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November 16, 2020 • Maya Ceremonial Era Long Count: 0.0.8.0.9 • 7 Muluc 12 Ceh • G9

“Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me; but I am the fire.”

from: *A New Refutation of Time*, by Jorge Luis Borge (1970:269)



In this Bonampak mural section, which shows the Initial Series text in the orange band above the parading figures, the beginning of time is compared to the beat of a drum and the shake of a rattle. The motion of walking is clearly captured in the parade of musicians, whose individual movements follow on from those either side to create the fluid illusion of progression. Late Classic Bonampak Structure 1, Room 1, east wall detail. Go to: <https://mayagodsoftime.com/archaeological-sites/mexico/#bonampak>

The Duality of Time: Animation and the Bonampak Murals

by Jennifer & Alexander John

Mary Miller once wrote that “the greatness of Maya art could never be unravelled without addressing Bonampak” and that “no study of the Maya could not treat the murals”, because without them it would be incomplete (Miller 2013: xiii-xiv). Accordingly, this paper represents an initial study of the animations at Bonampak and how they lead us one step closer towards understanding the story of the murals and the role of Maya art in general.

Since the rediscovery of the Late Classic Bonampak murals by American photographer Giles Healey in 1946, scholars have felt a desire to find a common thread running through the three rooms that house them; indeed, it was the subject of Mary Miller’s 1981 Yale dissertation. The search has been for a narrative uniting the

three mural rooms – a single, overarching story with a clear beginning and end into which the complete storyline could be poured, much like the historical listings found on Maya stelae that tell of political alliances and battles, and the order in which they occurred (Miller 2013: xiv; Martin and Grube 2008).

Our new vantage point began after identifying a handful of animations in the Bonampak murals we presented in our book, *The Maya Gods of Time* (2018). Our new idea is that the Maya associated the number three
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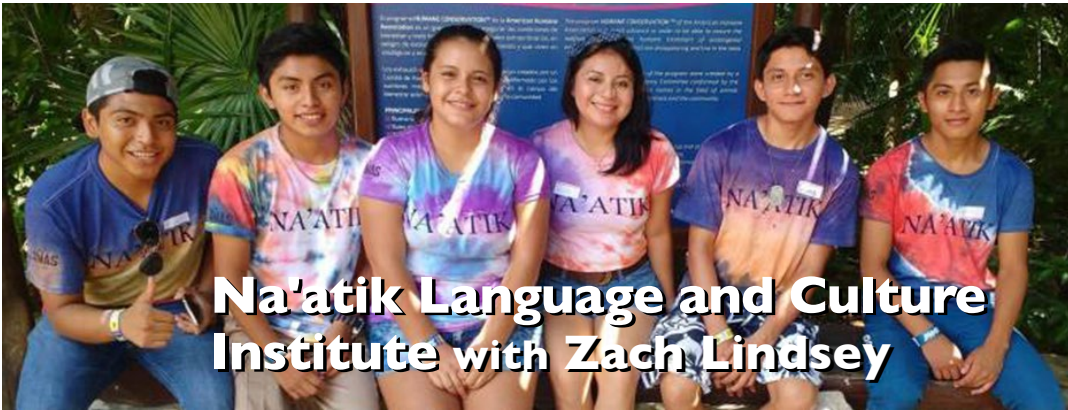
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with **Mark Brenner**

University of Florida



Jim Reed,
Editor

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Na'atik Language and Culture Institute with Zach Lindsey

Na'atik Language and Culture Institute is a nonprofit, intercultural language school for Spanish, Maya and English located in the Zona Maya of Mexico. It's our vision to create a society of compassion-driven global citizens through language and cultural immersion. Donate now at: <https://www.naatikmexico.org>

There are countless non-profit organizations affected in countless ways by the ongoing pandemic, but I wanted to mention one, since it relates to the Maya. The Na'atik Language and Culture Institute is a school in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. They offer English instruction to Carrillo children and Spanish and Maya classes for outsiders.

Na'atik recently hired a new instructor, Paulino Ek, to teach Maya online. As soon as I heard, I signed up. Ek customizes his lessons to a student's level, and he's very patient. He doesn't speak much English, so his student body is limited to folks who are comfortable speaking Spanish. (Learning Maya has, unexpectedly, improved my Spanish quite a bit!)

