

C-19 Virus Hits the Yucatan Photos by Pedro Tec

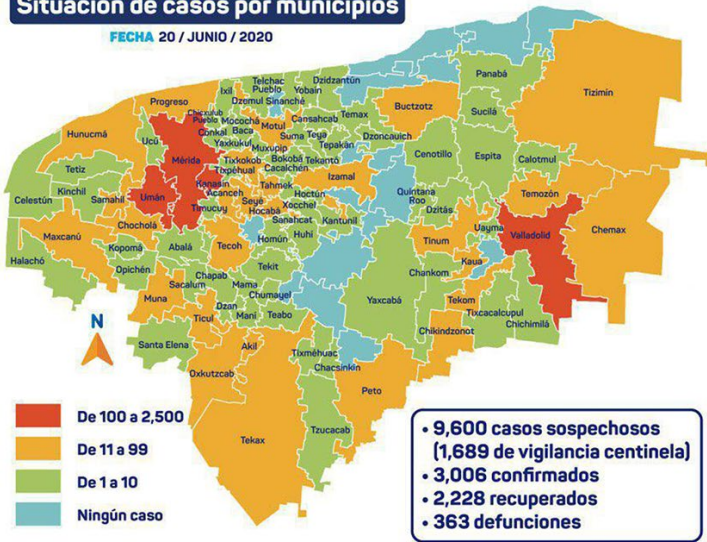
Ixil is one of the 106 municipalities in the Mexican state of Yucatan with a population of 3,728 inhabitants. The town is located roughly 25 km north of the city of Merida and just down the road from Chicxulub.



PANORAMA MUNICIPAL COVID-19

Situación de casos por municipios

FECHA 20 / JUNIO / 2020



On June 20, 2020, government officials released this map of COVID-19 cases by municipality in the Yucatan. The areas most affected are around Merida and Valladolid.

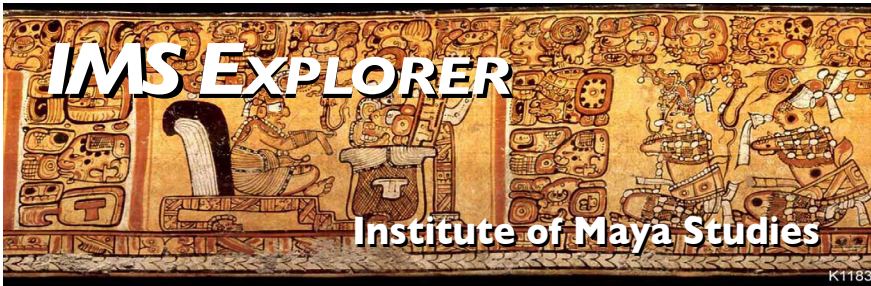
Pedro Tec lives and works in Ixil. When I viewed Pedro's Facebook page, he had posted the map at right and noted that there was one confirmed case of the virus in Ixil as of 6.20.2020.

Above, Pedro is working hard to help build drainage wells for the town and always wears a mask in public. It was 4 years ago, on 6/22/2018, that Pedro and I first made contact. Since then, we published his photo essays twice in the *IMS Explorer*.

Now, Pedro has some new images to share. Always dark and gloomy, yet with a poignant sense of style to reveal the deeper sense of being Maya in today's Yucatan.

At top left, three Maya women of Ixil; top right, Jacinto, a young "henequenero". Bottom left, villager Doña Clemencia holds a young child; bottom right, a grandfather collects firewood.





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Freedom Day • July 4, 2020 • Maya Ceremonial Era Long Count: 0.0.7.11.12 • 13 Eb' 15 Zec • G7

Largest, Oldest Maya Monument Suggests Importance of Communal Work

A University of Arizona discovery suggests that the Maya civilization developed more rapidly than archaeologists once thought and hints at less social inequality than later periods.

Aerial view of Aguada Fénix Main Plateau and the ramps connecting to causeways. Only these cow pastures and small pockets of forest were visible prior to the LiDAR study. Photo: Takeshi Inomata (UofA).

From the ground, it's impossible to tell that the plateau underfoot is something extraordinary. But from the sky, with laser eyes, and beneath the surface, with radiocarbon dating, it's clear that it is the largest and oldest Maya monument ever discovered.

