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Maya enthusiasts providing public education for 46+ years

A Community Partner of Miami Dade College -Kendall Campus, Miami, FL, USA

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Aako'ob All the Way Down: The Turtle and the **2020 Mesoamerica Meetings** by Zach Lindsey

The event was titled "Center and the Four Corners." This year's Mesoamerica Meetings at the University of Texas were all about directions in Mesoamerica. So why did I walk away thinking about turtles?

Some Mesoamericans, especially the Maya from at least the Middle Preclassic to the late Classic eras, considered the earth to be a turtle, and the surface upon which we walk to be the turtle's shell. Though this belief is mostly gone from contemporary Mesoamerican spirituality, at the 2020 conference, the ghost of the earth-turtle made itself well-known. From the turtle's name to its surprising use as a method for establishing social inequality, the earth turtle seemed to be everywhere.

Royal Turtles at Piedras Negras

I don't need to say "earth turtle"; I can use the turtle's actual name in ancient Mayan. according to David Stuart in his annual hieroglyph workshop. That name was almost

Jim Reed,

Editor

certainly Itzam K'an Ahk, at least in the Classic era.

The keynote presentation was by Stephen D. Houston who serves as the Dupee Family Professor of Social Sciences at Brown University. The title of his program was: "A Cosmos in Stone: The Necessity of Kings Among the Classic Maya."







The event opened with a hieroglyphic workshop led by David Stuart. Note: Just about every photo in this article was submitted by Elaine Schele.

It's a name that might be familiar to those of you who have read about the history of Piedras Negras. More than one king of the site used that name, and many of the most famous kings used the word Ahk in their names. A natural rock outcropping at the site even has a turtle shell carved into it.

This was likely a reference to "the animate earth," according to Stuart.

But it's not just Piedras Negras that celebrates the turtle; the quatrefoil shapes on Caracol Altars 3 and 19 are probably turtle shells, and God N wears a turtle shell at Tikal. The site of Ek Balam even has an old

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IMS Presentation: February 19, 7:30 pm



Various baskets for sale in the market.

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man as a turtle with a K'an symbol on his back, also probably a form of God N. God N as the turtle is important, because the glyph continued on page 3

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A Mexicolore history workshop on the Maya and the Aztecs at a Junior school in Kent, November 2019.

Get to know: Mexicolore! by Ian Mursell, B.Sc., M.A.

Mexicolore is a small, long-established, specialist, independent, "Living History" artifact-based teaching team that teaches about Mexico, the Aztecs, and the Maya, for schools and museums throughout England. We have worked with over 225,000 children in some 3,000 primary school visits alone since 1980, as well as in the British Museum, Museum of Mankind, and the Royal Academy of Arts.

We ran a series of oversubscribed workshops for schools attending the major exhibition "Aztecs" at the Royal Academy from 2002-3, and repeated this at the British Museum in 2009-10 in support of their exhibition "Moctezuma – Aztec Ruler".

In July 2015, we ran another series of workshops for schools and families attending the major exhibition on the ancient Maya at the World Museum Liverpool, and in 2017, we teamed up with the British Museum to trial the new Google Maya VR Project in schools.

We maintain a popular educational website in support of our programs in schools that attracts an average of 73,000 unique visitors each month.



Original artwork by some students who had attended an event titled "Enthusiaztec". The homepages of the site can be found at: https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/maya and http://mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/

The Mexicolore site is aimed largely at teachers and students of all ages with a serious interest in the Maya and the Aztecs (both now optional units of study in the National Curriculum for Primary History in England). It is updated and expanded constantly, and contains a wide range of carefully researched informational resources.

On our "Ask the Experts" panel (Honorary President Dr. Miguel León-Portilla, RIP) are over 90 world-class scholars and experts, including Professors



The Mexicolore home page. Access it at the hyperlink above.

Michael Coe (RIP), Gordon Brotherston, Warwick Bray, Alfredo López Austin, Davíd Carrasco, Frances Berdan, Michael E. Smith, Karl Taube, Mary Miller, Esther Pasztory, Camilla Townsend, Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, Anthony Aveni, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, Juan José Batalla, Patrick Johansson, Dr. Leonardo López Luján, Dr. Patricia Rieff Anawalt, and Dr. Colin McEwan.

