

April 20, 2016 • Maya Ceremonial Era Long Count: 0.0.3.6.16 • 11 K'ib 19 Pohp • G1



Spondylus: A Sacred and Precious Shell

by Sofía Paredes Maury

The ancient Maya and other Precolumbian groups used mainly two classes of molluscs: conch shells and winkle shells (*Gasteropoda*) and bivalve shells (*Pelecypoda*). Winkles are univalve or have a single spiral-shaped body, while the bivalves have two valves joined together by a hinge (Rubio, 1986).

In several examples, seashells appear in the beak of aquatic birds or sharing the same space in the scene with them. Their relationship with water gave them a symbolism associated to the underwater-world, being that water is one of the entrances to the Underworld.

Also, seashells were related to royal lineages, because they were used as precious jewelry by the Maya nobility and members of the royal court close to the ruler, such as dwarfs, who wore pectorals made of shells that were cut into a star-shape.

In fact, shells were highly appreciated by nobles as ornaments on their attire, used as necklaces, bracelets, belts, ear flares, and nose ornaments, or attached to their headdresses (Schele and Miller, 1992: 66-71). Pictorial depictions of shells also appear in mural paintings and on ceramic artifacts, indicating a strong symbolic meaning across time.

Spondylus sp. shells were among the most appreciated. They



Round ear flares made of *Spondylus* shell, jade and turquoise. Diameter: 6.3 cm. Cultural Registry No. 1.2.159.106. Photo by Ricky López Bruni.



Two square ear flares made of *Spondylus* shell in bright orange. Width: 2.5 cm. Cultural Heritage Registry No. 16.2.5.392. Photo by Fundación La Ruta Maya.

have a characteristic bright-orange or red color, as well as a spiny surface. On that matter, Diego de Landa – in the 16th century – mentioned that “the lords would decorate themselves with certain red shells” which were probably *Spondylus* shells, given their color.

Spondylus shells were also utilized in ritualistic and ceremonial settings by the Maya nobility, and are frequently encountered in royal burials. An open shell can sit up horizontally on its own spines and could be used as a place to deposit special offerings, that often included jade beads and human blood.



Jim Reed,
Editor

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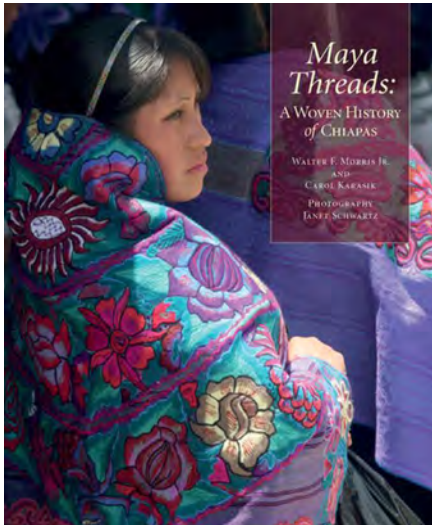
From the Ceremonial to the Everyday: Maya Textiles as Cultural Texts with

Dr. Gabrielle Vail
of the Florida Institute of Hieroglyphic Research

This shell has its origin off the Pacific coast of Ecuador and to reach them, the local collectors had to dive as deep as 25 meters under water! Afterwards,

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IMS Recommended Reading *Recently released book:*



Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas

by Walter (Chip) F. Morris and Carol Karasik, with additional photography by Janet Schwartz

Chip Morris's observant eyes have tracked the history, meaning, and evolution of textiles in this richly illustrated definitive work on the textiles of Chiapas.

Leafing through the pages of this stunning book, the images themselves weave a beautiful story of the modern Maya, living vibrant lives full of intense color, with undertones steeped in the revival of tradition and ancient customs.

Paperback: 224 pages; 224 pages; 9" x 11"; 245 color photos; 16 b/w illustrations; 6 maps; ISBN: 978-0-9838860-6-8; Published by: Thrums Books

Through the pages of this incredibly-researched history and photo gallery, the world of the Maya lives on through the lens of its culture and costume, still seen today in the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico.