If you're on lockdown and stuck outside the Maya region, online classes are a great way to make up for missed research or travel opportunities.

I asked Emily Becker, the current director of Na'atik's Study Abroad Yucatan program, to share a bit more about the courses, and here's what she has to say:

Here at Na'atik, we are currently adapting to this new reality by offering not only Spanish, but also Maya classes online with our teacher, Paulino (at right). Paulino is from Señor, a small predominantly Maya-speaking town in Quintana Roo. He has been teaching with Na'atik for a few years and has been a huge help in developing our Maya language programming.

Due to the nature of the language, having the mode of instruction be 100% online isn't exactly ideal for anyone. However, Paulino has been able to use his expertise in innovative ways to encourage students to learn and apply their skills in the virtual environment.

The focus of our online Maya courses is much deeper than mastery of the language. Each topic involves creating a deeper understanding of the culture of the region and the daily life of those who speak Yucatec Maya. Our classes incorporate specific vocabulary aimed



*Our **Homestays** are our primary accommodation option and living with a local family is an integral part of our immersion experience. Our warm and friendly homestay families will feed you three meals a day, spend time with you, make you feel welcome, and give you the opportunity to practice your Spanish or Mayan.*

at the practical use of the language – from the names of local flora and fauna to the Maya-specific cuisine of the region and even the unique architecture.

In order to provide a well-rounded body of knowledge on the Maya language, our courses include opportunities to practice one's writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. One of our current students, E. Logan Wagner writes, "Maya language does not conform to the grammar rules of our Indo-European language families. Truly, it is another world. The language professors at Na'atik on the other hand, are able to explain in it very simple terms, at the pace necessary for each individual student not only how to communicate in modern Maya, but indirectly how to decipher Maya Hieroglyphic writing. A way to connect to ancient Maya past."

Whether you're an absolute beginner or have a bit of Maya language learning under your belt, our classes will certainly provide an incredible opportunity to connect with our local community here in the Zona Maya through the mother-tongue of the region. Our classes are taught through Spanish, so an intermediate level of Spanish is required for students.

Contact say@naatikmexico.org for more information on how you can get started with Na'atik's online language courses.



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Paulino, our Maya instructor. Paulino has a Bachelors in Language and Culture from the Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo and is studying his Masters in Education at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Campus Tijuana.





Animation of a lord dressing in three steps. Bonampak East Room 1, north wall mural details. Animation extracted and adapted from Miller and Brittenham 2013: 78, fig. 133 (HFs 23-25-27). Click on this hyperlink to view the animation: https://mayagodsoftime.com/wp-content/uploads/A8_Bonampak-Room-1-Dressing-Lord-HF23-25-27-ANIMATION-4s.mp4



Animation of standing dignitaries lifting and lowering their hands in a gesture accompanying animated speech. The hand gesture animations are arranged in relation to three spondylus shells, three 'time' stones, forming a mnemonic to the Maya hearth and creation. Bonampak West Room 3, upper north wall details. Animation extracted and adapted from Miller and Brittenham 2013: 143, fig. 282 (HFs 57-58). Click on this hyperlink to view the animation: https://mayagodsoftime.com/wp-content/uploads/A21-22_Bonampak-Room-3-north-wall-HF57-58-59-60-ANIMATION-4.mp4

The Duality of Time: Animation and the Bonampak Murals

by Jennifer & Alexander John

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with time. Furthermore, in the same way that the Maya associated the number four with space and color (Seler 1902-03), we additionally contend that the Maya also associated the number three with wind and sound.

Miller and Brittenham (2013: 20-21) draw attention to the "three-ness" of the murals in *The Spectacle of the Late Maya Court, Reflections on the Murals of Bonampak*, and also look at how it is used to frame Maya art in general. However, they do not link its conceptual use to time. Equipped with this new insight, we are given the opportunity to examine the Bonampak murals through a new lens, one that recognizes the symbolic importance of their triadic composition linked to time.



