



INSTITUTE OF MAYA STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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IMS Annual Business Meeting and December Birthday Party: December 10



**You’re all invited
Plan to attend!**



**Jim Reed,
Editor**

Additional Pre-Maya Monuments Discovered at Tak’alik Ab’aj

On October 30, 2008, during a press conference given by Guatemala’s Ministry of Culture, archaeologists Christa Schieber de Lavarreda and Miguel Orrego Corzo announced the discovery of more pre-Maya monuments at the site of Tak’alik Ab’aj. Found in fragments, two of the sculpted stones (monuments 215 and 217) and two partial pieces of carved stelae (stela 53 and 67), have been grouped back together into what the researchers are calling: “The Carrier of the Ancestor of Tak’alik Ab’aj” (see fig. below).

The archaeological excavations of Proyecto Nacional Tak’alik Ab’aj have produced a stream of discoveries of very important sculptures this year. It began on March 10, 2008, with Altar 48, now being called the “Monument to the birth of the Maya culture”. The IMS reported on the discovery of Monument 48 in May (volume 37, issue 5).

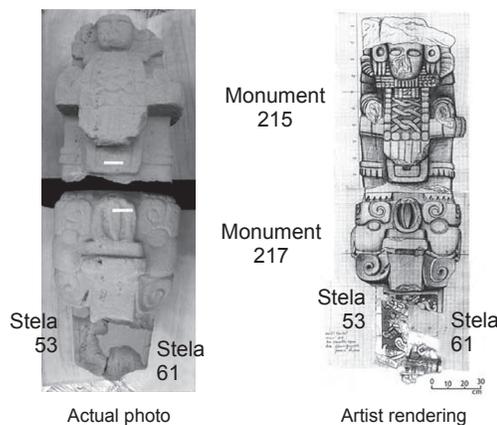


The back side of the body of an imposing character depicted on Monument 217 has a small “human-like” figure that appears to be being carried on its back. These infant figures have been interpreted by some archaeologists as divine beings or ancestors.

On June 25, Monument 215 was unearthed. It forms part of the basement wall on the east side of Structure 7A. As excavations continued along the wall, Monument 217 was discovered on August 26. Both monuments 215 and 217 had been mutilated and were integrated as constructive elements in this wall. However, researchers reported that it was possible to verify that the two sculptures had originally formed a single monumental sculpture that was carved on all four sides.

This sculpture presents an imposing character, decorated with insignias of power with certain Olmec characteristics such as the “U” sign on the sash. Something very surprising is that this character is carrying a small human figure on his back (see fig. at top). This small human figure has the position of his arms on his chest and hands folded down, and very straight legs, similar to those infants who are often found in the laps of Olmec jade figurines. The quality of the volume and complete form of the sculpture convey formal concepts of Olmec art sculpture; however, this sculpture seems strange.

continued on page 3



Piecing the fragments together we get the image of: “The Carrier of the Ancestor of Tak’alik Ab’aj”
Images courtesy of Proyecto Nacional Tak’alik Ab’aj.

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“Woven Threads Through Time: Maya Women, Weavers, and Their Stories”

Theme of an exhibition featuring Maya textile traditions to open in April, 2009. You are invited now to get in on a soon to close online auction to help support the event. Read on ...

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Backstrap loom weaving, still practiced by Maya women living in the mountainous regions of Chiapas, Mexico, and highland Guatemala, is an ancient tradition that can be documented from archaeological finds dating to the Maya Classic period (ca. 250–900 AD) and even earlier. Figurines of weavers and painted images from the time period before European contact in the sixteenth century reveal that Maya weavers today use many of the same techniques as their ancestors over a millennium ago.

Among some Maya groups, weaving is considered an act of creation. One gives “birth” to a weaving, and the cord that holds the loom and is tied to a tree or post is called an “umbilical cord.” Like people, woven objects must be fed in order to grow (the word for sustenance, *o’och*, is also used for the weft threads of a weaving in Yucatec).

