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**2000 Years of Mayan Literature.** By Dennis Tedlock. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010. 480 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

This treasury of Mayan literature culminates Dennis Tedlock's lifetime work with Mayan sacred texts, poetry, plays, almanacs, and inscriptions. It is a treasury in the old sense of that term, providing a storehouse of literature produced throughout the past two millennia that will generate comparative analyses and philosophical inquiries for decades to come. If scholars follow in Tedlock's path, it will also generate dramatic productions that will attract a broader audience into an appreciation of this fascinating civilization.

Tedlock is careful to distinguish the known from the unexplored territory of a writing system that combines logographs with phonetic signs in a visually and phonetically aesthetic system. He extends the narrative of the florescence and the continuity of an extraordinary literary tradition to the attempts by Spanish conquerors to obliterate any evidence of it by burning Mayan codices, erasing all evidence of their system of writing in stone or even brocade, and repressing the scholars and day-keepers who tried to continue the tradition. Throughout the book, he summarizes the scholarship by those who preceded and accompanied him in the work of transmitting and translating the surviving materials. His innovative techniques of working with contemporary day-keepers, demonstrated in his translation of the *Popol Vuh*—considered by some to be the Mayan Bible—in *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings* (1996), and of presenting the Mayan play *Rabinal Achi* for contemporary audiences, enable us to imagine the ways of Mayan thinking and knowing. As a storehouse of the surviving evidence of literature, it will further the work of scholars in triumphing over the destruction, suppression, and neglect that threatened to obliterate our vision of the past and the ongoing creativity and discovery in Mayan literature.

Tedlock's transcription of the texts draws on a geographic and a temporal ordering of the literature. His guided tour conducts us from the plastered walls inside the monuments of Tikal in the heart of a rainforest to the bricks of Comalcalco at the extreme western edge of the Mayan world, and from the walls of the cave of Naj Tunich in the mountains to the southeastern limits of the rainforest; in these places we are introduced to the traces of classic Mayan. The terminal phase of Mayan culture leads us northwest into the dense forests

of the Yucatan in the cities of Coba and Chichen Itza, which arose in the wake of the cities in southern Yucatan. From 1200 to the colonial period we learn of the books of *Chilam Balam*, which describe the founding of Chichen Itza with riddles and songs celebrating the birth of the twenty-day cycle, the *Popol Vuh* and the origin of the world, the annals of the Kaqchikel (a language group), and the drama of the *Rabinal Achi*.

In this time-space continuum, the sacred books, cosmic constructs, and almanacs provided a numerically defined and astronomically validated cosmos of a world in which Mayas were united by imagery and script and divided by internal lineage and intercultural rivalries. In their pluricultural and multilingual orbit, Mayas created a unique form of government called the *multepal*, or ruling council, during the three centuries prior to the European arrival, which is still being analyzed by scholars deciphering Mayan literature and headlined in newspapers as new discoveries are made.

The innovative quality of Tedlock's scholarship is evident from his second chapter, "Learning to Read," in which he combines his insights into the phonic and visual transcription of texts, and throughout the final chapter, "Rabinal Achi," in which he projects the skills of a Shakespearian director bringing to life a centuries-old drama. In order to appreciate Mayan literature, we learn the basic numerological order with which writers and artists constructed their world: the number 13 related to the full-moon phase and to articulations in the human body; 20 related to the digits of human feet and hands, which became the basic unit of cylindrical rituals; and the multiple of 13 and 20 in the 260-day ritual calendar, which was the ideal gestation period for birth.

In our reading lesson, we learn that the text follows a temporal sequence, with the image following a spatial sequence. For example, in one of the many illustrations linking the imagery evoked in the script, the many heralds of Moon Woman fly over her head, which signifies motion and portentous events. In the Dresden Codex sequence of her face-to-face encounters with four deities, the herald birds are in flight while she is seated cross-legged, and all encounters are coordinated with sidereal moments in the moon's passage. Hence we learn from logograms with phonetic script of the portentous significance of the relationship between Moon Woman and her heralds, which can then be translated into auguries, a meaning that is lost in a simple phonetic transcription. This reinforces Tedlock's message excoriating unilineal evolutionary mode logograms. Transcriptions that fail to address the multiple meanings contained in Mayan almanacs lose not only half the meaning but also the impact of prophecy contained in the text.

