5125.366** years (3114 BCE/BC – 2012 CE/AD).

More later about the Maya. Let's first examine current prophecies for 21 December 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> For an introductory explanation of the Maya Calendrics, see **Appendix 2**, p. 110.

## Some of the events proposed to come together on the winter solstice, 21 December 2012:

- On that morning, the **Earth and Sun will align with the “Dark Rift” near the Galactic Center**. This event last happened about 25,800 years ago.
- **The magnetic poles of the Earth may reverse**, leaving us unprotected from cosmic radiation for a time. The effect of magnetic fields on human creativity, initiative, mood, etc., is still unknown.
- There will be a **Venus Transit**, an eclipse-type alignment when Venus crosses between Earth and the Sun. We witness a pair of these about once a century: the last few were 1518 & 1526; 1631 & 1639; 1761 & 1769; 1874 & 1882; 2004 & then on **6 June 2012**.
- NASA predicts an **unusually powerful “Solar Maximum”** (sunspot season) for 2012 (though it may peak as early as late 2011). This happens every 11 years, and disrupts satellite and other electromagnetic communications.
- The usual **disasters** loom: food shortages, cataclysmic storms due to global warming, gasoline prices going through the roof, looming chaos in the Middle East—site of Biblical Armageddon and Eden—which will disrupt oil production and bring civilization to a grinding halt (some like to call it Mess-o’-potamia).
- According to ancient records, the **Maya Long Count Calendar will reach 13.0.0.0.0**. Due to the cyclic nature of Maya calendars, this date replicates the date at the **beginning** of this Creation in August 3114 BC/BCE (which the Maya also wrote as 13.0.0.0.0). The interval is 5125 years & 133 days, or **5125.366 years**.
- There have been **five Creations according to Aztec records**. Five times 5125.366 years is 25,626.8 years. Coincidence?
- The **return of Quetzalcoatl** (one of the great gods of ancient Mesoamerica), according to Aztec and Maya prophecies.
- The “13” in the Maya date 13.0.0.0.0 indicates “13 *Bak’tuns*.” A **Maya *Bak’tun* or *Pik* is 144,000 days**, the same number as the number of devotees taken up in the Rapture, according to the *Book of Revelation*. Coincidence? (For more about Maya time-period terminology like *Pik*, *K’atun*, etc., see **Appendix 11**, p. 150.)

## What is supposed to happen in 2012?

### *Four typical predictions*

“An imminent polar reversal that will wipe our hard drives clean.”

Daniel Pinchbeck

“The rare celestial alignment of our solar system, our sun, and our planet with the center of our galaxy—an event that will not happen again for another 26,000 years.”

Gregg Braden

The “dawning of a Wisdom Age ... standing on the shoulders of the Information Age.”

Peter Russell

“The December 21, 2012, date will likely be a “nonevent” similar to ... the widely anticipated Y2K phenomenon.”

Robert K. Sitler

## Nine Reasons why the “Maya Prophecies” should be read *very* critically:

**1. Very fragmentary.** What we have is only a handful of passages from a lost, and much longer, story.

**2. Contradictory.** Though Aztec, Mixtec, and Maya sources provide us a number of narratives, different versions disagree. The calendar dates associated with Maya “end date”, Aztec “end date”, and “return of Quetzalcoatl” *all* vary.

**For example:** the Aztec predict that this Creation will end on a **4-Movement** day in a **2-Reed** year, if it ends at all. The next possible Aztec end-date will come in 2027. On the other hand, Maya literature does not explicitly predict any end *at all*, and its so-called “end date” in 2012 is a **4-Ajaw** (**4-Flower** in the Aztec cycle), *not* **4-Movement**. Mixtec Creation stories mention the day **2-Deer** in year **13-Rabbit**. There are many other dates.

**3. Manipulated.** Tlacaélel, Machiavellian minister to three Aztec emperors, had no illusions about the power of historical propaganda, and saw to it that history was rewritten *completely* to exalt the Mexica and denigrate rivals. He was neither the first or the last to do this. At his behest, the Aztecs burned their *own* libraries as well as their enemies’, in order to start with a clean slate. They even *changed Quetzalcoatl’s birthday*. Likewise, Maya historical dates and intervals of time were manipulated for their numerological and augural significance.

**4. Misunderstood.** 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western world-view is *very* different from that of ancient Mesoamericans. We tend to project our own ideas and beliefs on others.

**For example:** Ancient Maya distinctions between truth and myth, and between various individual gods, were *nowhere near* our categorical boundaries. Their gods did not have as distinct personalities, joining, blending into each other, or splitting into gangs of 4 or 5. The days, and even the numerals in their calendars were living, powerful entities. Some Maya texts appear to have indicated “myth time” with “unworkable” calendar days. (See pp. 74ff below.)