In a region battered by centuries of invasions, subjugations, civil wars, and severe economic hardship, the Maya continue to celebrate and sustain their heritage in extraordinary traditional dress and festivals that are both riotous and sacred.

Enter their world through the pages of this book. Understand the roots of Maya culture and costume as it is expressed in their ancient history and legends, and in their ever-evolving, colorful, beautifully handcrafted dress.

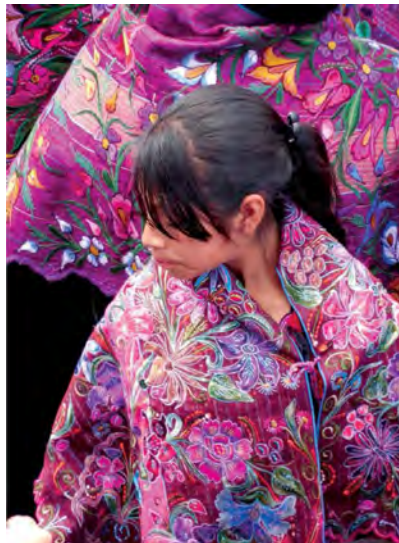
You will see exquisite gauze fabrics that trace their origins from the 9th century CE



A woman of San Andrés wears a traditional huipil while weaving a copy of the burial shroud of Lady Evening Star, queen of Yaxchilan. She is a member of the Comunidad de Tejedoras (formerly known as Sna Jolobil), who study and re-create antique and ancient

Maya weavings. Photo by Chip Morris.

The "flowering" of Maya culture is more than a metaphor in Zinacantan where local dress is a lavish field of ever-changing flowers for every major festival, when families wear new sets of clothing embroidered with fresh designs and the current color palette. Photo by Chip Morris.



to a present-day lowland village; festival wear that blends Roman Catholicism and Paganism, reverence and mockery; gloriously brocaded and embroidery wardrobes that tie communities together; embroidery techniques that reflect displacements and migration – in other words, fabrics that trace the history and evolution of a people.

With more than 245 stunning photos, 16 illustrations, and 6 maps, *Maya Threads* explores a full range of textiles and offers an in-depth look at the region's people. It vibrantly showcases an exuberant, private people whose textiles are constantly evolving on their own terms. *Maya Threads* is the ultimate source book for anyone interested in the culture and history of Chiapas. Perfect for an armchair traveler, fashion student,

textile artisan, curious observer, or world traveler, this book offers a fascinating historical journey through fabric.

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For Carnival in Chenalhó, a ritual transvestite wears the ancestral ceremonial huipil. Although women no longer wear this huipil, some still know how to weave it as his huipil is brand new.

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Fundación La Ruta Maya is the only private organization in the Mesoamerican region that has as its mission statement the recovery of archaeological objects that were removed from the country illegally in past decades, with the purposes of repatriation to Guatemala. The Foundation also receives donations from independent sources in Guatemala. La Ruta Maya Foundation is responsible for the custody and management of more than 3,000 Precolumbian artifacts, duly registered with the Registro de Bienes Culturales, IDAEH, as National Cultural Heritage. The entire collection is accessible for research to scholars and students, as well as to the general public, through temporary exhibitions organized each year in Guatemala. The collection is also available on loan to national and foreign museums and exhibitions. See: www.larutamaya.com.gt or www.facebook.com/larutamaya



Spondylus: A Sacred and Precious Shell

by **Sofía Paredes Maury**

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they travelled through long distance trade networks along the Pacific coastline for more than 3,800 km until they reached the coasts of the Maya area and southern Mexico.

Mesoamerica developed a complex commercial network across land and water routes. Over land, the transportation of merchandise was done by specialized carriers or *tememes*, who followed ancestral roads, paths, and passages between the mountains and valleys.

When arriving at a lake or river, products were transported in canoes. Most of the sites along the Usumacinta River – one of the most important trade routes in the region – were in their heyday during the Late Classic period (600–900 CE).

