



ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

www.mayaexploration.org

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Maya Intellectual Revival

500 years ago Spanish priests and soldiers swept across the Maya world, intentionally wiping out their cultural norms and replacing them with European, Christian ways. One of the most precious things the Maya lost was their writing system. One of only five original writing systems on the planet was outlawed as pagan and evil. Arguably, a culture's literature is the core of the expression of their identity. Without it, they are lost and lack self-representation.

Now, centuries later, the Maya people are working to relearn their ancient script. The process began in the 1980's when western scholars like Linda Schele began inviting Maya people to Maya hieroglyphic workshops. She and Nikolai Grube continued that work in the 1990's by offering summer classes within Maya communities. Eventually, a few dedicated Maya learned enough to become teachers themselves.

This year, for the first time ever, a 100% Maya conference to discuss, teach and disseminate hieroglyphic writing is taking place within the Maya world. When western scholars do that, it's an academic exercise. When Maya people do it, it's a cultural revival. This is a unique moment in world history. Never before has a culture



Linda and Nikolai teaching Maya hieroglyphs in the 1990's

lost their written language for 500 years and then recovered it. Over the last year, five different Maya communities in the Guatemalan highlands have carved and erected new hieroglyphic stelae and a sixth is standing in Mani, Yucatan. The more modern Maya that learn, the more new public monuments will spring up.

The conference is set to occur in Chiapas, Mexico next month. Support for the meeting comes from MAM - Mayas for Ancient Maya, led by Director and epigrapher Dr. Bruce Love. Their goal is to raise the \$30,000 needed to provide travel expenses and lodging for over 200 Maya participants. An Indiegogo crowd funding campaign got them more than half way there, but they still need help to reach their goal. If you would like to part of this historic moment, please consider donating. Donations can be made through their website - www.discovermam.org.

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Editor

Dr. Edwin L. Barnhart

Contact MEC**United States**

3267 Bee Caves Rd

Suite 107-161

Austin, Texas 78746

Phone: 512-350-3321

On the Webwww.mayaexploration.org**Email**info@mayaexploration.org

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Letter from the Director



Happy Maya New Year! Today, April 2nd, 2014 is 3 Manik' and the seating of the month Pohp. The five days of the Wayeb just ended and a new year has begun. This year is also named 3 Manik' due to what is called the "year bearer" system. There are four possible year bearer names - Ik', Eb, Kaban, and Manik', each paired with a number 1-13. Those four possible names and 13 possible numbers run through a pattern year by year until a cycle of 52 years is completed. Thus, it will not be the year 3 Manik' again until 2066. The names tell us what kind of year it will be and the numbers qualify it intensity. This year, a Manik' year, is said to be a turbulent year, one of business losses and illness. Sorry, I'm just repeating what Maya traditional teaching says. At least the 3 indicates it will be a mild version of a Manik' year.

This last year, 2 Kaban, was supposed to be a year of creativity and ideas. At least in the case of MEC, that prediction rang true. We created new travel courses, like the one to Ecuador featured in this issue of ArchaeoMaya. We found new public outreach outlets, like our revamped public lecture series. And we supported new ideas, like my iPhone app "Tulum - Be Your Own Guide" and the Maya Revival campaign. This year will mark 11 years in existence for MEC so if it has to be difficult, so be it. We, like the Maya themselves, will persevere.

We start this issue of ArchaeoMaya

with an uplifting story of academic solidarity. Maya Revival is all about Maya people learning to read and write in the script of their ancestors. The non-profit MAM is leading the charge to financially facilitate this movement and MEC is 100% in support of their efforts. This issue also relates MEC's latest field successes, namely David Hixson's charity mission in Yucatan and my own journey to the equator for equinox.

Every ArchaeoMaya informs you about our upcoming programs, but I'm especially excited about our summer offerings - The Maya Lunar Alliance and The Pyramids of Central Mexico, both in June. Led by MEC's newest member Dr. Gerardo Aldana, the Maya Lunar Alliance course is guaranteed to be one of the most intellectually rewarding courses we've ever run. On the other side of Mesoamerica, Dr. Michael Grofe will lead a rare trip through Central Mexico. Did you know that two of the world's three largest pyramids are both standing within two hours from Mexico City? Join Michael this summer and see them with your own eyes.

As I finish this letter in my Austin, Texas office, I see blooming flowers and singing birds out my window. They remind me of what great jobs we at MEC have - exploring the world with people who share our love of learning new things. I hope you are one of those we share that experience with in 2014.