Tedlock's explorations of text in the larger context begin with the earliest discovered evidence of writing in stone at a Guatemala site (400 BCE) and a Zapotec site (700 to 500 BCE). He draws the reader into his discovery process,

referring to his K'iche' shaman with whom he worked in Momostenango in order to confirm his understandings. In deciphering the relation of the three bundles depicted on the Vase of the Seven Gods, he notes that the hearthstones relate to the triangle of stars that the Greeks saw as Orion's belt, and that the Mayan scholars relate to the ordering of space. The bundles containing the three hearthstones also include stars that relate to the celestial head, underworld, and throne. He suggests that the gray area enclosed by the triangle of stars could be the obsidian mirror that reflected that order. In case we are in doubt, Tedlock provides the reader with a celestial map of the classic period showing the ordering of these stars as illustrated on the vase in a mirror image of their position in the heavens. The illustrations substantiate the text relating the creation of the world.

The Mayan view of history separates the era of the gods from the era of humans. As the rulers tried to identify with the divine, they sometimes rewrote their lineage in order to achieve it. These errors are noted, along with unintended slips that do not escape the careful reading that Tedlock accords to each inscription. At the same time, he eschews parallels with Shakespearean plays when comparing the dynastic inscriptions of Palenque and Yaxchilán or dramatized versions of *Rabinal Achi*. This is in line with his evaluation of the Mayan texts *sui generes*, ensuring an assessment of their merit on their own terms. This is not an easy read, and few scholars bring the focus and intensity of knowledge to attempt this task or to assess its truth.

Chapters 10 and 11 show the skills of Mayan artist-writers and should attract the attention of creative artists in the graphic arts. Chapter 10, "Drawing and Designing with Words," touches down on the power of communication in Mayan graphic arts in a way that, as Tedlock states, "lingers on the threshold between sight and sound" (113). What he calls "concrete poetry" are iconographic representations, often of gods with identifying signs (113). Pawahtun, the patron god of writing, is identified with the sign for his hammer, the lines on his face, and his hair net, and he is complemented with syllabic signs in the text that spell his name. Here again the combination of logographs and syllabic signs demonstrate the redundancy with which Mayan artist-writers conveyed a powerful image, in the case of Pawahtun, one who carries the sun, it is indicated with radiating lines, the crescent moon, and fire coming from his mouth. This masterful embodiment of weather has, in Tedlock's words, "retrieved logographs from the world of language and returned them to the external world of visible objects," which is about the best a graphic artist can do (119).

Chapter 11, "Graffiti," complements this discussion of graphics with examples of work by pilgrims or visitors who demonstrate their skills on the plaster interior walls of ruins, particularly in Tikal. Reflections of pilgrims and other visitors suggest the way in which Mayas related to space and their own past.

In one striking case, the visitor evokes the story of the twin god whose decapitated head is seen in the calabash into which it was transformed.

For those who are caught in the spell of the Mayan prediction of the end of the world in 2012, Tedlock foresees a happier deliverance. In Chapter 12, "The Question of the Beginning and the End of Time," he addresses the interpretation of the end of time depicted in Coba at the pinnacle of a series of thirteen time bundles when the 260-day calendar will stand at the same place as when the origin bundles were put in place. He reads it as the beginning of a new era, basing his conclusion on the depiction at the end of this "time-space continuum" of the sign for Ajaw Nah, or Lady of the House (132). She bodes a bountiful future with her sign of a frog swallowing the sun, which bodes abundant rain. He concludes that this sign suggests that the new era will have a feminine character and should be a good time for planting.

Tedlock is attentive to gendered and class perspectives in distinct Mayan epochs and in the postconquest period. Girls learned to read as well as boys, and feminine interests in birthing were an important part of the repertoire of vase paintings. Based on surviving paintings, the inclusion of women and girls depicted as scribes or students disappeared after the Spaniards imposed their rule.

