

The IMS Maya Lintel Team, but where?

IMS Explorer

A monthly newsletter published by the **Institute of Maya Studies**



August 19, 2009 • Maya Long Count: 12.19.16.11.0 • 6 'Ahau 18 YaxK'in • G4

An affiliate of the Miami Science Museum

Sacred Plants of the Maya Forest

by **Matt Walker**

Editor, *Earth News*, BBC

Some of the Central American rainforest's hidden treasures are being revealed by the Maya, more than a millennium after their passing.

A study of the giant trees and beautiful flowers depicted in Maya art has identified those they held sacred.

Created during the Maya Classic Period, the depictions are so accurate they could help researchers spot plants with hitherto unknown medicinal uses. The research is published in the journal *Economic Botany*.

Plants played a significant role in the ecology, culture and rituals of the Maya people, whose artwork reflected the rich diversity of plant life around them. But while numerous examples of such artwork exist, few have been studied to see exactly which plants they depict.

So natural historian and archaeologist Charles Zidar of the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, MO, and botanist Wayne Elisens of the University of Oklahoma, decided to find out.

They hope to discover plants of importance to the Maya that are either



Art depicting life: A Maya incense pot inspired by the spines of a ceiba tree (*ceiba pentandra*).

unknown to modern people, or have since been forgotten.

The team's first analyses focused on artwork produced within the southern lowland region of the Maya, located in the modern countries of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico.

They examined more than 2,500 images of Maya ceramics created within the Maya Classical Period of 250 to 900 CE.

The images are held within an image collection taken by Justin and Barbara Kerr, curated by the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies (FAMSI), based in Crystal River, Florida, U.S.

In particular, Zidar and Elisens searched for depictions of bombacoids, a diverse lineage of trees in the tropics characterized by swollen or spiny trunks and big, colorful, conspicuous flowers with long folding petals.

Across different ceramics, the two men found depictions of five species.

"I was surprised that a variety of plants from this family were depicted," noted Zidar.

The Maya clearly portrayed the ceiba tree (*ceiba pentandra*) also known as the silk cotton or kapok tree (above).

Trees of the ceiba genus can grow up to 50m tall, with swollen trunks producing large buttresses.

continued on page 4

VOLUME 38, ISSUE 8

August 2009

ISSN: 1524-9387

Inside this issue:

We're "Going Green"!; 2010 UT-Austin Maya Meetings; Discovery of Teotihuacan-style Murals

Archaeologists Excavate Ancient Maya River Port; Peabody Museum Receives Important Grant

Sacred Plants, *cont. from pg. 1*; Temple Lintels Report

The World's First Mummies; "The Caribbean Basin Before Columbus" Symposium

2009 SAA Meetings; Ancient Tomb Found in Machu Picchu

August Lineup of IMS Presentations and Membership Application

Upcoming Events



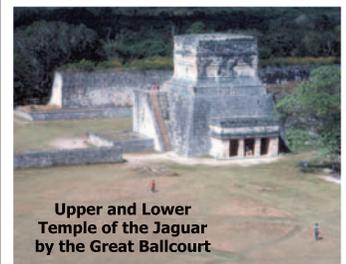
White blooms on ceramic: *quararibea* painted on a cup for drinking chocolate.



Jim Reed,
Editor

The *IMS Explorer* newsletter is published 12 times a year by The Institute of Maya Studies, Inc. 3280 South Miami Avenue, Miami, Florida 33129. The Institute is a non-profit corporation. The newsletter is available to IMS members and by subscription. See Membership Application on page 7. ©2009 I.M.S. Inc.

IMS Presentation August 19:



Upper and Lower Temple of the Jaguar by the Great Ballcourt

"Interpreting the Art of Chichén Itzá"

with
Dr. Edward J. Kurjack



A Message from Marta Barber, IMS President:

We're "Going Green"!