Patterns woven into Maya textiles reflect the worldview of their creators. A garment called a *huipil* worn by royal women on Maya monuments may include symbols associated with rulership and/or with fertility. The line art of Lintel 15 (above left) shows the wife of the eighth century ruler of the site of Yaxchilán participating in a bloodletting ritual to honor the ancestors.

Other themes serve to relate woven textiles to the natural world. Birds, including the beautiful quetzal with its long tail feathers, are frequently depicted, as are flowers, deer and representations of the ancestors.

These themes will serve as the focus for the “Woven Threads through Time: Maya Women, Weavers, and Their Stories” exhibit, scheduled to open in April 2009 at the Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center in Pinellas County, Florida. Visitors will be introduced to these handwoven works of art, with an emphasis on both ancient and contemporary Maya women, weaving and textiles. “We are honored to have Concepción Poou Coy Tharin, a weaver from Samac, Guatemala (above right), working with us as a consultant to the project,” say the organizers.

Sponsorship opportunities

Funding for this exhibition derives from individuals, organizations and businesses committed to conserving the cultural and

Weaver
using
backstrap
loom,
Madrid
Codex,
15th century.



Contemporary
Maya weaver
from Samac
using a
backstrap
loom.



artistic heritage of indigenous cultures. You can join this endeavor by becoming a sponsor to this exhibition and cultural exchange program.

Along with the many other benefits, a sponsorship provides an important business opportunity for your company or organization. Organizers anticipate that the Woven Threads exhibit will be viewed by 10,000–15,000 visitors to the preserve (both residents of Florida and visitors from out of state) during the six months that it will be on display. There are plans to create a virtual online exhibit for those who will be unable to attend in person. Additionally, opening day activities at Weedon Island will feature a series of talks, workshops and demonstrations by Maya weavers and leading scholars in the field of Maya studies.

Join in on the silent auction

Members of the IMS are invited to participate in an online silent auction to benefit the exhibition designed to highlight the weavings and stories of prehispanic and contemporary Maya women. Their stories will also be featured on their website, as will video clips and an extensive collection of photographs.

The auction opens on Sunday, November 30th and will close at noon (EST) on Monday, December 8th. To see what’s available, go to www.buetes.net. You can also help support the fund raising efforts for the exhibition by becoming a member of the Woven Threads Weaving Circle. To enroll and see the benefits associated with membership, please visit their website. The organizers appreciate your support and welcome your comments and suggestions. Contact them at MayaWeaving@gmail.com.

This notice was contributed by
Gabrielle Vail, the exhibition curator.



Additional Pre-Maya Monuments Discovered at Tak'alik Ab'aj

continued from page 1

The character is standing on the capital of a column of rectangular sides. The capital was carved in the shape of the head of a monster bat or “earth monster” (Cauac). This form of representation of the Cauac monster with Maya features is found a few decades later in other classic Maya cities, as in Quiriguá and Copán. In Quiriguá and Copán, the stelae have the Cauac monster on the base on which the rulers are standing.

Schieber de Lavarreda and Orrego Corzo say that it is important to note that the small figure on the back of the standing character is literally joined by an extended cloth or skirt to the head of the bat. It is evident that the intention of the sculptor of this figure was to communicate the importance of the union of the carrier of the ancestor with the earth monster.

The rectangular column that carries the capital of the monster bat was mutilated and cut near the start of the head of the bat. Surprisingly, two other pieces of sculptures found and saved from excavations years ago (Stelae 53 and 61), fit into the column. (See fig. at bottom of page 1.) Because these two pieces complete the column, it is now possible to see that on the frontal face of the column, a character was sculpted in low relief.

In low relief and in profile, this character shows definite characteristics and the distinct style of Maya sculpture. This character is decorated with lavish garments and its face emerges from an elaborate headdress mask, similar to the two figures carved on the two sides of Stela 5 of Tak'alik Ab'aj. On both sides



Currently under construction, the site of Tak'alik Ab'aj will soon have its own museum. It is very appropriately named “El Caracol del Tiempo” or “The Spiral of Time”

of the column, text can be found in a double column of very early-style glyphs. The meaning of these glyphs is still being ardently discussed by Maya scholars.