Animation of the enactment of the possible transformation of a human into a crocodilian beast to mark the moment of creation signalled by the deity impersonators' exchange of corn, which represents the seed for future rebirth. The possible transformation is suggested by features of the first human actor carried over into that of the beast, including the bulbous green collar edge repeated by the crocodile's scales, waterlilies growing from their headdresses and the humanoid limbs of crocodile. Animation extracted and adapted from Miller and Brittenham 2013: 79, fig. 137. Click on this hyperlink to view the animation: https://mayagodsoftime.com/wp-content/uploads/A6_Bonampak-Room-1-Croc-Transformation-HF47-48-ANIMATION-4s.mp4

It is not accidental that the murals encircle the interior walls of three rooms. In fact, the arrangement forms a deliberate symbolic structure alluding to the cyclicity of time, driven by the historical reoccurrence of birth, life and death, and supported by the dualistic frame the Maya saw time comprised of. It explains why scholars have encountered difficulties in imposing a linear-running narrative onto the murals. Instead, Maya recounts and stories merge the past, present and future; the past is the foundation for the present and the future is often an echo of the past.

We suggest the Bonampak mural triptych is ordered to a theme of *temporal succession*: in the east, a room is dedicated to cyclical beginnings, presided over by a god of the dawn, responsible for birth and creation in general. This is balanced by a room in the west, overseen by a god responsible for descent, demise, sacrifice and death, perceived as a type of sowing leading to cyclical rebirth. At the center, in the largest room, a god of life presides, a god of ascending growth and balance. The roles of these three deities – cyclical birth, life and death – are the broad story that unites each of the three Bonampak rooms.

Once we accept that the Maya did not perceive time as being solely linear, and that the Bonampak narrative does not consist of a single thread, but rather of three interwoven rings moving from east to west, we may see how the painted figures orbiting the walls of each room complement each other, perpetually circumscribing them while advancing to the beat of time. Read in this manner – and following the path of the sun – the composition of the three Bonampak rooms reflects the three wheels making up the Maya cyclical calendar *round*, the ritual *Tzolk'in* and solar *Haab* counts, which interlock and turn together to place a dualistic frame on time, representing a *moment* (a given day) within the *motional* count of time. As such, the three wheels of the cyclical calendar *round* –

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The Shamans of the Yucatan: Part I, by David Bolles

The Yucatecan shaman, called in the Yucatecan Mayan language *H Men* (he who makes) or *H-Men Dzac* (he who makes medicine), is still a very important person in the Yucatecan folk culture. His rituals play a very important part in the agricultural cycle, especially in the growing of corn and the raising of bees. He also is still very frequently used for the curing of illnesses, since there are certain illnesses which in the folk mind can be cured only by him and not by the doctors which practice European-type medicine.

In this article, the masculine form of the word shaman will be used, mainly because the majority of Yucatecan shamans are males, but it should be understood that *X Men* (she who makes) is equally implied. While I personally do not know an *X Men*, it is my understanding that *X Menoob* are considered to be as powerful as, and in some cases, more powerful than *H Menoob*.

There are two ways in which a person becomes an *H Men*. Either he is born to be one or he chooses by becoming an *idzat* (apprentice to an *H Men*) to learn to be one. The born *H Men*, all things considered, is thought to be the more powerful of the two.

A person becomes a born *H Men* as follows:

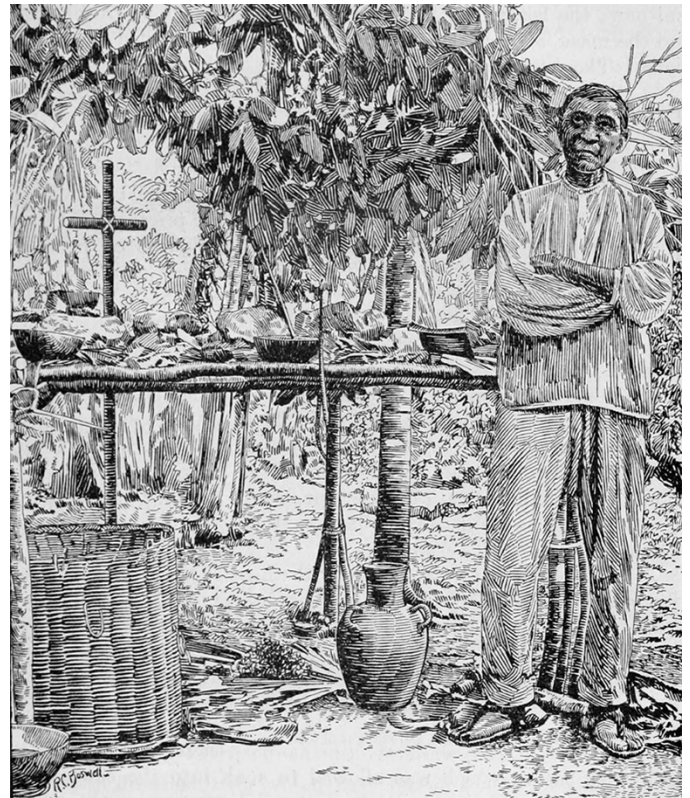
When the baby starts kicking and moving about in the womb, a mother who understands what movements are the sign of a born *H Men* will recognize whether or not this child is destined to become an *H Men*. If the child has a chance of becoming an *H Men* and if the mother wishes this to happen, then she will bury a *zaz tun* ("clear rock," a clear glass marble, also *sas tun*) or lacking that, a regular marble, in the back of the kitchen, or in the patio.