Other Precolumbian ports of “International” importance (due to their connections with other regions and cultures) were located along the shoreline of Honduras and the Yucatan peninsula. It is known that numerous river ports existed along several rivers that empty into the

A: *The ensemble shown at right has been recreated with 2 Precolumbian objects for interpretive purposes during the exhibition “Los Mayas y el Agua” (CFCE, Antigua Guatemala, July-November 2015).*

B: *Back side of same shell. Late Classic period (600-900 CE). Maya Lowlands. Length: 12.5 cm; Width: 11.5 cm. Cultural Heritage Registry No. I.2.144.284.*

Photos by Sofía Paredes Maury.

“The trade in which they are more inclined to work is that of the merchants... exchanging everything for cacao and stone beads... and they have for money and jewelry others made of certain red shells that were brought in net bags they have...”

– Fray Diego de Landa,
Chapter XXIII: 46.

Pacific coast of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Maritime trade was in its apogee during the Post Classic (900–1492 CE) and extended regionally from the Gulf of Honduras to the Gulf of Mexico, surrounding the Yucatan peninsula, with routes to Panama and Ecuador – both very important for the gold and Spondylus trade, respectively.



For the Post Classic, objects made of gold and tumbaga (an alloy of gold and silver) also came from Costa Rica and Panama. Other products of great value, such as stingray spines and teeth of great white sharks, were transported using the same routes used for Spondylus shells.

The Spondylus shell was a very precious object due to the difficulty in obtaining it. Throughout its commercial route it was also accessible to different cultures with which it could be exchanged for other products of similar or higher value. Its symbolic value was also extraordinary (Reed, 2003).

This spiny shell was apparently used mainly to collect the blood offered during self-sacrifice blood-letting ceremonies. This practice had the objective of offering the blood of ears, tongue (in women) and genitalia (in men) without the



Lic. Julio Cotom, an archaeologist with the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, is an expert in shell objects. Here he has isolated some of the items in the La Ruta Maya collection to advise on the taxonomic classification of the shell used in the manufacture of the various artifacts. Note some of the ear flares featured on page one.

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Mayas Teaching Mayas the Hieroglyphs and Ancient Calendar

MAM : Mayas for Ancient Mayan
at: <http://discovermam.org>

Join us in this movement – part academic, part spiritual – as the indigenous Maya reunite with their own past, reading the ancient hieroglyphic books and monuments, communicating with their ancestors.

MAM is the Maya word for Grandmother-Grandfather/ancestor and is our acronym in both English and Spanish: Mayas for Ancient Mayan and Maya Antiguo para los Mayas.

Our mission:

All across the Maya world, in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, we are finding Maya colleagues thirsting to learn the writing of their ancestors. We support them with workshops and teaching materials.

A number of Maya scholars have already become advanced epigraphers in their own right and they are now teaching the glyphs and calendar to others. Our Maya colleagues have the training, the knowledge, the language and culture, and above all the desire to recover their own history. All they lack is financial resources. That is where MAM steps in: with grants to prepare and print teaching materials, with donations of digital projectors, and with help for transportation, meals, and lodging to attend workshops.

Our Maya colleagues already know what to do and how to do it; MAM's mission is to support them.

Get involved, donate now

MAM has launched a Generosity crowd-funding campaign to raise funds to pay for the **Third International Congress of Maya Epigraphers**, to be held in El Remate/Tikal, Peten, Guatemala, May 14-20, 2016.

Go to: <https://www.generosity.com/education-fundraising/maya-revival-2>

For those who don't use the internet for donations, you can mail checks made out to the treasurer of MAM: AI Meador

2042 Windbrook Dr. SE
Palm Bay, FL 32909



From the Jolom Konob' workshop held 4 Ajaw 13 Pax (2.9.15), in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, Guatemala



On 4 Ajaw 13 Pax, the participants, with their day names, during the exercise involving the *Stxolilal Q'inale'* (Tzolk'in).



