

***Plumeria
Alba:
Sacred
Flower
of the
Maya***

***by Jim Reed
See pages 4 & 8***



A monthly newsletter published by the **Institute of Maya Studies**

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Volume 49, Issue 8
August 2021
ISSN: 1524-9387



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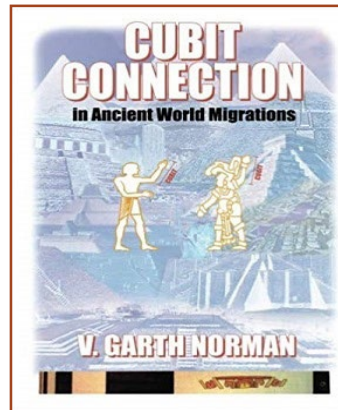
August 18, 2021 • Modern K'iche' Maya Long Count: 0.0.8.14.2 • 7 Ik 0 Mol • G3

Measure & Geometry Design in Ancient Maya Art & Architecture Compared with that of the Middle East

by **V. Garth Norman**

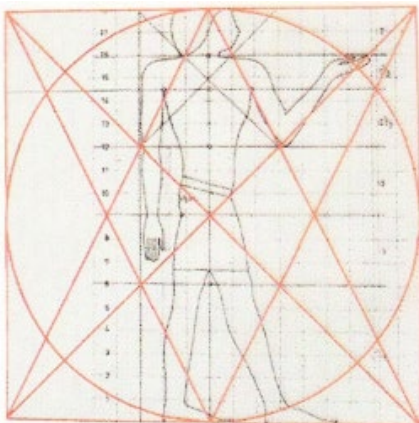
My IMS Zoom presentation on August 18 will be an interesting follow-up to Ed Barnhart's April presentation on "Ancient Maya Geometry". The April audience brought up expanding the study to decipher standard units of measure required for the proposed geometric design systems.

"Garth Norman's *Cubit Connection in Ancient World Migrations* (2018) provides dramatic evidence of standard measurements that began in Izapa's ancient sculpture and architecture as early as ca. 1600 BCE), with gradual extensive use throughout Mesoamerica that eventually were taken to build the antiquities in North and South America." (BYU)



Cover design and book layout by Jim Reed.

In 1967, Tones Brunés of Denmark, issued a two-volume study on geometry of the ancient Middle East. He suggested that Egyptian manuscripts used a geometric scheme for art instead of relying exclusively on the golden mean proportion. (The golden mean theory is based on natural proportions in the human body, where arms, legs, and other parts of the body are drawn in precise multiples or fractions of a set length.) Brunés' conclusions were



based on a study he had made of early Egyptian manuscripts (3000 BCE). Unlike later Egyptian art, which was produced using a standard grid, the earliest Egyptian manuscripts do not have a grid. They do, however, have proportional reference dots and lines that match the later grids. Brunés discovered that these points fit perfectly into a geometrical overlay consisting of a circle divided into quarters. The diagonals of the square and its halves provide reference points for the body. (See **Fig. 1.**)

Brunés concluded that the mandala was sacred and secret to the Egyptian temple

Fig. 1: Stylized Egyptian figure from Old Kingdom manuscript, Saqqara, Egypt. Egyptian manuscript copies dating from the early part of the third millennium BCE consistently have dots or horizontal lines fixed at the forehead, neck, armpits, elbows, base of spine, knee, and feet. The horizontal dotted lines of the grid, added later to assist artisans, conform to the dots except at the armpits. The armpit references seem to be determined by using a mandala; the two points are fixed by a line running from where two diagonals intersect the circle. Like most Egyptian art, this figure was composed according to the Egyptian cubit, the circle's radius for this figure being two cubits. continued on page 5



**Jim Reed,
Editor**

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IMS Streaming:

August 18 • 8 pm ET
Measure & Geometry in Ancient Maya Art & Architecture
with
V. Garth Norman

August 25 • 8 pm ET
Rapa Nui: Easter Island's Mighty Ancestors
with
Georges Fery



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Maya Train Update *Submitted by Sid Hollander*

Mérida, Yucatán, *The Yucatan Times* (June 17, 2021):

In the framework of the construction of the Maya Train, the Mexican federal government will allocate 849 million pesos (42 million USD), for research work in archaeological zones of Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan, revealed the Secretary of Culture, Alejandra Frausto Guerrero.

