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silly, but have you ever thought of Mesoamerican art as cute? In this article, I argue that the "cute" aesthetic described by art scholar Sianne Ngai (2012) existed in Mesoamerica, and I provide examples of cute artwork among the ceramic figurines of Classic and Postclassic Veracruz.

What is cute?

If the sublime is the overwhelming sense of awe that runs through a viewer of Goya's Saturn Devouring His Son, the cute is the overwhelming sense of "aww" at the sight of a Hello Kitty backpack.

The "Aww" Factor in

Veracruz by Zac Lindsey

It's easy to forget that some art is meant to be

Like all aesthetic categories, cute art creates a relationship between the consumer of art and the art itself. But the nature of that relationship varies



A Remojadas dancer; note the rounded face and belly; K1952. From Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Portfolio" at:



Jim Reed, Editor

Though she isn't smiling, this figurine's round face marks her as Veracruzana; K1865. From Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Portfolio" available at: depending on the Woman Basket Maker artist and the viewer.

At its most cynical, cute is a capitalist power dynamic exercised upon our things (Ngai 2012). Hello Kitty lets us be the boss of our backpacks.

But Joshua Dale (2016:7), another cute scholar, is more positive: "It is in our nature to nurture." Evolution makes us see children, and things with child-like features, as worth nurturing. But more than nurture, we must engage with them to turn them into social beings.

"Cuteness is an appeal to others: an invitation to engage in social behaviors including companionship, cooperative action, play, and communication through emotional reactivity." (Dale 2016:8).

All aesthetic categories are subjective. But the purpose of categorization is to create a productive model, not to divide objects and concepts with inflexible partitions (Bortolini 2017).

In aesthetics, the question is not whether you personally find an object cute, but whether "cute" continued on page 3



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Sid Hollander. Photo by Evan J. Albright, Laguna Conil, October 17, 2008. Maya scribe: K4010, mayavase.com

Pioneer in Maya Studies: Sid Hollander In Memoriam by Anne Stewart

I first met Sid and his wife Gene shortly after I joined IMS in 1972. They had just returned from a trip to Mesoamerica when they arrived at a border crossing after it closed. They spent the night sleeping on the ground right there waiting for it to reopen. This was obviously someone who loved Mesoamerican culture. Several members that were interested in glyphs began meeting on Saturdays. Most of us were interested in locating evidence of newly discovered glyphs such as the birth glyph, but all Sid was interested in were dates, numbers, or anything you could count or calculate. He enjoyed telling us about his adventures and how his step-daughter had won a Father's Day contest with an essay about the Best Father wasn't really her father. Then, there was the day he greeted me not with the usual "Hello", but with "Which do you think the Maya had first, the Haab or the Tzolk'in?"

After his divorce, he met Cherry Hammon, someone equally involved in



Friend Evan J. Albright converses with Sid in the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal. Photo by Sarah Chardo, March 26, 2006.

Maya studies. Her interest was not in glyphs or calendars, but in Maya foods, cooking, and ceremonies. They spent time in Maya villages always reporting back to IMS members. They eventually exchanged nuptial vows in a Maya ceremony at Dzbilchaltun. They exchanged typical gifts for a Maya bride and groom. He gave her a small stool, but I don't recall what he received. The whole ceremony was recorded and published as a multi-page article in *Americas* magazine, the official publication of the Organization of American States.

Once Sid retired, he moved to Merida. He soon began the computer mapping of Chichen Itza to track and document where artifacts were found. A year after he met Feli, they married, and he became part of a Mexican family gaining a stepdaughter and a grandson. They began setting up the beautiful home that so many of us know. Sid had a both an artistic eye and a love of Mexican art as found in Haciendas such as his dining room table that has a wrought iron base with a piece of plate glass; the decorative edge that was cut on-site by a craftsman with a hammer and chisel. With a grandson now came the Christmas list of toys that were either not available in Mexico or were cheaper for us to bring from the states.

Sid did love to eat. I think he knew every good restaurant in the Yucatan, and we tried them all, from the luxury of a Hacienda to a food cart on the street. Sid was a very generous person by giving me copies of both the "Maya Clock" and "The Long Count Maya Abacus" so the I could share them with the members of IMS in classes I was teaching. They all left class with a copy of their birthday in the Maya calendar as if they had just had a visit with Sid. When he was in Miami last month and called me and gave me the statistics for his recovery, I knew he was calling to say goodbye. I will always feel it was a rare treat to have known such a brilliant, but generous man.

– Anne Stuart

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Initial Series Maya dates and calendric mathematics for Sid's birthday. Submitted by his good friend Evan J. Albright. The stela was generated by an online version of Sid's Maya Calendar program found at www.barsanddots.com

The "Aww" Factor in Veracruz

by Zac Lindsey continued from page I

is a productive description of an artist's goals. Here, I provide examples of Mesoamerican art that can be usefully categorized as cute. But first, a brief history of cute.

The birth of cute

In Western art, cute is a new aesthetic, and many academics dismiss it as lacking gravitas. But, cute has influenced Asian, especially Japanese, art for centuries. Today, in Japan, the cute mascot industry is worth \$16 billion (Francis 2019).

Yet contributions to "cute studies" were sporadic until Sianne Ngai's 2012 book and a 2016 cute-themed edition of the East Asian Journal of Popular Culture (Dale 2016).

The newness of the field means that the aesthetic category has been underexplored in non-Asian cultures. The only discussions of the aesthetic of cute in the art of Mexico or Central America I could find focus on the commodification of Frida Kahlo (for example, Panki and Blake 2012). Providing examples of cute objects from Mesoamerica will hopefully open the doors to more rigorous studies of this aesthetic in ancient history.

