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November 16, 2022 • Modern K'iche' Maya Long Count: 0.0.10.0.17. • 7 Caban 10 Ceh • G8

Announcing a very special IMS livestreaming event:

Wednesday, November 16 at 8 pm ET:

“On the Path of the Kaanu'l Dynasty in Northeastern Peten: Recent Investigations at Chochkitam”

with **Francisco Estrada-Belli**
Tulane University (Ph. D., Boston University)

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89523412292>

Since the discovery of Dzibanché's hieroglyphic stairway and its publication in 2004, it has also been evident that the great Kaanu'l hegemony started out at the city of Dzibanché, in southern Quintana Roo reaching a first important turning point with the defeat of Tikal in 562. At that time, the Kaanu'l kings had already incorporated into their hegemony most of northern Peten including kingdoms such as La Corona, El Perú, Naranjo, and Caracol, although the locations and modalities of their expansion to the south remained unclear. After the discovery of references to the Kaanu'l dynasty at Holmul in 2013, we developed the hypothesis that the Kaanu'l kings may have advanced towards Tikal directly, rather than through more convoluted paths. Recent work at Chochkitam, in northeastern Peten, uncovered royal texts and tombs with titles identifying a previously unknown dynasty and Early Classic references to the Kaanu'l supporting the initial hypothesis regarding the possible Kaanu'l progression along the eastern Peten front during the early part of the sixth century, as well as the true identity of the architect of the victory over Tikal. *Be there!*

Francisco Estrada-Belli, Ph.D., specializes in Maya archaeology, Remote Sensing, and Geographic Information Systems. He is a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a National Geographic Explorer. He is the author of *“The First Maya Civilization.”*

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Nov. 16, 8 pm ET

On the Path of the Kaanu'l Dynasty in Northeastern Peten

with Francisco Estrada-Belli

Nov. 30, 8 pm ET

Bringing The Maya Back to Life

with Jon and Pamela Voelkel



**Jim Reed,
Editor**

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Intact Maya Chocolate Vessel Uncovered in a Playa del Carmen Cave

Researchers from the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) recovered the 13cm tall vessel after being notified by the Cenotes Urbanos project.

The vessel was partially submerged and buried in soft sediment, deposited by the rainy season that tends to flood the entire cave.

"It has a reddish colour on the outside and a black slip on the inside, partially covered by calcium carbonates. The decoration seems to provide a phytomorphic image, similar to a pumpkin", explained archaeologist Antonio Reyes.

The vessel dates from the Late Preclassic period (300 BC to AD 250), and although lacking a spout, archaeologists suggest that the vessel was used for drinking chocolate.

Maya chocolate was consumed as a hot liquid beverage, seasoned by mixing the roasted cacao seed paste into a drink with water, chilli peppers and cornmeal, and then transferring the mixture repeatedly between pots until the top was covered with a thick foam.

The drink was used in official ceremonies and religious rituals, as funerary offerings, as a



tribute, and for medicinal purposes.

The team plans to return to the cave in the dry season to conduct a systematic study and determine if the cave holds any other artefacts, indicating whether the chocolate-type vessel was an offering and simply not a chance find washed into the cave by rainwater.

Heritage Daily has their article here:

[Playa del Carmen Chocolate Vessel](#)



**2022
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An Artistic Eye for the Maya with artist Steve Radzi

TIKAL – Temple of the Grand Jaguar (Temple I) (732 AD) is located deep in the Peten jungle of Guatemala in the Parque Nacional Tikal. It is a magnificent Classic Peten style structure and was built as a funerary temple dedicated to the ruler Jasaw Chan K'awiil I, whose tomb was found buried deep inside. The temple is 180 feet high and was excavated between 1955 and 1964. The high roof comb is decorated with a sculpture of the seated king. The entrance into the shrine below is carved with wooden lintels that were originally painted red and made of sapodilla wood. On my first visit in 1975, I was able to climb to the top of Temple I. I sketched this view from the top of the Temple of the Masks, which lies across the main Plaza.