Incidentally, the site has been selected by the British Library to be archived as one of a small number of "documentary heritage" sites that are due to form part of the UK Web Archiving Consortium project.

We welcome offers of introductory, entry-level articles on any subject of general interest! Contact me at: ian@mexicolore.co.uk

> Yours truly, **Ian Mursell**, Director of "Mexicolore" MirandaNet Fellow, Institute of Education, London University

1980-2020: 40 years of bringing Ancient and Modern Mexico to life through over 3,000 workshops in schools, museums, arts centers, hospitals, and other venues throughout England.



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David and Elaine Schele, along with Barbara MacLoed at the annual Meso kickoff party. The presenters and their programs proved very interesting and worthy of praise. At right above, Kathryn Reese-Taylor, and Susan Milbrath. All images on this page submitted by Elaine Schele.

Aako'ob All the Way Down: The Turtle and the 2020 Mesoamerica Meetings by Zach Lindsey cont. from page 1

for the king of Piedras Negras seems to be capped with what Stuart called God N's "hair net." But, Itzam K'an Ahk has origins that predate the Classic era and Piedras Negras.

The Turtle Quincunx

The researchers at the Late Preclassic site of San Bartolo have done amazing things with the fragmented mural found at the site. Besides the well-preserved north and west walls, archaeologists have found more than 7,000 pieces of plaster from the destroyed east and south walls. Using these pieces, they were able to reconstruct some of the iconography. Stuart believes the whole mural represented four days of creation. The results of some of this reconstruction will be published shortly, according to Stuart.

In portraying the earth, the mural painters painted a turtle. But what is most interesting is the shape and form of the turtle. It's a quatrefoil, the shape so common on images that show windows into the other worlds.

At San Bartolo, the quatrefoil-backed turtle has figures inside, as though we are seeing the people inside the earth, or inside the turtle's shell; most important is the maize god. He would eventually emerge from the back of this turtle, as described on a famous plate in the Kerr Collection as K1892.

Turtles and Clowns

Paso del Macho is a Middle Preclassic site in Yucatan. There, Evan Parker and colleagues found a cache of 18 jade pieces, many of which were probably pectorals. This cache was in a pot with four turtles on the rim and a turtle on the bottom; it was capped with broken greenstone which was probably carved to look like a turtle shell.

If the earth is a turtle, the people who made this offering were ceremonially recreating the world. As jade often represents corn, the people of Paso del Macho were showing the corn inside ready to be born.

But jade was valuable; the cache represented a massive amount of wealth for the Middle Preclassic.



L) Dr. Ivan Šprajc presented about Maya Astronomy and Group E-Type Complexes. R) No Maya conference is complete without Mark Van Stone!

Thus it may have been a way of establishing power – the beginning of social hierarchy.

But why would people let their neighbors start bidding them around? Parker believes it began as a sort of clowningaround that got more serious in the Middle Preclassic. After all, as Parker noted, the hero twins win the day not by traditional acts of valor but by trickery and performance.

In many North American indigenous groups, clowning plays an important ritual role. Clowns are not only some of the few people who can give orders (most but not all of which are intentionally bizarre or silly), they serve as conduits for spiritual energy. In early Maya times, clowns as much as shamans may have been the connections between the people and the turtle earth. So what's the difference between a clown and a politician? Level of social stratification, apparently!

Oh Yeah, and Not-Turtles

Of course, it wasn't all turtles and clowns. Ivan Šprajc deconstructed a number of myths about E-Groups; Amara Solari and Linda Williams revealed the Prehispanic elements hidden in a Catholic mural at Dzidzantun; and Kerry Hull warned us not to get too close to water if we're in the Ch'orti region of Guatemala. (Water is a conduit for dark spirits.)

You should've been there; though if you weren't, you can pay a fee to view the entire symposium online at https://utmesoamerica.org/digital-streaming-and-recorded-videos-new-year until May I5.

But somehow as I sit on the bus headed home from the meetings and I see the cracks in the drying Texas mud, all I can think of is turtle shells.