She indicated that both the agency under her charge and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) will make important investments designated to upgrade the existing and the uncovered archaeological zones that visitors will have a chance to encounter along the route of this railway project.

For the ancient Maya sites of Yucatan, 381 million pesos will be allocated; for Chiapas, 206 million pesos; as well as 160 million pesos for Campeche, and 102 million pesos for Quintana Roo.

The Secretary stated that these actions “essentially integrate a cultural project that seeks to demonstrate the vitality of the Maya culture. For this reason, visitor services will be upgraded and the architectural complexes of various archaeological zones distributed along this route will be improved through a historical investment.”

In line with the plans proposed by the Ministry of Culture, the work that will be carried out in several archaeological zones in the Yucatan Peninsula seeks to dignify cultural heritage, expand research and conservation of cultural assets, guarantee their protection, improve services for visitors and, of course, promote the development of the local Maya indigenous communities.

These actions will revitalize the archaeological zones of Palenque, Edzna, Tulum, Chichen Itza, the Ruta Puuc, Coba, and Calakmul, which “are an example of Maya culture due to their heritage value, to benefit the communities, and redistribute the flow of tourists, which will allow boosting the economic development of the area.”

Thus, the Puuc Route will receive 116 million pesos, for improvement works in Uxmal,

Kabah, Xlapak, Sayil, Oxkintok, Chacmultún, and Labna.

“Thanks to this, the route through Uxmal will grow with the incorporation of architectural complexes that were not accessible to the general public and with the rehabilitation of the sacbé or the main road that connects it with Kabaah, it is about 18 kilometers that will now be visited and in which raises the integration of nearby communities,” she said.

For Chichen Itza, 265 million pesos are allocated, which will be channeled to the research, conservation and maintenance of 23 buildings and the construction of its Site Museum, “a debt owed to visitors to facilitate understanding of the evolution of this ancient Maya city.” Similarly, the expansion of the visiting area stands out, integrating the so-called Initial Series, in Chichen Viejo.

In the case of Palenque, 206 million pesos will be allocated for the conservation and restoration of 23 monuments and the extension of the route to new archaeological exploration areas.

In Tulum, Quintana Roo, 65 million pesos will be invested, to carry out conservation and maintenance tasks in the 22 buildings enabled for the visit, as well as the exploration, habilitation, and public opening of monuments in Tanchah, to expand the visiting area. Therefore, with these resources, an immersive room will also be built in Tulum and the Tulum-Tanchah connection path will be enabled, among other actions that will allow tourists to have a better experience on their visit.

In Coba, with an investment of 37 million pesos, conservation and maintenance will be undertaken in the sets of monuments called Macanxoc, Coba, Nohoch Mul, and Chumuc Mul; in addition, the reconfiguration and improvement of services to the public will be carried out.

While in Campeche, other major archaeological zones that will receive financial support are: Calakmul, a mixed World Heritage site, where the buildings that make up the Chiik Naab Complex will be consolidated and stabilized, some of which retain mural paintings, and maintenance will be provided to 27 archaeological structures. Additionally, in conjunction with the Ministry of Communications and Transportation, the improvement of the access road is projected, works for which an investment of 80 million pesos is contemplated. *Looks like a lot of work is planned!*

Source: Thank you ex-IMS president Sid Hollander for submitting this informative article! Access the original article here: [Maya Train Update](#)





Rapa Nui: Easter Island's Mighty Ancestors

by **Georges Fery** See August 25 program info on page 7.

The history of Easter Island is a dramatic example of the clash between faith and demographics. Throughout human history, communities mitigated or, as in our case, worsened their environment, and destroyed their food chain. On a large landmass, people move with the seasons or away from their neighbors' hostility. Conversely, island migrations are dependent on limited land and food collection zones, extending offshore or not. Observations that may apply to Easter Island, but are insufficient to answer its riddle. The island's name in Polynesian is Rapa Nui, as is the language spelled in one word, Rapanui.

Ancient nonliterate cultures recorded their histories as myths and folklore, while their beliefs were strongly associated with an "otherworld" of ancestors and "mind-made" deities.