4 Ajaw 13 Pax. Drawing by Jorge Pérez de Lara.



L) The intense interest by all students was very evident. R) Hector Xol, Maya Qek'chi' epigrapher and long-time MAM colleague, will instruct at the upcoming Congress of Maya Epigraphers.



All the above is from a very successful workshop that MAM sponsored last year in the town of Santa Eulalia, in the Guatemalan highlands. There, the nature of Classic Maya writing was explained using examples taken directly from the stelae. This was followed by a study of the calendar system, including the Long Count, the Tzolk'in (*Stxolilal Q'inale'* in Q'anjob'al) and the Haab.

To better explain the calendars, the participants were given exercise activities to show how the calendars worked. To understand the Tzolk'in, they formed two circles, one representing the 20 day-names and the other the numbers 1-13. The students learned that at the point where the two circles came together, they were creating a

single date; in effect the students themselves became a living calendar of 260 days!

Knowledge of the Tzolk'in was of ultimate interest for the participants since many of them were conscious of this calendar, still in use and respected by the elders of the community; and especially because the office of *Alcalde Rezador* (Chief Prayersayer) still exists today in Santa Eulalia and is closely linked to the count of the sacred days and the celebration of the Yearbearers. 🏰

Editor's note: You can check out numerous workshops and seminars that MAM has sponsored by exploring their website at: <http://discovermam.org>.

And please consider donating now to their Generosity campaign to support the Third International Congress.

Founded on October 25, 1990 by Wilbur Garrett, retired editor of the *National Geographic* magazine, La Ruta Maya Conservation Foundation is organized as a nonprofit in the United States under the laws of the State of Virginia. In Guatemala, it operates a fully owned subsidiary, and Fundación La Ruta Maya, is registered as a nonprofit with the Ministry of Interior. Fundación La Ruta Maya (Guatemala) is the only private organization in Central America that promotes and manages the recovery of archaeological property that left the country illegally in the past decades, with the purpose of repatriation. The Foundation also receives donations in Guatemala. Mission: To recover, preserve, study and exhibit its archaeological collections, support museums, publish academic documents, and implement educational programs. See: www.larutamaya.com.gt or www.facebook.com/larutamaya



Spondylus: A Sacred and Precious Shell, by Sofía Paredes Maury

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need to sacrifice the whole individual. Among the ruling families, important events, such as births, inaugurations, or accessions to the throne, were accompanied by dances, music, and bloodletting practices.

Spondylus shells were buried in caches or hidden offerings, usually with sacred objects in their interior, such as jade beads, shark teeth or sting ray spines. The latter were precisely used to perforate the body and scatter blood. In some cases, these shells have been found with jade beads inside, as if they were some kind of jewelry boxes, although the symbolism of jade is more related to water and the ancient Maya's concept of "preciousness".

Tomb 116 in Tikal (located in Temple I) had several shells deposited as offerings, but none of them seemed more important than an offering consisting of two Spondylus shells, one on top of the other, attached to the each other with natural calcareous material (Paredes Maury, 1996).

The ancient name for this

Editor's note: Two excellent examples of Spondylus shells in my collection. The Maya gods blessed me when I won an IMS raffle two years in a row, that was comprised of these beautiful gifts donated by Fran Thorpe.



kind of offering was *yohl ik'nal*, "heart (center) of the wind-place" (David Stuart, written communication).

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We look forward to more articles by Sofía Paredes Maury and La Ruta Maya in future issues. Meanwhile, check out: www.facebook.com/larutamaya 🏠