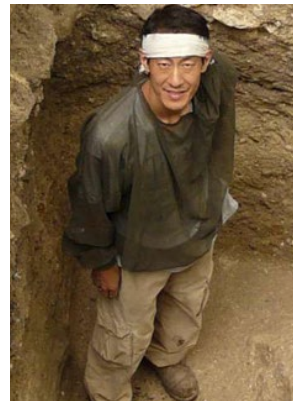
Located in Tabasco, Mexico, near the northwestern border of Guatemala, the newly discovered site of Aguada Fénix lurked beneath the surface, hidden by its size and low profile, until 2017. The monument measures nearly 4,600 feet long, ranges from 30 to 50 feet high, and includes nine wide causeways.

The monument was discovered by an international team led by Takeshi Inomata and Daniela Triadan, professors in the University of Arizona School of Anthropology in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, with support from the university's Agnese Nelms Haury program and under the authorization of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) of Mexico.

The team used LiDAR – or light detection and ranging – technology, which uses laser-emitting equipment from an airplane. Laser beams penetrate the tree canopy, and their reflections off the ground's surface reveal the three-dimensional forms of archaeological features. The team then excavated the site and radiocarbon-dated 69 samples of charcoal to determine that it was constructed sometime between 1,000 to 800 BCE.

Until now, the Maya site of Ceibal, built in 950 BCE, was the oldest confirmed ceremonial center. This oldest monumental building at Aguada Fénix is also the largest known in the entire Maya history, far exceeding pyramids and palaces of later periods.

The team's findings were published in the June 2020 issue the journal *Nature*. *cont. on page 2*



Takeshi Inomata and Daniela Triadan worked together at Ceibal, Guatemala, where they excavated a plaza dating to 950 BCE. "Maya mobile hunter-gatherers and sedentary farmers, worked together to build a ceremonial center here long before people in the Maya lowlands transitioned into a fully agricultural society. People tend to think that the faster you get settled, the faster you start building. Actually, the ceremonial structures occurred at the beginning" noted Inomata. Photos courtesy of Takeshi Inomata (UofA).

IMS Program Note:
It is summer break time at Miami-Dade College, accordingly, there will be no IMS public presentation in July.



**Jim Reed,
Editor**

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Largest, Oldest Maya Monument Suggests Importance of Communal Work

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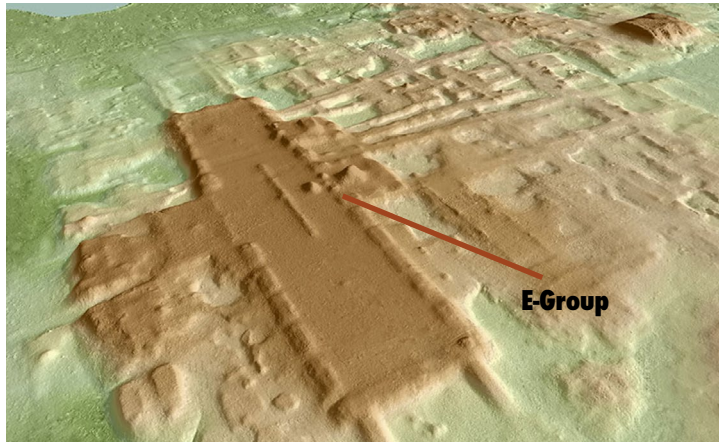
“Using low-resolution LiDAR collected by the Mexican government, we noticed this huge platform. Then, we did high-resolution LiDAR and confirmed the presence of a large structure. This area is developed – it’s not the jungle; people live here today – but, this site was not known because it is so flat and huge. It just looks like a natural landscape. But, with LiDAR, it pops up as a very well-planned shape.

“The discovery marks a time of major change in Mesoamerica and has several implications. First, archaeologists traditionally thought Maya civilization developed gradually. Until now, it was thought that small Maya villages began to appear between 1,000 and 350 BCE – what’s known as the Middle Preclassic period – along with the use of pottery and some maize cultivation.

