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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE AGE OF MAYA RUINS ***

ON THE AGE OF MAYA RUINS

BY

CHARLES P. BOWDITCH

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ON THE AGE OF MAYA RUINS

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BY CHARLES P. BOWDITCH

The inscription lately discovered in Chichen Itza by Edward H. Thompson, United States Consul at Merida, is of more than passing interest. It contains an Initial Series of glyphs, which, so far as I know, gives the only initial date that has been found in the northern part of Yucatan.

Although it may be a matter of doubt on what date the long count declared by the Initial Series began, yet, if we assume that the majority of the initial dates refer to the time when the buildings or stelæ on which the dates occur were erected (and this assumption seems altogether probable), we can at least decide on the relative age of the ruined cities in which the buildings or stelæ are found.

The great cycle glyph in the Chichen Itza date is somewhat injured, but it is apparently of the same character as those found elsewhere. The numbers of the cycle, katun, tun, and uinal periods are 10, 2, 9, and 1, respectively. The number of the kin period is a face which, from the circle of dots around the mouth, is pretty surely 9. The day number is 9 and the month number is 7. The day glyph is somewhat obscure, but contains a circular frame supported by a knot, while the month glyph is pretty surely Zac. We can then be sure of the following:?. 10. 2. 9. 1. ?, 9. ?. 7. ?., with the probability that the second ? should be replaced by 9 and the last ? should be replaced by Zac. Assuming for the moment that the great cycle sign is what Goodman calls 54, we find from the tables that 54. 10. 2. 9. 0. 0. is 6 Ahau 18 Chen (49), and that 54. 10. 2. 9. 1. 0. is 13 Ahau 18 Yax (49). Now, in order to reach a day with the number 9 and a month day with the number 7 from 13 Ahau 18 Yax, we must add 9 days. This makes the date necessarily 54. 10. 2. 9. 1. 9., 9 Muluc 7 Zac (49). The day sign, though rubbed, has the characteristics of Muluc, and the month is shown to be surely Zac; the kin number is also proved to be 9.

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There is just a possibility that the great cycle may not be 54. If it is 53, the date must be 9 Muluc

12 Muan; if it is 55, the date must be 9 Muluc 2 Yaxkin; but the month number is clearly 7, which eliminates both these great cycle numbers. In order to find a great cycle with the numbers ?. 10. 2. 9. 1. 9, 9. ?. 7. ?, we should have to go back or forward from Great Cycle 54 at least five great cycles, which means over 25,000 years. This is such an enormous distance that it can practically be thrown out of consideration, and we may be well satisfied that the great cycle is really the same period in which almost every one of the other dates occurs, viz., 54.

It will be interesting to compare this date with the first and last known dates of the other ruined cities of Chiapas and Guatemala. I give a list of these dates:

	Earliest	Latest	Period of Existence
Piedras Negras	54.9. 8.10.6.16.	54.9.12. 2. 0.16.	3.11.12. 0.
Copan	54.9. 6.10.0. 0. ^[1]	54.9.16.10. 0. 0.	10. 0. 0. 0.
Quirigua	54.9.14.13.4.17. ^[2]	54.9.19.13. 0.12.	4.19.13.15.
Yaxchilan	54.9. 0.19.2. 4. ^[3]		
Palenque	54.9. 4. 0.0. 0. ^[4]	54.9. 8. 9.13. 0.	4. 9.13. 0.

The above collation establishes the fact that Piedras Negras, Copan, Palenque, and Quirigua flourished contemporaneously for at least a part of their existence, for the last known date of Palenque is but 0. 11. 16, or less than one year before the first known date of Piedras Negras. This does not necessarily mean that Palenque was deserted at the establishment of Piedras Negras. Of course as investigation proceeds other inscriptions may be discovered which may give earlier or later dates, but it is interesting to note the relation between the known dates of all these cities.

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The date of Chichen Itza is later than any of the dates found above. The following list shows the distance from the earliest and latest dates of the ruined cities of Chiapas and Guatemala to the date recently found in Chichen Itza.