**5. Errors.** Many, many Maya monuments contain errors, both of transcription and of calculation, most noticeably in dates and distance numbers. A quick survey counts over 50 numerical mistakes *carved in stone*. Apparently the Maya, believed that “a card laid is a card played” and **never, ever, erased or corrected a mistake**. (For an example, see pp. 51-52.)

**6. No mention of destruction**, nor of renewal, nor improvement, connected to the coming 13.0.0.0 Maya “end date”. The so-called “end-time prophecies” are *all* modern conjecture.

**7. Maya monumental texts contain many implications that they expected Life and the calendar to continue without interruption**, far beyond 2012.

**8. The Mesoamerican concept of “cyclic time” is not that cyclic.** To both the Maya and the Aztec each Creation was an improvement on the previous era.

**9. Solstices** were of *very minor* importance. Though they record hundreds of ceremonies, anniversaries, jubilees, dedications, offerings, astronomical events, etc., inscriptions almost never mention events on solstices or equinoxes. However, especially very early, during the Middle Formative, the Maya *did* build “E-Groups”, architectural alignments to the Solstices and Equinoxes. (Fig. 1, next page.)



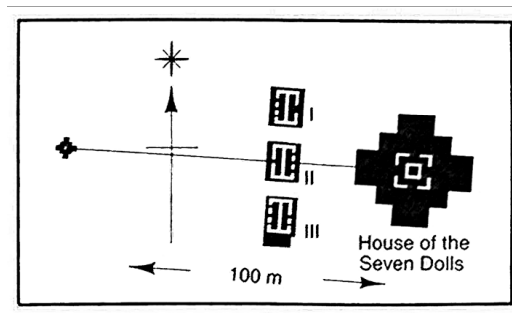


Abb. 4: Aufsicht auf die E-Gruppe in Dzibilchaltun (Aveni 1989:281).

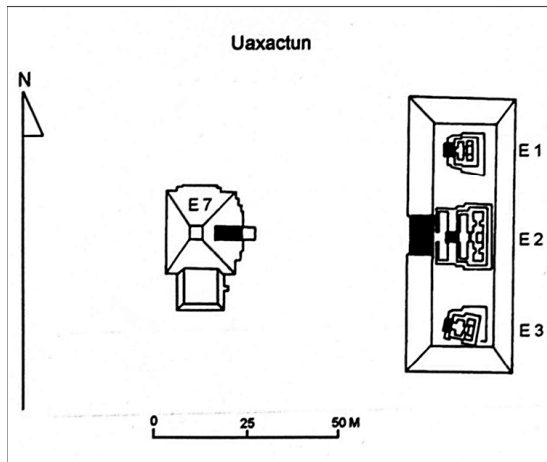


Abb. 2: Uaxactun - Modell der E-Gruppen (Chase 1995:90).

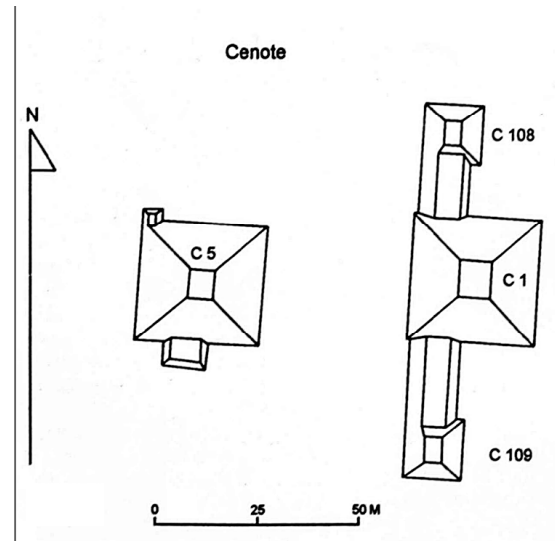


Abb. 3: Cenote-Modell der E-Gruppen (Chase 1995:90).

Fig. 1. **E-Groups.** Only Waxaktun (left) actually aligns with the Solstices and Equinoxes.

Illustrations from Kopka, Katrin,  
Hausarbeit zum archäologischen Phänomen der E-Gruppen  
Bonn, den 15.04.2006

*Nota bene:* Archaeoastronomers have long been puzzled by the fact that *most* E-Groups *do not* align to these risings. Aveni, for example, points out that architectural alignments indicate that Middle Preclassic religion apparently *did* esteem solstices, but fashion changed, to favor other astronomical events. Recent investigation suggests that some “anomalous” E-Groups may rather have been aligned to the solar Zenith Passages and Nadirs, events more highly esteemed than Solstices. The First Zenith Passage coincides with the onset of the rainy season in much of Mesoamerica.<sup>2</sup>

(The name “E-Group” derives from the structures at Waxaktun/Uaxactun, which were discovered in the region of the excavation which the archaeologists had arbitrarily designated Section E.)