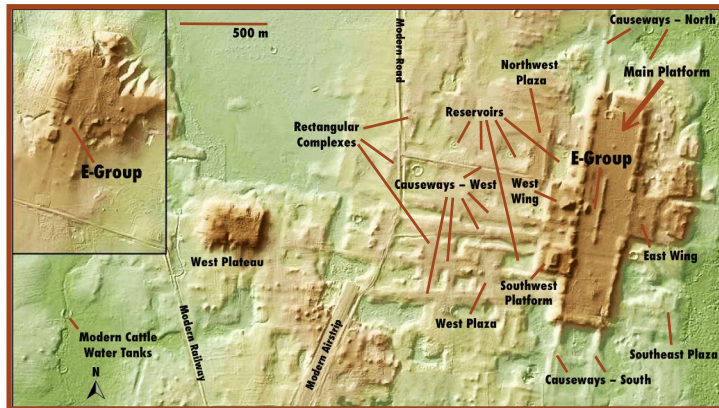
“Second, the site looks similar to the older Olmec civilization center of San Lorenzo to the west in the Mexican state of Veracruz, but the lack of stone sculptures related to rulers and elites, such as colossal heads and thrones, suggests less social inequality than San Lorenzo and highlights the importance of communal work in the earliest days of the Maya.

“There has always been debate over whether Olmec civilization led to the development of the Maya civilization or if the Maya developed independently,” Inomata said. “So, our study focuses on a key area between the two.”

The period in which Aguada Fénix was constructed marked a gap in power – after the decline of San Lorenzo and before the rise of another Olmec center, La Venta. During this time, there was an exchange of new ideas, such as construction and architectural styles, among various regions of southern Mesoamerica. The extensive plateau and the large causeways suggest the monument was built for use by many people, Inomata said.



This LiDAR image was featured on “The World News Tonight with David Muer” on June 7. The expansive platform features an E-Group at center.



This image calls out the main aspects of the “downtown” area of the site. Detail highlights the E-Group. Images contributed by Takeshi Inomata.

“During later periods, there were powerful rulers and administrative systems in which the people were ordered to do the work. But this site is much earlier, and we don’t see the evidence of the presence of powerful elites. We think that it’s more the result of communal work,” he said.

“It’s not just hierarchical social organization with the elite that makes monuments like this possible,” Inomata noted. “This kind of understanding gives us important implications about human capability, and the potential of human groups. You may not necessarily need a well-organized government to carry out these kinds of huge projects. People can work together to achieve amazing results.”

Inomata and his team will continue to work at Aguada Fénix and do a broader LiDAR analysis of the area. They want to gather information about surrounding sites to understand how they interacted with both the Olmec and the Maya. They also want to focus on the residential areas around Aguada Fénix. “We have substantial information about ceremonial construction,



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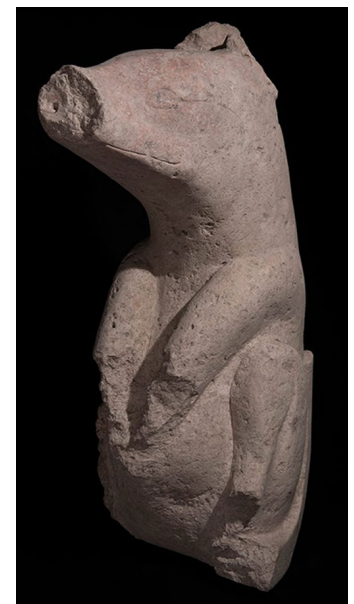
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A stone sculpture of a peccary dated to the Middle Preclassic (1000 to 700 BCE), found at the Aguada Fénix site. Credit: Takeshi Inomata, courtesy of InsideScience.org.

but we want to see how people lived during this period and what kind of changes in lifestyle were happening around this time,” Inomata said.

Source: Compiled by the editor from the original source, the University of Arizona, at: <https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/largest-oldest-maya-monument-suggests-importance-communal-work>



A) View from below of Structures E1 (R) and E2 (L). B) View from atop Structures E1 and E2. C) D) The "most intriguing" Structure I3.

Plan de Ayutla (Ak'e') Photos and Texts by George Fery

Until recently, the ancient city now called Plan de Ayutla located 2.2 miles from the Tzeltal community of the same name, in the Sierra Jalapa, in Chiapas, was erroneously referred to as Sak Tz'i (White Dog). It seems that the city's ancient name may be Ak'e'. It was contemporaneous in the upper Usamacinta river basin with Yaxchilan, Piedras Negras, Lacanha, and Bonampak, among others.

The site mass plan (D) shows three steep tall hills each one with an acropolis. Between the mounds are plazas, a large ballcourt, and other structures at ground level. Plaza Ajk'ol or Upper Plaza in Maya-Tzeltal, is the largest at 445-ft long by 265-ft wide. The site extends over 62 acres and 74 structures have been identified, along with seven sunken plazas.