Dear members and readers,

The 21st century is happily moving along and, with it, the enormous changes in technology. Newspapers are in trouble and more often than not, Americans are getting their news from bloggers and twitterers out in cyber space. Nature is also in trouble, whether

by the overuse of fossil fuels or the rapid expansion of the modern world into once virgin territories. "Going green" is the mantra of this and approaching decades. We at the Institute of Maya Studies, want to contribute in any way we can to such a call from nature. At the same time, in a modest way, we wish to join the technological revolution.

That's why we are planning to send to those members who wish so, our monthly newsletter, the *IMS Explorer*, in digital format. For the time being, we will be sending this superb publication via e-mail. The benefits of this are many: first you will receive *IMS Explorer* in full color, as our editor, Jim Reed, is now preparing it every month. Also, you will receive the digital color version at the same time as those receiving the normal black & white version by postal mail.

We will soon have a way to renew subscriptions on-line on our website, www.instituteofmayastudies.org.

To those of you who receive the *IMS Explorer* as a compliment of our organization, we will begin to send them to you by e-mail. Most of you who are on that list are universities and other institutions that are fully up-to-date in the digital world. Others, such as professionals, are used to getting periodicals by e-mail. To those members and subscribers who live outside the United States, we are strongly requesting that you ask to make the change to the digital mailing.

I am now asking those of you who want to help us "go green", to send us your e-mails addresses so that we can begin the change. You can send with confidence your e-mail notices to either our editor Jim Reed at mayaman@bellsouth.net or to our new IMS e-mail address: imsiami@yahoo.com. You will also receive announcements of events and other news from IMS. Thanks in advance.

Marta Barber
silibarber@bellsouth.net

2009 IMS Board of Directors:

Marta Barber

President
silibarber@bellsouth.net

Joaquín J. Rodríguez III, P.E.

Vice President/
Director of Research
rod44@comcast.net
954-786-8084

Beth Wiggert

Treasurer/Subscription List
beth2vic@earthlink.net

Diana Phillips

Secretary/Public Relations
dianamark@juno.com

Ann S. Dickhaus

305-665-5175

Peter Flanagan

Research Fund Committee
786-246-5918

Ellen Jacobs

305-444-3309

Patricia Manfredi

Hospitality
pmanfred2003@yahoo.com

Steve Mellard

Website Committee/
Program Co-Chair
stevenmellard@cs.com

Juan L. Riera

Program Co-Chair
juanr377@gmail.com

Rick Slazyk

arcwerks@bellsouth.net

Beth Wein

Hospitality

Lister Witherspoon IV, J.D.

Membership Chair
305-541-0558

Frank May

Webmaster
frm@frmay.com

Jim Reed

Newsletter Editor
mayaman@bellsouth.net
404-680-1644

2010 Maya Meetings:

March 16-19, 2010

Early Maya Iconography and Script

Coordinators of the University of Texas – Austin's 2010 Maya Meetings are excited to announce that next spring's event will take place in Antigua, Guatemala, at UT-Austin's new academic and conference center for Mesoamerican studies, the Casa

Herrera. Since 1977, international students and scholars have gathered in Austin each year to learn and discuss the latest findings in Maya research. Coordinators are now able to take the Maya Meetings to the land of the Maya, to expand this spirit of learning and exchange. They hope to make Antigua a routine location for future conferences, alternating each year with their traditional venue on the UT-Austin campus.

Check out updates at: www.utmaya.org.

Discovery of Teotihuacan-style Murals

Archaeologists of Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) have discovered the remains of Teotihuacan-style murals at the site of El Rosario, located in the Mexican state of Querétaro.

Researchers have known about the site of El Rosario since 1958, but excavations started in 2007, 49 years later. The murals were probably produced in the first occupational stage of the site, calculated to be between 200-650 CE. The murals are of great importance, as these are the only murals yet known produced in Teotihuacan-style in Querétaro (and to the north of the Valley of Mexico). Considering the problem of further deterioration of the murals and the



Partial view of the recently discovered murals.

problem of looting, the murals will be cleaned and secured by INAH specialists before they are moved to the Museo Regional de Querétaro.

