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Abstracts

Teotihuacan and the Maya: The Round Trip

Claudia Brittenham (University of Chicago)

We often conceptualize interaction between Teotihuacan and the Maya world as unidirectional, focusing especially on the movement of people and ideas from Central Mexico into southeastern Mesoamerica. But ideas never flow in just one direction: we know that people from all over Mesoamerica lived at Teotihuacan, and that people moved back and forth between Teotihuacan and other Mesoamerican regions. This paper examines artistic evidence for the round trip of ideas between Teotihuacan and the Maya world, looking at works, especially ceramics, that emerged out of the encounter between different cultures.

The Tangled Journey of the Cross of Palenque

Christina Bueno (Northeastern Illinois University)

In 1909, Mexico's inspector of monuments, Leopoldo Batres, hauled the final panel of the Cross of Palenque to the National Museum in Mexico City. With this, the Cross of Palenque, an enormous limestone artifact made up of three panels, became whole again. For decades, the different pieces of the artifact had been scattered throughout Mexico and the United States. One of the panels existed in the Smithsonian Institution. Another was part of the archaeology collection in Mexico's National Museum. The final panel had been too difficult to move out of Palenque, until the Mexican government gave the necessary resources to Inspector Batres. This paper traces the journey of the three panels to Mexico's National Museum. It focuses on the Mexican government's efforts to make the monument whole, a process that obscured the Cross of Palenque's complicated and fragmented history. It highlights how the construction of patrimony aims to make artifacts appear pristine and whole and as if they naturally belong to the state, obscuring their previous contexts along with the struggles involved in turning them into national property.

Sacrificial Bowls in Ancient Mesoamerica

Zachary Hruby (Northern Kentucky University)

Blood sacrifice has been a mainstay of Mesoamerican ritual practice since Formative times. This presentation examines what was done with the sacrifice after the ritual killing was finished, and

specifically the vessels that were used to hold the sacrifice. Not simply inert ceramic dishes, gourds, or baskets, sacrificial bowls like the Aztec *cuanabxicalli* and the Maya *k'in* bowl were ideologically charged items, rich in symbolism, and often perceived as animate beings. I argue that Maya cache bowls were the material correlate to sacrificial bowls depicted in the iconography, and that their deposition effectively creates an axis mundi, however temporarily, at the place of their interment.

Trial by Fire: Ceramic Breakage from a Production Locus in a Tzeltal Maya Community in Yajalon, Chiapas, Mexico

Andrew Kracinski (University of Illinois - Chicago)

Ceramics fill a critical role throughout history as art, trade goods, religious objects, and most crucially, domestic objects utilized in food storage and consumption. With an important role throughout history, ceramics feature prominently in any archaeological assemblage where cultures utilized such technology. However, one gathers only so much information from the archaeological record; it helps to have additional sources of information to confirm (or give credence to) a proposal or theory. For corroborating information, we can study how modern cultures make, utilize, and break objects like ceramics. In interviewing a potter in the town of Yajalon, Chiapas, Mexico, as well as excavating in her firing location, I will contribute to the overall understanding of ceramic manufacture and breakage patterns found in archaeological assemblages. The findings contribute to our identification of ceramic production zones and technology in addition to the economic and social importance of potters in indigenous communities.

“I Brought You Here that You Might Learn Something:” Calendar and Place in Contemporary K'iche' Ritual

Matthew Krystal (North Central College)

The 260-day *Cholq'ij* cycle remains an important feature of the highland Guatemala religious landscape. *Cholq'ij* ceremonies are experiences that bring to life fundamental precepts of a distinctively Mesoamerican cosmology. This presentation follows Obispo Garcia, an *ajq'ij* ‘daykeeper,’ as he makes offering at an altar in Canton Panquix, San Miguel Totonicapán. Employing video recording, the presentation explores how social actor, space, and time intersect to create a sacred place and a multivalent ritual. The principle social actor, Don Obispo holds the title of *chuchkajaw*, reflecting more than 30 years of experience as a respected daykeeper. The physical setting, complete with a cave, a spring, and a stream, make it ideal as place to make offering. The time of the ritual, on the day 3 *Kej* (‘deer’), shapes the ceremony in important ways as well. The presentation concludes with a discussion of cultural continuity in context of social change. Obispo is compelled to make offerings for a number of reasons that outsiders view as “traditional.” He initiated as a daykeeper in response to a call. He is guided in his practice by the *Cholq'ij*. His profession demands that he respond when asked for help. However, Obispo also responds to what he sees as pervasive misrepresentation of Maya spirituality. Here, Obispo’s motivations seem better framed by the concept of “cultural activism” than by “tradition.” In the end, cultural habit,

conscious action, and rich performance create and transmit meanings that are at once contemporary K'iche' and ancient Mesoamerican.