This mythological perception was inherited from waves of migrating people from the Eurasian landmass to the western and central Pacific, thousands of years in the past. The

mythological past traditionally short on facts, leaves many gray areas in the Rapa Nui ethnological record. The origin of the historical group that settled on the island points to Hiva Oa and Mangareva in the Tuamotu archipelago. In the Polynesian Triangle, human settlement began in Hawaii (north corner) and Rapa Nui (south-eastern corner) from around 900 CE, and New Zealand (southwestern corner) from around 1200 CE.

In Rapa Nui, climate, animal migrations from birds to fish, food crops success or failure, rain fall and other life sustaining needs, were believed to be the exclusive domain of *Make-make*. The paramount god was the sole master of *mana* the magical power granted or withheld at will to Rapa Nui's ancestors who, in turn, granted *mana* to their living family heads. No success or failure, from nature's reward to joy or sadness, wellbeing, or deprivation could happen in this world without *mana*. The belief in an "other-world" as a wellspring of ancestral powers for individuals, was common to most cultures of the Pacific.

In the Rapa Nui mythology of Easter Island, *Makemake* (also written as *Make-make*) is the creator of humanity, the god of fertility, and

The majestic moai sculptures of Ahu Tongariki. ©Georges Fery



Georges photographed this map of Rapa Nui while on an adventure there with Ed Barnhart. ©Georges Fery

Makemake with two birdmen, carved from red scoria. Public domain.



the chief god of the "Tangata manu" or bird-man sect (this sect succeeded the island's more famous Moai era). He appeared to be the local form, or name, of the old Polynesian god *Tane*. *Makemake*, is shown with a round face and eyes, an almost childish image – a frequent subject of the Rapa Nui petroglyphs.

With this mythological perception of life and dependence on their ancestors, the Rapanui could not possibly understand the cumulative cause and effect of their actions, nor their failures. Ultimately, the question remains, did *Make-make* turn his back and withhold *mana* from his ancestors?



Note the excellent stone working of *Vinapu*, comparable with ancient sites in South America. ©Georges Fery



Plumeria Alba: Sacred Flower of the Maya by Jim Reed

Little did I know that when I planted what I thought was a nice plant with pretty flowers in my mother's yard that I would eventually learn it was very connected to the Maya.

It wasn't until I moved it from direct sunlight in the front yard to under the shade of the leaves of my bananas that it finally started to bloom. When a group of flowers appeared, I thought they were so nice that I shared the photo (above right) in an email to the IMS Board. IMS webmaster, **Keith Merwin**, immediately got back to me with this message:

"You do realize that *Plumeria* is shown on many Maya art items and was imported to Hawaii to make lei because it doesn't fall apart when you string it on a line? So the two plants most connected with Hawaii both came from the Caribbean, Pineapple and *Plumeria*. **Keith**

I then ran outside and realized that I had moved the *Plumeria* plant right next to my pineapple, so, I shared the photo at right. This started me on a month-and-a-half journey to contact Maya scholars and explore everything I could learn about this wonderful plant with beautiful flowers.

The **IFAS Extension** website of the University of Florida notes: "*Plumeria alba* is well-known for its intensely fragrant, lovely, spiral-shaped blooms which appear at branch tips June through November. The tree itself (below) is rather unusual in appearance; the 20-inch-long, coarse, deciduous

leaves clustered only at the tips of the rough, blunt, sausage-like, thick, grey-green branches. Branches are upright and rather crowded on the trunk forming a vase or umbrella shape with age. They are rather soft and brittle and can break but are usually sturdy unless they are mechanically hit or disturbed. A milky sap is exuded from the branches when they are bruised or punctured." (1)

In an excellent paper posted to *academia.edu*, that he himself calls "a comprehensive and up-to-date study of the cultural history of the genus *Plumeria* in Mesoamerica,"