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Aveni, personal communication, February 2009. Solstices are typically esteemed in northern latitudes, where they signal the cold winter and fecund summer. In the tropics, the wet and dry seasons are much more important.

## Cultural Diversity

The next 2 maps (Figs. 2 & 3) attempt to show how diverse Mesoamerica is, both culturally and linguistically.

The Maya, and the later Mixtec and Aztec cultures, are only a few of many peoples. Mesoamerica has greater linguistic diversity than Europe. This goes hand in hand with a diversity of myth, including their cycles of Creation and "End-Times."



Fig. 2. Main Languages spoken in Mesoamerica.



Fig. 3. E.g., just the Mayan area (light blue), comprises 22–30 living languages even today. Map based on linguistic maps of Mendizábal & Jiménez (1936, 1941), Frederick Johnson (1940), & McQuown (1955); modified from *The Handbook of Middle American Indians*. Courtesy FAMS.org



## Culture Areas and Dates

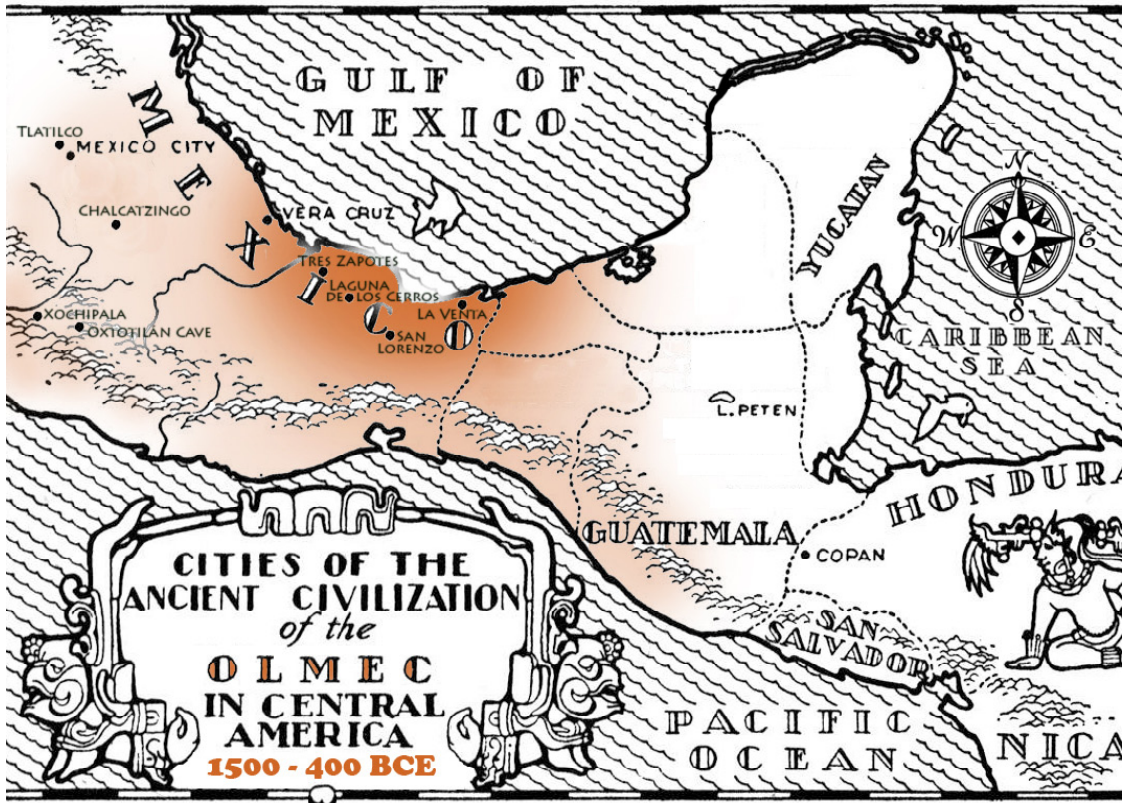


Fig. 4. The Olmec, mysterious “Mother Culture”, dominated the other peoples of early Mesoamerica.