Happy Maya
New Year,

The Maya Lunar Alliance - A New MEC Travel Course

One of the most amazing aspects of ancient Maya astronomy was their ability to calculate the cycles of the moon. This summer MEC will host a special travel course to investigate what we do and don't know about Maya lunar calculations. Led by world renowned archaeoastronomer Dr. Gerardo Aldana, the nine-day travel course will focus intensively on how politics, religion and astronomy were intertwined within ancient Maya Civilization.

The trip will begin late June in Belize, exploring ruins and sacred caves. Moving on into Guatemala, visits to Tikal and Uaxactun will focus on how ancient astronomy influenced Maya religion and politics. Further south, a day will be spent touring beautiful Rio Dulce by boat followed by an evening hieroglyphics workshop. The final days of the trip will be an exploration of two of the most beautiful Maya cities - Quirigua and Copan. For each site visit Dr. Aldana will provide an orientation to the hieroglyphic history of the local dynasty, along with a more focused look at the historical figures involved in the Late Classic Lunar Alliance. All along the way these histories will be contextualized and related to current research questions in the field through nightly lectures/discussions to complement the day trips. After a final celebratory dinner in Copan, participants will fly back to the USA from San Pedro Sula, Honduras.



Maya lunar eclipse calculations from the Dresden Codex

To learn more and sign up for the course, log on to: http://mayaexploration.org/study_mecaldana_june14.php



Pillars of the Classic Maya
Palenque to Copan ♦ NOV 21 - 30, 2014

GO

The Pyramids of Central Mexico with Dr. Michael Grofe



This course runs June 2-8, 2014 and is designed for students of varying levels to learn about the Pre-Columbian cultures of Central Mexico. After exploring the world class museums of Mexico City, students will visit two of the three largest pyramids in the world. First Teotihuacan's massive Pyramid of the Sun and next Cholula's Great Pyramid built at the base of Volcano Popocatepetl. The ruins of Cacaxtla and its amazing murals will also be explored along the way. On the last day of the course students will travel by boat through Xochimilco's floating gardens, the last surviving section of Tenochtitlan, the once mighty capital city of Aztecs. Nightly lectures will compliment the day trips.

To learn more and sign up for this course, log on to: http://mayaexploration.org/study_mecgrofe_june14.php

Equinox at the Equator

This spring's annual Midland College travel course brought a group of intrepid Texans to the amazing country of Ecuador. During the week they climbed volcanoes, trekked through the Amazon, dined in 17th century haciendas and explored indigenous markets. But the highlight of the course was a perfectly timed visit to the center of the world.



Line of the equator at the Intinan Museum

About an hour north of Quito lies the equator, the line that divides the north and south hemispheres of the Earth. The Inca called it "the place where the Sun sits up straight", clearly a reference to the fact that only at the equator is the Sun's daily path through the sky perfectly perpendicular (90°) to the horizon. French cartographers marked the line in the late 1700's with a monument, but unfortunately missed the actual line by about 200 meters. When modern instrumentation discovered the error a small museum was built over the true line. It's a fun place where a host of entertaining experiments are conducted by enthusiastic tour guides.

The Intinan Museum as it's called has been open since 1960, but this year they opened a new building dedicated to the equinox. A beautiful domed structure, its interior walls are painted with scenes of ancient Andean life. In the center is a large model of the Earth, equator pointing up to a circular window at the dome's peak. The building is designed to teach visitors about another unique aspect of the equator. Equinox is defined as the day that the sun rises exactly east and sets

exactly west. That happens all over the planet, but only at the equator does another solar station happen simultaneously – zenith passage. That's the day when the sun crosses through the exact top of the sky, its zenith. Zenith passage only occurs in the tropics, and only at the equator is it the same days as equinox – March 21 and September 22 (give or take a day some years).

The Midland group was there for the new structure's grand opening. Right at 12:20pm (not noon because the museum is not right on a time zone line), zenith passage at the site, the proud owner Humberto Vera explained to a crowd gathered within how and why the phenomena occurs there. He ended by explaining that the ancient Andean people knew about it too. On a hilltop viewable from the museum, an archaeological site was found dating back to before the Inca. It was a stone tower built perfectly on the line of the equator. How they did it is still a mystery, but whatever methods they used, they were superior to the one's French scientists incorrectly applied some 700 years later.



Humberto Vera explains the Intinan Museum's equinox exhibit

Dr. Barnhart's Summer 2014 Chautauqua Courses



The Mysteries of the Moai and the Demise of Rapa Nui - Easter Island, Chile

June 25 - 30, 2014

Travel to one of the most remote archaeological sites in the world – Easter Island – for a first hand investigation of its incredible statues, called Moai. Their purpose and potential links to ancient astronomy and mathematics will be the focus of the course. Only two spaces left!