A Quest to Save Sacred Waters in the Maya World

Khristin Landry-Montes (Cornell College)

The karst landscape of Yucatán, Mexico is dotted with thousands of sinkholes. These features, called cenotes in Spanish and *ts'ono'ot* in Yucatec Mayan, range from closed caverns to open surface ponds. Cenotes, and the underground aquifer system that connects them, are the only continual source of naturally occurring fresh water in Yucatán. Because of this, and because they are truly otherworldly places, cenotes were conceived by the ancient Maya as sacred spaces. This is evidenced via the archaeological material preserved in cenotes. Cenotes and associated offerings were also documented by the ancient Maya themselves in painted books of ritual and prophecy referred to as the Maya codices. Today, cenotes remain culturally important to Maya communities. Some are sites of ritual activity while others are developed for tourism and serve as important economic resources. Despite their importance, however, cenotes are increasingly endangered by contamination. One approach to mitigating these threats is through community-driven educational programming aimed at mobilizing Maya youth to conserve cenotes in their communities. In 2018, InHerit: Indigenous Heritage Passed to Present, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, collaborated with students and faculty at the Universidad de Oriente in Valladolid, Yucatán, along with teachers at nine middle schools in Maya communities, to develop sustainable experiential education curricula related to cenote conservation and archaeological and cultural heritage. The project was supported by funding from the National Geographic Society with the overarching goal of supporting Indigenous communities in creating lasting social change.

Looking for what was not known to be lost? Tikal's Missing Carved Wooden Lintel

James Meierhoff (University of Illinois – Chicago) and Jeff Beuchler (Merced College)

In 1879 the Guatemalan Secretary of Agriculture Salvador Venezuela saw the damage that was wrought to the temples of Tikal by the removal of many of its carved wooden lintels, and observed that; “The beams of the doors of these towers, which form the lintels of the doors, were pulled out by a foreign doctor [Gustave Bernoulli] the year before last, and that which time and nature could not destroy with the great trees that had grown there this man has done...” Astonishingly, Valenzuela’s next course of action was to perform the same deed that he was condemning Bernoulli for; “As that doctor of whom I spoke had done, I pulled out the lintels of the principal door of this building, saving the carved part and removing with an axe the rest of the beam, to bring them to our museum with some small insignificant objects of stone and clay that we found.” The Tikal Project attempted to account for Tikal’s missing lintels. However, Valenzuela’s report of his exploration of Petén in 1879 was discovered too late for his admission to have been included in their analysis. If Valenzuela indeed removed a lintel from Tikal, which lintel had he taken? Which building was he in?

Where is it today? This presentation reviews the current understanding of Tikal's missing wooden lintels and explores the possibility that Tikal had yet another carved wooden monument and where it may have been located."

Bones, Heads, and Eyes: Maya Ritual Display of Body Parts in Northern Yucatan

Virginia Miller, University of Illinois – Chicago

In Mesoamerica, bones and skulls, whether of ancestors or slain enemies were considered to be potent relics. The ritual manipulation and display of decapitated heads, digits, and femurs is well documented. While they are not preserved, according to surviving imagery, even eyes were extracted. Nevertheless, among the Maya, the representation of body parts and ritual sacrifice such as heart extraction and decapitation is usually limited to painted ceramics during the Late Classic. From about A.D. 800-1000, large-scale sculpture and painting in northern Yucatan features human sacrifice, skeletal imagery, crossed bones, post-mortem heads, and other severed body parts. At the same time, Chichén Itzá witnessed the innovation of a new architectural form, the skullrack, decorated with reliefs of skeletal executioners and hundreds of impaled skulls. Combined skeletal and iconographic data confirm increased head processing and exhibition at Chichén Itzá when compared to Classic-period Maya centers. These were not foreign introductions, as was long believed, but were almost certainly already practiced centuries before at Yucatecan urban centers such as Uxmal and Kabah, probably in response to the religious and militaristic demands of a new era. Northern Maya practices also foreshadow the massive human sacrifice and macabre imagery of the later Aztecs.