The cute of Veracruz

Ceramic figurines from Classic and Postclassic Veracruz are known for a specific, unique feature: a smile (Beverido Duhalt 2006, Paz and Medellin 1971). The exaggerated smile first appears among the Classic era Remojadas culture of Veracruz, from about 100 to 800 CE. But even Postclassic figurines such as those from Nopiloa often smile.

Still, the most characteristic element of the figurines may be roundness rather than the smile. The whole body of these figures tends to be rounded, and individual features are also rounded, so that round faces have round cheeks. Though warriors among the Nopiloa figurines do not smile, they are stylistically recognizable by their roundness.

This may have been utilitarian, as it is easier to fire smoother objects (Conlee personal communication). But many



A young woman carries a basket, possibly to the market. Her face is round and her head is proportionally larger than life; K317. From Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Portfolio" available at: <u>Woman Carries a Basket</u>

other ceramic depictions of people and gods in Mesoamerica are not rounded. For example, KI503 from Jaina includes sharp edges, square features, and difficult-to-fire gaps. The naturalistic faces of Postclassic Veracruz such as KI14 show that local sculptors were not restricted to rounded forms. Rather than being utilitarian, roundness might equal cute.



A warrior with a frightening mask is revealed to be rather rounded, and thus "cute," when you remove the mask. K3111. From Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Portfolio" available at: <u>Veracruz Warrior</u>

Thomas Alley (1981) found that people associate round faces with youth, and that longer, thinner faces were less cute, and Walt Disney animator Preston Blair (1994) taught amateur animators to add facial features to simple circles for more than half a century.

Roundness is quantifiable. I recently measured the first 16 search results for "Veracruz figurines" and "Jaina figurines" in Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Gallery". I excluded non-ceramic figurines, those from Olmec Veracruz, and those whose faces couldn't be measured because of photo angle. By dividing the width from cheek to cheek by the height from forehead to chin of the figurine, I generated a ratio suggesting whether a face is circular or ovular.

The ratio of width to height of an average real human face is about 3:4, or, as a decimal, 0.75. The average Jaina face was thinner than that, at 0.70, probably because of Maya cranial elongation. The average Veracruz face was 0.96, and 5 pieces, all Classic era Remojadas figurines, had faces which were slightly wider than their length. Among the collection, the mean value of head shape was significantly higher than the Jaina mean; t(30) = 5.2039(p<0.001)(which, in this case, equals "rounder").

Richly detailed and with removable headdresses, the Veracruz figurines have an undeniable quality of artistic production that show a high level of skill and knowledge. Yet unlike the more severe Jaina-style figurines, the Veracruz figurines convey happiness, and this is not by accident.

What cute says

Much of Mesoamerican art is sublime. On Yaxchilan's Lintel 24, Ix K'abal Xook draws a rope through her tongue while her husband watches in mute approval; this fits the Merriam-Webster definition of "lofty,



The "Aww" Factor in Veracruz

by Zac Lindsey continued from page 3

grand, or exalted in thought, expression, or manner." Many of the Jaina figurines, such as K2826 with his twisting, pained face, are also sublime.

The Veracruz figurines, too, have been described as sublime. For example, Paz (1971) describes the Veracruz smile as follows: "A smile shakes up the universe, stands outside of it, reveals its entrails. The terrifying smile is a manifestation of the divine. Like sacrifice, a smile negates work. And not only because it's an interruption of work but because it calls into question the tranquility of working."

Ngai might disagree with Paz. Rather, something can be worthy of serious academic study without, itself, being meant to be serious. Rituals in Mesoamerica were often intense and scary. By showing happy people in ritual dance, the sculptors of Veracruz figurines were setting aside the sublime, cosmic horror of the ritual experience to say that Mesoamerica could be a warm, loving place. In the words of Dale (2016:8), the figurines are "an appeal to others: an invitation to engage in social behaviors." And they're so darned cute!

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An Artistic Eye for the Maya with artist Steve Radzi

OXKINTOK: "Satunsat" (*tzat tun tzat*) or Labyrinth. (200–900 CE)

The Satunsat structure appears to be an unremarkable terraced building platform. However, on the inside is a series of interconnected vaulted passageways and horizontal ducts that span three levels. The site is easily accessible by road off Highway 180 south of Merida near the town of Maxcanu. The site core consists of four main complexes. There are numerous pyramids, palaces, temples, courtyards, and at least two entry arches. There are some very unusual sculpted statues standing in front of a columned palace on the east side of the site. Oxkintok is well worth a visit.

Steve Radzi has been illustrating Maya sites for many years. In 1995, his original black & white illustrations were exhibited at the IMS Conference at the Science Museum in Miami. In recent times, Steve has colored them, bringing them to life. These illustrations have not been published before. We shall feature his work in issues through December. Enjoy. You may visit Steve's site for more of his work. <u>www.mayavision.com</u>



Cute was a choice, not an obligation. This Veracruz face shows that circular forms were not the only ones in a ceramicist's repertoire; K3 I 14. From Justin Kerr's "Precolumbian Portfolio" available at: <u>Remojadas Portrait</u>

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Yucatan's Loss; Heaven's Gain: Sid Hollander

In Memoriam by Evan "Josh" Albright

Sid Hollander and I began our friendship 17 years ago when I was researching what would become my book The Man Who Owned a Wonder of the World, a history of the exploration, excavation, and exploitation of Chichén Itzá. We shared an interest in Maya archaeology as well as the love of a good story. When Sid found out I appreciated a good math challenge, I joined the circle of friends with whom he regularly shared his research and study of the Maya calendars.

Sid was proud of having served as president of the Institute of Maya Studies. Whenever the Institute would publish anything that included even a whiff of information about Chichen Itza, Sid would forward it to me, usually demanding my comment.