Steve Radzi has been illustrating Maya sites for many years. The original black and white illustrations were created in 1995 for an exhibition at the Miami Museum of Science. In recent times, Steve has colored them, bringing them to life. These illustrations have not been published before. We shall feature his work in this and upcoming issues. Enjoy. You may visit Steve's site for more of his work. www.mayavision.com



Chochkitam: A New Classic Maya Dynasty and the Rise of the Kaanu'l (Snake) Kingdom

by Francisco Estrada-Belli and Alexandre Tokovinine

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Thanks to many epigraphic references compiled in the last 35 years, there is a growing consensus among Mayanists that a hegemonic state existed in the Maya Lowlands during the Classic period headed by the Kaanu'l royal dynasty and based at Dzibanche and Calakmul. Many aspects of its organization are still poorly documented, however, important questions that remain unanswered include how power was exerted and passed on within this political system in ways that might differ from those found in an average-sized Maya kingdom. In this article, we present new archaeological and epigraphic data from Chochkitam, a little-known site in northeastern Peten, Guatemala. Although this was a center of average size, the epigraphic texts reveal its political standing as a royal city with important connections with the Kaanu'l and other regional powers at various significant junctures during the Classic period, including before, during, and after the Kaanu'l hegemony. These historical reconstructions, although fragmentary, provide important data to validate emerging hypotheses regarding how the Kaanu'l kings managed their domain.

The notion that Classic Maya kingdoms were able to grow into hegemonies has gained increased acceptance in the last decades, thanks to epigraphic data unearthed at numerous sites that reveal a network of client polities centered on the Kaanu'l dynasty based at Dzibanche and Calakmul. The Kaanu'l greater domain extended over most of the Lowland Maya kingdoms during the Classic period, circa AD 500–751 (**Fig. 1**). Much of what is known about this hegemony comes from texts produced during the peak of its power in the Late Classic period, from AD 640 to 736, when the dynasty was situated at Calakmul. Much more obscure is its early history, from ca. AD 400 to 571, when the kingdom rapidly expanded from Dzibanche.

In this article, we present new archaeological and epigraphic data from Chochkitam, a little-known site in northeastern Guatemala, revealing its political standing as a seat of royal power in the geopolitics of the Maya Lowlands before, during, and after Kaanu'l hegemony. More broadly, these data contribute to ongoing discussions of the origins of the Kaanu'l dynasty, the identity of its early rulers, specific modalities of royal succession and corulership, and, finally, the routes through which the hegemony was expanded.

The “Snake Head” *k'uhul Kaanu'l ajaw* (“holy Kaanu'l lord”) royal title is one of the most frequently

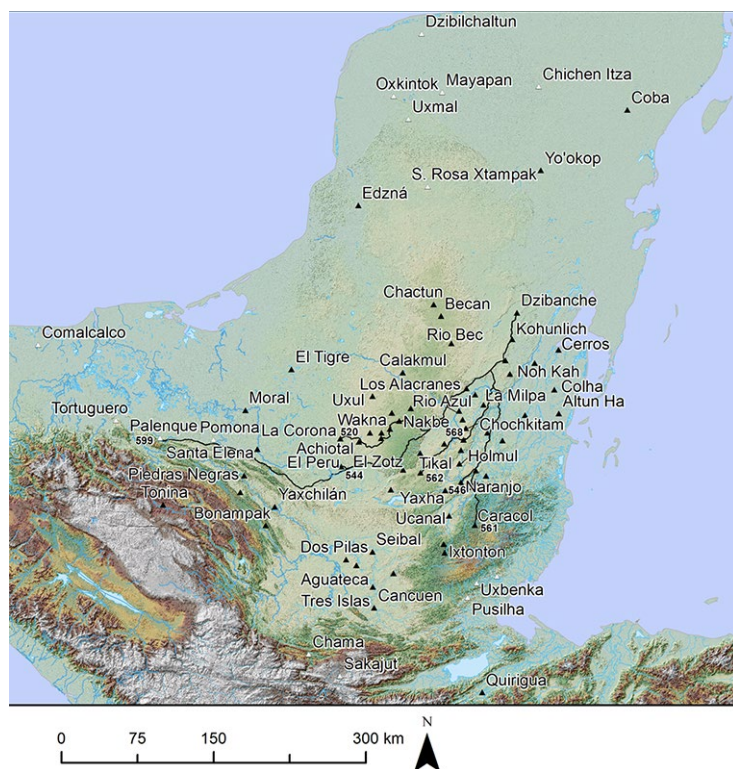


Fig. 1: Map of Maya Lowlands showing the known extent of Kaanu'l hegemony during the Dzibanche period and hypothetical routes from Dzibanche (avoiding the wetlands) and other sites mentioned in the text. Drawn by Francisco Estrada-Belli; terrain data from NASA SRTM.