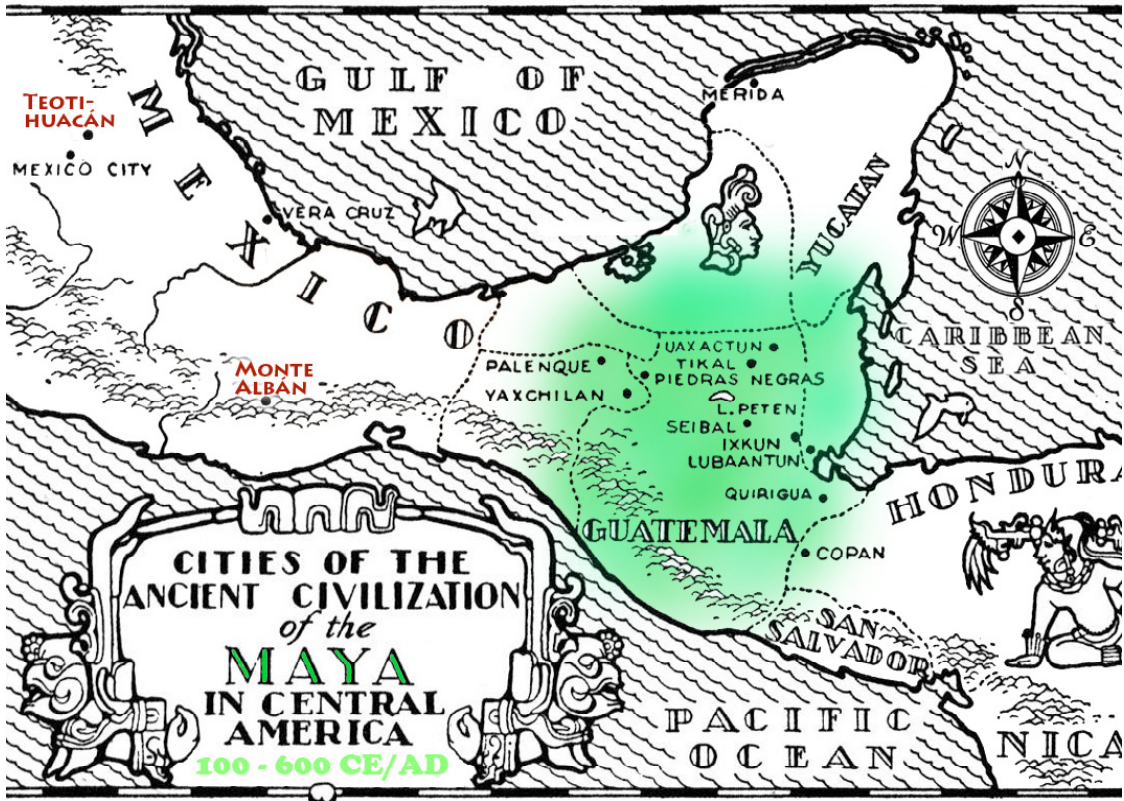


Fig. 5. Teotihuacán, the Zapotec, & the Maya arose in the Late Preclassic; continued into the Early Classic.