When the child takes its first steps, it will go directly to the place where the *zaz tun* is buried and dig it up. This is the sign that the child is indeed destined to become an *H Men* and will need no further education but is born with the knowledge necessary. (It should be noted that the game of marbles is very common in the Yucatan, and lost marbles are in the muck of almost every patio!)

While the foregoing is the common explanation of what



A *Cha-Chaak* rain-making ceremony is performed by an *H Men* for the villagers of La Esperanza, Tzucacab, Yucatan. The ritual began with the traditional *sakab* and *balché*. The *H Men* sacrificed some turkeys, offering them to the gods during his prayers. *El Diario de Yucatan* notes that rain did fall that day. (Source: www.yucatan.com)



An *H-Men* from Chichan Ha, Quintana Roo, showing some of the items discussed here. Illustration from *The Maya Indians of Southern Yucatan and Northern British Honduras* by Thomas W. F. Gann, Smithsonian Institution, Bulletin 64. 1918.

many of the general attributes of being an *H Men*. Furthermore, the rituals which are used in agricultural ceremonies and the herbs and substances used in common home remedies are of common knowledge by those interested in such things.

Thus, the born *H Men* will be surrounded by those factors which are basic to the *H Men*'s profession as he grows up. It seems safe to say that for those "born" *H Menoob* who succeed, that it is a case of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The person who chooses to become an *H Men* generally does so as follows:

The road for a person who chooses to become an *H Men* by becoming an *idzat* (*H Men* apprentice and helper) is much more difficult. First of all, since he is not born with the knowledge, he must learn it, and that can and most often does take years as an *idzat* to a master *H Men*. Besides this, there are sacrifices which are required to show the sincerity of one's desire to become an *H Men*.

For a married person with children for example, the life of someone in your family should be offered, according to some *H Menoob*. Others say that one does not really have to offer up one's own kin; a live turkey buried in the backyard would suffice. I have not been able to determine if the *H Men* who takes the life of one of his kin, preferably of his first born son, is any more powerful than the *H Men* which buried the live turkey.

Generally, the *idzat* learns from his master both through example by taking part in helping with the

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The Duality of Time: Animation and the Bonampak Murals