occurring titles in Classic Maya political statements (Marcus, 1976).¹ Martin and Grube (1995) suggested that it was associated with explicit expressions of overlordship, proposing that major Classic Maya kingdoms had hegemonic relations with smaller polities. Subsequent research revealed that place names were the main component of such royal emblem glyphs (Berlin, 1958), although they did not always correspond to the place names associated with the archaeological sites occupied by the holders of any given emblem glyph (Stuart and Houston, 1994). It later became apparent that the Late Classic seat of the Kaanu'l dynasty was located at the archaeological site of Calakmul, known as Chi'k Nab and Huxte' Tuun in the hieroglyphic inscriptions (Martin, 1996, 2005).

The discovery of a hieroglyphic stairway celebrating conquests and rituals undertaken

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¹ Following established conventions (e.g., Houston et al., 1998), the logograms and syllabograms are reported in bold uppercase and lowercase, whereas transliteration is in *italics*. Ancient Maya proper names are *italicized* only when their transliteration is specifically discussed.

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by Early Classic Kaanu'l kings at the site of Dzibanche suggested that it may have been the early capital of the Kaanu'l kingdom (Martin, 2020; Nalda, 2004; Velásquez García, 2004). Excavations at the site uncovered several richly furnished tombs. One of these potentially royal burials contained a bone bloodletter, with an inscription identifying its owner as “holy Kaanu'l lord Jom Uhut Chan” (also known as “Sky Witness”; Nalda and Balanzario, 2004). Subsequent epigraphic discoveries at Dzibanche and Xunantunich provided evidence that the toponym of Kaanu'l of the “Snake King” emblem glyph was, in fact, the ancient name of Dzibanche and that the hub of Kaanu'l hegemony only moved to Calakmul in AD 636–640 (Helmke and Awe, 2016; Martin and Velásquez, 2016).

Recent studies have expanded the list of Dzibanche-based Kaanu'l rulers. Martin and Beliaev (2017) identified references to K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich', known as Ruler 16 of the Kaanu'l dynastic list on the so-called codex-style ceramic vases (Martin 1997, 2017). The inscription on a wooden lintel from Dzibanche (Gann, 1928) suggests that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' became *kaloonte'* (high king or paramount ruler) in AD 550. The text on a ceramic vessel at Uaxactun mentions him as an overlord of a previously unknown Tikal king. According to El Perú Stela 44, K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' also supervised the accession of a local ruler in AD 556. A reanalysis of the crucial passage on Altar 21 at Caracol credits the decisive defeat of Tikal ruler Wak Chan K'awiil in AD 562 by Dzibanche and Caracol forces to K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich', instead of to “Sky Witness,” as previously thought (Martin, 2020; Martin and Beliaev, 2017).

The new discoveries also implied that there was a chronological overlap of some sort between K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' and his apparent successor “Sky Witness.” The latter is mentioned as a “holy Kaanu'l lord” and a supervisor of a king's accession in AD 561 on Stela I at Los Alacranes, a subordinate polity 90 km south of Dzibanche (Grube, 2008). The revised chronology also failed to resolve discrepancies between accession dates of Kaanu'l dynasts, as reported in the lists on codex-style vases, and the dates of references to the same individuals on carved monuments. One possible explanation for the discrepancy would be a succession system in which rulers acceded to the “holy king” (*k'uhul ajaw*) office first and only later to the “hegemon” (*kaloonte'*) position, whereas the codex-style lists mentioned only those Kaanu'l lords who achieved the *kaloonte'* rank (Martin, 2017, 2020). At any point in time, a hegemon or high king would corule with one or more