Archaeologists Schieber de Lavarreda and Orrego Corzo note that there are many questions that arise around concerning this monumental sculpture:

- Why is the character carrying a small figure on his back?
- Who is the character and who is the little creature?
- Why is this character standing on a bat?
- Why is the sculptural style of the character apparently different from that of the style of the bat?
- What is the message that the sculpture is transmitting? What is the message transmitted by the two texts in early-style glyphs?
- Why was this sculpture destroyed and its pieces then included in the structure of the wall?
- Where would this sculpture originally have been standing so that it could have been seen from all four sides?

It is known that the fragments of this enigmatic sculpture were placed into the fill of the walls of the buildings during the second part of the Late Pre-Classic Period (Ruth Phase, 200 BC–150 AD), which is when the early Maya culture was flourishing. Therefore this sculpture must have been carved before this time.

It must have been carved at the start of the early Maya era, or a little earlier, when the changes in Tak'alik Ab'aj from the Olmec era to the Maya era were taking place, during what is called the transition period. Could it be that the early Maya sculptor wanted to invoke the preceding Olmec culture as ancestors, just as it later appears in other Maya stelae, where the ancestors are depicted watching from the heavens to protect and legitimize the power of the ruler represented below?

The sculpture of the “Carrier of the Ancestor of Tak'alik Ab'aj” is an unprecedented finding. The monument is unique and



Monument 48 was unearthed buried top-side down. Since its discovery in March 10, 2008, the researchers have had time to thoroughly clean the monument as well as make artist's renderings.



Images courtesy of Proyecto Nacional Tak'alik Ab'aj.

represents a great challenge for archaeologists.

According to the latest opinions of Maya archaeology experts, there is so much about the Maya civilization that is not yet known. There are so many archaeological sites that are yet to be excavated and studied, that they predict that the classic concepts about Maya history will change dramatically over the next 20 years. In fact, in Guatemala alone, most of the archaeological sites that are considered Maya have not yet been excavated. Vast geographical areas full of Maya cities and monuments are still covered by earth and jungle.

Published with the authorization of: Christa Schieber de Lavarreda and Miguel Orrego Corzo; Ministry of Culture and Sports; Head Office of Cultural and Natural Heritage; Proyecto Nacional Tak'alik Ab'aj, El Asintal, Retalhuleu, Guatemala.

Source: From an original article titled “New Maya Olmec Archeological Find in Guatemala”, composed and translated to English by Bosse Persson. Released 10/30/2008 at: www.guatemala-times.com. Submitted by Scott Allen and Mike Ruggeri.



Program Recap for 2008 • Our 37th Year for the IMS!

Offering great programs about Maya and Mesoamerican pre-Columbian studies along with a four-part educational series entitled "Maya 101"

January 16: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"The Birth of the Maya," Part One of Maya 101, with Marta Barber.

January 23: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Maya Architecture: Building Construction and Site Planning," Part Two of Maya 101, with Joaquín J. Rodríguez III, PE, SECB and Rick Slazyk, AIA, NCARB.

February 13: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"Maya Writing and Art: The Art of Communication," Part Three of Maya 101, with Ray Stewart.

February 20: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Maya Astronomy" with Dr. James R. Webb, Professor of Physics and Director of the SARA Observatory at Florida Atlantic University, Miami, FL.

March 12: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"Maya Gods and Religion," Part Four of Maya 101, with Marta Barber.

March 19: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Portal to the Puuc and Chenes: Maya Architecture in the Yucatán and Campeche" with Scott Allen.

April 9: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"Understanding Maya Codices" with Steve Mellard.

April 16: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"The Archaeology of Northwest Nicaragua" with Clifford T. Brown, Ph.D, Florida Atlantic University.