by Jennifer & Alexander John

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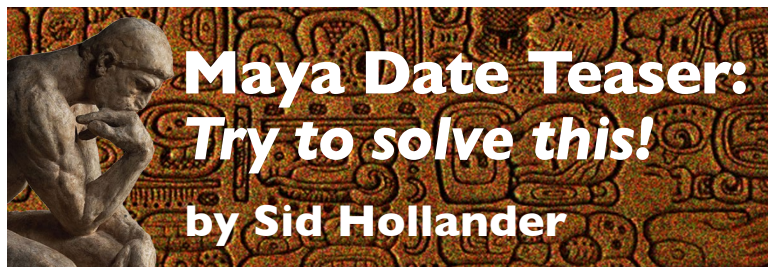
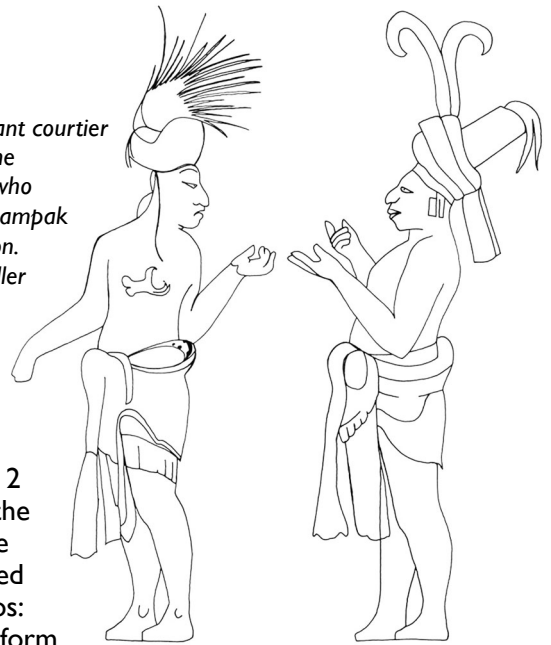
and also the three Bonampak mural rooms – refer to the way in which time is ‘built’ in three parts. Here, the two smaller rooms exhibiting fewer figures become comparable to the two smaller wheels, while the larger central room displaying more ‘cogs’ (‘figures’) resembles the larger time wheel. The three elements form an allusion to our human perception of time in ‘three’, that is, as past, present and future.

The association of the three rooms with cyclical time is cemented into Room 2 by an eroded Calendar Round Date. The Calendar Round repeats every 52 years, a date that repeats rather than ‘being fixed in absolute time’ (Miller and Brittenham 2013: 64-65).

Animation of an elegant courtier turning to speak to the courtier behind him, who lowers his hands. Bonampak

East Room 1, north wall, west-side animation. Animation extracted and adapted from Miller and Brittenham 2013: 80, fig. 142. Click on this hyperlink to view the animation: https://mayagodssoftime.com/wp-content/uploads/A7_Bonampak-Room-1-Dignitaries-HF-75-76-77-ANIMATION-4s.mp4

Its inclusion in central Room 2 supports the recurrent nature of the battle theme played out there. The Calendar Round cycle further linked the human condition to the cosmos: twenty ‘days’ relate to the human form exhibiting ten fingers and ten toes, the 260-day (20 by 13) Tzolk’in round is linked to ‘birth’, as it approximates the nine-month human gestation period, while the entire cycle (interlocking the 365 days of the solar Haab with the 260 days of the Tzolk’in counts) comes close to the 52-year life span of a human (see Rice 2007: 30-39) – leading on to cyclical rebirth.



Last night, I had the strangest dream. No, I wasn’t back in my youth as a protest singer, I was a real archaeologist in the Yucatan! I was in my backyard garden when I found a shard! Bottom line: it had the remains of a Long Count date painted on it. I could make out the following. I substituted a bold red letter for each glyph that I could not identify or it seemed would never be identified (until you stepped in!):

**8.12.C.B.A 12 Chikchan^[5]* Haab: D-E
Dios 9 (God of the Night) Year Bearer: F-G**

I thought that it would be fun/nice to read, but I couldn’t make out the positions where I have placed red letters. In the Winal position, I noticed, that in where one would expect dots, that this area was in bad shape except that the central position was pristine and clearly never had a dot. Well, I was in for some fun, and I was able to decipher it. Plus, I think the date is unique. Let’s find out if it is unique! Try to decipher this Maya date challenge and send your response to the editor and he will pass it on to me. I will answer each response personally.

***Note:** The inclusion of the notation^[5] indicates the position of the object within its cycle, i.e. “Chikchan^[5]” indicates that Chikchan is day 5 in the cycle of Tzolk’in Day names. 🗿

Editor’s note: Please try and find a solution! Send your answer(s) to me at < mayaman@bellsouth.net > and I’ll make sure that you get a personal response from Sid Hollander. Accepting a challenge like this may take your mind off the other problems of the day.

Returning to the murals, we can now compare the circular motion of the figures parading around its walls to the turning cogs of the wheels of time. However, the circular motion projected upon the mural artwork is not uniform. Occasionally, the sequential pacing of the mural halts, even turning against the overall flow of the murals. Miller and Brittenham (2013: 21) noted how only the large deity heads in the room vaults are perfectly centred in their placement on their respective walls, while the remaining imagery beneath gives in to ‘gentle asymmetry’.