Early in my research, Sid introduced me to the major players in Chichen Itza archaeology at the time. As my own network of knowledge experts expanded, I never hesitated to return the favor and introduce Sid to them. Sid was gregarious, completely comfortable talking with everyone, be they archaeologists, politicians, tradespeople or campesinos. In his later years, Sid's limited mobility meant when we traveled, I frequently had to deposit him on a chair while I went to do some research task. I almost always returned to peels of laughter, which was just Sid having an uproarious conversation with a stranger.

For years, Sid signed his e-mails with this ditty: The first sign of Senility is a man who forgets his theorems, The second is that he forgets to zip up, The third sign is that he forgets to zip down!

Even at the end of his life, Sid Hollander never forgot his theorems or which way to zip. - Evan "Josh" Albright





Bars & Dots Online, based on the DOS program BarsDots Pro, (c) 1989-1994, by Sid Hollander This site does not currently have an SSL certificate and does not accept nor store user information For best experience, view this site on a laptop / desktop; limited support for smartphones Click the menu icon in the upper left to begin..

"Sid Hollander was born 12.16.3.8.9 13 Muluc 7 Tzec, per the Maya Calendar, of which he was expert. His 'Bars and Dots' computer program to figure Maya dates, the first ever developed in the 1980s, is still in use today." Submitted by Sid's good friend Evan J. Albright via Twitter. Check out this website version at: https://barsanddots.com

- Sid was IMS president for one term in 1986.
- Sid was editor of the IMS Newsletter from November 1983 until the end of 1987.



 He introduced tracking of IMS membership by computer. - Submitted by Anne Stewart

An Expedition with Sidney: by Arthur Dunkelman with Sushila Oliphant and Others

In the spring of 1992, during a causal conversation with Don Fernando Barbachano at his home in Miami, he told me that it had been many years... decades... since he had visited the family hotels in Yucatan and the Maya sites. I contacted Sid Hollander, retired teacher, mathematician, and Maya enthusiast living north of Merida and working on his Bars & Dots Maya Calendar



Playful Sid being Sid during the expedition. Photo submitted by AD.

program. Playful and generous, Sidney, (being Sidney) naturally knew everyone worth knowing in the world of Maya archaeology. We hatched a plan to "kidnap" Don Fernando for a circumnavigation of the peninsula, to visit the family properties and archaeological sites of his youth. With the collaboration of his wife, Doña Carmen, we managed to convince him that it would be fun, sort of a "victory lap" in celebration of the success of the Barbachano vision to bring attention to the Maya World. Sidney would be our "fixer" and designated driver.

We gathered a few Institute of Maya Studies stalwarts (pictured on the next page), rented a Volkswagen Combi, and set off for Merida. The group started out with high spirits and a sense of adventure. And adventures we had...

Friends out together in Tizimin, from left to right: Evan J. Albright, Sid Hollander, Steve Fry, and Bill Drennon. March 2, 2008.

Sid Hollander An Expedition with Sidney: In Memoriam by Arthur Dunkelman with Sushila Oliphant and Others continued from previous page

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After stops at the Mayaland Hotel in Chichen Itza and Hacienda Uxmal, we headed south, onward into "uncharted" territory. Skirting Chetumal, we traveled to Kohunlich and Xpujil where we encountered a small problem... the weather was "moist," the site was muddy and the

structures slippery. Don Fernando, always impeccably dressed in white, was reluctant to explore the ruins until Stalwart Sidney rigged a series of ramps that Don Fernando could ascend without risk to his pristine attire. As the afternoon slipped away, we decided to retire to an "eco-lodge" that consisted of tepee-shaped log huts with hammocks... not to anyone's liking.

We had big plans for the following day, a trip to the Río Bec region. For this, we were fortunate to have the services of Juan Briceño, the "dean" Maya guides. After a hasty breakfast, we set off in our Combi... slow going, but we were going... until we reached the final descent to Hormiguero where the VW slid off the "road" and down a hill. There was no driving out. We needed help. Sid decided to keep the now-bickering group calm while Juan and I set out for help. It was a two, perhaps three km trudge in the mud to a village of resettled Guatemalan Maya refugees. They were not thrilled to see us nor eager to help.

Eventually, a bargain was struck. We set out in a pick-up with a sturdy rope and when we arrived at the stranded vehicle Sid took command... "everybody out" and quick as you can say "Juan Brisceno", the VW was pulled up the hill. "Everybody in" and back on what was now a treacherous, seriously muddy road. It was getting dark and raining. Sidney's steady hand and masterly driving brought the vehicle to safety.

After we returned to Xpujil, Don Fernando led a mutiny! He REFUSED to spend another night in the "eco-lodge." With a booming voice and larger than life presence, Sidney could be *quite* convincing, but despite all his reasoning (the late hour, no dinner, driving at night, etc.), all agreed to push on and risk the dangers of the road than stay in Xpujil.

It was a sullen group. Sidney made a fatherly attempt to lighten the mood by playing word games. Thankfully, we arrived in Escarcega without incident but with no hotel reservation. Ever resourceful, Sidney located a motel that took us in, gave us thread-bare towels and tiny bars of soap before clicking us, individually, through a turnstile... with a reminder... "*trae la toalla*" ("return the towel") when you leave in the morning.

I knew Sidney for more than 35 years, a friend, full of jokes, puns, fun, and challenges whose sharp mind never missed a beat and never tired of exploring the Maya calendar. Each new, updated, ever-better version of his "Bars & Dots" program had an added feature that offered more calculating opportunities. It saddens me to know that I'll never get another call from his Magic Jack phone line in Merida to ask if I'd tried the newest version or challenge me with a mathematical puzzle. I'll remember him, and always hold him in my heart.