Gray and White Wares and the pan-Mesoamerican Tradition in Formative Times: A Case Study from Tayata, Mixteca Alta

Maria Teresa Palomares Rodriguez (Southern Illinois University - Carbondale)

The Mesoamerican Formative is known for the exchange of pottery with pan-Mesoamerican motifs, some of them "Olmec-style". White and gray wares form part of the debate about the origin, exchange, and production of a widely distributed pottery tradition in early times. The scholarly consensus is that these wares played an important role for interrelationships among emergent elites and chiefly societies during the Early/Middle Formative. Ceramic analyses, XRF and typology of attributes, from the Tayata site in the Mixteca Alta, show technological strategies for obtaining similar gray and white vessels to those with high quality into the exchange networks. These wares at Tayata, have been identified in structures and contexts related to households inhabited by a local elite. It seems the production of gray and white wares was not under clear control of any group, and the variation into these wares, shown across Formative Mesoamerican sites, is the result of the variability of local production. White and gray vessels were not for cooking, but rather serving, and possibly displayed along with offerings, as part of feasting at different events; studies of access, manufactured, and use of these pots relate to the emergence and consolidation of local elites.

Identifying the Archaeological Signatures of Inequality: An Analysis of Inequality at Late Formative La Joya and Bezuapan

Nicholas Puente (Loyola University – Chicago)

This research project presents an analysis of artifact assemblage data from La Joya and Bezuapan, two Late Formative Period (*ca.* 400 BC-AD 100) sites in southern Veracruz, Mexico. The study focuses on the ways in which wealth inequality is manifested in the archaeological record; wealth is defined here as the total of desirable factors consisting of two main categories that provide value, relational, and material forms. An analysis of systematic coring data, in addition to information derived from in-field excavations, provides insight into wealth inequality across households at the two sites. These data are interpreted using an economic measure known as the Gini index. The Gini index assesses the cumulative distribution of percentile values in reference to an assumed constant. This measure has been increasingly applied to archaeological sites, and this thesis seeks to provide another useful and comparable archaeological example of the Gini index's utility and a discussion of the limitations of the Gini coefficient. This analysis also provides additional information relevant to the study of Formative Period societies along the Mexican Gulf lowlands.

Investigating Persistence: Postclassic Ceramic Contexts and Chronology at Ka'kabish, Belize

Kerry L. Sagebiel (Northern Illinois University) and Helen R. Haines (Trent University)

Ka'kabish, Belize is 10 km northwest of Lamanai and, like Lamanai, was occupied in the Postclassic. Four chultun burials in site center, several hinterland burials, and a cache containing Postclassic ceramic vessels have been excavated at Ka'kabish. Additionally, Postclassic ceramic sherds have been found in more mundane contexts. This paper will use ceramic cross-dating, ceramic seriation, non-ceramic artifact analysis, and radiocarbon dates from these contexts to propose a working Postclassic ceramic chronology for Ka'kabish. Ceramic links with the northern Yucatan will be explored along with implications for trade, immigration, and emulation.

Incorporating Mountains for Understanding Teotihuacan's Ceremonial Heart

Yifan Zou (University of Chicago)

One important theme of Teotihuacan study is the city's planning and design. Although tremendous attention has been paid to the city's specific orientation, monumental scale, grid layout, and visual relationship with surrounding mountains. The last phenomenon is well acknowledged but far from being fully explored. Through revisualizing an embodied experience of processing along the Avenue of the Dead, I will demonstrate why paying attention to mountains' different relationships with built structures can help understand the diachronic unfolding of Teotihuacan's ceremonial core. In particular, I will use this interrelationship to help us understand the principles regulating the Moon

Pyramid's seven phases of expansion, the Sun Pyramid's unsurpassing height, the addition of *adosada* to the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, and the punctuation of the Avenue of the Dead. While recognizing the importance of astronomical alignments in Mesoamerican city planning, this paper emphasizes the importance of embodied experience of urban landscapes.