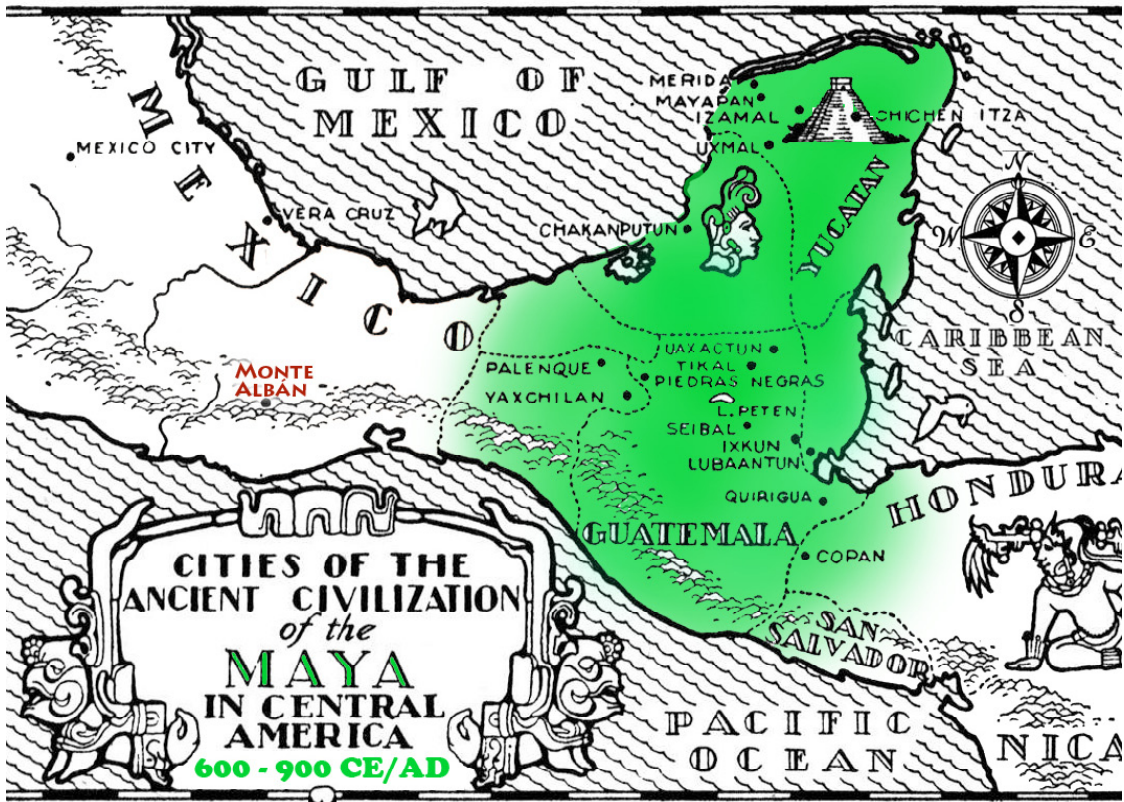


Fig. 6. The Maya, Zapotec, & others flourished after the fall of Teotihuacán around 650 CE/AD.

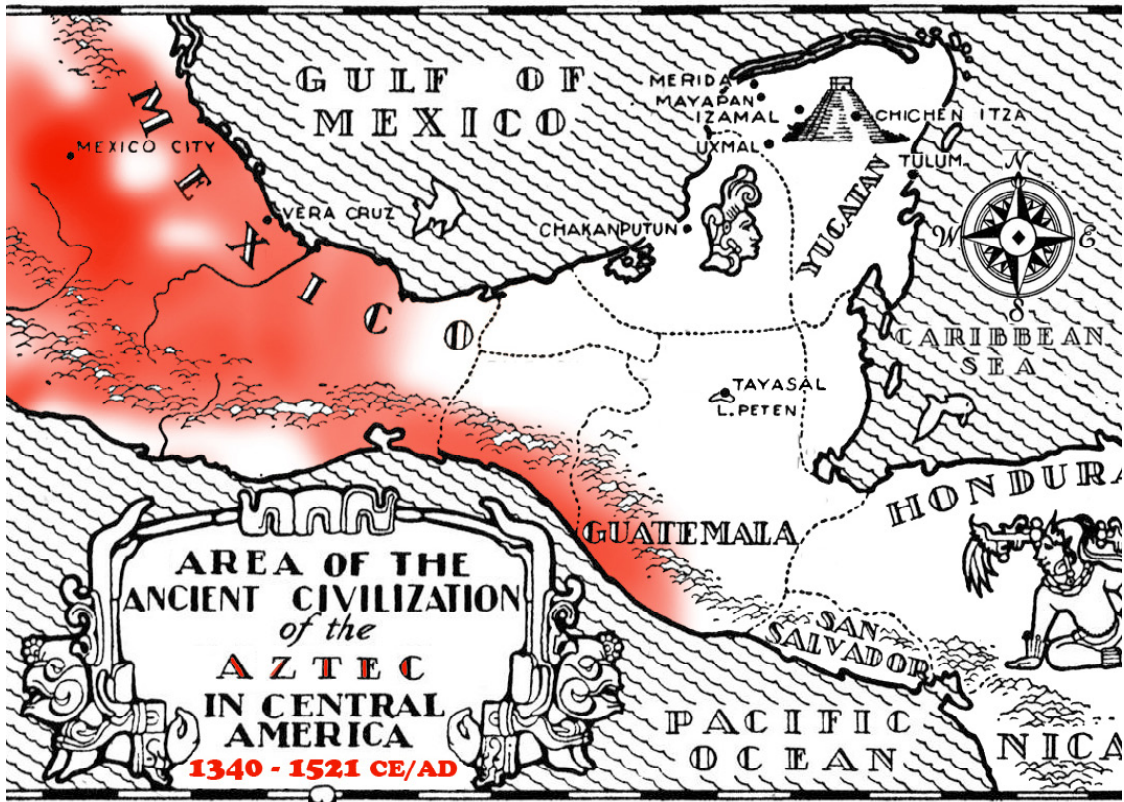


Fig. 7. The Aztec dominated the Late Postclassic. Maps adapted from Pal Keleman, *Medieval American Art*, 1946