In honor of Sid, everyone please access this online version of this Internationally-know program: Sid's <u>Bars & Dots</u>

The expedition Maya adventurers from left to right: Dr. Ruth Gubler, Sid Hollander, Mrs. Villaverde, Arthur Dunkelman, Linda Dunkelman, Fernando Barbachano, Juan Briceño, and Cirilo Villaverde. Photo credit: Sushila Oliphant.





Sid alongside one of the carved/painted pillars inside the recently excavated/consolidated Temple of the Tables, which is right next to the Temple of the Warriors, at Chichen Itza. March 24, 2006. Photos Evan J. Albright.



Sid with archaeologist and good friend Lilia (Lili) Fernández, Merida, March 14, 2011. Photo: Evan J. Albright. Note: Sid would ask us to point out: "Lili's the one in dark blue"!

A Shout Out to a Great Man; and a Good Friend, by Jim Reed

I've known Sid since the late 1990s. He's always invited me to visit with him at his home in Merida, and last year while in Miami. He always sent me versions of his programs to review and test. We didn't always agree when it came to Maya calendar correlation factors. I would tell him that I follow the count of the modern K'iche' Maya, who maintained the count over millennia and that I never feel the need to listen to any other point of view. We agreed to disagree, but I still love the man. He was the best Maya math man ever!



Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89977078210

"Quetzalcoatl and the Dresden Codex Venus Table" with Gerardo Aldana, PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara

In Calculating Brilliance, I follow up on arguments that there is a relationship between the Central Mexican deity Quetzalcoatl, the Maya's K'uk'ulkan, and the treatment of Venus in the Dresden Codex – but, as Förstemann and Seler deduced over a century ago, the references are implicit. In this presentation, I offer a new interpretation of pages 29 through 54 of the Borgia Codex and how they speak to a complex interweaving of astronomy and politics during the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods across Mesoamerica.



The Preface of the Venus Table of the Dresden Codex, first panel on left, and the first three pages of the Table. Image credit: University of California, Santa Barbara.



Gerardo Aldana is Dean of the College of Creative Studies, Interim Director and Curator of the Repository for Archaeological and Ethnographic Collections, Professor of Archaeology and the History of Science, Department of Chicana/o Studies, College of Letters & Science, at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Check out their website at: <u>www.ccs.ucsb.edu</u>

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A Brief History of Maya Time

The Mayan^I communities of present-day Mexico and Central America developed an intricate calendar with origins as early as the eighth century BCE. Though many today first encounter it through tabloid coverage of supposed predictions the calendar makes about the "end" of time, its fame in the history of science rests in part on the technological, social, and political sophistication the calendar reveals was required to reliably track historical time.

Ancient Mayan cultures are best known in contemporary popular culture by representations of the archaeological sites of Tikal, Palenque, Copan and Chich'en Itza. Alongside their "pyramid temples" these sites are often recognized for the calendric records found in numerous hieroglyphic inscriptions. And while Mayan communities still thrive and struggle in southern Mexico and Central America, and while the content of the inscriptions is now understood to comprise multiple literary genres, this is likely all overshadowed in modern popular culture by the apocryphal interpretations of the "end of the Mayan calendar" in the year 2012. When we get past these straw man interpretations, however, and consider the calendar and its complexity within its historical contexts, we encounter a rich history of science, influenced by politics, religion, and social change over time.

Mayan astronomy presents more than just an object of scientific curiosity. Its development offers a unique perspective through which to view Mesoamerican science and culture more broadly. For one, it evidences a Western Hemisphere indigenous science that was developed independently from Africa, Europe and Asia. Second, Mayan astronomical records were preserved in a robust hieroglyphic writing system used for centuries before cross-Atlantic contact was made. The record is unique in providing robust non-Western scientific records in architectural, artistic and textual forms. In these records, we therefore have indigenous voices addressing indigenous audiences. These are not the translations or interpretations of European colonists or evangelists, but Mayan scribes



An example of Classic Mayan hieroglyphic writing. Here, Caracol Altar 23 depicts high-ranking captives from nearby cities, taken by the authority of the k'uhulajaw of Caracol, K'inich Joy K'awiil. The central text starts with a Calendar Round date and commemorates a k'altuun event. Image courtesy of Gerardo Aldana.

recording Mayan thoughts, philosophies, religions and sciences for Mayan audiences. This too makes them unique.

It may be, though, that this uniqueness has left Mayan astronomy vulnerable to misinterpretation, in particular in combination with another factor. During the first centuries after cross-Atlantic contact, hieroglyphic writing was actively suppressed and replaced with writing using the Latin alphabet. Even village ritual specialists writing in their own indigenous languages for local communities began using alphabetic script, with the Books of Chilam Balam as key examples. By the late nineteenth century, literacy in the hieroglyphic writing system had been lost at least for a century, requiring modern Russian, European and American scholars to initiate a process of decipherment. Within this latter process, the number system and the components of the calendar were quickly deciphered, but the text itself remained impenetrable until the 1960s, and hasn't been considered securely deciphered until the late 1990s. This means that for nearly continued on page 9

It is traditional within Maya archaeology to use "Mayan" when referring only to the languages within the family, and "Maya" for all other references. For example, we say "Maya archaeology," "Maya region," "Maya people." John Justeson and David Tavarez – a linguist and a historian – have countered that in English, the latter practice is reserved for references to certain animals (fish, deer) and not for people or cultures. I accept their critique and follow their recommendation in this piece. See Justeson, John, and David Tavárez. "The Correlation between the Colonial Northern Zapotec and Gregorian Calendars." In *Skywatching in the Ancient World: New Perspectives in Cultural Astronomy in Honor of Anthony F. Aveni*, edited by Clive Ruggles and Gary Urton, 17-82. 2007, University Press of Colorado, Boulder, CO.