Source: Text condensed from the online edition of the daily Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, released 6/10/09 at: <http://ancient-mesoamerica-news-updates.blogspot.com>. Photo courtesy of INAH/ Melitón Tapia.



On the Cover:

IMS Explorer image of the month: Members of the IMS Maya Lintel Team, including Dr. Edward J. Kurjack, speaker for our August 19 program, high atop the Temple of the Seven Dolls, Dzibilchaltún, Yucatán.



Archaeologists Excavate Ancient Maya River Port

The discovery of 23 archaeological pieces from about 600 BCE has strengthened the historic importance of the Maya city of Moral-Reforma, a river port located in the current Mexican state of Tabasco. Until a group of experts began excavating it three months ago, the ruins were almost entirely unknown to outsiders.

The archaeological site, which is 87 hectares (217 acres) in size, is located adjacent to the ranching community of Reforma.

The community belongs to the municipality of Balancan, which in Maya means "place of tigers and serpents," and it is located 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco.

Benito López, one of the two experts heading the excavation, noted that Moral-Reforma functioned as a port or bartering spot for other Maya cities in the present-day states of Campeche and Chiapas, and in neighboring Guatemala.

Running together near the site are the Usumacinta River (the country's largest) and the San Pedro River – a major communications route with southern Mexico.

"The hypothesis tells us that this zone could have been a route for those who were ... seeking to trade," said López at the site, where the temperature reaches 45°C (113°F) during the summer.

The first investigatory work was done on the main structures at the Maya port 17 years ago, and some of the principal monuments have been restored,

among them a traditional ballcourt and three buildings.

Five stone stelae with inscriptions, some complete and others just fragmentary, from the area are currently exhibited at the museum in Balancan and the Carlos Pellicer Museum in Villahermosa.

For the past few months, the team of archaeologists has been investigating one of the two main levels of the most important building, a pyramid covered with soil that rises in the extreme northern part of the site and resembles the style seen at Calakmul in the state of Campeche.

When one climbs up the first 15 steps of the pyramid, one can see a series of altars discovered in recent weeks which "surely were painted and plastered," according to López.

Masks, small sculptures, stones, spear points and heads painted green comprise the 23 pieces unearthed in the area adjacent to the pyramid.

"This morning, we found another little face of a person. These pieces are of limestone, flint, the same material with which the pyramids are made," added López during a stroll through the site.

The pieces found to date were sent to the Villahermosa office of Mexico's National Anthropology and History Institute for restoration.

According to the research performed so far, Moral-Reforma was part of the dominion of Palenque, one of the main Maya cities in Mexico.



This interesting array of masks was released with the article but it cannot be confirmed that they are actual masks from the excavations.

Francisco Cuevas Reyes, the other archaeologist heading the investigation, remarked that at the site are another 95 earthen mounds that could contain more Maya artifacts or buildings. "With this work, the (Maya) people are taking shape," he asserted.

The experts calculate that by August they will have excavated 50 percent of the main pyramid, with the collaboration of a team of about 100 workers, most of whom live in Reforma.

Carlos Cajija Alvarez is one of the archaeologists' reliable men. Not only does he keep a list of the artifacts found, but he supervises the work of the other workers.

"Not just anyone can work here. Desperate people are not hired because the requirement here is to have patience," Cajija Alvarez said, adding that he built houses before taking this job and getting an introduction to the world of archaeology.

Source: From an original EFE News Service report by Kristian Cerino, released 6/3/09 with above image by the Latin American Herald Tribune at: www.laht.com.

Peabody Museum Receives Grant to Preserve Maps, Plans, and Drawings

The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology has been awarded a \$150,000 grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Over the next 18 months, the museum will improve teaching and research access, preservation, and storage for its map collection of nearly 4,000 unique, hand-drawn, and annotated documents dating as early as the 1840s.