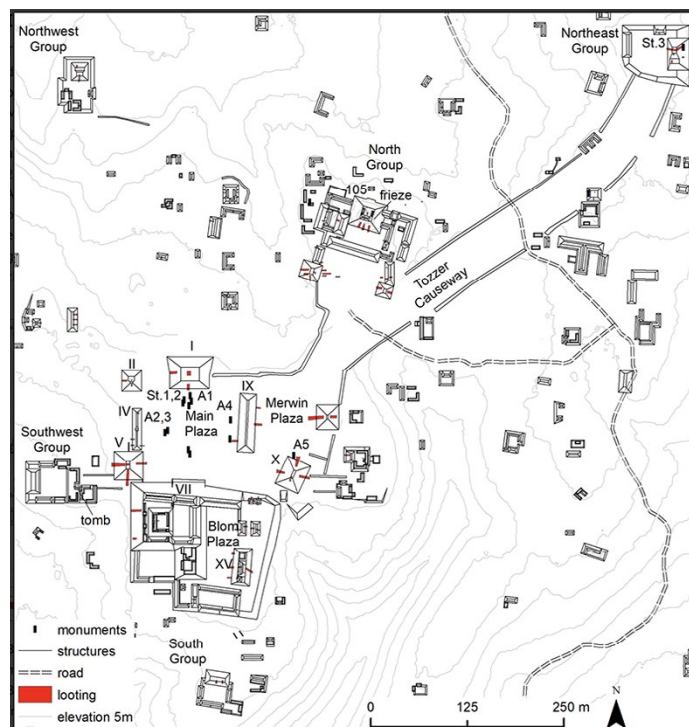


Fig. 2: Map of the ceremonial core of Chochkitam. Drawn by Antolin Velasquez and Francisco Estrada-Belli.

lesser “holy kings.” This system would enable the management of war campaigns on foreign lands while a ruler in power remained at home. This two-tier organization was attested at other Classic Maya royal houses, including those of Bonampak-Lacanha and Motul de San José (Tokovinine, 2013; Tokovinine, Zender, 2012).

Our investigations at Chochkitam sought to uncover archaeological and historical data to fill a large gap in the history of a section of northern Peten that extended from Holmul to Río Azul, for which little or no well-preserved texts exist. Of particular interest to us were any possible links to the ebb and flow of regional political influences during the middle of the Classic period; in particular, whether the Kaanu'l expansion prior to the decisive war against Tikal in AD 562 advanced through a direct route (**Fig. 1**). The accession of Naranjo's ruler in AD 546 under Kaanu'l lord Tuun Kab Hix marked a terminus *ante quem* for the timing of the arrival of Kaanu'l armies into central Peten by this or an alternative route, following the coastline and the Belize River Valley. The site of Chochkitam appeared to be located precisely on a north–south inland route from Dzibanche to Tikal. This eastern land route would complement a western route connecting Dzibanche to La Corona and El Perú, which, according to

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contemporary textual references, was used by the Kaanu'l by AD 520, prior to the route that originated at Calakmul after AD 640 (Canuto and Barrientos, 2013; Martin, 2008, 2020).

Investigations at Chochkitam

The site of Chochkitam (CKT) was first reported in 1909 by archaeologist Raymond Merwin during the first Harvard University expedition in northern Peten (Tozzer, 1911). It was mapped by Tulane University's Frans Blom in 1924 who reported an inscribed monument (Blom, 1988; Morley, 1937–1938: Vol. 5). The site likely owes its name to a plant locally known as *chooch-citam*, “peccary-choch” (Roys, 1931). The site's three main monumental groups extend over approximately 0.5 km² of upland ridge terrain and are connected by broad causeways (**Fig. 2**). The Main and Merwin plazas form a continuous area of 2 ha. To the south are the Central Acropolis's royal courtyards. The North Group features a 10 m high pyramid, an 80 m long palatial structure to the south, and small lateral courtyards. The Northeast Group features an eastern pyramid and small range structures on a 5 m high plaza platform. Several residential groups surround the main ceremonial complex, forming the urban zone of a medium-sized city. Less dense residential zones extend for at least 3 km to the north and south.