Mike Coe, Yaxchilan, 2012. Note: This tribute appeared in and is courtesy of The PARI Journal 20(2):15-27 ©2019 Ancient Cultures Institute.

Every graduate student is a bit intimidated at their first meeting with a new adviser. I arrived at Yale on the recommendation of Stephen Houston, completely overwhelmed with the idea of being at an Ivy League school, in the office of Dr. Michael Coe, inside the Peabody Museum of Natural History.

It was far from my home in South Florida, culturally and physically. Mike never tolerated anyone calling him Dr. Coe more than once, and we got that cleared up right away. Then he asked me about my undergraduate thesis on women in Classic Maya politics. Because my undergraduate adviser, Anthony Andrews, was a Mayanist, and I had attended the Austin Maya Meetings and worked at Caracol, I had the opportunity to discuss my thesis with many scholars.

The vast majority of them thought the topic absolutely unimportant – a piece of fluff that would never turn into a career. When Mike asked about the stelae of Naranjo, he astonished me: there was, Mike noted, a whole lot more to the story of royal Maya women than anyone expected. He told me how hard Tatiana Proskouriakoff had worked to get her ideas published (he knew her!), and I heard the first of many tales about the evils of J. E. S. Thompson. I left that meeting with new confidence in my views of the Maya. The great Mike Coe agreed that I was on to something! That was 1988.

He remained curious and enthusiastic about every intellectual left turn I took in the intervening 30+ years. Before Mike passed, he sent me a preface for my edited volume on Maya food and a cover endorsement for another volume.

Mike never stopped giving – or being able to meet people on level ground, as he did with me in his office that fall. He found a kernel of inspiration in almost anyone's research and took pleasure in amplifying what they had to offer.

INAH Archaeologists Discover Cave Filled with Near Perfect Maya Ceramics

A cave, located 2.7 kilometers to the east of the Temple of Kukulcan, was discovered in 1966 but remained intact for 50 years as the archaeologist who was informed of the discovery decided to block the entrance.

The cave named "Balamkú" will help to better understand and perhaps rewrite the history of Chichen Itza, in the Yucatan. "The hundreds of archaeological artifacts, belonging to seven offerings documented so far, are in an extraordinary state of preservation" commented Guillermo de Anda, Director of the Great Maya Aquifer Project, the underwater exploration of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). De Anda was one of the first to enter the cave, after crawling for hours in the narrow tunnels that lead to it.

Guillermo de Anda, explained that because "the Cave of the Jaguar God" was kept sealed for centuries, "it contains invaluable information



Maya artifacts found in "Balamkú" cave Photo: Karla Ortega/INAH.

related to the formation and fall of the ancient 'City of the Water Wizards', and about who were the founders of this iconic site. I could not talk,

continued on page 5



L) Large stone carvings and massive stucco sculptures portray Maya deities. C) Preserved clay and stucco figurines showcase Maya artistry. R) Maximon: the exhibit also looks at the millions of people today who speak a Mayan language or who are direct descendants. Credit: Royal BC Museum.

Maya: The Exhibition at the Cincinnati Museum Center

The Cincinnati Museum Center is bringing an exhibit about Maya culture to the United States for the first time. (Editor's note: This is the same exhibition that recently came to a close at the Royal BC Museum in Vancover – now under a new name!)

Maya: The Exhibition, that opens March 14, features more than 300 original objects that detail the daily life, religion, politics and innovations of the Maya. Among the items are preserved clay and stucco sculptures, elaborate gold and jade jewelry, stone tools and large carvings with hieroglyphs. Interactive elements allow guests to get a more intimate look at certain artifacts.

"Discoveries of the last 20 years have transformed our understanding of the people and

why the great Maya cities were abandoned in the heart of Central America," noted Dave Duszynski, vice president of featured experiences at Cincinnati Museum Center. "Never before has such a spectacular set of Maya artifacts traveled to North America. We are thankful that Guatemala is sharing these amazing national treasures with Cincinnati."