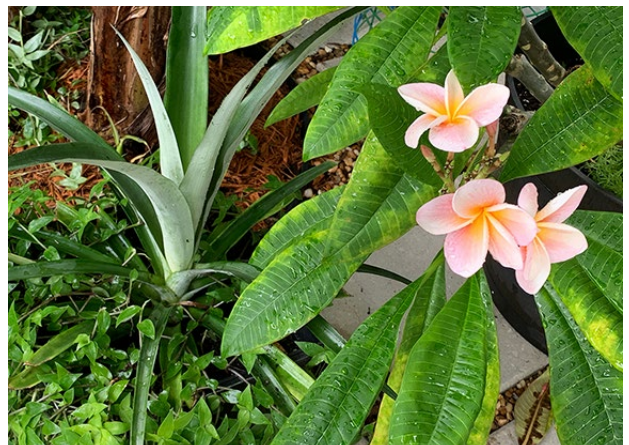
Thomas J. Zumbroch notes: "Members of *Plumeria* are shrubs or small trees with thick branches and alternate leaves, characterized by copious milky sap which is a skin irritant. Broad inflorescence with waxy petals and a regular calyx of five lobes are identifying features. The showy, night scented flowers and a tendency to have a multitude of blossoms open at one time, lie at the root of their popularity. They are native to a region in the Americas roughly from Panama northward as far as the tip of peninsular Florida and Baja California, with a concentration in Central America, as well as the Caribbean islands."(2)

This includes the Mayalands, especially the Yucatan peninsula. I asked **Sofia Paredes Maury** of the Ruta Maya Foundation about *Plumeria* showing up on polychrome Maya ceramics and she shares that **Dorie Reents-Budet** mentions the use of *Plumeria* in painted vases. She includes some examples in *Painting the Maya Universe*.

In a personal communication, **Nicholas Hellmuth** of FLAAR Mesoamerica said "Nice professional quality photos of the *Plumeria*, Jim! Photos of flowers can help epigraphers and iconographers." *cont. on page 8*



A *Plumeria alba* has white flowers with yellow centers while *Plumeria rubra* (in my garden above) produces red-toned flowers. There are many other selections of *Plumeria* which display a variety of flower colors. Photo: Jim Reed.



My *Plumeria* shares a spot under the shade of the banana leaves with my pineapple. Photo: Jim Reed.



Of course, I searched local nurseries and found my own *Plumeria Alba* which I placed in the partial shade by my mother's bedroom window. Photo: Jim Reed.



Middle-aged *Plumeria alba* tree: White Frangipani.

●●●●● Photo: Ed Gilman (UFL).

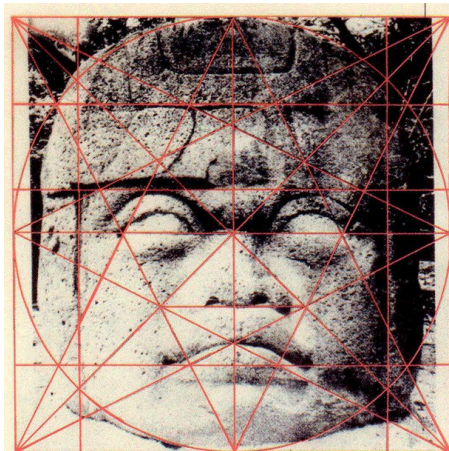
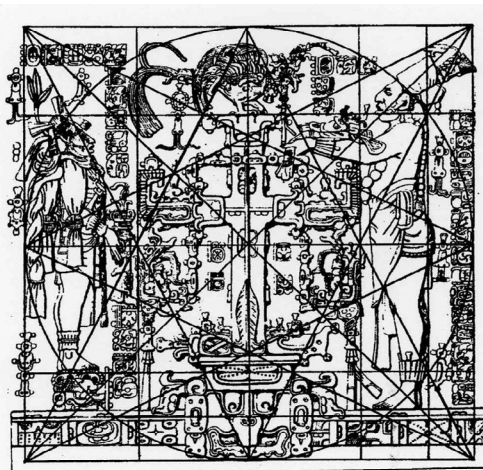


Fig 2: Tablet of the Cross in the Temple of the Cross, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. The Classic Maya sculptures of Palenque, dating to the seventh and eighth centuries CE, have been noted for their unusual geometric composition. Applying the mandala to the art reveals the remarkable details of the underlying geometric format. The Babylonian cubit (49.5 cm) was used in Palenque's art – derived from the length of the forearm. **Fig 3:** Monument I, La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico. The famous monolithic Olmec heads date from around 1000 BCE. The mandala composition is apparent in both the facial features and the helmet. The width of the face between the side straps of the helmet measure three Babylonian cubits – 49.5 centimeter cubits. **Fig 4:** Aztec Calendar Stone, Mexico. This famous carving is the latest-known example of Mesoamerican art composed by using a geometric mandala, which is here superimposed on the stone. Of all known examples, the Aztec calendar best reveals an underlying geometric format. Intersecting lines of the diagonals and inner rectangle determine the widths of the concentric circles – all measured by the Babylonian cubit.