Blom (1988; Morley, 1937–1938: Vol. I) reported seven plain monuments from Chochkitam's main plaza and a carved one, Stela I, which he photographed. In the north edge of the plaza, Blom noted an altar and a possible stela fragment near Stela I; two other altars were found in front of the western palace, Structure IV, and another one was found in front of the eastern palace, Structure IX. An additional monument was noted in front of the north side of a pyramid at the south end of the Merwin Plaza, Building X.

Beginning in 2019, our team conducted survey and excavations at Chochkitam. We updated the map of the site and investigated looters' trenches in the main structures, locating three looted and one undisturbed royal tomb. In 2019, we redocumented Stela I (**Fig. 3**), confirming the good condition of its carving. We also recorded two partial altars

Fig. 3: Stela I, Chochkitam. 3D model by Alexandre Tokovinine. From the Visual Documentation Lab at the University of Alabama.

From photographs by Jesus Eduardo López, courtesy of the Holmul Archeological Project.



and two adjoining fragments of another carved stela (Stela 2) in that same spot.

The monument in front of Structure X, Stela A5, was found to be a probable altar with only minor traces of carving. In 2021, we located and documented a carved stela (Stela 3) in the Northeast Group. To test hypotheses about Chochkitam's position in relation to potential routes from Dzibanche to northern Peten, we developed several routes using GIS methods and plotted them against the location of known sites.

The earliest architecture encountered by our limited excavations at Chochkitam dates to the Late Preclassic period (400 BC–AD 250). It is a stairway on the central axis of Building VII, at the south end of the Main Plaza. Much more activity at the site has been documented for the Early Classic period (AD 250–550). In addition to a later version of that same acropolis stairway, we found Early Classic construction phases in Building XV and in the North Group (**Fig. 2**). Greater building activity at the site, however, appears to have occurred during the Late Classic period (AD 550–830).

The pre-Kaanu'l perspective on Classic Maya kingship at Chochkitam is provided by Stela 3 (**Fig. 4a** and **4b**, next page). This small monument, measuring 1.00 × 0.74 m, was left by looters on the back slope of the eastern Northeast Group pyramid. It is the central portion of a stela whose upper and

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lower sections are still missing. The relatively good preservation of the carving suggests that the monument was not exposed to the elements for a long time.

The front of Stela 3 depicts a standing human figure holding a double-headed serpent, a common element of royal god-summoning rituals during period-ending ceremonies (**Fig. 4a**). A large feline head is visible on the protagonist's belt. Both the body and the head of the protagonist are in full-frontal view. The style of the headdress and of smaller iconographic elements is consistent with Early Classic sculpture (Proskouriakoff, 1950). When these elements are considered together with the frontal view, the chronological distribution becomes more restricted: for example, at Tikal and Yaxha, such monuments are accompanied by strong visual links to Teotihuacan imagery that appears around AD 378 (Grube, 2000; Stuart, 2000). There are no overt Teotihuacan traits in the imagery on CKT Stela 3, but the full-frontal view would suggest links with Central Peten.

The inscription on the back of the monument is arranged in two columns of hieroglyphic blocks (**Fig. 4b**). The paleography of the text is solidly Early Classic. The narrative is visibly incomplete because its initial and final parts are on the missing fragments. The date and the predicate of the main sentence are lost. The glyphs in Blocks pA1 and pB1 are largely gone. Block pA2 contains a single logogram **TE'** followed by a possible **TAY** grapheme in the remaining corner of pB2. The next word in the inscription in Block pA3 is "god" (**K'UH**). Therefore, the preceding part of the text contained the name of a deity or deities. There are at least two Classic Maya theonyms with **TAY**: Tayal/Tayel Chan K'inich and Juun Tayal Chan Ajawtaak, the latter being a common reference during period-ending ceremonies (Martin et al., 2017; Tokovinine, Zender, 2012). The **TE'** (te' for "wood, stick, tree") logogram could be part of another theonym. However, it is just as likely that it belonged to a predicate referring to something that the god or gods did. Block pB3 contains a grapheme that looks like a raptorial bird head with a headband or another sign altogether on top of it. Surface damage complicates secure identification, but one very tentative reading would be **LAK-[K'IN]**