Accordingly, the actors’ performance replicates the way the world turns, like the imperfect motion of the clouds, stars, moon, and sun in the sky, seemingly governed by the perfectly-aligned Gods of Time placed at the center of the divine axis of turning time.

A deliberate visual ‘halting’ technique incorporated into the murals captures the viewer’s attention, the ‘hesitating’ figures standing out as we scan the murals, akin to the brief pausing of a movie or a camera shot lingering on a particularly poignant frame. As a result, the stasis of these figures is effectively juxtaposed with the turning movement flowing through the murals, to represent an instant, a perceived moment, contrasted with the flow of time.

About the Authors

Jennifer John is an art historian, Mayanist and photographer. Her PhD, from University College London, examined Postclassic Maya ceramic iconography at Lamanai, Belize. Alexander John is a medical doctor, and also an artist and student of anthropology. They currently live with their three girls (and six wombats) on Flinders Island, a small island off the north coast of Tasmania.

To be continued in the December IMS Explorer, references cited in this issue will appear then.

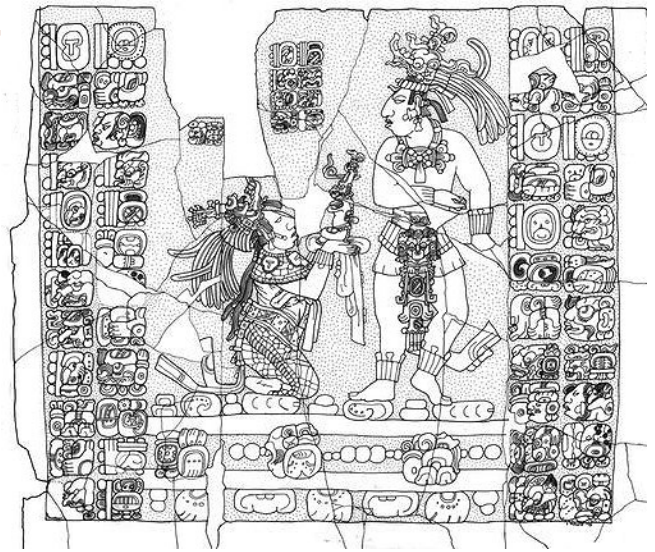
Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for November by Zach Lindsey



From **14 November 686 CE** (9.12.14.10.11 9 Chuwen 9 K'ank'in G4) to to **20 November 686 CE** (9.12.14.10.17 2 Kaban 15 K'ank'in G1), Piedras Negras witnessed the wedding of the century when Lady K'atun Ajaw (from the city of Namaan – present-day La Florida) married K'inich Yo'nal Ahk when she was just 12 yrs old. It was a wedding so grand not even the death of K'inich Yo'nal Ahk's father on November 16 or 17 could stop it – or perhaps the imminent death of the father forced the son to expedite his wedding plans. Because information about the wedding appears on Piedras Negras Stelae 1, 3, and 8, as well as a set of conch shells, we know a lot about the timeline. First, there was a betrothal event. Next, the previous king died.

Finally, the queen was adorned for marriage in a ritual that either took place on November 19 or 20. Stelae 3 and 8 disagree; but Stela 8 agrees

“Rarely if ever in Maya writing does a lady receive as much attention as Lady K'atun Ajaw of Piedras Negras. In Stela 1, we learn of her birth and the events surrounding her marriage. We also have her full image. The sides of the stela are devoted to her husband, Ruler 3.” From Mark Pitts in his *Brief History of Piedras Negras: As Told by the Ancient Maya*, downloadable at: http://www.famsi.org/research/pitts/pitts_piedras_negras_history.pdf



Temple XIV tablet, in the Cross Group at Palenque. Illustration by Linda Schele. The Linda Schele Drawing Collection is now housed by LACMA. Go to: <http://ancientamericas.org/collection/browse/29>

with decorated conch shells found in a burial, so bank on sending the anniversary gift on the 20th.