Furthermore, the strategic location of Plan de Ayutla (Ak'e') must have played a leading role for the control over trade routes in the Ocosingo valley and the region around Palenque (Fernández, 1994, Hernández, 2003). Most of the structures viewed today are from the Early Classic, 300-600 CE, while the latest dates recorded are in the Late Classic, 850-950 CE.

A team from the Institute of Maya Studies visited the site in 2012, but could only go up to the North Acropolis. At the time, the West and East acropolises were not cleared of dense tropical vegetation.

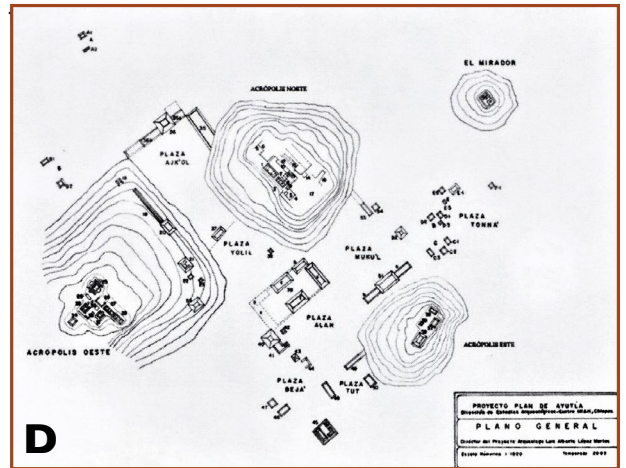
The three tall mounds triadic complex with the North Acropolis, 150 feet high, the East at 105 feet and the highest, the West at 215 feet.

The ballcourt is on Plaza Yolil, between the west and north acropolises, enclosed by six structures.

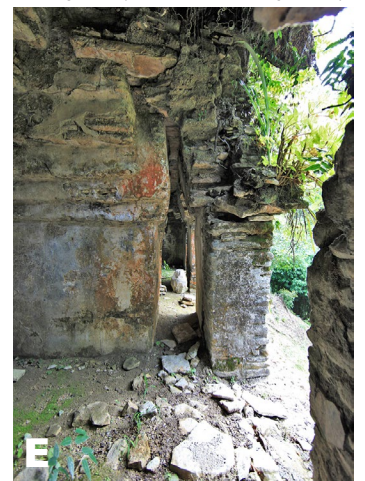
The entire ballcourt complex is 280-ft long by 131-ft wide. That makes it the largest in the Upper Usumacinta region, and underlines the influence of an important dynasty.

The North Acropolis is located on a natural hill whose top was leveled and terraced as a semi-circular 620-ft plateau. Nineteen structures are identified so far, including a palace-type residential complex with inter-connected chambers for reception, numerous bedrooms, living quarters, and storage laid out on four distinct levels, a reminder of the Acropolis at Piedras Negras. Among the most intriguing structures, however, are Structure I3 for its peculiar architecture, and a theater.

Structures 1, 2 and 3 are built on the mound's southern edge and are among the most prominent buildings. They are large



D) General site plan of Plan de Ayutla (with three Acropolises).



E) View from within the Narrow Front Gallery of Structure E2.



F) View from above of Structures E3, E11, E12 and E13. G) Structures E3, E12 and E11 (L-R).

vaulted double galleries, but the narrow front ones can only be corridors given their three-ft width, while at the rear are three vaulted rooms, the central one in each case being the largest. The façade with three entrances, flying cornices, friezes on inclined planes, and decorations with stucco masks, is indeed reminiscent of Palenque (Martos López, 2008).

continued on page 4



Plan de Ayutla (Ak'e')

Photos and Texts
by George Fery

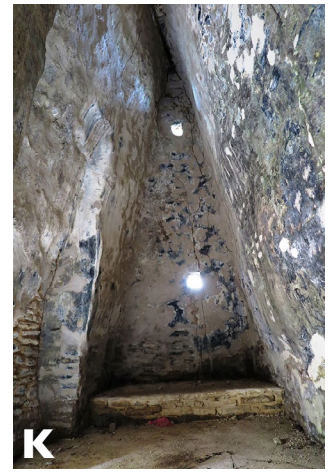
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Structure 13 (H,I,J,K) is the most notable building of the North Acropolis. Located in the central area of the complex, it is of a quadrangular floor plan 30-ft on the side and 38-ft high. The interior spaces of the building are largely defined by two parallel galleries linked by a narrow door at the eastern end. Distinguishing these rooms from others at Plan de Ayutla, is their unusually 26-ft high triangular vaults, remarkable among all known examples of Maya architecture. Still more puzzling are the walls of the vaults that were painted black, an unusual pigmentation for Classic Maya interiors. The massive friezes on its gable roof, decorated with stepped apron moldings, gives the building its singular appearance.