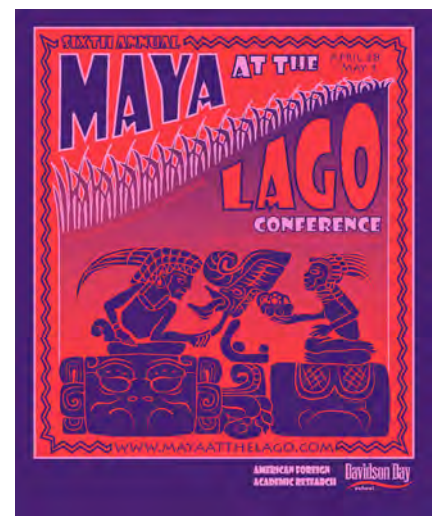
6th Annual Maya at the Lago Conference

Davidson Day School and American Foreign Academic Research welcome you to historic Davidson, NC for the sixth annual Maya at the Lago Conference, April 28 – May 1, 2016. The Maya at the Lago Conference (M@L) is a four-day "Everything Maya" event that's comprised of lectures, workshops, and exciting social activities. M@L brings some of the world's top Mesoamerican archaeologists together to share their experiences and current research with colleagues, students, and the general public. The research

is fresh and the delivery is easy to digest. Regardless of your experience, Maya at the Lago has an offering that will pique your interest.

Featured speakers include Richard M. Leventhal, Jason Yaeger, Jaime Awe, Cynthia Robin, Marc Zender, Pamela Geller, Scott Fedick, Stan Guenter, Christina Halperin, Ted Neff, Pat Urban, Eleanor King, Chelsea Blackmore, Arthur Joyce, Ed Shortman and Karl Taube.

This year, we are honoring Wendy Ashmore of the University of California, Riverside. Register now at: www.mayaatthelago.com/



Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas

by Walter (Chip) F. Morris and Carol Karasik, with additional photography by Janet Schwartz

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In the words of the authors themselves:

“This book isn’t about fashion per se but how a culture preserves traditions, adopts ideas, and adapts to changing times. Throughout their turbulent history, the Maya have clung to tradition while riding the waves of change. This remarkable resilience has guaranteed their survival, and nowhere is their success clearer than in their beautiful and diverse costumes. History and change are woven into Maya clothing. As we have seen, some textile traditions can be traced back to classic Maya civilization.



A Tojolabal man in his embroidered shirt, Chiapas. Photo by Janet Schwartz.

Editor’s note:
As a graphic artist I really like the design and layout of the texts and photos in Maya Threads. This is the spread for pages 194-195. With a satin-matte finish on the cover, the book not only looks good, it feels good too!



“Spider Monkeys,” the ceremonial clowns of Chamula, rule the Carnival celebration in Chiapas. Photo by Joe Coca.



Yet the brocaded designs preserved for millennia have been lost during periods of hardship and then almost miraculously rediscovered through dreams or by chance. Certain traditional garments may take on new roles: for example, the old ceremonial huipil of Chenalhó is now worn exclusively by ritual transvestites (see photo on page 2).

“A sly comic undercurrent is generally at play during Maya festivals, where the men’s ceremonial costume both mirrors and mocks the lavish fashions of the Spanish conquerors. In everyday life, the standard dress reflects the changing relationship between Maya and non-Maya communities. Store-bought materials are becoming increasingly popular among Maya women. Yet a more significant trend is happening in the town of Carranza, where the mutual exchange of styles and fabrics implies a greater respect for indigenous culture.”

Walter F. Morris, Jr (“Chip”) came to Chiapas as a tourist from Boston in 1972 and has stayed on to become deeply expert in the textiles and culture of the Highlands. His fluency in Tzotzil and his extensive time in Maya villages have given him unique insights into the history and symbolism of Maya textiles, which he has shared generously in his writings. Carol Karasik is a writer and editor who has produced a number of books on modern Maya culture. Janet Schwartz is a clothing designer, a tour guide, and accomplished journalist/photographer. All three reside in San Cristóbal, Chiapas.

Source: Thanks to Karen Brock of Thrums Books. The book is available now on Amazon.

