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**WORK AND LEISURE**—Nels Anderson—*Free Press*, 266 p., \$5. Study examines significant relations between work and leisure as current ways of using time.

• Science News Letter, 81:236 April 14, 1962

## MATHEMATICS

### Soviet Scientists Decipher Mayan Script

► SOVIET MATHEMATICIANS have succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphic script of the ancient Mayas of Mexico and Central America with the help of modern electronic computing machines, the UNESCO Courier, monthly publication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, reports.

Using only 40 hours of computer time, Felix Shirokov, lecturer at the Moscow Power Institute, describes how this was accomplished. The team working on the problem was headed by S. L. Sobolev, director of the Soviet Institute of Mathematics, Siberian Division.

At the height of their civilization, the Mayas not only possessed astronomical observatories but had a calendar more accurate than the present Gregorian calendar, the article states. "The Europeans, however, showed no interest in the Maya calendar," and "the Conquistadores . . . burned the Maya books," Mr. Shirokov continues.

The article continues: "Only three manuscripts have been preserved; they are now in museums in Madrid, Dresden and Paris. The Paris codex was in a bad state from the time of its acquisition and the Dresden codex was badly damaged during the Second World War and may be considered as nonexistent; fortunately this manuscript had been published and research workers are able to use a printed copy. There are also a number of inscriptions on stone, done in a special 'lapidary' script. These, taken together, constitute the source of our knowledge of the Maya system of writing."

Describing the task of deciphering the hieroglyphs, Mr. Shirokov writes that the Novosibirsk mathematicians used their electronic computer to find the frequency of letter combinations in the Maya language. Then the computer found the frequency of occurrence of the hieroglyphs in the Madrid and Dresden manuscripts. After that, there remained the job of correlating the frequencies.

An example from the translation follows: The young maize god fires pottery from white clay;

The god of death, the destroyer, fires a pot; The god of the North Star fires a pot; The yellow jaguar fires a pot.

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