"With the Maya, we can explore and see how people without any contact to other civilizations in Europe, Africa or Asia came up with similar ideas, inventions and solutions," explained Nikolai Grube, curator of the exhibit and professor of anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn.

While the exhibition focuses on the height of the Maya civilization, it also looks at the millions of people today who still speak a Mayan language or who are direct descendants.

The exhibition also includes a section on current archaeological work by the University of Cincinnati at Maya sites in Central America.

Maya: The Exhibition is produced by MuseumsPartner in collaboration with the National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (MUNAE) and La Ruta Maya Foundation in Guatemala. It is supported by the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes de Guatemala.

Source: From an article by Nikki Kingery, Projects Editor of the Cincinnati Business Courier. Posted 01.15.2020, at: https://www. bizjournals.com/cincinnati/news/2020/01/15/ cincinnati-museum-center-brings-exhibit-on-maya. html Submitted via Google Alerts.



De Anda contemplates on of the offerings within the cave. Photo: Karla Ortega/INAH.

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I started to cry. I analyzed bone remains in the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza, but nothing compares to what I felt when entering, alone, for the first time in that cave."

INAH Archaeologists Discover Cave Filled with Near Perfect Maya Ceramics

Of the remains of ceramics that can be seen in the seven offerings, at least 200 censers stand out, engraved with the representation of the god of water, Chaac.

The hypothesis of the INAH archaeologists is that the northern part of the Yucatan peninsula suffered an unusual drought towards the Late Classic (700-800 CE) and Terminal Classic (800-1000 CE) periods forced the inhabitants to make requests for rain, going to the bowels of the earth, to the underworld, where fertility deities resided. The censers and vessels retain charred remains of food, seeds and bones, among other elements, which will be used to date

the finding and determine the rituals carried out by the Maya.

De Anda said experts had crawled into the cave that villagers had led them to, in hopes of finding a connection to the cenote that researchers know lies under part of the Pyramid of Kukulcan. At 400 meters from the entrance, some chambers began to open.

He also explained that at the moment no excavations will be conducted in the cave.

Source: From an online article released by The Yucatan Times. Read more at: https://www. theyucatantimes.com/2019/03/archaeologistsdiscover-cave-under-chichen-itza-with-hundredsof-mayan-objects/.html

Submitted via Google Alerts.



K'an Joy Chitam I seems to have acceded in difficult times for the kingdom of Palenque. Despite being an adult, he did it four years after the death of his predecessor Ahkal Mo 'Nahb I. His right to sit on the throne was acquired when he was five years old, at a ceremony held in Tok Tahn, the former "headquarters" in which some functions of the court were still held. In his long life and reign, his management must have been successful, having won the recognition of his successors. He is mentioned in inscriptions from the reigns of Pacal the Great, K'inich Kan Bahlam II, and of K'inich Ahkal Mo Nahb III. Above, he appears on the sarcophagus of K'inich Janaab' Pakal. Offerings to the gods that he made in the years 534, 554, and 564, are recorded in the east panel of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for February by Zach Lindsey

6 February 565 CE: On 9.6.11.0.16 7 Kib 4 K'ayab G7, Palenque ruler K'an Joy Chitam I died and entered the white road to Xibalba. Not much is known about his rule because of how early it came in Palenque history, but he was important enough to be remembered. He received mentions on the lid of K'inich Janaab' Pakal's sarcophagus, the Temple of the Sun tablet, and the inscription at Temple XIX.

8 February 752 CE: On 9.16.0.13.18 6 Kaban 5 Pop G7, the unfortunate

Yax P'ul Took' of Santa Elena found



Yaxchilan Lintel 8 showing Yaxuun B'ahlam (on the right) with captives. Peter Mathews, 1977.

himself kneeling and biting his thumb before the lord of Yaxchilan, Yaxuun B'ahlam IV. While for Yax P'ul Took' himself, this event was deadly important, for the broader Maya political structure, the capture may have been posturing. Yaxuun B'ahlam was once regarded by Maya archaeologists as a great conqueror for his use of the title Aj Winik B'aak, or "He of 20 Captives." But many of the sites he conquered, including Santa Elena, were tiny, and his true military prowess is fogged in propaganda.