The historic maps and other documents from research expeditions are associated with the museum's

collections and with Harvard's Department of Anthropology fieldwork of the past 140 years. They include ethnographic and linguistic field maps, site plans, large-sized watercolors, and sketches of archaeological sites and artifacts from North, Central, and South America and beyond.

There are also architectural drawings documenting American anthropological history as well as vital records of the Peabody Museum, the oldest museum dedicated to anthropology in the Western hemisphere.

So much valuable information will be preserved for future generations. Check out the full story at: www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2009/06.11/peabody.html



Watercolor of mural painting, "Temple of the Warriors, Chichén Itzá", by Ann Axtell Morris. Works by Morris and others will be conserved and moved to a dedicated storage area for better preservation access. Image courtesy of Peabody Museum.



Sacred Plants of the Maya Forest

continued from page 1

To the Maya, the ceiba tree was sacred, mapping out the upper, middle and underworlds. Considered the "first tree", or "world tree", the ceiba was thought to stand at the centre of the Earth. Modern indigenous people still often leave the tree alone out of respect when harvesting forest wood.

The thorny trunks of the ceiba tree are depicted on ceramic pots used as burial urns or incense holders, which are designed in a strikingly similar fashion. Two other tree species, the provision tree (*pachira aquatica*) and the shaving bush tree (*pseudobombax ellipticum*) are also copied into the designs of similar pots.

On cacao pots and a plate for holding tamales, the Maya drew flowers of either *p. aquatica* or *p. ellipticum*. On the cacao pot (top right), the flowers seem to form part of the headdress of a high-ranking individual.

Smaller white-flowered blossoms of *quararibea funebris* or *q. guatemalteca* also appear to adorn another vessel used

for cacao drinking. The Maya used this species to flavor and froth cacao beverages so it is appropriate for them to represent the plant on the vessel, remarked Zidar.

"It was previously thought that only the ceiba tree was of great importance," noted Zidar.

"It has amazed me that so many plants are depicted. These plants are not as stylized as previously thought, and thus you can name the plant family, genus and even the species."

Zidar is continuing the work, expanding it further to find out which animals as well as plants were considered of high importance by the Maya people. He also hopes the research will unveil secrets known to the Maya that have become lost in time.

"The Maya have lived and used rainforest plants to heal themselves for thousands of years. We are just beginning to understand some of their secrets."



A pseudobombax flower inspires a headdress worn by the Maya elite on a vase photographed by Justin Kerr.

"By determining what plants were of importance to the ancient Maya, it is my hope that identified plants can be further studied for pharmaceutical, culinary, economic and ceremonial uses. More should be done to conserve large tracts of forest in order to properly study these plants for their value to mankind," he continued.

"This research has already been of interest to pharmaceutical companies that are looking to extract alkaloids from plants that were important to the ancient Maya."

Source: From an original article by BBC Earth News Editor Matt Walker at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk>. Explore the Kerr Maya Vase Database at www.famsi.org.

Temple Lintels Trace Suggested Reason for Collapse of Maya Culture

The builders of the ancient Maya temples at Tikal in Guatemala switched to inferior wood a few decades before they suddenly abandoned the city in the 9th century CE. The shift is the strongest evidence yet that Maya

civilization collapsed because they ran out of resources, rather than, say, disease or warfare.

Researchers led by David Lentz, a palaeoethnobotanist at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio, sampled wooden beams and lintels from all six major temples and two palaces within the ancient city of Tikal.

The first three temples, built before 741 CE, used only large, straight logs of the sapodilla tree – a particularly strong wood that is nevertheless easy to carve with ceremonial inscriptions. But after that date, large sapodilla logs were almost entirely replaced in temple construction by logwood, a smaller, gnarly tree that is almost impossible to carve.

