

The theory of an Asiatic origin is probably nearest to the truth, but the tribes who migrated from Asia left that continent at a very low stage of development. They drifted slowly down to the North American continent into Central America. In the rich Central American highlands and valleys they cultivated maize, or corn, built up a culture, and constructed mounds. From this centre the culture spread—returned north, and also extended towards the south, carrying the corn culture along with it.

Many things indicate that the Maya culture was indigenous to Central America, but they cannot be discussed in this short description. Only this much can be stated—that when we first meet the Maya, i. e., when the monuments were executed which carry the oldest dates, they already had a fully developed system of writing, and were experts in handling numerals, chiefly for the purpose of astronomical calculations. We find them at full cultural swing just around the time of the birth of Christ. They carved hieroglyphs on stone, built temples of cut limestone blocks and mortar, and arranged them around squares oriented to the cardinal points.

We have already spoken of the Tuxtla statuette as having the oldest date on record on the American Continent (98 B. C.) The next is the Leyden Plate dated 8-14-3-1-12 1 Eb 0 Yaxkin (60 A. D.) Both these objects are light of weight and carved in jadite.

The oldest large standing monument is in Uaxactun, Department of Petén, Guatemala, where Stela No. 9 records the year 68 A. D.\*

These dates are intriguing. The Tuxtla statuette was found outside the western limits of the Maya area, the Leyden plate near its eastern boundaries, and Stela 9 from Uaxactun stands in a ruined city in the center of the area in which the Old Empire flourished. Around this latter place are a series of monuments on which are engraved very early dates, and it is therefore likely that the Maya culture had its first growth in the heart of what is now the big forests of the Department of Petén.†

Our sources of information of the history and activities of the ancient Maya can be divided into the following groups: ancient manuscripts and inscriptions on stone written in Maya hieroglyphs; historical records written in the Maya language but with Spanish characters; descriptions written in the Spanish language by people who arrived in the Maya country shortly after the Conquerors; and finally, archaeological and ethnological data collected by modern explorers among the Maya speaking people.

\*Discovered by Dr. S. G. Morley of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

†Morley, 1925.