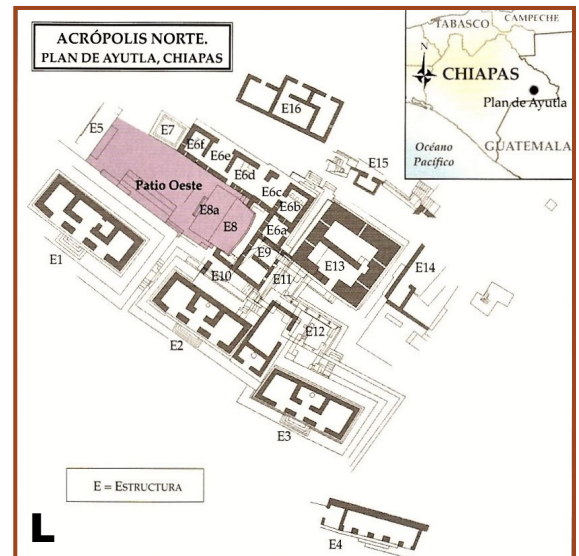
During fieldwork, it was discovered that the building had two more vaulted rooms above the lower chambers. The only possible means of accessing these upper rooms would have been an interior staircase along the medial wall of the two great vaults in the lower rooms. The presence of these galleries imparts a new quality to the building, creating something close to a tower, although there is nothing to discount the possibility that the upper vaults were an architectural solution to the challenge of constructing a taller, but less massive building to prevent collapse.

Fieldwork in 2009 revealed that the back room at the top of the structure has a complicated hole and channel system, perhaps allowing for astronomical observations. It is quite possible that the building functioned to observe the sun's zenith at the summer solstice, an important date to mark the beginning of the agricultural calendar and the coming of the rainy season. On solstices, an observer located below inside the back chamber, could see three illuminated rectangles at the top of the vault. The discovery inside this same lower rear chamber of two graffiti (a lord on a throne with a ceremonial bar, and an image of the building), seems to indicate the importance of the structure as the residence of the ruler. Additional data suggest that Structure 13 was built during the Early Classic (300-450 CE).

During the 2008 and 2011 INAH archaeological seasons, work focused on the West Patio (79-ft x 33-ft), surrounded by several structures, among which are Structure E7, that was a small shrine and a large double platform, Structure 8/Structure 8a. The two levels of



H) View from above Structures E12 and E13. I) The top of Structure 13 features a stepped-fret design. J) Looking up at the 26-ft (8-m) tall triangular vaults, and K) Side view of the vaults within Structure 13.



L) Site plan of the North Plaza at Plan de Ayutla.

architecture are associated with its neighbor (Structure E1), with low, construction-like bleachers, west of the platform or "scene". This "theater" or "show" place could accommodate 100 to 120 people.

The back of Structure 8 is slightly curved which may have helped for acoustical effects. In the Maya past, public events involved the spectators as much as the participants in a dynamic way, including in a secular ballgame, but perhaps not in a ritual one. Given the limited size of the theater, the spectators could have been from the nobler segments of the kingdom, and it was probably not open to the community at large.

In ancient cultures, as a rule, public shows of any kind were used to bolster the governing status of the elite and tutelary deities. In this case, the limited size of the show place may have had the same function as that of a ballcourt, with restricted use to the nobility.



M) West Plaza Theater Complex and Structure 5. N) Plaza Alan, Structure A.



Sadly, Religious Condemn Spiritual in Guatemala's Peten?

Maya Medicine Specialist and Traditional Healer's Life Taken in Chimay, Guatemala

"We're all speechless and words cannot express our sadness and fury," says project leader.



L) A female Spiritual Guide oversees the burning of the participant's offerings in a ritual in honor of Maya traditional healer Domingo Choc Che. R) Choc Che examines a plant that he used frequently in his work. "Grandfather Domingo was part of a team that investigated the benefits of natural medicine. He was well-respected and surrounding villagers depended upon his special talents. (Movement for the Liberation of Peoples).

Domingo Choc Che, a member of the Association of Maya Spiritual Guides, was the victim of a mob that accused him of practicing acts of witchcraft and lynched him in the village of Chimay, San Luis, Peten, Guatemala – a fact that was documented in videos circulated by the social networks and that caused public outrage.