"It's definitely an inferior material," says Lentz, who reasons that the temple-builders would only have accepted logwood if they had run out of suitable sapodilla trees to harvest (*Journal of Archaeological Science*,



The lintel above the top doorway of the newly restored Temple V at Tikal was studied in this research. Photo by Editor Jim Reed, 7/28/08.

DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2009.01.020).

Earlier studies of pollen deposits have suggested that deforestation and soil erosion were increasing in the region as Maya civilization neared its collapse. But the temple timbers of Tikal are the first to show that ecological over-exploitation directly affected Maya culture.

Source: Abstract of a full report published in *New Scientist* magazine at: www.newscientist.com/article/mg20227104.400-temple-timbers-trace-collapse-of-mayan-culture.html

Editor's Corner:



Photo courtesy of MYNEWSAGENCY.

Can it be real? British news agencies reported on July 8, 2009 that a 350-ft Maya-like design crop circle appeared overnight next to Silbury Hill in Wiltshire. They see it as an omen of 2012.



The World's First Mummies: Arsenic Poisoning Victims in Chile in 5000 BCE

Seven thousand years ago, about 100 km from the contemporary port city of Arica in Chile, a child died. The grieving parents did not want to part with the last remains. They removed the head and internal organs of the child, stuffed it with animal hide, painted a clay model of his head and decorated it with tufts of his hair.

The delicately preserved body was excavated in 1983. Archaeologists believe it is the earliest mummy. More than 100 child mummies were discovered in Camarones near Arica that year. Later, preserved bodies of adults were found as well. Archaeologists say the embalmed bodies were of people from Chile's Chinchorro community.

Unlike mummies in later civilizations, most notably Egypt – that flourished for 2,500 years beginning 3,000 BCE – that spun around prestige, wealth and power, Chinchorro mummification was based on a democratic and humanistic view of the dead, and everyone was mummified.

Archaeologist Bernardo Arriaza, who studies the Chinchorro at the University of Tarapaca in Arica, wrote that unlike the Egyptians who hid the dead, the Chilean community embraced them. The child mummies even took their place beside their parents at the dinner table.

Mummy Dearest and Arsenic?

A few years ago Arriaza launched a daring new theory: the Chinchorro were victims of arsenic poisoning.

"I was reading a Chilean newspaper that mentioned pollution

and it had a map of arsenic and lead pollution, and it said arsenic caused abortions. I jumped in my seat and said, 'That's it,'" Arriaza said.

Following the lead, Arriaza collected 46 hair samples from Chinchorro excavated from 10 sites in northern Chile. Ten samples from the Camarones river valley had an average of 37.8 micrograms per gram – much higher than one to 10 micrograms of arsenic per gram that indicates chronic toxicity according to World Health Organization (WHO) standards. The sample from an infant's mummy had a residue of 219 micrograms per gram.

One theory is that they could have washed their hair with arsenic contaminated water but pathologists explain that washing is unlikely to leave such high levels of arsenic traces.

Arriaza has another explanation. Chinchorros were a fishing society. They collected plants along river mouths and hunted both sea mammals and wild birds. They made fishhooks out of shellfish, bone or cactus needles; spear throwers were used to hunt sea lions and wild camelids, while both lithic points and knives were manufactured using flint stones.

The Chinchorro lacked ceramic vessels, metal objects and woven textiles, but this was not a social handicap: their simple, yet efficient fishing technology allowed them to thrive along the Pacific coast.

But life was not without dangers. In the 1960s tests on water drawn by the city of Antofagasta in the Camarones River Valley showed that it was laced with

A mummified Chinchorro baby in San Miguel Museum in Arica city.
Credit: Reuters.



860 micrograms of arsenic per liter – 86 times higher than the limits acceptable by the WHO.

Arriaza believes this was so even 7,000 years ago. Tests on the Chinchorro mummies strengthen the arsenic poisoning theory.