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**April 13, 2016 • IMS Explorer Session: An Intro to the Maya
Can You Dig It?: The Tools of an Archaeologist**

with IMS Secretary and Library Chair Janet Miess



The 'field site tools' include the tools used for digging, the apparatus for recording and the safety kit. Photo courtesy of: www.archaeology-international.co.uk

Archaeology is the study of human culture through the recovery of fossils, architecture and artifacts etc. For this purpose, excavation is done. This excavation sometimes has to be carried out in soft or hard soils and sometimes even underwater. Different archaeological tools are used for different locations and for different types of excavations. After having done the excavation analysis and interpretation, documentation needs to be done. There are two categories of archaeological tools: the tools used on the field site and the tools used by the specialists in the laboratories.

(www.archaeology-international.co.uk)

Not everyone who enjoys archaeology wants to be an archaeologist full time. Interested "lay archaeologists" can usually volunteer on projects. Every year the AIA publishes the Archaeological Fieldwork Opportunities Bulletin that lists many current projects. You can also contact your local state archaeologist, who will often have information on projects ongoing in your area or the Mayalands. (www.archaeological.org/education)

April 20: IMS Feature Presentation

**From the Ceremonial to the Everyday:
Maya Textiles as Cultural Texts**

with Dr. Gabrielle Vail,

of the Florida Institute for Hieroglyphic Research



Huipil of Tactic (meaning "Land of the Deer"), Guatemala, featuring the ancestors, deer, and diamond motifs.

When weaving a textile using traditional techniques such as a backstrap loom, Maya women encode information that is clearly visible to others, as well as that which remains hidden except by close scrutiny and analysis. The former includes the striking colors and designs, as well as the materials used, whereas the latter involves how

the textile is structured: the type of weave, the spin and ply of the threads, and similar details.

We know from Maya weavers themselves that dreams as well as stories of culture heroes and celestial beings are woven into textiles in ways that can be interpreted by the weaver and those who share the same language and stories. Examples of some of these narrative textiles will be discussed, in particular examples from the Alta Verapaz and Ixil regions of Guatemala dating to the early 20th century. Their technical attributes will also be considered for what they can tell us. More recent examples of textiles from the Chiapas highlands will also be discussed, as will suggestions that they can help inform us in interpreting textiles represented in pottery and sculpture from Classic period contexts.

Gabrielle Vail received her Ph.D. in anthropology from Tulane University, with a specialization in Maya archaeology. Her research emphasizes prehispanic Maya ritual and religion, as well as calendrical and astronomical texts, as documented in Maya screenfold books called codices. Dr. Vail also works closely with weavers from highland Guatemala and Chiapas and has curated several exhibitions focused on Maya weaving. Dr. Vail's work is highlighted in numerous publications, as well as the online Maya Codices Database (www.mayacodices.org), and most recently with the Florida Institute for Hieroglyphic Research.



All meetings begin at 8 pm • Institute of Maya Studies • www.instituteofmayastudies.org

The IMS is a Community Partner with Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus, Miami, FL

Both programs will take place in K-413 (in Building K-4, Room 13)

Check out their website at: www.mdc.edu for directions and campus map.

IMS Hotline: 305-279-8110



Excavations at San José Mogote 2: The Cognitive Archaeology

by Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus

San José Mogote is a 60-70 ha (148-172 acres) Formative site in the northern Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico, which was occupied for a thousand years before the city of Monte Alban was founded.

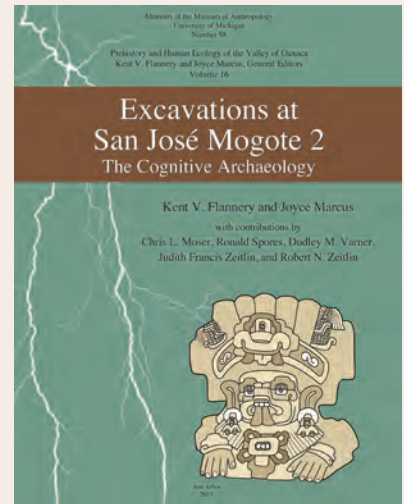
The University of Michigan is publishing the final site report on San José Mogote in three volumes: Volume 1 (*Excavations at San José Mogote 1: The Household Archaeology*), published in 2005, describes the archaeology of households; Volume 2 documents the cognitive archaeology; and Volume 3 will explain the mortuary archaeology.

