

Route 1, Box 39  
Kimberly, Idaho  
83341  
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Dear Dr. Thompson:

It is indeed an honor to receive such an informative letter from the real authority on the Maya civilization, and I do appreciate your taking your valuable time to advise me of the Holmes error in translation. Torquemada's account of this blademaking operation is certainly nebulous and it gratifying to note that you agree with my contention that the toolmaker did not hone the prismatic blades. Certainly it would not be necessary to hone such a magnificent edge as that of the prismatic blade. Your explanation of the smithy analogy certainly explains a great deal and I only regret that I did not have access to your fine book when I was writing this paper. I researched my personal library of Meso American information and found many references to your works. However, Kimberly is a very small town and our library leaves much to be desired; and the Idaho State Univ. library is a 200 mile round trip from here which presented a problem.

You are so right about the vital sentence of chest pressure, for if it read "press it against the chest" that would mean the crutch was pressed against the chest and this, of course, would not work for the seating of the tip would be disrupted, the pressures of the body would be nil, and the poor fellow would probably end up with a bad bruise or a hole in the chest. I certainly agree with your explanation. I am delighted that you are so aware of the differences in obsidian and of the discrimination of the aborigines in their selection of stone. Quality of material makes all the difference in the world to the toolmaker and also the end result. However, this is a point I have had great difficulty in getting across to students of lithic technology. Material must be first rate and free of flaws to produce fine tools such as the obsidian razors. You may be interested to know that during my experiments I had to use obsidian from Burns, Oregon which does not compare in quality with that from Mexico or Guatemala. Therefore, I subjected some of the stone to the thermal treatment and found that the quality improved greatly and that I could produce straighter blades with fewer undulations. This, of course, does not mean that the Maya altered their material for, indeed, it would be unnecessary to change such fine stone; but it seems to prove the point that superior material is a real asset when making the prismatic blades. Material is critical to the toolmaker and I am constantly at odds with those who refer to certain artifacts as being "crude" when it is evident that the workman was forced to use inferior material and had to be very skilled to have accomplished any flaking at all. I think we must always consider material and the quality of the workmanship in relation to the stone.

May I impose upon you for further information? Do you have any information on the tip of the crutch? Holmes also says "They take the stick (which is cut off smooth at the end) with both hands, and set well hom against the edge of the front of the stone, which also is cut smooth in that part - - -". This gives no reference to an insert or a tip other than wood so do you know if there is any mention anywhere of material other than wood having been inserted at the tip of the crutch? I would greatly appreciate any information you may have on this point.

I am employed by Dr. Earl Swanson, head of the Department of Anthropology and Director of the Museum at Idaho State University who has offered to send me his personal copy of the "Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization". Dr. Swanson had the pleasure of visiting you with Miles

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Burkitt in 1955 and he sends his regards and asks that you give Miles his best wishes when you have the opportunity. Dr. Swanson will send the reprints you requested and I am sure he will be happy to put your name on the mailing list for future anthropological publications.

I am certainly looking forward to reading your account of the Maya civilization for I have made several trips to the ruins in Mexico and consider Meso American archaeology to possibly the most fascinating facet of this profession.

It may be of interest to you to know that Dr. Jacques Tixier of the Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle, Prehistoire, Institut de Paleontologie Humain, 1 Rue Rene Panhard, Paris, France is very skilled in the manufacture of polyhedral cores and blades. When you next visit Paris you may wish to contact this man and see an actual demonstration. He has also made a short movie of this blademaking method which is available with an international tape which you may wish to see. I have worked with this man and he is very skilled and extremely interested in the various blademaking techniques.

Again, thank you for your information and if, at any time, I can be of service to you please do not hesitate to write.

Yours very truly,

Don E. Crabtree

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