The Ancient Pyramids of Peru Northern Coastal Peru

July 1 - 7, 2014

Did you know that along Peru's north coast stand pyramids older than the ones in Egypt? This course will travel across the Northern Coast of Peru, learning about the Chimú, the Moche and the many unnamed cultures that came before them. Only four spaces left!

Helping Hands in Yucatan

MEC and Carroll University have been working for years to develop a travel course for their students and this was the year we finally succeeded. Not only did we run a successful course, but with course instructor Dr. David Hixson's guidance, the student's donated laptops to a small elementary school in Quintana Roo.

The course's main foci were art, architecture, and photography in the Maya ruins. Day trips to Tulum, Coba, Chichen Itza, and Ek Balam amply covered those goals. However, the most rewarding part of the week was their visit to the village of San Angel in Quintana Roo. Carroll University generously donated 12 gently used laptops, one for each attending student to carry to Mexico. When they arrived to San Angel, they were met with a dance by elementary school students and speeches of thanks by their teachers. In a formal ceremony, each Carroll student handed a laptop to a smiling child. After the ceremony, there was lots of playing with the children and a wonderful lunch hosted by the community.

Carroll University's donation was especially meaningful to Dr. Hixson who has worked tirelessly to support Maya communities for decades. He and his father had planned a humanitarian project in San Angel for 2014 but lack of volunteers compelled them to cancel it. Thanks to the students at Carroll University, the goal of helping San Angel was revived. MEC could not be more proud of Dr. Hixson, the students of Carroll University, and the good works we together have achieved.



Laptops handed out in San Angel

News From the Field

Ball Court Under a Ball Court

A ball court found in Yucatan in 2012 is now consolidated and open for public viewing. Located in the town of Maxcanú, the court was part of a Classic Period cluster of communities in the Puuc Hills, though oddly not associated with a city or any nearby structures. Ball courts outside of ceremonial precincts like this are rarely found. Its chance discovery occurred when an elementary school chose the spot to build a basketball court. Apparently, both the ancient and modern Maya thought it looked like a nice place to play a ball game!

Pyramid of the Sun Problems

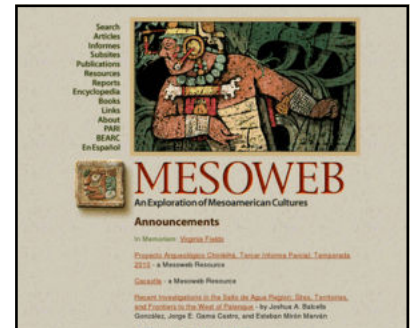
Caretakers and archaeologists at the site of Teotihuacan have raised serious concerns that the Pyramid of the Sun is destabilizing and in danger of collapse. As the 2nd largest pyramid by volume on the entire planet, the Pyramid of the Sun is not just a treasure of Mexico, but an important monument for all of humanity. A project using a muon detector to look for internal chambers instead found that the pyramid's interior is drying differentially. The south side is drier and 20% less dense than the north. While the threat of collapse is not immediate, ideas of how to fix it have not been forthcoming. The first conference to discuss the problems met in March.

Internet Resource Corner

This is a new section of ArchaeoMaya. Each issue from here on, at least until we run out of good resources to promote, will feature a different website with information about ancient cultures and archaeology. As our first feature, we'd like to call your attention to Mesoweb. If you haven't already found it, we're sure you'll agree that it's one of the best sources of information about Mesoamerica anywhere on the internet.

Created by Joel Skidmore for the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute (PARI) about 16 years ago, Mesoweb has grown into an incredible database of information found nowhere else. Some of its many features include timelines, maps, and full translations of hieroglyphic panels. A section named "Informes" holds a large collection of original field reports from archaeological projects. Primary sources of information like these are hard to come by, as often they are never publicly published. Another section called "Online Publications" includes scanned versions of rare and important early Mesoamerican publications. Books like those have been out of print for decades and Mesoweb is one of the rare places they can still be found and read.

The site is maintained by a team of top scholars from universities across the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. Perhaps its most valuable offering is a vast and growing collection of research papers penned by some of the best minds in the field. A new paper is posted almost monthly, making Mesoweb not just a great source for known information but a force for advancing our knowledge of Mesoamerica. Check it out for yourself at www.mesoweb.com.





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