Excavations at San José Mogote 2: The Cognitive Archaeology (2015) deals with every building and feature that can shed light on indigenous ritual, religion, and political ideology. Filling 432 pages and utilizing more than 400 photographs and line drawings, this book describes in detail more than 35 public buildings, including men's houses, one-room temples, a performance platform, two-room

state temples, a ballcourt, and two types of palaces. These new empirical data allow the authors to reconstruct the evolution of complex Zapotec state religion from the simpler ritual features and buildings of Oaxaca's earliest sedentary communities.

Kent V. Flannery is a curator in the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan. Joyce Marcus is a well-known Latin American archaeologist and professor in the Department of Anthropology, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She also holds the position of Curator of Latin American

Published by the
University of
Michigan Museum,
ISBN: 978-09157038-6-9,
available on Amazon.



Archaeology, University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology.

Together, they also wrote *The Cloud People: Divergent Evolution of the Zapotec and Mixtec Civilizations* (2003), as well as *Early Formative Pottery of the Valley of Oaxaca* (1994).

To inquire about the price and availability, call Amy Winchester at 734-764-0485. 📞

Upcoming Events at the IMS:

All IMS events for April and May will take place in Room K-413 at Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus. That's Building K-4, Room 13. See www.mdc.edu

April 13 • 8 pm: *An Intro to the Maya Can You Dig It?: The Tools of an Archaeologist*, with IMS Secretary and Library Chair **Janet Miess**.

April 20 • 8 pm: *IMS Feature Presentation From the Ceremonial to the Everyday: Maya Textiles as Cultural Texts* – with **Dr. Gabrielle Vail**, of the Florida Institute of Hieroglyphic Research. We learn that dreams are often the inspiration for modern-day Maya weavers.

May 11 • 8 pm: *An Intro to the Maya How Bloody Were the Maya?: Separating Fact from Fiction* – with IMS's very own **Marta Barber**.

May 18 • 8 pm: *IMS Feature Presentation Revisiting a Classic Maya Coronation Ceremony* – with **Marc Zender**, Tulane University.

Upcoming Events and Announcements:

April 9, 1:30 pm: *Penn Museum Lecture River Lords: Namaan and the Classic Maya Political Landscape* – Theme of the Pre-Columbian Society of the Penn Museum April Lecture featuring Joanne Baron, PhD, Director, La Florida Archaeology Project; Consulting Scholar, Penn Museum. Dr. Baron will discuss what is known about the ancient Namaan (La Florida) polity. Philadelphia, PA. More info at: <http://www.precolumbian.org>

April 28–May 1: *M@L Conference Maya at the Lago* – The Maya at the Lago Conference (M@L) is a four-day “Everything Maya” event that's comprised of lectures, workshops, and exciting social activities. M@L brings some of the world's top Mesoamerican archaeologists together to share their experiences and current research. At Davidson Day School in Davidson, NC. Get additional info at: <http://www.mayaatthelago.com/program>

Permanent Museum Exhibit Visible Vault: Archaeological Treasures from Ancient Latin America – We invite you to visit our Visible Vault exhibit to view a selection of unique objects displayed from among a collection of hundreds of other treasures produced by the ancient peoples of the Americas. The exhibit hall also features dim, dramatic lighting so that the artifacts, which are largely ceremonial in nature, can be viewed today as they might have been in the past. At the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, Los Angeles, CA. More info at: www.nhm.org/site/explore-exhibits/permanent-exhibits/latin-american-art

Editor's Tip: *Online all the time Mesoamerica and Ancient America Lectures, Conferences and Exhibits* – Check out Mike Ruggeri's comprehensive list of upcoming events at: <http://bit.ly/11aKJzE>



IMS EXPLORER

Join the **Explor-ation!** Scholar or not, we welcome submissions from IMS members and other Maya enthusiasts. Share what interests you with others. All articles and news items for the **IMS Explorer** should be forwarded to the newsletter editor at: mayaman@bellsouth.net