May 14: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

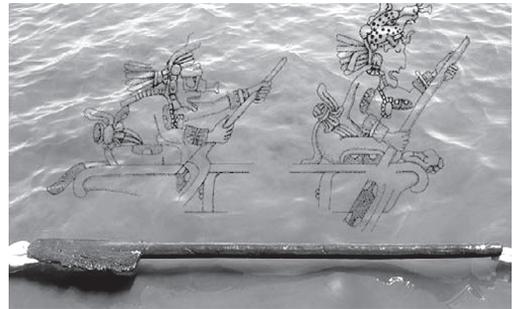
"Copán–Guatemalan Highlands Maya Adventure – Part One," a new DVD video by Jim Reed.

May 21: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Three-dimensional Spatial Technologies and Mesoamerican Archaeology" with Travis F. Doering, Ph.D. and Lori D. Collins, Ph.D., Directors of the Alliance for Integrated Spatial Technologies, University of South Florida.

June 11: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"Copán–Guatemalan Highlands Maya Adventure – Part Two," a new DVD video by Jim Reed.



An ancient wooden Maya canoe paddle that Heather McKillop and her team found submerged in Belize.

An end-of-the-year special treat ... in November, Dr. Heather McKillop, a highly respected specialist on the ancient Maya, provided an engrossing and informative account of her underwater archaeological fieldwork on the coast of Belize.

June 18: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"The Panama Gateway: Pre-Columbian Intermediate Area" with George Fery.

July 9: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"Architecture 101" with Rick Slazyk, AIA, NCARB.

July 16: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Geology of Central America and the Mayalands" with Joaquín J. Rodríguez III, PE, SECB.

August 13: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

"A Tale of Two Cities: Yaxchilán and Bonampak" with Ray Stewart.

August 20: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Spanish Gold: Too Much of a Good Thing?" with Juan L. Riera, B.A., M.A.

September 10: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

DVD Presentation of "Cracking the Maya Code" (Cancelled due to effects of a passing hurricane)

September 17: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Another Tale of Two Cities: Palenque and Toniná" with Marta Barber.

October 8: *IMS Meeting: Classroom-style*

DVD Presentation of "Cracking the Maya Code" with commentary by Steve Mellard.

October 15: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Architecture and Society: Maya Style" with Dr. Edward Kurjack.

November 19: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"Underwater Archaeology: A Lost City of Belize" with Dr. Heather McKillop. (Only one program this month due to many IMS members being away on a Maya adventure at the time.)

“Spider God” Temple Found in Peru

A 3,000-year-old temple featuring an image of a spider god may hold clues to little-known cultures in ancient Peru.

People of the Cupisnique culture, which thrived from roughly 1500 to 1000 BC, built the temple in the Lambayeque valley on Peru’s north coast. The adobe temple, found this summer and called Collud, is the third discovered in the area in recent years.

The finds suggest that the three valley sites may have been part of a large capital for divine worship, said archaeologist Walter Alva, director of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum.

Alva and colleagues started the dig in November 2007, when they discovered a 4,000-year-old temple and a mural painting at the Ventarrón site in the valley. Both the temple and mural were the oldest ever found in the Americas. The entire religious complex houses every ancient Peruvian architectural style up to the Inca, Walter Alva said, and is one of only a few sites in Peru that spans so many cultures.

Several meanings

The spider-god image appears often in other sites created during Peru’s Early Formative Period, 1200 to 400 BC. For instance, the Garagay temple in Lima and the Limón Carro site in northern Peru both include the imagery, according to Ignacio Alva, Walter Alva’s son and colleague.

At the newfound Collud, the spider god carried several meanings, experts say. The image combines a spider’s neck and head, the mouth of a large cat, and a bird’s beak, Ignacio Alva said.