20 February 724 CE: On 9.14.12.7.2 9 lk

10 Pop G7... something happened. The hardest part for today's epigraphers is not reading pristine glyphs, but making guessing games when an inscription is worn away. In this case, K'inich Yo'nal Ahk II

worn away. In this case, K'inich Yo'nal Ahk II name was Kooj – "Puma". celebrated his birth day at a place called the White Yek? House, according to Mark Pitts. But the form of that celebration is a mystery to us. It may have included dancing. (Who doesn't love to dance on their birthday?) But unless we find another inscription covering a similar time frame, we may never

know for sure. Still, let's hope he got to dance!

Maya Bones Bring the Ancient Maya to Life

Trained in both medicine and archaeology, Vera Tiesler has revealed how the human body was deeply woven into the religion, tradition and politics of the Maya world.

The Autonomous University of the Yucatan, in the Mexican city of Merida, holds one of the most comprehensive libraries on Earth. But few books line the shelves on the bottom floor of the anthropological sciences building. Instead, boxes are stacked from floor to ceiling in almost every corner of the laboratory, with labels naming Calakmul, Pomuch or Xcambo and other ancient Maya ruins. Inside every box is a set of human bones.

Bodies from some 2,000 burials are stored here, with another 10,000 records of others in a database. The remains of some of the most famous

Maya kings have passed through this room at the

university. Ancient paupers, warriors, priests, scribes, lords, ladies and artisans – the lab has seen them all.

Trained as a physician and an archaeologist, Tiesler reads the region's history in its bones. By bringing a medical eye to ancient Maya civilization, she has changed how scientists perceive that society, putting some of its seemingly more unusual traditions into context and shedding light on the lives of key individuals.

Through studies of thousands of bodies, she has helped to illuminate how the Maya's knowledge of human physiology was an integral part of their society – from birth to death. How they shaped the heads of their babies reveals insights into their family traditions and spirituality. And her investigations into many of the deaths suggests that ritualized sacrifice was perfected to a high art – an idea that challenges



K'inich Yo'nal Ahk II's pre-regnal

Vera Tiesler examines the remains of a person buried in Mexico during early colonial times. Credit: Pim Schalkwijk.

popular views of the Maya world as a society of peaceful stargazers. Throughout, she has continued on page 8



A vase carved to resemble a woven basket. The motif is the Maize God being reborn from a split in the earth. K634 by Justin Kerr. Explore all of Kerr's fantastic archive of images at: research.mayavase.com

Using data from new excavations and a survey of the literature, this book project asks, what agentive role did nature and indigenous perceptions of nature play in the cogeneration of cultural practices and values among the Classic Maya? Soft technologies such as containers and goods made of cloth, paper, and basketry were a fundamental part of ancient economies but they have been avoided as topics of investigation in favor of durable goods more often made by male specialists outside of domestic settings. Using a variety of evidence for plant fiber technologies, this study frames the analysis of such objects and spaces within a new dialogic human-plant studies model that acknowledges plants were agents in, rather than merely objects for, the production of knowledge and social meaning.



Traci Ardren is professor of anthropology at the University of Miami and holds of PhD from Yale University. Her research focuses on issues of identity and other forms of symbolic representation in the archaeological record, especially the ways in which differences are explained through gender. Current preoccupations include the role of cuisine in identity formation in the later periods of Classic Maya culture and prehistoric southern Florida, as well as the ways we can read memories in ancient living spaces. Traci directs the Matecumbe Chiefdom Project looking at the political organization and environmental adaptation of the Prehispanic occupants of the Florida Keys. She is also co-director of the Proyecto de Interacción Política del Centro de Yucatán, at the Classic Maya site of Yaxuna, in Yucatan, Mexico where she investigates the ways ancient road systems allowed for the flow of information and ideas as well as how culinary tourism and modern foodways intersect.

The IMS is a Community Partner with Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus, Miami, FL This program will take place February 19 at 7:30 pm in K-413 (in Building K-4, Room 13) IMS Hotline: 305-279-8110

Go to the college website at: www.mdc.edu for directions and campus map.