Note: Ths article is drastically condensed from Gerardo Aldana, "Maya Calendar and Mesoamerican Astronomy," Encyclopedia of the History of Science (February 2022) doi: 10.34758/qyyd-vx23, downloadable on academia.edu

continued from previous page

a century, the scholarship on Mayan astronomy was developed based on numbers and dates, without an ability to contextualize them. Its non-Western basis along with secure access only to calendric information therefore left the interpretation of Mayan astronomy by European diasporic cultures in a precarious state.

In the historiography of Mayan astronomy, there have been two noteworthy peaks of activity that have strongly shaped the literature we have available today. At the end of the nineteenth century, the German librarian, Ernst Forstemann, cracked the Long Count calendric system and used it to find Venus periods in the Dresden Codex. This generated a spate of activity seeking similar patterns within the vast collection of dates actively being recovered from monumental hieroglyphic inscriptions – on stelae, carved into wooden lintels, and painted on walls. Nearly all of this scholarship in the pre-decipherment early twentieth century built interpretations based on the identification of numerical patterns and their correlation to astronomical periodicities.

While the number of deciphered texts has increased overwhelmingly since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the number of records understood to be explicit astronomical references has decreased substantially. Now that we can read inscriptions and we have a much richer archaeological record for architectural and material culture context, we encounter a subtler role of astronomy within ancient Mayan cultures. What we find is that - as in other ancient civilizations - there were substantive political applications and motivations to astronomy. In very broad outlines, this essay follows three generalized phases of astronomical application as put to political purpose: i) alliance; ii) *ajawlel*; and iii) professionalism. These three phases correspond roughly to what have been referred to as the Formative, the Classic, and the Postclassic periods.

Formative Period

The Formative period in Mesoamerica runs roughly from 2000 BCE to 200 CE. It begins with mostly nomadic or semi-nomadic populations and some sedentary groups living sustainably throughout the region, and the period ends with large cities dotting what are now Mexico and Central America. The early settlements created a tapestry of small-population cultural forms across the landscape, in some cases within language groups and others across languages. Within such cultural tapestries, some geographic resources would be shared by communities occupying them at different times; other



The ball court at Q'umarkaj, a late Postclassic city of the K'iche' Mayans. Image courtesy of Gerardo Aldana.

resources would be guarded by specific clan groups; and some would fall into open contestation periodically or persistently. Throughout the period, alliances and political accommodations would have been necessary between nomadic clans and sedentary ones. What shifts during the early Formative period is that some communities found interest in and developed the means to alter the landscape substantively. Circa 1800 BCE, sedentary communities built the first permanent, shared architectural complexes in the riverine lowlands of the Veracruz Gulf Coast and the agriculturally fertile valleys of the Oaxacan highlands. The emphasis was not on huge pyramids at this point; near the coast, most of the labor was dedicated to moving earth in order to create level, interconnected plazas, which itself was no small feat in the tropical lowlands of Veracruz and Tabasco.

Also during the early Formative period, a trade archipelago developed. Some clan or set of clans began mining jadeite in the highlands near what eventually became the city of Kaminaljuyu (and now Guatemala City), for transport to those growing permanent settlements of the lowland Gulf Coast. Since all stone resources are rare to non-existent in the Veracruz lowlands, both serpentine and jadeite were imported from some distance. At around the same time, some community botanical specialists found that the combination of rubber tree sap with an extract of a morning glory vine could create a material with new properties. In particular, this combination generated a substance that could be stretched

and returned to its original shape. continued on page 10



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Eventually, this new material was made into rubber balls, which were incorporated into a game that became pervasive throughout Mesoamerica by the late Formative period, which is referred to simply as the Mesoamerican Ball Game.

What we have, then, to contextualize the origins of astronomy in Mesoamerica is that by the middle Formative period, there was a need for long-distance alliances between communities at relatively stable locations, facilitating the movement of specialized trade goods over thousands of miles. Locally, the management of labor forces was necessary for architectural efforts serving public activities. Shared cultural activities emerged across regions.

A key mechanism for stabilizing the stations along the trade archipelago was a new and greater reliance on agriculture, which could have replaced the more nomadic lifestyle of seasonal migration to follow food productivity. While maize had been cultivated in various forms for centuries before the onset of the Formative period, it is only during the Formative period that it takes on the role of a staple within a well-diversified diet. By the Middle Formative, a dependence on maize-beans-squash agriculture, alliances facilitated by periodic play of the ball game and valuation of exotic trade goods all came together in this network across the languages and regions of Mesoamerica. It is within this context that the oldest and most enduring forms of astronomy as well as calendric technology took shape.

The 260 Day Count

Known in K'iche' as the chol *qiij*, in Nahuatl as the *tonalpohualli* and in pseudo-Yucatec (coined by early twentieth-century Mayanists) as the *tzolk'in*, the 260 Day Count shows up during the middle Formative period as the earliest calendric device in the archaeological record. An Olmec stamp from ca. 650 BCE, including a 260 Day Count date, was probably used to decorate ceramic vessels. A 260 Day Count date on San Jose Mogote Monument 3 appears to serve as the name of an individual, dating as early as 300 BCE. Although the count has changed in graphic representation and in individual components according to language and region, in structure it has not changed since the first millennium BCE to its present use among highland Mayan communities.

The origins of the 260 Day Count are ancient, but still contested. Some scholars have proposed astronomical origins noting that along the latitude of 14.8 deg N of the Equator, the Autumnal zenith passage of the Sun occurs 260 days after the Vernal zenith passage of the Sun. Given that the large Formative period site of Izapa sits at this latitude and appears to have



Nobles playing the ball game depicted on a Classic period drinking cup. K2022. This image is from Justin Kerr's Mayavase database: <u>www.mayavase.com</u>



The 260 Day Count also known as the ch'ol qiij and the tzolk'in. The sequence is read in paired columns from left to right; the first pair of columns reads: Imix, Ik', Ak'bal, K'an, Chikchan, Kimi, Manik, Lamat, Muluk, Ok. The second pair of columns reads: Chuwen, Eb, Ben, Ix, Men, Kib, Kaban, Etz'nab, Kawak, Ajaw.