He also believes Chinchorros suffered from chronic ear irritation and impairment probably due to continuous fishing in the Pacific Ocean's cold waters. They also suffered from parasitic infections from eating poorly cooked fish and sea lion meat.

"In highly stratified societies like ours, lower-class children receive simple or meager mortuary disposal. But in a small group, the death of children certainly threatened the survival of the entire group. Affection and grief may thus have triggered the preservation of children," the archaeologist said.

Chinchorro morticians made incisions to deflesh the body and removed internal organs. Clay, grasses and feathers were used to fill the cavities. The bodies were painted bright red from head to toe, the face was painted black or brown. A long wig up to 60 cm was used to ornament the head. Facial features were modeled to convey life.

A Reuters story by Savvy Soumya Misra at www.downtoearth.org.in. Submitted by Scott Allen.

"The Caribbean Basin Before Columbus"

Theme of the 2009 Symposium of the Pre-Columbian Society of Washington, DC

The 2009 symposium will be held in Washington, DC on Saturday, September 19, 2009. William Keegan of The Florida Museum of Natural History will be the symposium moderator. In addition to Dr. Keegan, speakers include Scott Fitzpatrick of North Carolina State University; Corinne Hofman, of Leiden University (The Netherlands); Lee Newson,

of Pennsylvania State University, and Peter Siegel, of Montclair State University.

New discoveries and fresh thinking call into question the previously held view that pre-Columbian islanders were socially and geographically isolated. Today, archaeologists from many nations are active throughout the Caribbean basin, uncovering new

finds far from their places of origin. Contact and exchange throughout the Caribbean basin are the twin themes of modern-day researchers. This symposium will explore the latest thinking on the Caribbean basin and its peoples before 1492.

For a detailed look at the symposium program and/or to request a symposium brochure, please visit the Pre-Columbian Society/DC website at: www.pcswdc.org.

2009 SAA Meetings in Atlanta, GA, a Huge Success

by Jason Yaeger

University of Wisconsin – Madison

The 74th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) took place April 22–26, 2009, in Atlanta, Georgia. This yearly event is the principal venue in the United States for archaeologists working around the world to share their research with each other and the broader public. This year's meeting was well-attended and included many interesting sessions. As always, Maya archaeology was well represented.

One of the marquee events for Mayanists was a pair of symposia honoring the eminent Maya archaeologist, **Robert J. Sharer**, author of *The Ancient Maya* and director of a long-standing project at Copan, Honduras. Professor Sharer's colleagues and students presented papers that ranged from biographical sketches of his career and their interactions with him to current research projects that drew inspiration from Sharer's own research.

One of Sharer's first graduate students, Payson Sheets, shared stories of participating on Sharer's project at Chalchuapa, El Salvador, in the 1970s, and Marion Popenoe Hatch, one of Sharer's colleagues in Guatemala, presented her most recent theories of interaction between



Editor's note: I was there during the Saturday homage sessions for Robert Sharer (center). I snapped this photo as many of the presenters gathered for a final group photo. Way too many familiar faces here to list ... see if you can guess who some of them are!

the Formative period cultures along the Pacific Coast.

The papers were a fitting celebration in honor of Professor Sharer on the occasion of his retirement from the University of Pennsylvania after nearly four decades of teaching.

Another important session took place on Friday. Entitled "The Great Maya Droughts in Cultural Context," this symposium organized by Gyles Iannone (Trent University) brought archaeologists, paleoclimatologists, paleobotanists, soil scientists, and other scholars together to share their findings on the role of climate change in Maya history, particularly the Classic-period collapse.

Taken together, the papers demonstrated the different regions of the Maya world had very different



Dr. Robert J. Sharer.

These two photos by Moses Hudon.



Dr. Marion Popenoe Hatch smiles beside IMS Explorer editor Jim Reed. Try "Googling" her name and learn of how much she has added to our understanding of various ancient Mesoamerican cultures.

cultural and climatic histories, and they effectively showed that while droughts played an important role in Maya history in many regions, they cannot be considered the only cause of the Maya collapse. Heather Pringle presents a nice summary of this on-going debate in the April 24 issue of *Science* (vol. 324, no. 5924, pp. 454-456).