Several organizations have spoken out against the event and verified that Choc Che was a powerful spiritual guide, and was part of the Association of Maya Spiritual Guides.

Mónica Berger, head of the Anthropology Unit of the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, indicated that "Grandfather Domingo" as they called him, was working on the recovery of ancient Maya natural medicine. He was a collaborator on a University College of London (UCL) pharmaceutical project. "We were working on an inventory

of medicinal species in order to document and protect Q'eqchi' medicinal knowledge, so that there is evidence that this is all indigenous knowledge," said the anthropologist.

The Human Rights Prosecutor, Jordán Rodas Andrade, also condemned the events in which Choc lost his life, whom he defines as an expert in issues related to natural medicine.

Choc Che, was recognized and appreciated by the scientific community. He was part of a transdisciplinary team in research and development projects that combined the efforts and databases of the University of Zurich, Switzerland, the University College of London, England, and the Universidad del Valle, of Guatemala.

The United Kingdom's ambassador to Guatemala, Nick Whittingham, wrote on Twitter: "I acknowledge the legacy of Mr. Domingo Choc as a spiritual guide and express my condolences to his family. We value the contributions that Mr. Choc made to the @UVGgt and @UCL project on Maya ancestral medicine. We are confident that the State will carry out a prompt investigation."

In response to some comments voiced and publically posted, noting that the perpetrators were "evangelicos who considered Choc Che to be a devil"; the Apostolic Vicariate of Petén, in a statement signed by Bishop Mario Fiandri, said "What is clear is that the lynching of Don Domingo Choc Che was not a problem of rejection of culture; it had no participation from any of the churches; and it was not a problem community, but rather a problem between two families in Chimay."

UPDATE: On June 9, 2020, a notice posted by Willian Cumes of *La Prensa Libre*, announced the capture of four persons; two men and two women (all related) who came from the same village of Chimay. 🗑️

Source: From an online *prensalibre.com* news release posted 6/8/2020 by César Pérez Marroquín and Dony Stewart. Originally submitted via Facebook by Sofía Paredes Maury of La Ruta Maya Foundation. This article as well as followup news releases are available by Searching "Domingo Choc Che" on the *La Prensa Libre* website at: <https://www.prensalibre.com>



Domingo Choc Che was part of the Association of Maya Spiritual Guides, as is this elder, who is blessing the offerings and about to light the fire. Photo: Free Press, via *La Prensa Libre*.

Maya Spirituality • Belize • Part I, continued • by Jim Reed

I had a young Maya friend who lived with his family down by the river. He had his own dugout canoe, called a “cayuko”. On full moons, we would cross the river and make our own trail up to the top of the tallest pyramid with machetes. The pyramid (named El Castillo, “the Castle”) is the largest structure at the Maya site of Xunantunich; the second tallest in Belize at some 40 m (130 feet) tall. I saw the beautiful crystal clear-canopy of stars above; I slept atop the castle under the glow of a full moon. This is where I first fell in love with the Maya realm, and the “Maya mystique” took hold of me.

Thomas Gann chose the Cayo District area to settle in because he had an interest in Maya archaeology, and he wished to be able to explore the (at the time) unknown wonders of the indigenous people. Gann’s successor, Sir J. Eric S. Thompson, implemented a more methodical approach, and was able to establish the region’s first ceramic chronology.

Turns out that I was following in the footsteps of one of Britain’s great explorers, as I, too, wanted to explore the unknown wonders of the Maya. My search has evolved into a life-long passion.

While in Belize, I had two encounters with an old Maya woman who was the local “curandera” – the village healer and midwife. Once, a poor single mother was living in a shack down by the river at the lower end of our property. Chayito was a friend, and I would pass by to talk with her; she liked to laugh. She had a small child and a baby, and called upon the *curandera* when the baby had a strong fever. The old woman burned



In this shaded spot along the Mopan River, we would eat, bathe, swim, tube, – and do our laundry! I also caught little minnows (anchovies) in a submerged wine bottle in which I placed some tortilla dough. They made for great protein – but somewhat strange to see all those little eyes looking up at you in your soup!



L) An authentic Maya “cayuko” canoe, hand-carved from a single tree trunk, usually from a sacred Ceiba tree, also known as the Kapok Tree. R) “El Castillo” pyramid at Xunantunich. The first modern explorations of the site were conducted by Thomas Gann in the mid-1890s. Gann moved from Britain and served as the district surgeon and district commissioner of the Cayo District, British Honduras, starting in 1892.