16 November 653 CE: On 9.11.1.2.0 9 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in G4, K'inich Kan B'ahlam of Palenque did something which had been done by the people of Mesoamerica for thousands of years before he was born and continues to this day – he entered a cave. This event, memorialized on Temple XIV Panel, may have been in honor of G1 and G111. While we don't know much about his specific cave-entering ritual, we know that rituals in caves often involve singing, chanting, incense-burning, and sacrifice. 🏹

The Shamans of the Yucatan: Part I, by David Bolles

continued from page 4

preparations of medicines and performing of ceremonies and through conversations with his master. (I hesitate to use the word “lessons” because these conversations seem to take place as the occasion arises.) I have yet to learn at what point an *idzat* graduates from his position and becomes acceptable to his community as an *H Men*.

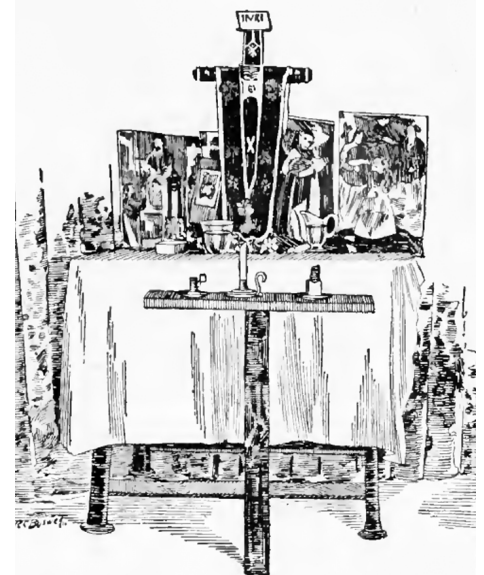
There are many types of *H Menoob* ranging from *H Dzac Ya* (he who medicates pain) to *H Pul Ya* (he who throws pain). There are *H Dzac Yaob* who never do *pul ya*, although of course, they must have the knowledge of the powers of an *H Pul Ya* in order to undo the damage inflicted by one. I have also heard that there are *H Pul Yaob* who never do *dzac ya*, but this might have been said out of spite. Generally though, the *H Menoob* are capable of doing both, and it seems to rest on the character of the individual as to how much of

which practice he will do. There are those who rarely do agricultural ceremonies

Traditional table setting. Illustration from *The Maya Indians of Southern Yucatan and Northern British Honduras* by Thomas W. F. Gann, Smithsonian Institution, *Bulletin* 64. 1918.

and those who seem to prefer to specialize in doing them. Thus, just as are there are many types of medical doctors ranging from the general practitioner to the various specialists, so too there are various types of *H Menoob*.

The *H Dzac Yaob* have various ways of divining the sickness of a patient. The use of a *zaz tun* (sacred stone) with the aid of chants is a common method. Also common is *padz* (massage) in which the *H Men* tries to feel the site of the illness. There are also *H Menoob* who use European divining methods such as the use of cards or dice. The truly powerful *H Men* though



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IMS Zoom Event • November 18

Dense Human Populations, Overexploitation of Resources, and Protracted Severe Droughts: A Recipe for Classic Maya "Collapse" with Mark Brenner

Department of Geological Sciences & Land Use and Environmental Change Institute, of the University of Florida
Cenote Miguel Colorado (Campeche)

Since the 1960s, Earth scientists working in the Maya Lowlands have generated data that provide insights into the paleoclimate and paleoecology of the region. Lake sediment cores from the hilly terrain of Peten contain evidence of profound, human-mediated landscape transformation (deforestation and soil erosion). Evidence for periodic, severe and persistent droughts, first emerged from study of a sediment core collected in Lake Chichancanab, and such climate drying has now been documented from lake cores taken elsewhere. Such qualitative paleoclimate findings suggested that drought played a role in Maya cultural transformation ("collapse"), given the temporal correlation between past dry periods and changes in the archaeological record.

Join me in this IMS Zoom event! I will present some recent data that shed light on past climate, environment and demographics in the Maya Lowlands, and discuss how multiple stressors may have affected ancient Maya culture.



Sr. Serapio Canul Tep (Punta Laguna) describes the Ch'a Ch'áak ceremony, an ancient ritual requesting rain.