Measure & Geometry Design in Ancient Maya Art & Architecture Compared with that of the Middle East

by V. Garth Norman *cont. from pg. 1*

See August 18 program info on page 7.

priesthood, who controlled state arts and crafts. He concluded that after drawing the figures according to the mandala, Egyptian artists then added the grid pattern, which matched up with many, but not all of the reference points.

To test Brunés' ideas, I tested the mandala design on other Egyptian manuscripts. The first step was to find where the artist centered the body. Then a vertical diameter had to be determined. From that step, the basic tools of compass, square, and ruler were used to develop the overall circle, square, and their divisions. I found that both seated and standing Egyptian figures all conformed to the geometric mandala.

Next, I then applied this same technique to Mesoamerican monuments, examining human figures and the Aztec calendar stone (See **Figs. 2, 3, & 4** above.). Many scholars have attempted to explain the mechanics behind the Aztec calendars obvious geometric design, but until now, no one has been able to devise a design that accounted for the angles and the spacing of the circles. The mandala

provides a solution to the mystery; the eight sets of angles line up with the diagonals of the mandala's square, and the inner circle of glyphs conforms to the diagonals of the rectangular halves of the square.

I subsequently tested the mandala on numerous Olmec, Izapan, and Classic Maya-Palenque sculptures in Central America, which cover more than 1,500 years of civilization, and represent many different styles. The vast majority fit the geometric pattern precisely – even intricate and minute details conform to the mandala. Further research has also shown the mandala's worldwide distribution.

Measure

My original discovery at Izapa identified that the geometric design composition on Stela 5 was composed with two standard measurements that turned out to be identical with the ancient Royal Babylonian and Royal Egyptian cubits. In studying the Izapa Stela 5, and related Izapa sculptures, I discovered that factoring, (doubling or halving a standard several times) was involved in the lengths of the

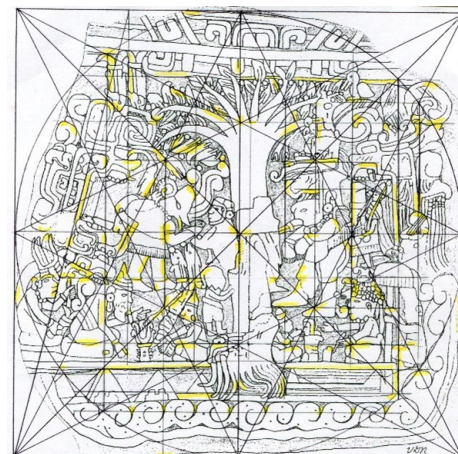


Fig. 5: Izapa Stela 5 Tree of Life, with circle and square geometry. The overlay shows that positioning on both sides of the tree defines the underlying geometric pattern.

different parts of the human body, and different figures. (See **Fig. 5** above.) This confirmed the Babylonian cubit (49.5 cm) and the Egyptian cubit (52.5 cm).

I then expanded the Izapan geometry and measure discovery research across Mesoamerica to numerous archaeology sites and museums with positive results. All measurements disclosed that these two Middle Eastern cubits are the Pan-Mesoamerican standard measurements based upon ancient kings' forearm measurements.

continued on page 6

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for August by Zach Lindsey

11 August 3113 CE: On 13.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kum'uk G9, the maize god was reborn from the underworld and a group of gods oversaw the creation of our era. Creation stories in any religion often include some of the most philosophical meditations on culture, and they are also some of the most difficult events for outsiders to understand. There are a thousand things to say about the night the gods set three sacred stones in the sky and lit a fire between them to ignite the cosmic hearth. But, the stars can say it better than I can! So, I'll just say if you have clear skies where you are, go outside, look for Orion's belt, and find the first star in the belt, which is called Alnitak. You're looking at one of the hearthstones of the cosmic hearth!