Malmström hypothesized that Izapa was the birthplace of the Mayan calendar. Several problems have arisen with this proposal, though, including that no 260 Day Count dates were actually recorded at Izapa even though the site is rich with iconography, and that a post-Gregorian-Reform level of accuracy for computing the solar year would have to have been attained in I300 BCE,

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served an important role in early trade routes between the Mayan highlands and the Gulf Coast, Vincent



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centuries before monuments or permanent architecture were built there, in order for his argument to hold.

On the other hand, the scholarly consensus is that the earliest attested uses of the 260 Day Count were for names. We know from written indigenous records starting in 300 BCE that individuals were named for the 260 Day Count date on which they were born. This extremely long, 2,500-year recorded tradition, has also been evidenced by modern K'iche' Maya daykeepers, in highland Guatemala. K'iche' practitioners have suggested further that the 260 Day Count was biological in origin, which resonates with Native North American traditions that observe two "births" for an infant. A child is first "born" on the date on which its mother misses her menses, suggesting to her that she may be pregnant; and the child is born again on the date it "touches the earth," as the phrase goes in Chol Mayan. On average, these births are separated by about 260 days. Under this interpretation, the count is 260 days long because it renders the same date for each of these "birth" events.

A birthdate utility to the 260 Day Count, independent of astronomical purpose, may well have been productive for Formative period community interactions. Following the same tradition for naming infants and interpreting their destinies would have facilitated alliances between nomadic or semi-nomadic groups as well as marriage proposals between members of different clans. Additionally, in the Popol Vuh, the authors tell us that the gods created people in order to keep their days, or even more provocatively to "dayify" the gods themselves. At the least, this suggests that this ritual time would have been imbued into stories and myths, providing entertainment within and between clans at festivals or gatherings. The 260 Day Count may have found numerous practical everyday uses, therefore, bringing communities together without any direct relationship to astronomical periodicities. None of this, of course, would have prohibited the 260 Day Count in the long run from being applied to keeping track of time more generally, which is unequivocally evidenced in the archaeological and historical records. In other words, the 260 Day Count may have been useful far beyond simply naming and timing ritual events, but it is not unlikely that it found its origins primarily as a social technology.

The E-Group

In the early twentieth century, spurred by the work of Ernst Förstemann and others who found astronomical



View of the eastern horizon from Group F at Izapa. The photograph was taken on June 23, 2012, just after the summer solstice, showing sunrise behind Volcán Tajumulco. Image courtesy of Gerardo Aldana.



Illustration of the Uaxactun E-Group sight lines (after Ricketson, "Astronomical Observatories").

patterns within hieroglyphic inscriptions, Sylvanus Morley and Oliver Ricketson encountered a provocative architectural complex at Uaxactun, located in the center of the Peten of what is now Guatemala. Specifically, the complex – now referred to as an "E-Group" - was useful in tracking the tropical year during the Late Formative and Early Classic periods. The name "E-Group" was incidental, reflecting that the architecture was located on a quadrant of the archaeological map labeled with an "E." Because the same architectural features were found at other sites, they were designated as following the "E-Group" architecture at Uaxactun.

While scholars have suggested that the alignment of architecture to sunrise stations may have reflected a religious veneration of the Sun, as with the 260 Day Count, there is also a social utility to consider. In particular, E-Group architecture provided the opportunity to support alliances among local communities during

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the middle Formative period. That is, the desire for sustained trade amidst a mosaic of independent networks of semi-nomadic and sedentary clans would render some organizational structure beneficial.

With the mosaic of lifestyles and subsistence uses of the landscape throughout Mesoamerica, a community would likely have needed more than the resources available to a single clan in order to maintain and secure a permanent location along a trade route. Alliances would certainly have facilitated the security issue, but they also would have required a system to share or distribute power given that these clans would initially have been of essentially equivalent stature.

The Feathered Serpent

Chich'en Itza in present-day Yucatán, Mexico, is known around the world for its equinox commemorations. During the Terminal Classic period, a structure to the north of the early settlement was expanded from a traditional pyramidal structure topped by a north-facing temple to the much larger radially symmetric structure known today as "El Castillo" or the Temple of K'uk'ulkan. The latter name, K'uk'ulkan is a linguistic construct made up of two primary parts. K'uk' is the Yucatec Mayan word for the bird known as the quetzal (Pharomachrus mocinno), and kan is the word for serpent. A k'uk'-ul kan, then, is a bird-like serpent, or in more common translation, a "feathered serpent."

The feathered serpent concept had likely arisen in the region around modern Mexico City, and had spread in this period throughout all of Mesoamerica. In Nahuatl, the feathered serpent is known as Quetzalcoatl, in Yucatec Mayan K'uk'ulkan and in K'iche' Mayan Guk'umatz. In each case, the construct functions both iconographically and conceptually as a powerful figure. That is, as a bird-serpent, such a creature has the ability to enter into and through all three cosmological communities: that of the Underworld, the middle world and the celestial realm. Accordingly, it is fitting that the highest priesthood order in Aztec society was that of Quetzalcoatl. Moreover, in legends recorded in the language of the Aztecs, Quetzalcoatl is intimately tied to the planet Venus, and so a Venusian astronomy also grew in significance during the Postclassic period.

Mayan Astronomy After the Post Classic

A key shift occurs during the Colonial period (post 1519 CE) or perhaps shortly before in the Late Postclassic (1300 to 1519 CE). The Long Count was dropped from calendric records, even though some of the same periodization was still used. In particular, 360-day periods, or "haab" in the Classic period, are now referred to as "tuns." These tuns were also accumulated into groups of 20, which were given the name "katun," in place



of winikhaab. In turn, these katuns were run in a great cycle - no longer in linear fashion through the Long Count.