Mark Brenner

Mark Brenner is a limnologist/paleolimnologist with special interests in tropical and subtropical lakes and watersheds. He received his undergraduate degree in Biology from Grinnell College and his MS and PhD degrees in Zoology at the University of Florida (UF). Mark is a Professor in UF's Department of Geological Sciences and Director of the Land Use and Environmental Change Institute (LUECI). He teaches courses in Limnology, Paleolimnology, Florida Lake Management, Tropical Field Ecology, and Humans and the Environment of the Yucatan Peninsula, the latter two in Yucatan, Mexico. Mark is Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Paleolimnology*. Mark's research addresses interactions among climate, environment, and humans. He has conducted fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, China, Cambodia, Madagascar, and Florida. In addition to his interests in ecology and paleoecology, Mark is an avid fan of alternative music and a collector of folk art.

November 18 • 8 pm • IMS Zoom Presentation • with Mark Brenner

Click on or copy and paste this hyperlink into a browser window and "bookmark" it until the event:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81700215266>

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The Shamans of the Yucatan: Part I, by David Bolles *cont. from page 6*

will know the site and type of ailment even before the patient enters to see the *H Men*. A common story relating to successful cures is that even before the patient has had the chance to speak and tell the *H Men* what ails him, the *H Men* will say that the patient has such-and-such ailment and must undergo the following treatment.

Once the illness has been determined, the *H Men* tries to alleviate it either through medicines (today, both homemade remedies and commercial remedies such as penicillin are used) or through chants, or through a combination of both.

The medication is sometimes administered by the *H Men*, but frequently directions are given to the patient on how to take or use the medicine. In some cases, the *H Men* does not even prepare the medicine, but instead tells the patient what herbs and minerals must be gathered, and how to prepare and apply the medicine at home. If chants for a curing ceremony (*santiguar*) are to be part of the treatment, then of course that must be done by the *H Men*. An *H Men* will frequently go to the home of his patients if they live near him to carry out these chants.

The *H PulYaob* are approached by patrons who want to



In this image, author David Bolles dances a traditional Yucatec Maya dance in honor of his 80th birthday in June 2019. He shares the dance floor with his wife Leonor Kim Bolles, who is to his left, on the right. That evening, they danced "the Pig's Head Dance" and "the Fiesta del Pueblo Jarana". Looks like fun!

do harm to some individual. Often the motive is to even the score or to get revenge for some harm done by that individual to the patron, be it real or imagined. That is, many Yucatecans, both Maya and the acculturated Spanish-speaking people, take offense very easily, and sometimes, in cases where no offense was intended.

To be continued in the December IMS Explorer.



Ship that Sank off Yucatan was Carrying Maya Slaves

Experts at INAH (Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History) have identified a steamship that sank off the Yucatan Peninsula in the middle of the 19th century as a vessel that transported Maya slaves to Cuba to work on sugar cane plantations.

In 2017, the shipwreck of *La Unión*, a paddle-wheel steamship owned by a Spanish company that operated out of Havana, was discovered less than four kilometers off the coast of the Gulf of Mexico port town of Sisal, Yucatan, by underwater archaeologists who were assisted by local residents.

The ship sank in September 1861 after it caught fire shortly after leaving Mexico for Cuba.

The underwater archaeologists initially named

the ship *Adalio* after the grandfather of a local fisherman who guided them to the wreck site. The experts soon identified it as a steamship that was built in the mid 1800s. The base of its wooden hull was well preserved by sand that covered it, and several other parts of the vessel were still in relatively good condition despite spending more than 150 years underwater.

After three years, INAH investigators gathered enough information to confirm that the wreck they had found was of *La Unión*. It is the first ship that transported Maya slaves to have been located and identified.

Half of the 80 crew members and 60 passengers on board perished after the ship caught fire and sank, the institute said, adding that the number of Mayan slaves who died are not included in those figures because they were considered goods rather than people.

"Each slave was sold for up to 25 pesos to intermediaries and they could resell them in Havana for up to 160 pesos for men and 120 pesos for women," said Helena Barba Meinecke, head of the Yucatan office of the INAH Underwater Archaeology Department

A year before it sank, *La Unión* had been found transporting 29 Maya people believed to be slaves, including children aged as young as 7. Just months before the tragedy, then president Benito Juárez had issued a decree against the forced removal of Maya people from their land. But the Maya slave trade continued.

Source: mexiconewsdaily.com