CH'EEN spelling *lak'in ch'een* for "eastern holy place" or "eastern city." This is followed by

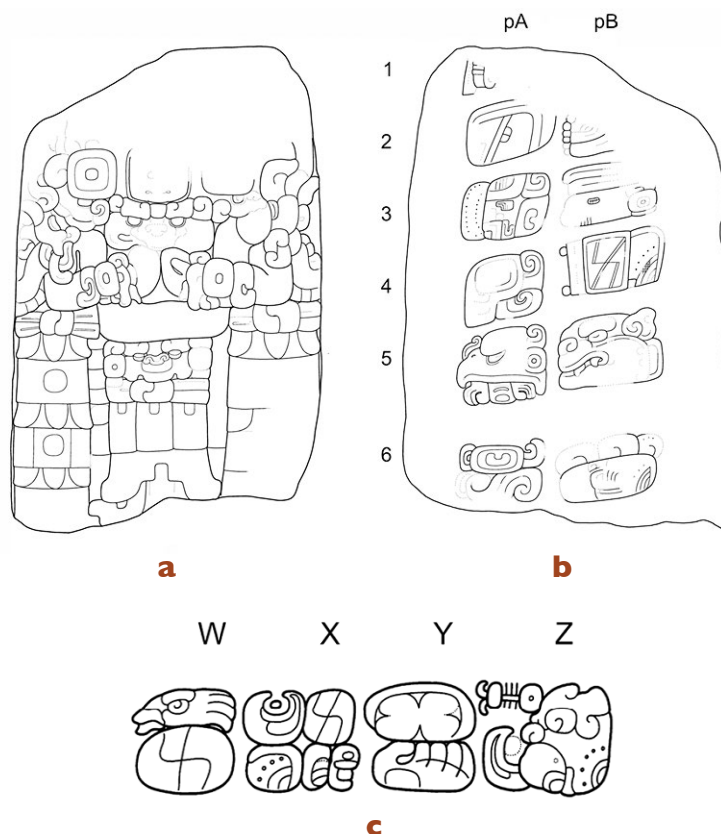


Fig. 4: Chochkitam Stela 3: (a) front; (b) back; (c) detail of stucco frieze, Building A, Group II, Holmul. Redrawn from Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine, 2016: Figure 6a.

CH'AB-ya for *[u]ch'abiiy*, "it has been her/his/its penance/creation," in Block pA4 – a common reference to the king's generative auto-sacrifice required to enable the divine presence, presumably the one mentioned in the previous sentence (Stuart, 2005). Block pB4 provides further contexts with **12-TZ'AK-TUUN**, which seems to omit a preposition for *[ti/tu] lajcha' tz'ak-tuun*, "in her/his/its twelve stone-gathering(s)." A similar expression occurs as a title on a late sixth-century stucco frieze on Building A at Holmul (**Fig. 4c**, Block X), where it refers to one's age in years as **20-TZ'AK-TUUN-li-a** for *winik tz'ak-tuunila'*, "the person of twenty stone-gatherings" (Estrada Belli and Tokovinine, 2016). The implication is that the text on the stela refers to the ceremonies marking the completion of the 12 years of a 20-year period (k'atun). Dedicating a stela for the first 12 years of a k'atun is very rare, but there is at least one other case relatively nearby: Stela 9 at Lamanai

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was dedicated in 9.9.12.0.0 or AD 625 (Closs, 1988).

The protagonist's name is spelled in Blocks pA5 and pB5 as **MUWAAN BAHLAM** (muwaan bahlam, “hawk jaguar”). It is not accompanied by any title, although the preceding passages are consistent only with rituals undertaken by royalty.

The rest of the inscription on the stela contains part of a parentage statement introduced by *y-une[n]*, “his son of father,” in Block pA6, followed by what looks like an uncommon variant of the logogram **YOPAAT** in Block pB6, which is likely the first half of a name that could look something like Yopaat Bahlam. The rest of the inscription would be on a now missing lower fragment.