L) If you don’t have a cayuko, a picturesque hand-operated ferry built in the 1950s, can take you (and your vehicle) across the Mopan River. Photo by Manolo Romero / Belize.com R) Remarkably well-preserved friezes that represent Maya deities, the “tree of life”, and astronomical symbols, adorn the eastern and western sides of El Castillo. I was there during the time the archaeologists were doing their restoration of the western frieze.

copal incense, brushed the baby all over with fresh herbs, and sang songs that were petitions to the Maya gods. She then asked the mother for a chicken egg. She broke the egg and placed everything but the shell under the baby’s head. The baby slept deeply, and in the morning the fever had abated and the egg was cooked!

When we lived in Belize, our land was up on a mountain ridge between two towns, along the Mopan River. Besides the Maya family helping us to build the yoga lodge, the father and his three sons also taught us the traditional “slash and burn” method of agriculture – to grow our own corn, beans, and squash.

We would get up early, at dawn, with the awakening chorus of insects as our natural alarm clock. We’d sweat and toil for about four hours, until the heat

was intolerable (at least for us gringos!). Then we’d make a lunch, and head down to the river to relax and bathe for a couple hours.

Over a period of a week or more, I noticed a strange sensation deep inside a single spot on my upper shoulder, where a large purulent lump was also forming. I mentioned that to Chayito, and she notified the *curandera*. A few days later, the old woman appeared, and she asked me to take my shirt off and sit in a chair. She burned some copal incense and brushed herbs across my shoulders. She asked if I smoked cigarettes and I replied in the affirmative. I thought, “Why does she want to take a smoke break now!” I handed her one that I had in my top pocket. She removed a small quantity of tobacco, spit on it, and attached it onto the lump with a band-aid. She said some words in Mayan, and told me to go and sleep on it. *cont. on page 7*



On Piedras Negras Stela 3, Ix K'atun Ajaw sits cross-legged on an ornately carved royal bench; her daughter leaning on her knee.

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for July

by Zach Lindsey

July 5, 674 CE: U ki'imak ólal k'iin k'aaba' (happy birthday) Ix K'atun Ajaw! On 9.12.2.0.16 5 Kib 14 Yaxk'in G7, a lady from La Florida was born. Just 12 years later, she became queen of Piedras Negras when she married Lord K'inich Yo'nal Ahk II. One of the most famous women in Maya history, she is immortalized on Piedras Negras Stela 3 with her daughter in an unexpectedly sentimental moment.

July 12, 1562: 11.17.2.17.18 10 Etz'nab 16 K'umk'u G7 was a dark day in the Maya world; it was the day Maya interpreter Gaspar Antonio Chi pronounced judgement on his kinsmen to the Spaniards. He called them

heretics, helping to spur the auto-da-fe which probably also included Diego de Landa's infamous book burning. By the end of the summer of 1562, more than 150 Maya men, women, and children had been tortured to death by the Spanish.

July 27, 487 CE: Palenque King Butz'aj Sak Chiik ascended to the throne on 9.2.12.6.18 3 Etz'nab 11 Xul G3. This lesser-known Palenque leader nevertheless appears to have been important, according to Martin and Grube: He was the first king to refer to Lakamha' ("downtown" Palenque, including the Temple of the Inscriptions) instead of its previous center, Toktahn. 🏰

Maya Spirituality • Belize • Part I, continued • by Jim Reed

continued from page 6

I had the misfortune of enduring the experience of having a Botfly larva munching on my inner tissue. Word is that down by the river, a Botfly had attacked a mosquito, and laid some of its eggs on the legs of the mosquito. When the mosquito bit me and tasted my blood, eggs were absorbed down into the bite. But, with the help of the *cuandera*, in the morning, I was able to easily squeeze out the inch-long critter. Overnight, the nicotine had killed the larva; the wound soon healed... and I was cured!



Fun Facts:

That creature named the Mosquito: In this illustration from a Late Classic Maya vase, the mosquito wears its weapon on the front of its headdress and dribbles blood from its underside. Artwork by Karl Taube.

These experiences opened my eyes to the secret world of the Maya. To me, the work of the *curandera* was spiritual in nature. I started investigating Maya shamanism. And luckily, or was it fate (?), there was an American woman who had been trained by a local Maya power man living nearby. She had some property on the Macaw River in the same Cayo District – just 14 kilometers from our place. I made it my mission to seek her out. And over the decades, **Rosita Arvigo** and I have become good friends; I consider her to be one of my early mentors.