Ancient Tomb Found in Machu Picchu Archaeological Park

Archaeologists at the National Institute of Culture (INC) have found a pre-Inca tomb in the Salapunku archaeological zone, located inside the Machu Picchu Archaeological Park in Cusco, southeastern Peru.

Archaeologists declared the unearthed remains were most likely of an adult female dating back to the ancient Killke culture. The group inhabited the region from 900 to 1200 CE, prior to the Incas.

Francisco Quispe is leading excavations in the area. He says the funerary ceramics and bird skeletons also discovered in

the tomb are strong indications that the

grave belonged to the Killke. Quispe noted, "The most important discovery regarding this tomb was that it was closed, meaning it corresponds very likely to a female."

Quispe remarked that the tomb was positioned differently from regular ones, which makes it all the more interesting and unique.

The tomb was discovered in a rocky area alongside a mountain called Wakaywillka, considered by pre-Hispanic populations as the guardian of the Vilacanota valley. Archaeologists have unearthed nine other graves in the same area.

The archaeological zone of Salapunku is at 2,631 meters above



A close-up view of the tomb contents.

sea level in the foothills of the La Veronica mountain and it occupies an area of 229,420 square meters.

Source: From an original article released 6/17/09 with image above at: www.andina.com.pe/Ingles/Noticia.aspx?id=eyyzr413uKc=

Institute of Maya Studies Line-up of Presentations!

August 12, 2009: IMS Explorer Session (Classroom-style): "Medicines: They're not just for breakfast anymore!"



A bark bath from the gumbo limbo (prevalent in the Southern U.S. and Mesoamerica), will alleviate the discomfort of insect bites, sunburn, rashes, skin sores and measles.

with **Michele Williams, Ph.D., RPA**

Traditional cultures value plants for their medicinal and culinary uses. Come learn about evidence for prehistoric uses of plants in similar manners!

Michele Williams, Ph.D., RPA is the Director and Terrestrial Archaeologist for the Southeastern Region of Florida Public Archaeology Network. Dr. Williams has participated in digs throughout the southeastern United States for the past 20 years. Her specialty within archaeology is the use of plants by prehistoric Native Americans.



Vanilla, that wonderfully sweet and tasty flavoring, is created from the vanilla orchid, one of only a few edible orchids. Most commercial vanilla comes from *v. planifolia*, a plant likely first cultivated by the Maya.

August 19: IMS Presentation (in the Museum Auditorium):

"Interpreting the Art of Chichén Itzá"

with **Dr. Edward J. Kurjack**

Professor Emeritus at Western Illinois University.



The Lower Temple of the Jaguars has surviving painted murals. (Jim Reed, 7/20/09)

Scholars have examined the art of Chichén Itzá and arrived at widely different interpretations, thus showing that it is truly difficult to find meaning in stone. Dr. Kurjack believes the most successful studies begin with an etic perspective, which focuses on behavior that can be described and phenomena that can be counted. Rather than starting with an attempt to understand the symbolism in the minds of the artists, the research should proceed by describing the elements composing the art and analyzing the distribution of these elements.

Morris, Charlot and Morris (1931) successfully showed that the pilasters of the Northwest Colonnade illustrated a scene of richly attired individuals with tied hands surrounded by armed personnel and onlookers at the margins. An ossuary pit at the foot of the stairs by one of the pilasters depicting "prisoners" may be linked to the narrative.

Using this same etic procedure, we can re-examine the Temple of the Warriors complex and study other world-class examples of Pre-Columbian art at Chichén Itzá, especially the Tzompantli and the Lower Temple of the Jaguars.