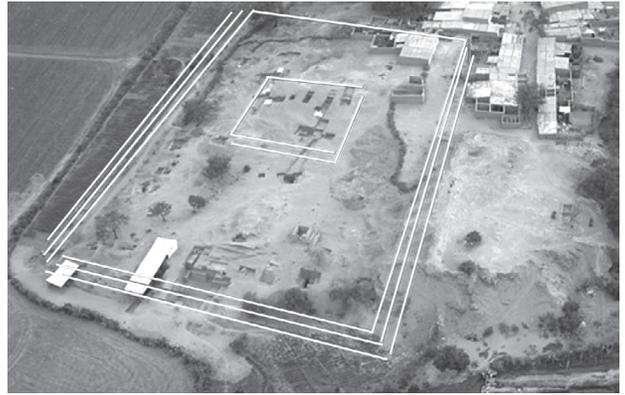
The spider is also carved with lines radiating from its neck, creating a web-like appearance. The web symbolizes hunting nets, a sign of human progress and prosperity, Ignacio Alva said. Traps set with nets caught more prey than spear hunting, he added.

The spider figure also had political significance, Ignacio Alva said. “Any emergent political group would have to be associated with this god.”

Richard Burger, an expert on the Chavin culture that followed the Cupisnique, first identified the spider

The Collud temple found recently in Peru may have been part of an ancient capital of divine worship. The temple (a white outline at the excavation site traces the temple’s previous location) also featured a spider deity that served as both a religious and political figure.

Image courtesy of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum.



deity in stone bowls found at the Limón Carro site. The importance of spiders is owed partly to their connection with life-giving rain, he said.

“They were associated with divination of rainfall because spiders come out before rain,” said Burger, an archaeologist at Yale University who was not involved with the Lambayeque excavation.

The spider deity was also associated with textiles, hunting, war and power, Burger added. “There is an image of spider deities holding nets filled with decapitated human heads, so there was an analogy with successful warriors and claims of power.”

Intense interaction

The Chavin people who came after the Cupisnique built a temple named Zarpan adjacent to Collud, about three hundred years later. The new temple finds may help explain a cultural shift from Cupisnique to Chavin, said team leader Walter Alva.

“Cupisnique and Chavin shared the same gods and the same architectural and artistic forms, showing intense religious interaction among the cultures of the [Early] Formative Period from the north coast to the Andes and down to the central Andes,” he said.

The temples are similar in size, roughly 1,640 ft (500 m) long and 984 ft (300 m) wide. Collud has a monumental clay staircase with 25 steps, perhaps the inspiration for the later Zarpan temple’s clay staircase, Ignacio Alva said.

The Chavin did not build clay structures in the Andes, where significant rainfall threatened their stability. But clay structures were typical of the Cupisnique culture, which developed on the arid north coast.

It’s unknown how the two cultures interacted, if at all, experts say.

“This place is the testimony of two cultures overlapping and will help clarify what is Cupisnique and what is Chavin,” Walter Alva said.

Mystery decline

Pieces of structures found at the site may lead to the discovery of a fourth or fifth temple, according to the team. Yale’s Burger wonders if the ongoing excavations will demonstrate what happened to the site as north-coast cultures declined between 900 and 700 BC.

“The far north coast in earlier times was very important, but it has been largely ignored because there’s so little information,” Burger said. “This could change that. Does this center continue to be important or does it collapse?” he asked. “Do the Cupisnique continue to flourish independently or in close contact with the Chavin?”

Ignacio Alva predicts the site will show that the temple complex transformed itself, but did not collapse.

Source: From an original article by José Orozco, National Geographic News correspondent in Caracas, Venezuela. Released 10/29/2008 at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com>. Submitted by Scott Allen and Mike Ruggeri.

2012 is Controversial!

The Institute of Maya Studies maintains an area of our web site devoted to **Understanding 2012**. Scholars Anthony Aveni and Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, as well as John Major Jenkins, are all ready to release new books on the subject. Researchers Mark Van Stone and Robert Sitler will be submitting articles to be published in the IMS newsletter in the coming months. The IMS looks forward to sharing the insights of all investigators who are just now making their voices heard. Four years to go! Discover your own perspective. Check out our 2012 link at: <http://mayastudies.org>