The quest for the treasure of the Belize rainforest was Rosita's magnificent obsession. She believed that if she could locate and study with a natural healer trained in the old ways, she could begin to unlock the knowledge that would help people the world over regain their health. Like most great adventures, that was easier said than done, and often takes half a lifetime.

continued on page 8

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Ixil Maya Wall Paintings Discovered Within a Home in Chajul, Guatemala

The recent renovation of a house in Chajul in western Guatemala has revealed an unparalleled set of wall paintings, most probably from the Colonial period (1524–1821 CE). The iconography of the murals combines Precolumbian elements with imported European components in a domestic rather than a religious setting, making them a unique example of Colonial-period art.

In an article released in the June 2020 issue of *Antiquity*, the authors present the results of iconographic, chemical and radiocarbon analyses of the Chajul house paintings. Access the original article at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity>

Dating to the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries CE, the paintings may be connected to a revival of the local religious organization (*cofradías*) in the context of waning Spanish colonial control.

Experts believe that the works may once have been accompanied by others which did not survive until the present day.

The wall paintings – which were uncovered in the colonial-era house in 2003 and have since been conserved by a Polish team – cover three



of the walls of the property's central room. Photo: By team member R. Slabonski, on behalf and courtesy of Cambridge.org/Antiquity.

In their study, archaeologist Jarosław Żrałka of Poland's Jagiellonian University and colleagues teamed up with members of the local Ixil Maya community to analyze the paintings' pigments and style. The paintings appear to depict ceremonial dances that recreate important historical events or religious rituals – with figures in the art seen dancing and playing instruments. The Ixil Maya people believe that the paintings may represent the “*Baile de la Conquista*” – the “Dance of the Conquest” – which recounts the conquest of the Maya by the Spanish and their eventual conversion to Christianity. 🏰

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Rosita's healing career began in the USA where she became a Doctor of Naprapathy; this is a science of bodywork similar to chiropractic manipulation. In the 1970s, she went to Mexico and studied with traditional healers. In 1981, she went to Belize to search for a “*h'men*” (one who knows). The *h'men* is a doctor-priest/priestess who has the ability to heal in both the physical and spiritual realms. After some time of not finding a healing mentor, she was almost ready to leave when she met Don Elijo Panti, believed to be the last survivor of the great *h'men* trained in the ancient knowledge.

During her 13-year apprenticeship with Don Elijo, Dr. Arvigo learned the ancient Maya system of healing that employs medicinal plants, massage, acupuncture, herbal and sweat baths, and prayers to effect cures on a wide range of maladies. She opened a facility on her property to share her knowledge named the IxChel Tropical Research Center. She maintains the Panti Maya Medicine Trail, which

Rosita and Don Elijo searching for medicinal plants. Panti passed onto the white road to Xibalba in 1996, at the age of 101.

I have strolled along on numerous occasions, that exhibits many of the healing and curative plants and herbs of the Belize rainforest. (See “*Panti Medicine Trail*” by Mark Cheney in the *October 2010 Explorer*.)

Appropriately, at the start of the trail, grew a giant Ceiba tree – the sacred world tree of the Maya, believed to be “*Yax Che*,” or the first tree on earth. The Maya believe that its roots reach through the center of the Universe into the nine levels of the Underworld, its trunk into the thirteen levels of the Upperworld, and its branches into Heaven. At its crown sits Hunab-K'u, the creator, contemplating his world.

Rosita stated that Don Elijo studied under Maya *curanderos* in the jungles of Guatemala and Belize when he was a *chiclero* collecting sapodilla tree resin (*chicle*, the base for chewing gum) for companies such as Wrigley. He received international recognition for his vast body of knowledge and service to humanity



with awards such as “Distinguished Contribution to Science” (The New York Botanical Gardens), and was made a Member of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II.

Rosita, ethnobotanist and spiritual healer, is the author of six books on traditional healing in Mesoamerica. On my bookshelf is a copy of *Sastun*, her biography of Don Elijo. I learned that a “*sastun*” (*sas-toon*) is a divination tool cherished by the *h'men*, and the name means “Stone of Light.” Through this stone a shaman communes with the spirit world of the Maya to divine things that are hidden.

Rosita writes, “It is folly to ignore the sacred in life or medicine.”

To be continued in the August IMS Explorer.

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