2020 New Membership and Renewal Application

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|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
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Maya Bones Bring the Ancient Maya to Life continued from page 6

uncovered a rich culture in which the human body was deeply woven into religion, tradition and politics.

By looking at drawings and carvings from the time and comparing them to skull shapes, she deduced that head styles follow matrilineal traditions: children tend to have the mother's style. She, along with others, found a possible reason, based on Maya traditions in colonial times. The ancient Maya saw babies as not-yet human, and at risk of losing their essence through a few points in their skulls. By shaping the head, the Maya kept the essence in place.

By the time Tiesler got her PhD in 1999, she was already fleshing out much of ancient Maya culture and soon began excavating royal tombs. Tiesler has examined many of its important kings or queens excavated over the past century. She was part of the team



L) An elongated skull reveals clues about the tradition of shaping infants' heads to alter their growth. R) Tiesler arranges a skeleton from early colonial times in Mexico. Credit: Pim Schalkwijk.

that examined K'inich Janaab' Pakal of Palenque and his companion, the Red Queen, between 1999 and 2006. She found that their relatively luxurious lifestyle gave them premature osteoporosis, visible in their thinning bones. Their teeth were barely worn from eating soft, decadent food their whole lives.

Tiesler's favorite kings are the ones for which she oversaw the excavation process from start to finish. Take Fiery Claw (or Yukom Yich'ak K'ahk') of the Classic Snake dynasty. By studying his bones, she found that he was portly, bordering on obese, and in his 50s when he died. She also discovered that he had a painful disease that fused several vertebrae together, suggesting the ballgame he was depicted on a stela playing in would have been dangerous to play and was most probably propaganda.

Source: From an article by Nature writer Erik Vance; viewable online at: https://www. nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00517-y

Upcoming Events at the IMS:

Wednesday, February 19 in K-413 7:30 pm: IMS Presentation Go in Pairs Intertwined: Soft Technologies and the Role of Plants in Classic Maya Identity –

with **Traci Ardren**, PhD. Traci is an anthropological archaeologist interested in New World prehistoric cultures. Congratulations to Traci on being awarded a prestigious Dumbarton Oaks fellowship for the spring of 2019. In her program, she'll discuss her latest research gleaned at Dumbarton Oaks.

Thursday, March 19 in K-413 7:30 pm: IMS Public Presentation Making a Home at Yaxnohcah, Campeche, Mexico – with Debra S. Walker, PhD University of Florida; Book Author. Debra is a Registered Professional Archaeologist, specializing

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



in the ancient Maya and pottery analysis. She has undertaken research in Belize (Cerro Maya), Guatemala (Naachtun), and Mexico (Yaxnohcah 2011-present). Currently, she is a research curator at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Wednesday, April 15 in K-413 7:30 pm: IMS Public Presentation Dense Human Populations, Over-exploitation of Natural Resources, and Protracted Severe Droughts: A Recipe for Classic Maya "Collapse" – with Mark Brenner, PhD, University of Florida. Mark is a limnologist/paleolimnologist with special interests in tropical and subtropical lakes and watersheds. Mark's research addresses interactions among climate, environment, and humans.

Check out and get in on the fun on our IMS Facebook page: Get in on all the action! IMS members post interesting links and more. Join the *Explorer*-ation! Copy & paste: https:// www.facebook.com/groups/MiamilMS/

Upcoming Events:

Thru April 3, 2021: *MIHS Museum Exhibit* **Paradise Found: 6,000 Years of People on Marco Island: The Key Marco Artifacts** –



Kev Marco Cat.

The Marco Island Historical Society (MIHS) celebrates its 25th Anniversary and the realization of a 25-year quest to bring "home" on loan the world-famous Key

Marco Cat and other rare Precolumbian Native American artifacts discovered on Marco Island, Florida. In collaboration with Collier County Museums, the Smithsonian Institution, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Go to: https://themihs.info/keymarcoartifacts/

Editor's Tip: Online all the time Ancient Americas Events – Explore Mike Ruggeri's most excellent and comprehensive page. Copy & paste: https://mikeruggerisevents.tumblr.com/

Join the **Explorer**-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