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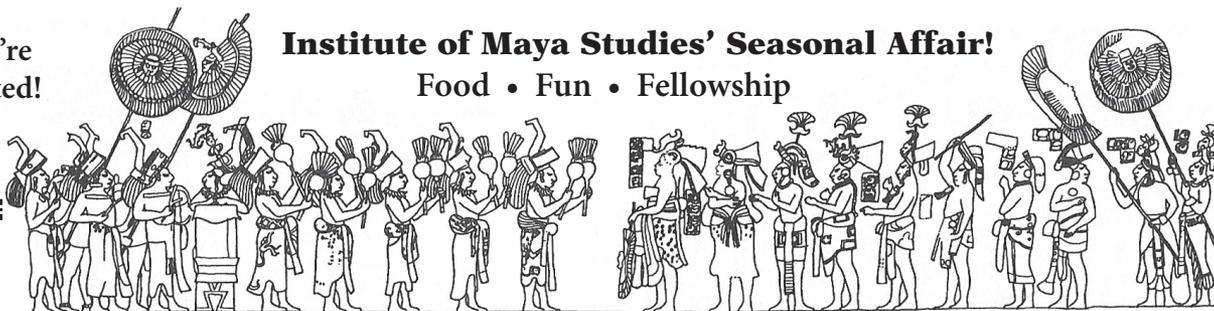
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You're
Invited!

Institute of Maya Studies' Seasonal Affair!

Food • Fun • Fellowship

Plan to
Attend!



IMS Annual Business Meeting and December Birthday Party!

Officially dubbed the Annual Members Meeting, members seldom think of it as that. Think holiday fellowship, food and fun. Think bargain books and other desirable items. Think Happy Birthday to the IMS.

The IMS has been together for 37 years!

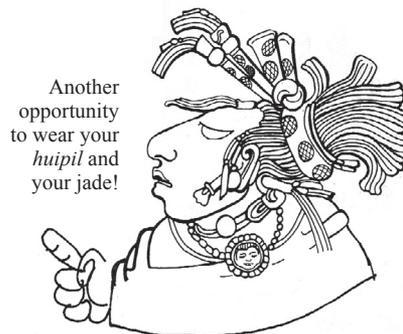
As established in the bylaws, the event takes place on the second Wednesday of December, in this case December 10. We combine our anniversary party with a short business meeting, a few short committee reports and the announcement of the new board members elected that evening to the 2009 Board of Directors.

If you haven't mailed in your ballot yet, you can even bring it to the event.

Also, there's our Book Sale – bring some, buy some!



Enjoy Show and Tell with IMS travelers recently returned from an adventure to the Mayalands.



Another opportunity to wear your huipil and your jade!

Marta says "Feel free to wear your favorite Maya get-up!"

The Institute of Maya Studies' Seasonal Affair • Wednesday, December 10 • Have a drink and a piece of cake too!
8-9:30 PM • Miami Science Museum • 3280 South Miami Avenue, across from Vizcaya
Inquire about IMS Membership benefits • Maya Hotline: 305-235-1192 • <http://mayastudies.org>

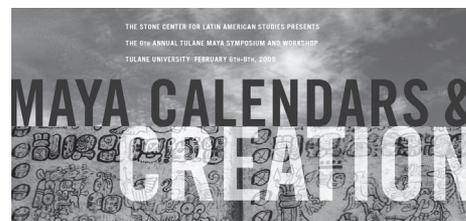
"Maya Calendars and Creation"

Theme of the Sixth Annual Tulane Maya Symposium and Workshop, hosted by Tulane University's Stone Center for Latin American Studies, to be held the weekend of February 6-8, 2009.

Through a series of lectures, workshops and a roundtable discussion, specialists at next year's symposium will discuss our current understanding of the intricacies of Maya calendars and the relevance of the upcoming completion

of the final Baktun of the current era within the worldview of the ancient and contemporary Maya. *That means 2012!*

With guest speakers from the fields of archaeology, art history, epigraphy, ethnohistory, linguistics and archaeoastronomy, the 2009 symposium promises to be a memorable weekend. Dr. Anthony Aveni will be the keynote speaker and the latest word is that Dennis and Barbara Tedlock have been added to



the roster of presenters. **Important note:** For IMS newsletter readers, the special advance pre-registration rate of \$75 has been extended until December 15th. Visit their website now at: <http://stonecenter.tulane.edu/MayaSymposium>

Institute of Maya Studies

The Institute of Maya Studies is totally member-supported! If you are not a member, please take a moment and join us. Membership brings many benefits and helps the IMS bring educational programs to the public. If you are already a member, please encourage your friends to join.