Feathered Serpent in Postclassic imagery, pt. 2: Qchi (9 Wind) of the Borgia Codex.



Feathered Serbent in Postclassic imagery, pt. 3: a feathered serpent headdress in the Codex Nuttall.

This is often referred to as the Katun Count in the literature.

Overall, the modern decipherment of the Mayan hieroglyphic writing system was spurred by an interest in astronomy and calendrics, although such scholarship was unanchored to the actual histories recorded. As of the early twenty-first century, the hieroglyphic script has reached an advanced stage of decipherment, which has impacted our understanding of Mayan astronomy. While it is now understood as being not as prominent as previously thought, there is still much to explore at a more nuanced level in the inscriptions of the Classic period, the codices of the Postclassic, and the architecture of both periods.

Note: This short article was condensed from Gerardo Aldana's 48-page original. The complete paper with footnotes and an extensive Bibliography is available here: Maya Calendar-Meso Astronomy

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Send your essay to: Zac Lindsey at: *lindseyzj@gmail.com*

For your bio: Include your affiliation. Demographic information such as ethnoracial category or gender is not necessary, but important if it helps distinguish you and your point of view from others.

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"Gazing at the Death Face": The Story Behind the Story of the Discovery of the Tomb of K'inich Janaab' Pakal with Elaine Schele, PhD

For those of you who are well-versed in the study of the ancient Maya, the story of the discovery of the tomb of K'inich Janaab' Pakal at Palenque is a familiar one – how in 1952, the Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruz Lhuillier while exploring and excavating the Classic Maya site of Palenque, Mexico found a mysterious hidden stairway at the bottom of the interior of a temple. He then discovered a 1200-year-old magnificent undisturbed tomb in a chamber containing an intricately carved sarcophagus lid with a royal skeleton inside. The task of getting to the bottom of the stairway

was daunting. He and his crew spent four swelteringly hot seasons (three long seasons and one very short one) digging out the solidified mortar inside the 80-foot-deep stairs in the belly of the Temple of the



Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions, deep below which Alberto Ruz Lhuillier excavated the tomb of K'inich Janaab' Pakal.

Inscriptions. That information is relatively well-known, but the fascinating history that I am going to relate to you is the "story behind the story" of how all that happened. For instance, in his INAH *Informes*, he noted the funding assistance that he received from Nelson Rockefeller



Vednesday July 27

at 8 pm ET

Gazing at the Death Face. Image of Pakal's skull and death mask taken by Arturo Romano right after the tomb was opened.

but did not elaborate as to how that funding materialized or how much it was. I am going to reveal that and include many other historical tidbits that are not common knowledge. It's a story of the trials and triumphs encountered during archaeological excavation work including the qualities

of friendship, trust, and scholarship between individuals and agencies. On the other hand, the story reveals moments of frustration, mystery, ineptitude and mistrust among those same persons and institutions – qualities that illuminate the fallibility of human nature. I hope you will join us.

Elaine Day Schele, PhD. Elaine is an adjunct assistant professor at Texas State University where she teaches the art history of Pre-Columbian America. Her master's degree was earned at Texas A & M University where she studied city and regional planning. She was a practicing urban planner for over 20 years. In 2012, she graduated from the University of Texas with a PhD in Latin American Studies where she specialized in the art, archaeology, and history of the ancient Maya and their cities. Her dissertation was entitled "The Untold Story of Alberto Ruz and his Archaeological Excavations at Palenque, México: A Micro- and Macrohistorical Approach". She has published several articles on Alberto Ruz and is currently collaborating on another. She lives
in Austin, Texas, with her husband David and their blue and gold macaw, Blue Bird.

"Gazing Into the Death Face" by Elaine Schele, PhD

In 1952, while exploring and excavating the Classic Maya site of Palenque, Mexico, the Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruz Lhuillier excavated a mysterious hidden stairway that led the bottom of the interior of a temple. He then discovered a 1200-yearold magnificent undisturbed tomb in a chamber containing an intricately carved sarcophagus lid with a royal skeleton inside.

But the task of getting to the bottom of the stairway was daunting. He and his crew spent four swelteringly hot seasons (three long seasons and one very short one) digging out the solidified mortar inside the 80-foot-deep stairs in the belly of the Temple of the Inscriptions and finally arrived at the bottom of the stairs. When Ruz found the tomb chamber on June 15, 1952, he thought he had discovered a giant elaborate altar inside an abandoned chapel.

On top of the altar was a magnificent carving that Ruz believed "must be something very essential about the Maya religion". As he and his workmen set about cleaning and recording the contents of the chamber, they could not keep their eyes off the carving. In addition to the low relief sculpture on the sarcophagus top, there were hieroglyphs all around its edges. This discovery happened at the beginning of the rainy season. Ruz wanted to investigate the altar further, but the rains had arrived and "water ran down the walls and down the stalactites, and



Closeup of Ruz's crew using car jacks to raise the sarcophagus lid. Photo credit: Life Magazine 1953:72. This photo was probably taken by Romano Pacheco.



After deciding to lift the sarcophagus lid, Ruz instructed his crew to go into the forest and fell bari trees to hold up the lid. Here you see them beginning the process of rolling the stumps down the steps. Credit: Life Magazine, by Romano Pacheco..

the constant dampness was too much for us". They ended their work on July 5th, but they were on pins and needles to try to understand the nature of this large mysterious block, so Ruz planned to return for a second season that same year. The first season of 1952 had begun July 5th, and the second season took place from November 15 until December 2I - this last was a special 37-day session. Both sessions were minimally funded by Ruz's employer Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH).