The Institute Maya Studies • All meetings are Wednesdays • 8-9:30 PM • Miami Science Museum
3280 South Miami Avenue, across from Vizcaya • \$6 donation requested from non-members
Inquire about IMS Membership benefits • Maya Hotline: 305-235-1192

Note our new website address: www.instituteofmayastudies.org

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 benefits and helps the IMS offer educational programs to the public. If you are already a member, please encourage your friends to join.

Membership Application

or Newsletter Only Subscription Form:

Name: _____
Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____
E-mail: _____
Phone: _____

New Renewal

- Benefactor: \$350
- Patron: \$150
- Century: \$100
- Family: \$50
- 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.





Volume 38: Issue 8 • August 2009

IMS Explorer

Newsletter of the
Institute of Maya Studies
3280 South Miami Avenue
Miami, FL 33129

Call the Maya Hotline
at 305-235-1192

New website address:
www.instituteofmayastudies.org



Within and without, the Temple of the Warriors is full of beautiful murals and sculpture.

**August 19:
IMS Presentation:**

"Interpreting the Art of Chichén Itzá"

with
Dr. Edward J. Kurjack

Upcoming Events at the IMS:

August 5, 2009: **IMS Board Meeting**
All IMS members are welcome to attend.

August 12: *IMS Explorer Session*
"Medicines: They're Not Just for Breakfast Anymore!" – with Michele Williams, Ph.D., RPA, Director and Terrestrial Archaeologist for the Southeastern Region of Florida Public Archaeology Network. This is a very interesting topic that we haven't heard much about before. Come hear Dr. Williams discuss the fascinating use of the fauna by Ancient Americans, one of her specialties!

Aug. 19: *IMS Presentation (in the Auditorium)*
"Interpreting the Art of Chichén Itzá" – Various scholars have examined the art of Chichén Itzá and arrived at widely different interpretations. Join our good friend **Dr. Edward J. Kurjack** as he explores an etic perspective. He believes that rather than starting with an attempt to understand the symbolism in the minds of the artists at Chichén, the research should proceed by describing the elements composing the art and analyzing the distribution of these elements.

Upcoming Events and Announcements:

Sept. 1 – Dec. 18: *Museum Exhibit*
"Art of Sky, Art of Earth: Maya Cosmic Imagery" – Theme of an exhibition at the Wake Forest University Museum of Anthropology in Winston-Salem, NC. The event focuses on St. Bonaventure University's collection of ancient Maya pottery. Get more info at: www.wfu.edu/moa

Sept. 14: *Smithsonian Seminar*
"Belize of the Maya" – Theme of a two-part seminar at the S. Dillon Ripley Center, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. "Ancient Maya Sites" with Archaeologist John Henderson from Cornell University, and "Rainforest to Reef" with Biologist Marcella Kelly, an associate professor in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences at Virginia Tech. More info at: <http://resident-associates.org/ticketing/tickets>

Through Dec. 31: *Museum Exhibit*
"Aztec to Zapotec: Selections from the Ancient Americas Collection" – Theme of an Orlando Museum of Art Exhibit in Orlando, FL. Representing a time period of more than

3,000 years, the exhibition features more than 180 works drawn from the OMA's Art of the Ancient Americas Collection. Get more info at: www.omart.org/exhibitions/aztec-zapotec

Through Dec. 31: *Museum Exhibit*
"Fragile Memories: Images of Archaeology and Community at Copan, 1891–1900" – A photo-essay featuring the best visual records of early Peabody expeditions chosen from their recently completed two-year project to digitize over 10,000 19th-century glass-plate negatives, especially from the museum's expeditions to Copan. Peabody Museum of Archaeology, Cambridge, MA. More info at: www.peabody.harvard.edu

Through Jan. 31, 2010: *Museum Exhibit*
"Painted Metaphors: Pottery and Politics of the Ancient Maya" – Theme of an exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in West Philadelphia, PA. Get more info at: www.paintedmetaphors.org



IMS Explorer

Please note that all articles and news items for the *IMS Explorer* 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