Reading Questions

Secrets of the Maya Otherworld (Alma Guillermoprieto)

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/sacred-cenotes/guillermoprieto-text>

1. What is the astronomical significance of the dates May 23 and July 19 for the cave the archaeologists were observing?
2. What happens on the date of the spring equinox at the El Castillo pyramid? (note that the spring equinox happens around March 22. It is one of two days in the year that the sun is directly overhead at the equator, and that day and night are 12 hours everywhere on Earth)
3. What do the findings in the previous questions suggest about the sophistication of the ancient Maya?
4. Who is Chaak? What can often happen, according to Maya tradition, if he is absent?
5. Explain why no river runs through this region, even though the rainfall there would be sufficient to give rise to rivers in areas that are not covered by limestone.
6. When is the rainy season, and when is the dry season?
7. What is the unsolved archaeological question?
8. What does the author cite as a miracle?
9. The term “water table” refers to groundwater. It is the absolute elevation of the top of the saturated zone. How much can the water table drop from drought?
10. For the sky-gazing Maya, the pyramids in the Yucatán served what function?
11. What does Caamal answer to the question of how people like him bridge the difference between the old Maya gods and Jesus Christ? Why does the author ask him this question?
12. What is the term used for non-Maya visitors?
13. Characterize the degree of modernity evident in many villages of the Zona Maya, including the village of Chun-Yah.
14. What is a Cha Chaak?
15. Curanderos (practitioners of herbal medicine) are a large part of culture throughout Mexico. What kinds of health benefits are claimed by the 40 different plants Don Mariano (Mariano Pacheco Cammal) knows? (the term “Don” is used in front of a person’s first name to denote respect)
16. How does Don Mariano define being Maya, when asked by the author? Explain.
17. What are milpas, and why are those who depend on them more likely to be subjects of Chaak?