Clearly, a priestly and royal class bias in literacy and learning existed during the preconquest period that influenced the themes and pictorial representations. Tedlock notes the soft, plump bodies of students depicted in a class supervised by Pawhatun. Regional distinctions also influence the literary production as Tedlock points out in Mixtecan and Yucatecan codices. Tedlock shows that the scribes do not work in the *milpa*, or maize field, but rather are specialists, so their bodies do not show muscles. The comparative basis for class, gender, and regional distinctions is enhanced by the combination of pictures with text.

Tedlock's discussion of the literature on day-keeping in Chapter 19, "Diagrams of the Days," resonates with the work of David Freidel and Linda Schele in placing human beings in the center of the Mayan cosmos (David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path*, 1992). They inspire the creation and maintenance of the cosmic order, beginning with the hearthstone bundles and the ensuing calendrical count of twenty days. Like Tedlock, Freidel worked with modern shamans who transmitted their understandings of human and cosmological time. The survival of these concerns give contemporary Mayas the urgency they demonstrate in their ordering of the rituals and predicting the outcomes for human destinies. Analyzing their obsession, Anthony Aveni (*Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures*, 2002) reduces the motivations for regulating time by classic Mayan rulers to a validation of their dynastic rule. One might

turn it around to indicate that the attention of these cultivators, concerned with weather conditions and predictions as to their own dynasty, may have prompted those who wished to be rulers to try to insert their management over time as a means of promoting loyalty.

Tedlock challenges Mayanists, including Freidel, Schele, Aveni, and others, who conceive of Mayan time as cyclical. He rejects the Western imagery based on mechanical clocks with cog and wheels, claiming that they see time as moving directly back and forth, as a weaver would thread a loom. The diagram of the days, in the imaginary of Mayas as expressed in the literature, favors a movement from the four corners and four sides of a diagram of the earth to the center (229 *et seq.*).

This prompted my recall of the Mayan cosmos held by Tzeltal speakers of Amatenango del Valle, Chiapas, when I lived in the village during the late 1950s and 1960s (Nash, *In the Eyes of the Ancestors: Belief and Behavior in a Maya Community*, 1970). They conceived of the cosmos and planets, including earth, as round, but their lives were enclosed in the square space of a four-sided village, within a square house, and surrounded by square *milpas*. Although this did not conform to reality, it was clearly an ideal configuration reinforced by the temporal and spatial coordinates of the numbers 4 and 20. Their reinvoking of the past might well have taken them on straight memory paths.

Recent scholarship in archaeology and social anthropology has filled the gap left by a premature diagnostic of the collapse or decline of the Maya after the passing of the classic age. Tedlock fills that gap with the growing historical record made available in the *Chilam Balam*, demonstrating the vital cultural formation in northeastern Yucatan. In their encounters with Toltec populations from the north, the populations of the new cities of Chichen Itza, Mayapan, and Itzamal were developing a new form of government called *multepal*, or shared abundance. This was centered on groups rather than dynasties, indicating a great deal of interaction in a wider circuit. Toltec influence in the architecture of Chichen Itza, similar to that found in Tula, is part of a shared interaction of people and deities coexisting in the same sites. This did not mark the end of the conflict between lineages, and the Cocoms and Xiues continued up to the arrival of the Spaniards. In the Yucatan, as well as to the west in the K'iche' territory, the Mayas strove to become allies with the Spaniards when they arrived. Those who withdrew to the rainforest continued to resist the Spaniards until the late seventeenth century. The Mayan script, with the use of syllabic signs and the construction of characters that say the same thing, was still in practice in the autonomous regions.

Tedlock's comments on the process of acculturation, derived from the literature produced by Mayas and that contained in Spanish archives, provide intriguing clues to a distinct way of accommodation in colonial practice. He

argues that, although they did not fall into the Christian narrative during this process, they did reexamine prior history in a search for a pattern of destiny, using Mayan rather than Christian ways of measuring time. For Mayas, the Christian calendar was considered an addition rather than a substitution for their existing cylindrical knowledge. These continuities were based on the Spaniards' reliance on the Mayan leaders who, before the conquest, were the *halvah winik*. Apparently, they retained their former arrogance as well, because one of these leaders, when required by the Spaniards to take an exam in order to hold office, commented that the governor general of the Spaniards should be required to take the exam.

