
An important cycle of Mayan time ended with the death of Sir Eric Thompson in 1975, coinciding as it very nearly did with the end of Katun 8 Ahau in the classic calendar—the fateful date of termination of important cycles throughout Mayan history. The present volume is a fitting tribute to a great scholar and a great man, whose death leaves the rapidly expanding field of Mayan studies exposed, leaderless, and bereft at a most dangerous cosmological moment.

Social Process in Mayan Prehistory describes the content of the work in a sense requiring explication. Contributions are offered to the explanation of the social processes acting upon the Maya, but also of those acting upon the scholars who have studied them, an ambiguity altogether appropriate to the scholarship of the man in whose honor the twenty-five separate essays were composed.

The chapters cover the history of the Maya from the Early Formative to seventeenth-century ethnohistory and include contributions to the history of Mayan studies as well. Given the subject, there is an inevitable concentration on the alpha and omega of the Maya: what caused the rise, and what caused the fall of Mayan civilization? There is a widely shared emphasis on economic processes in both connections. But there is a concurrent consideration of the social and ideological factors involved, which Sir Eric would certainly have approved.

The biography and select bibliography of Sir Eric Thompson by Norman Hammond, which opens the volume (chapter 1) and closes the cycle (8 Ahau), is a graceful tribute to an often opinionated and controversial figure whose great good humor, catholic scholarship, lively imagination, and keen intelligence nonetheless made him universally revered as what he sometimes jokingly called himself: el huehue. Huehuetzine, ave atque vale.

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