DISTANCE OF THE EARLIEST AND LATEST DATES TO THE DATE OF CHICHEN ITZA

	Earliest	Latest
Piedras Negras	13.18.12.13, 274 y. 323 d.	10. 7.0.13, 204 y. 73 d.
Copan	15.19. 1. 9, 314 y. 259 d.	5.19.1. 9, 117 y. 164 d.
Quirigua	7.15.14.12, 153 y. 247 d.	2.16.0.17, 55 y. 102 d.
Palenque	18. 9. 1. 9, 364 y. 9 d.	13.19.6. 9, 275 y. 194 d.

The Book of Chilan Balam of Mani^[5] states that on Katun 13 the people whose history is recorded in this book reached Chacnouitan eighty years after leaving Nonauil, and that on Katun 6 of the following cycle Chichen Itza was discovered, and that on Katun 11 of the second following cycle they removed to Chichen Itza, having remained at Chacnouitan ninety-nine years. The distance from Katun 13 of one cycle to Katun 6 of another is 200 tuns, or about 197 years. The distance from Katun 13 of one cycle to Katun 11 of the second following cycle is 280 tuns or about 276 years.

First date of Piedras Negras,	54.9.8.10.6.16	} 3.11.12. 0. = 70 y. 250 d.	} 13.18.12.13 = 274 y. 323 d.
Last date of Piedras Negras,	54.9.12.2.0.16		
First date of Quirigua	54.9.14.13.4.17	} 4.19.13.15 = 98 y. 145 d.	} 13.18.12.13 = 274 y. 323 d.
Last date of Quirigua	54.9.19.13.0.12		
Chichen Itza,	54.10.2.9.1.9	2.16.0.17. = 55 y. 102 d.	

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The coincidences of dates are remarkable when it is seen that the length of time from the first date of Piedras Negras to that of Chichen Itza is $278\frac{2}{3}$ tuns, while the time between the arrival at Chacnouitan to the removal to Chichen Itza is given by the Book of Chilan Balam as 280 tuns. More than this, if an inscription should be found hereafter in Piedras Negras recording a date as late as 54. 9. 13. 9. 6. 16, this would show a stay in Piedras Negras of 99 tuns, the time given in the manuscript for the stay at Chacnouitan, and if about 54. 9. 13. 9. 6. 16, the people of Piedras

Negras deserted that city, they would have passed 204 years and 73 days before arriving at Chichen Itza. Now, all the historical dates of Quirigua lie between this last date and that of their arrival at Chichen Itza. Could the people of Piedras Negras have passed over to Quirigua and occupied that city during a part of this period of 204 years?^[6]

Such speculations may not be of great value, but if they excite enough interest to induce a more thorough investigation, they will not be absolutely useless.

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] The date of Stela D given by Goodman as 54. 9. 5. 5. 0. 0. is almost surely 54. 9. 15. 5. 0. 0.
- [2] The dates 54. 13. 0. 0. 0. 0. and 54. 9. 1. 0. 0. 0. may well be traditional and not historical, and refer to a period lying far in the past.
- [3] This date on Lintel 22 is very clear, but as it is the only one which I have seen, I omit it in the following discussion. If historical, it is earlier than the earliest date of Quirigua except that of the normal date 54. 13. 0. 0. 0. 0., 4 Ahau 8 Cumhu.
- [4] The dates of the Temple of the Cross, Temple of the Sun, and Temple of the Foliated Cross are almost surely traditional. The date on the Palace Steps, given by Goodman as 55. 3. 18. 12. 15. 12., should undoubtedly be 54. 9. 8. 9. 13. 0.
- [5] *The Maya Chronicles*, D. G. Brinton, Phil'a, 1882, p. 87.
- [6] If, however, we accept the date of 54. 9. 1. 0. 0. 0. in Quirigua as historical, as I was inclined to think when I wrote "Memoranda on the Maya Calendars used in the Books of Chilán Balam," the foundation of Quirigua would be anterior to all the dates which I have used in the above calculations.

Transcriber's note:

In general every effort has been made to replicate the original text as faithfully as possible, including some instances of possible irregularities in the use of commas and periods in Mayan dates.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE AGE OF MAYA RUINS ***

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