Membership Application

or Newsletter Only Subscription Form:

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Individual: \$40

Student: \$25

Newsletter Only: \$25 (U.S.)

Newsletter Only: \$30 (non-U.S.)

Newsletter-only option available outside of South Florida only.



Mail to the Institute of Maya Studies, Inc. Attn: Membership, 3280 South Miami Avenue, Miami, FL 33129

The Institute of Maya Studies is a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization. Membership dues and contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by the I.R.S.



Upcoming Events at the IMS:

December 3: *IMS Board Meeting*

All IMS members are welcome to attend.

December 10: (*It's the second Wednesday*)

IMS Annual Business Meeting and

December Birthday Party

– Join with us as we celebrate 37 years together!

We're planning food, fun and fellowship.

There will be a book sale – bring some,

buy some – and share some cake and

a drink or two. The party follows our

official annual business meeting that

includes a few short reports on the state

of the organization, a tally of the votes,

and official announcement of the newly

elected IMS Board members for 2009.

January 7, 2009: *IMS Board Meeting*

All IMS members are welcome.

Jan. 21: *IMS Meeting: Museum Auditorium*

"By the River and Into the Jungle:

Unraveling the Secrets of Piedras

Negras"

– Just returned from a recent

visit to the site, Marta Barber shares what

was seen, experienced and absorbed!

Upcoming Events and Announcements:

Through December 14: *Museum Exhibit*

"La Vida Sin Fin – Day of the Dead

2008" – Theme of the National Museum

of Mexican Art exhibition in Chicago, IL.

This is the largest annual Day of the

Dead exhibition in the United States.

Get more info at: [www.nationalmuseum](http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org)

[ofmexicanart.org](http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org)

January 17–18, 2009 *Symposium*

"3rd Braunstein Symposium on

Mesoamerican Figurines"

– The UNLV Marjorie Barrick Museum

and Braunstein Foundation are pleased

to announce the 3rd Braunstein

Symposium on Mesoamerican Figurines.

It is hoped that the symposium will

be a lasting tradition to discuss and

discover selected topics related to

ancient Mesoamerican figurines.

Scheduled to take place at the

UNLV Marjorie Barrick Museum

in Las Vegas, NV. Get more info at:

<http://hrcweb.nevada.edu/museum>

February 6–8, 2009:

Symposium

"Maya Calendars and

Creation"

– Theme of

the Sixth Annual Maya

Symposium and Workshop at Tulane

University, New Orleans, LA. The 2009

symposium promises to be a memorable

weekend spent exploring and discussing

Maya creation mythology, divination

and prophecy, and calendar systems.

Keynote speaker Dr. Anthony Aveni will

discuss 2012. Get more info at: [http://](http://stonecenter.tulane.edu/MayaSymposium)

stonecenter.tulane.edu/MayaSymposium

Through April 19, 2009: *Museum Exhibit*

"The Aztec World" – Theme of a new

exhibit at The Field Museum of Chicago

in Chicago, IL. With hundreds of

spectacular artifacts and works of art,

assembled together for the first time,

you can journey into the everyday lives

of an ancient culture. Get more info at:

www.fieldmuseum.org



Please note that all articles and news items for the IMS newsletter must be submitted to the Newsletter Editor by the second Wednesday of the month. E-mail news items and images to mayaman@bellsouth.net or forward by postal mail to: Jim Reed, 936 Greenwood Ave NE, Apt.8, Atlanta, GA 30306



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IMS Seasonal Affair!

December 10

**IMS Annual
Business Meeting
and December
Birthday Party!**