The other two hearthstone stars are Rigel and Saiph. If you live in a very clear area, you might even see wisps of Orion's nebula, the fire started by the gods.

28 August 682 CE: On 9.12.10.5.12 4 Eb 10 Yax G4, Lady 6 Sky arrived in Naranjo to find a city crippled and leaderless from wars. She may not have been greeted warmly, despite marrying into a branch of the Naranjo royal family. A scion of Dos Pilas, Lady 6 Sky presumably saw the city of Naranjo as a way to wage war on her family's enemies. And wage war she did, even against the superpower Tikal. Famed for portraying herself in men's clothing and standing on the backs of captives, Lady 6 Sky was apparently a warrior-queen in every sense of

Stela 24 of Naranjo depicts lady wac-chanih-ahau (Lady 6 Sky) standing atop a bound captive warrior. Dated: 9.13.7.3.8 7 Lamat I Zotz'. Drawing by Linda Scele/FAMSI.

the word. But she also spurred a cultural renaissance in Naranjo, including important updates to the Maya calendar. I have a personal opinion that she was more devoted to the divinatory aspects of the calendar than some other kings and queens of her time – even the day she picked to enter the city, 4 Eb, is a day contemporary Maya shamans consider to be good for laying down new paths and starting new endeavors. 🏹



Measure & Geometry Design in Ancient Maya Art & Architecture Compared with that of the Middle East

by V. Garth Norman *cont. from pg. 5*

A standard measurement suggests a high degree of cultural interchange among different peoples in ancient America. The fact that it endured over 2,000 years also suggests a high level of continuity from generation to generation. Most surprising, however, is the fact that the 49.5 centimeter length is the same as the

Royal Babylonian cubit, preserved in a table of measurements on a basalt statue of King Gudea of Lagash, Babylon – dating ca. 2050 BCE. In conclusion, these two Middle East standard measurements have been tracked since 1985 across Mesoamerican antiquities and into North America and South America and foreign lands (see publications on www.garthnorman.com).

Editor's addition: This ceramic figure from Comalcalco, Mexico, has a rectangular plate on its forehead that can be measured like similar objects on other sculptures in many museums. Source: Pinterest/posted by Andre Thunestvedt.



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The IMS has two Zoom presentations this month!

Join in the Exploration!

Wednesday, August 18 • 8 pm ET • IMS Live Streaming Event:

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81821531833>

Measure & Geometry in Ancient Maya Art & Architecture with V. Garth Norman



An illustration of Izapa's Tree of Life Stela 5 superimposed with a cubit grid. Today's Maya refer to original tribes and chiefs as roots and their descendants as branches of a tree.

Garth Norman, director of the Center for Izapan Research, proposes a sophisticated and complex link between ancient art and architecture in the Middle East and in Mesoamerica. After analyzing numerous paintings on monuments and architecture in both Egypt and Central America, he proposes that the geometric patterns evident in Egyptian portrayals of gods and humans are the same as those in Mesoamerican figures. He has also determined the basic units of measure in Mesoamerican hieroglyphic art, statuary, and architecture – units of measure that match the standard units of measure in the Near East – the Royal Babylonian, and Royal Egyptian cubits. These parallels are highly detailed, indicating ancient cultural interchange between the two regions.



Garth and his wife Cheryl enjoy the Summer Solstice sunset at Utah's Parowan Gap (a significant ancient calendar observatory).

Wednesday, August 25 • 8 pm ET • IMS Live Streaming Event:

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88990333853>

Rapa Nui: Easter Island's Mighty Ancestors with Georges Fery



Georges at Ahu Tongariki, Rapa Nui.

The tragedy of Easter Island is wrapped in the “mind-made” faith of another world, with dreadful consequences. What happened to the people of this sixty-five-square mile island in the middle of a million square miles in the South Pacific, which is called by Easter Islanders *Te Pito o Te Henua* or *The End of the Land*? The silent stone giants are today the only witnesses to the dreadful tragedies, as they often are under similar circumstances.