The news of a secret chamber, found in the Maya jungle made world-wide headline news. Between the first and second seasons of 1952, Ruz's public speaking engagements were many. He wanted to get the word out about the discovery, and I suspect that at the same time he hoped that he could raise money to continue to excavate the secret chamber. Nelson Rockefeller, the American benefactor who earlier provided funding for the project, had ceased funding it after the 1951 season. However, he began funding it once again at the urging of Rosa Covarrubias after she saw a presentation Ruz made about the discovery of the elaborate tomb. Also, during this time, Ruz presented a paper and published at least three articles in which he discussed the altar and the iconography of the carved lid.

Back to the discovery – Ruz and his crew were extremely anxious and curious to know the purpose of the large stone block and its carved top. They did not want to wait until the 1953 season to solve the mystery of the block and discover its real nature. They returned to Palengue on November 15, 1952. The continued on next page



"Gazing Into the Death Face" by Elaine Schele, PhD continued from previous page

purpose for this short season was to determine if the altar was one solid block of stone, i.e., an altar, or if it was hollow inside. The reasoning was that if it was solid there would be nothing to investigate under the carved stone, in which case, it was not advisable to lift the lid and possibly damage a carving of extraordinary value. If it were hollow, that would indicate that it was a tomb. They used a hand auger to drill into the sides of the sarcophagus at several locations around the block. Eventually they found cinnabar on the drill when it was extracted, indicating that the block was hollow and that a royal skeleton lay inside it. They made plans to raise the lid. After notifying INAH officials in Mexico City of this



Ruz (with camera) and others as they peered into the tomb chamber. Note the bari logs on both the left and right side of the image that are holding up the sarcophagus lid. Source: Life Magazine 1953:72. This photo was probably also taken by Romano Pacheco.

important tomb, he invited them to come immediately. All parties arrived from Mexico City and then after a day's worth of work, the lid was raised on November 27, 1952. They were surprised to find that



The entrance to the tomb was covered with two heavy slabs with holes drilled into them for ropes. Here you see the now opened entrance and the remaining slab behind it.

here was another lid that they had to remove that was carved and fitted back into the same block that covered the cavity where the body was lying. After lifting that, they were awed by the result. As Ruz told A.J. Mason in a Saturday Evening Post article:

"My first impression was a mosaic of green, red and white. Then it resolved itself into details - green jade ornaments, red painted teeth and bones, and fragments of a mask. I was gazing at the death face of him for whom all this stupendous work – the crypt, the sculpture, the stairway, the great pyramid with its crowning temple - had been built, the mortal remains of one of the greatest men of Palenque! This was a sarcophagus, the first ever found in a Maya pyramid."

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient Maya History for July by Zac Lindsey

6 July 292 CE: On 8.12.14.8.15 13 Men 3 Sip G4, ancient scribes at Tikal memorialized an event using the Long Count, which is the calendar marking the number of days since the beginning of time. It was hardly the earliest for example, the Long Count appears at El Baul centuries earlier, and the Calendar Round goes back much farther. But it was the earliest at Tikal, and the fact that it appears on a stela with a portrait of a leader on the front (Stela 29) shows the hallmarks of Classic culture - the stelae cult, the ajaw system, the forest of kings and queens - was already established at the great site of Tikal. It also shows just how long Tikal was a capital of artistic innovation in the Maya world: 292 CE, the city's earliest date, is 577 years



before the last date at the site, 869 CE. Unfortunately, the monument is cracked, and the event the stela memorialized is missing, which admittedly takes some of the fun out of things... But I'm sure it was something important and not at all mundane like putting on a pelt and a helmet.

14 July 685 CE: On 9.12.13.4.3 2 Ak'bal 6 Mol G2, Itzam K'an Ahk ("Ruler 2") of Piedras Negras was adorned in a pelt and helmet in a ritual witnessed by the king of Calakmul, Yukno'm Ch'e'n. This may have happened at El Cayo, or the lesser lord K'an Xook came to Piedras Negras to watch. Though it was undoubtedly a festive occasion, on the K'an Xook panel, it takes on a somewhat somber note: After the adornment, the next event the panel describes is the death of K'an Xook, followed by the death of Itzam K'an Ahk himself just a few winals (20-day periods) later. From other monuments, we know Yukno'm wasn't far from "entering the road" either. It's easy to imagine this was the last time the old colleagues and maybe even friends were together. A little over a year later, when the monument was commissioned, all three of the figures mentioned on the panel were dead. While in most cases, their children took over and their deaths don't represent dynastic instability, this event was clearly the end of a political era.

You've Seen Cute Figurines, How About Humorous? by Janice Van Cleve

When Janice Van Cleve, the other half of the IMS Newsletter Committee, saw Zac Lindsey's "cute" figurines, she submitted these humorous figurines from the personal collection she started archiving after visiting the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. See if you don't agree with her that some of these are just downright humorous.



The Maya Flying Nun.



Why am I so happy? I am a pot head.



Oy vey! Has anybody seen my bra?



Oh damn! I got my butt on backwards again!

The Maya created some wonderfully expressive figurines with very human emotions. I included a whole bunch of them at the end of my book Incidents of Travel in Mesoamerica and invited readers to supply their own captions. continued on next page



You've Seen Cute Figurines, How About Humerous?

by Janice Van Cleve continued from previous page



"Boo hoo. I sat here all day and still nobody bought my avocados."



"Gimme chocolate and nobody gets hurt!"



"You don't know the power of the Dark Side!" (statue from Lubaantun, Belize)



"I couldn't eat another bite. Oh no! You're not thinking of giving me a wafer thin mint!"

Janice Van Cleve is the author of numerous books about the Maya. Check them all out on her website at: <u>http://mayas.doodlekit.com</u>