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MONT 109N

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MFA Trip- Mayan Culture

1. On many of the cups, bowls, and plates, we see a few different uses for these to their owners. First of all, many recorded important, specific events in the history. They reminded their owners of the past for their cultures. The other important purpose that these items held was to depict religious occurrences. Many gods and natural settings were shown on these different, seemingly everyday items.
2. A specific event depicted on one of the ceramics was a vase showing presentation of a tribute by Calakmul to the society of Tikal. The date given on the ceramic was October 7, 691 AD. The tribute consisted of 12,000 cacao beans, some cloth, and quetzal-bird feathers. The tribute was given as either a diplomatic gift, or as the result of a skirmish. Either way, a few years later, Tikal defeated Calakmul in an important battle.
3. One representation of religion on the ceramics was a scene showing the birth of “Baby Jaguar”. The scene depicts the birth of this deity, who lies in a dish with a “birth serpent” umbilicus rising out from his body. The other figures in the ceramics were most likely Baby Jaguar’s parents. The lizard-like “saurian” heads adorned with maize leaves indicate that the birth took place on some supernatural mountain location. The black background of the scene marks that event as occurring before the creation of humanity. The hieroglyphic text included on the back gave the location, birth date, and deity’s name.
4. The clothing of the Mayans mainly consisted of cloth dress. Many nobles wore headdresses and jadeite earrings. Also, warriors would tattoo themselves or body paint before going into battle. Kings would wear white cloth with head-shaped beads attached to them. For hairstyles, it appears that they never really showed much of their hair, preferring to wear headdresses.

For music, flutes would produce melodic tones that complemented the rhythmic sounds of rattles and drums. Another part of the musical tradition was using conch-shells as trumpets.

The food that appeared to be typical was included a stew, maize, chocolate, and tamales. This stew was called “ul,” which was a sort of cereal of flavored maize. The only information found about Mayan drink involved chocolate drink, and the consumption of alcoholic or hallucinogenic drinks.

Continuities within from the Mayan food today include the “ul” stew, which today they call “atole.” In addition, maize and tamales still are staples of the Mexican diet.

One English word that can be traced back to the Mayans is “shark”. In Mayan times, they used xoc (pronounced “shoke”) to describe sea-bound predators. Another Mayan word passed down to modern English is “kakaw”. This word derives to “cacao,” or chocolate, in English.

1. While many modern viewers admire the beauty of the Mayan artistic objects, I disagree with this opinion. For me, most of the objects were very repetitive. I feel like the Mayan artists saw the types of settings and scenes that others made, and just re-made them. I am amazed that so many of their artifacts have survived at such a high quality for this long. I am in awe of that fact, but not of the art itself.

The Mayans believed that aritistic creativity was similar to the creation of the universe by the gods. This is why the Mayan artists were highly educated in math, history, and religion, since they consider art to be connected with these thought processes. To the Mayans, the process of creating art meant creating a whole small world on the piece that they were working on.

The word “ts’ib” meant both “to paint” and “to write”, insinuating that while the Mayan artists were painting, they were also telling a story within each piece of art.

1. For me personally, I feel like not much has changed due to seeing the Mayan art in person. I had tremendous respect for Mayan skills in astronomy and mathematics before seeing any art that they had once created. I had no need to see art to confirm my personal feelings on the Mayan civilization.

What I am impressed with concerning the Mayans is how many of these objects survived in such quality condition. While wear and tear is natural after hundreds of years, we were able to still see high quality in the ceramics.

I feel that, following a collapse, the thing that survives is a legacy, even when the people are gone. Hundreds of nations have collapsed at one point or another in human history, yet we still know about them. This gives off the impression that societies survive even after they have “collapsed”.