These incidents are recorded in the *suyua*, or mixed language of towns settled by different populations. This tolerance of cultural plurality is marked in the Yucatan, where Toltec and other influences from the north found their place along with the Yucatan Maya. Clearly this was not on the agenda of the Spanish, and the last attempts recorded by Mayas in the *Chilam Balam* failed to integrate a pluricultural government following the pattern of Chichen Itza. Yet the survival of the *Chilam Balam* provides leads for future attempts that seek multicultural integration. Once the reader has ingested the metaphorical basis of the mixed language, she or he can read and absorb the double meanings. The impact is like that of a poem, half understood on hearing but replayed and reflected upon as its multiple meanings enter the spores of a new comprehension.

As the conquest reached the highlands of Chiapas, repression of Mayan literacy grew. Colonial administrators put a ban on even the weaving of clothing that revealed the wearer's town of origin, lineage, and individual identity. It was, as Tedlock points out, an attempt to erase the memory of the Mayan heritage (299).

Yet events during the past few decades have proven that the attempt has failed. Revitalization of the Mayan culture is now driven by a profitable tourist industry that brings foreign capital and visitors to marvel at the level of civilization achieved by the Mayan people. Their tourist dollars serve to retain the arts and artisan production even as these revenues allow the producers to buy commercially available clothing. The Mayan civilization continues to make headlines as new discoveries attest to the literary and aesthetic achievements of the diverse populations that shared its traditions. The discoveries of the tomb of an elite personage in Chiapas de Corzo in May 2010 and of another tomb in Tonina a few months earlier suggest the widening horizon of Olmec influence as early as 700 BCE.

Even more convincing of the revitalization is the burgeoning literary production occurring in the centers of Mayan population in Chiapas and Guatemala. Tedlock limits his discussion of these contemporary sources of



Mayan literary production to a brief four-page epilogue. Among the new centers stimulating creative writers are *Sna T'z'ibahom* and the women's writing group *Fundación para la Fomenta de la Mujer Maya*, which are centered in San Cristobal de Las Casas. Both groups, sponsored by anthropologist Robert Laughlin and writer Miriam Laughlin, are dedicated to producing and dramatizing works of Mayan writers in Spanish and the Native languages of Tzeltal and Tzotzil. Anthropological linguist Louanna Furbee has developed a Tojolobal writing group in Comitán that tapes and digitalizes literature of a language that is threatened with extinction. Carter Wilson, who has written two novels based on his profound knowledge of Mayan history and culture, brought to my attention the three volumes of Guatemalan Mayan literature collected by Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann (*Words of the True Peoples/Palabras de los Seres Verdaderos*, 2007). We can look forward to future treasuries as this burgeoning creative field finds an audience for their work.

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**Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject.** By Kirsten Pai Buick. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. 344 pages. \$89.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

The central issue at the heart of Kirsten Pai Buick's *Child of Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* is how we understand the constructs of race and gender as they relate to artistic production. Buick challenges the reader to reconsider the "art-as-self" paradigm, which she argues predominates the art historical discourse. She demands that scholars move away from the idea of race and gender as "problems." Instead, Buick provides a nuanced interpretation of Mary Edmonia Lewis and her art within the context of the late-nineteenth-century United States and Rome, what she calls "culture-as-context" (50). The book takes an unusual format. Each chapter begins with a critique of how art history deals with the black and Indian subject. She takes to task previous scholars who have read Lewis's black and Indian identity too narrowly and defined her artistic production as infused solely by race and gender. The second part of each chapter examines Lewis's career and the themes of her work. Buick considers three dominant ideologies that are essential to understanding Lewis's sculpture: sentimentalism, true womanhood, and the vanishing Indian. Through the employment of such ideologies, Buick argues that Lewis participated in the creation of a national art that was multivocal and diverse.