In summary, the imagery and text on Stela 3 provide the first glimpse of Classic Maya kingship at Chochkitam. Curiously, even though the iconography and rhetoric of the monument conform to royal monuments, there is a conspicuous absence of royal titles in the narrative. The style hints at a possible link to Tikal at a time of intensified interaction with Teotihuacan. The fact that Muwaan Bahlam of Chochkitam potentially ended up as a captive at Yaxchilan highlights the complexity of the political landscape of that period.

The next dataset clarifying the position of Chochkitam in the Classic Maya world comes from the North Group, the second largest ceremonial complex at the site and a major focal point of royal activity during the Early Classic period. In 2021, our excavations focused on the central pyramid (**Fig. 2**, Str. 105). Here, looters had penetrated Early and Late Classic construction phases, including an intact structure composed of two gallery-style rooms. The western section of the northern room was occupied by a tall bench. On the exterior, we exposed 5 m of the western half of the north side and a 1 m section of the western side, adjacent to the northwest corner and revealing a carved frieze (**Fig. 5**). Unfortunately, its uppermost section had been truncated in antiquity by a later floor.

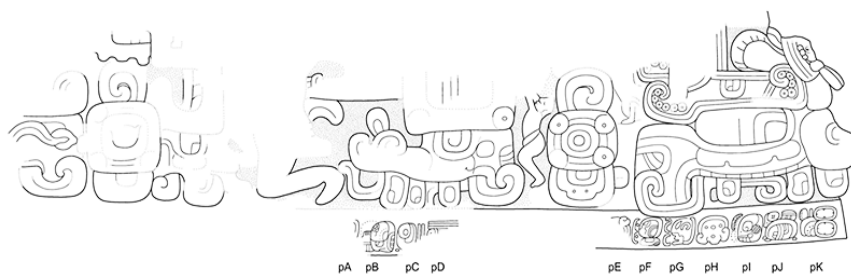


Fig. 5: (top) Stucco frieze, Structure 105, Chochkitam. 3D model by Alexandre Tokovinine. From the Visual Documentation Lab at the University of Alabama.

From photographs by Jesus Eduardo López, courtesy of the Holmul Archeological Project. (bottom) Western side of the Chochkitam stucco frieze.

Drawn by Alexandre Tokovinine and Cesar Enriquez.

The frieze features **WITZ** mountain spirits shown as heads with open mouths and stone-like teeth (**Fig. 5**, bottom). The excavations exposed the mountain head on the northwestern corner and part of the mountain in the center of the composition. Large serpent heads are depicted next to the mountains; the heads are facing each other, toward a large anthropomorphic figure kneeling before the central mountain. A smaller flying or suspended human figure appears between one of the serpent heads and the earflare of the corner mountain. The lower part of a torso of a seated human figure (up to just above the belt level) is visible on top of the corner mountain.

In summary, the Chochkitam frieze evokes the theme of royal apotheosis and belongs to a set of similar monuments from the region. The inscription contains at least two Long Count dates, one of which is preserved well enough to establish that it corresponds to AD 568. The name of the local protagonist is gone, but he was apparently commanded by the Dzibanche ruler K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' carrying the title of “holy Kaanu'l lord” and “East(ern) kaloomte'.” This implies that by AD 568 Chochkitam had been incorporated

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into the Kaanu'l hegemony. The fact that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' was in charge as late as AD 568 conforms to the corulership hypothesis outlined earlier.

A significant inscribed vessel came from the first unlooted burial from Chochkitam that was found in a looters' trench in the Southwest Group. Not much remains of the upper structure of the pyramid, but within its core was a dense layer of ceramic fragments, many of which were from polychrome vessels. Fortunately, the looters stopped their excavation at this point. Below the layers of blackened ceramics was a thin layer of small chert flakes. Below this layer were limestone slabs capping a cist cut into bedrock. Within it, was an extended individual with the head to the west, four ceramic vessels, and two carved jade earflares. The vessels included a Palmar Orange polychrome bowl decorated with quincunx motifs, a small Chinos Black on Orange polychrome bowl decorated with fleur-de-lis, a Cabrito Cream polychrome tripod plate featuring a seated figure on the interior, and a Zacatel Cream Panela variety polychrome vase (**Fig. 6**). That vase's iconography includes a repetitive flowery "solar path" motif (Taube, 2009) with cloud scrolls. Stylistically, it has close parallels with a group of polychrome vases belonging to Xultun's Queen Yax We'n Chahk. Previous investigations of similar ceramics dealt almost exclusively with looted vessels (Krempel et al., 2021). This is the first case of an inscribed Zacatel Cream Panela variety polychrome vase near Xultun with archaeological provenience.