©Georges Fery

Rapa Nui is famous for its stone statues of human figures, known as *moai* (meaning “sacred ancestor”). The *moai* were probably carved to commemorate important ancestors and were made from around 1000 CE, until the second half of the seventeenth century. During that time, the inhabitants of this remote island quarried, carved, and erected around 887 *moai*.

Plumeria Alba: Sacred Flower of the Maya

by Jim Reed *continued from pg. 2*

“Wild *Plumeria* are white; no other colors are wild in Guatemala; if you find a red one, that means there was a home garden there in past years and the house has rotted away. *Bishop de Landa* lists lots of colors of *Plumeria* that were around homes in Yucatan. These are native, but not wild (they are ‘domesticated’).

“*J. Eric S. Thompson* was totally incorrect to suggest (in 1954) that the *K'in* sign comes from *Plumeria*. The *K'in* glyph is a ‘4-petalled flower’ in some renditions. *Plumeria* flowers have distinctive five petals.”

Seems that Thompson assumed the ancient Maya had “stylized” the 5-petalled *Plumeria* to be the basis for the shape of the representations of 4-petalled flowers he noticed

on Maya artifacts and some of the Codices, further believing that it more likely represented the four cardinal directions so prominent in Maya cosmology. Perhaps he never encountered 4-petalled species of flowers in the wild.

Nicholas Hellmuth will share more on that in the continuation of this article in next month’s *IMS Explorer*.

In a personal communication, *Barbara MacLeod* said: “I am not aware of *Plumeria* appearing in the iconography. *Merle Greene Robertson* gave a paper at an early Mesa Redonda (1971 or 72) on identifiable medicinal plants in Palenque iconography; it’s either in Volume 1 or 2 of the series. I am aware of Thompson having written about Maya views on *Plumeria* as representative of

sexuality, but I don’t remember where. I have a *Plumeria* in my garden that I got from *Elaine Schele*; I need to feed it to tease it to bloom. The tree is a native species; I have seen it in the wild.”

References in this article:

- (1) Gilman, Edward F. and Watson, Dennis G. 2021 “*Plumeria Alba*: White Frangipani”, An article posted on the University of Florida’s Extension website. Access their article here: [Gilman and Watson](#)
- 2013 “*Plumerias* the Color of Roseate Spoonbills – Continuity and Transition in the Symbolism of *Plumeria L.* in Mesoamerica”, *Ethnobotany Research & Applications – A Journal of Plants, People, and Applied Research*. Access the full paper at this hyperlink: [Plumerias](#)

Note: This article will continue in the September IMS Explorer. 🏠

Let’s Get to Know our August IMS Zoom Presenters

V. Garth Norman has researched as an Archaeologist, Epigrapher, and Archaeo-astronomer in Mesoamerica, and North and South America for 60 years. He is Director of Archaeological Research Consultants (ARCON 1982-2021). Norman’s pioneering study of Izapa, Mexico’s sculpture for NWA (1962-1980) resulted in 3 publications: *Izapa Sculpture Album* (1973), *Izapa Sculpture Text* (1976) and *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa Sculptures* (1980). In his recent *Izapa Sacred Space: Sculpture Calendar Codex* (2015), he decodes Izapa’s original Maya sacred 260-Day Calendar based on Izapa’s location at 14.8° north latitude. Migrants took this Calendar to South and North America (see Parowan Gap, *Nature’s Perfect Observatory – Norman 2007*). In his *Cubit Connection in Ancient World Migrations* (2018) book, Norman decodes Middle Eastern standard measurements and geometry



Garth measures a T-shaped “Ik” window at the Governor’s Palace in Palenque.

that were used to build antiquities in Mesoamerica and in North and South America. Norman holds Graduate Degrees in Ancient Studies and Archaeology-Anthropology from BYU. He has participated internationally in SAA symposiums, and lectured worldwide. Spend some time at: [garthnorman.com](#) 🏠

Freelance writer-photographer **Georges Fery** addresses topics, about history, cultures, and beliefs of ancient and today’s indigenous communities of the Americas.



Georges at Quirigua.

The author is a fellow of the Institute of Maya Studies and The Royal Geographical Society, London, UK. Georges is also a member in good standing of the Maya Exploration Center, the Archaeological Institute of America, the NFAA – Nonfiction Authors Association, as well as the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC.

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