Conclusions

Data from Chochkitam contribute significantly to our understanding of the history of the kingdom and of its place in a greater political landscape. The long dynastic count of Chochkitam rulers implies that the royal line traced itself back to Preclassic times. The truly historical record begins with Muwaan Bahlam of CKT Stela 3 sometime in the fourth or fifth century. Muwaan Bahlam's political affiliations are unknown, although the innovative style of the monument implies a link to Central Peten. The increased prominence of Xultun as a key regional partner of Tikal and Caracol indicates that Chochkitam benefited less than its immediate neighbors from the post-*entrada* order.

That situation apparently changed with the rise of the Kaanu'l dynasty. The Chochkitam frieze inscription explicitly states that Kaanu'l king K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' commanded local rulers. K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' is now confirmed to have been alive and active as Kaanu'l's hegemonic ruler in AD 568, six years after the victory over Tikal. This confirms Martin and Beliaev's (2017)

identification of him as Ruler 16 on the Kaanu'l dynastic sequence, between



Tun Kab Hix and "Sky Witness"; he coruled with the latter for some time. The spatial extent of K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich's network discussed here indicates that he was the true architect of the Kaanu'l expansion. Furthermore, a least-cost route analysis suggests that Chochkitam could have been an important waystation to launch attacks against Xultun and Tikal. It also suggests that all other northeast and central Peten kingdoms on direct routes to distant allies had been secured by the Dzibanche kings before the Tikal war in AD 562.

Chochkitam inscriptions expand our list of royal dynasties, which, like those of La Corona, Río Azul, and Holmul, had the trappings and ritual obligations of Maya royalty but lacked full royal titles like emblem glyphs. In the case of Chochkitam, Holmul, and Río Azul, the lack of royal titles seems to be related to distinct local identities and the time depth of these identities, rather than the perpetually subordinate status of the rulers. Chochkitam rulers claimed to be one of the Thirteen Divisions, on par with Tikal, Xultun, and Altun Ha kings.

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Fig. 6: Zacatal Cream Panela variety vase (CHO.L09.11.02.02) from Chochkitam. Photo by Francisco Estrada-Belli.

Chochkitam: A New Classic Maya Dynasty and the Rise of the Kaanu'l (Snake) Kingdom

by **Francisco Estrada-Belli** and **Alexandre Tokovinine** *continued from page 8*

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Finally, Chochkitam inscriptions offer a glimpse of what may be the Classic Maya “east identity” that was clearly shared by other polities in the region, including the Kaanu'l of Dzibanche. It appears that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' still perceived himself as a specifically “eastern” hegemon. At Chochkitam, the “east identity” is revealed in the royal names evoking the east and by distinct ritual practices such as commemorating 12 years of a k'atun with a stela and venerating the Yopaat deity. Chochkitam texts reveal that the boundary between the “east” and the “west” was somewhere west of Xultun and east of Naachtun.

After the gradual withdrawal of the Kaanu'l from the Peten after their defeats by Tikal, Chochkitam became part of a reorganized political landscape. It appears that the dynasties of Naachtun, Xultun, and Río Azul dominated the new political network. Data from Chochkitam indicate relationships with all the three sites during the reign of Ahaal Chan K'inich, albeit asymmetrical ones, because there are no external references to Chochkitam or gifts from Ahaal Chan K'inich to his Naachtun, Xultun, or Río Azul counterparts.

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“Bringing the Ancient Maya Back to Life in Classrooms Around the World”

with Jon and Pamela Voelkel

Access and download this active hyperlink: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81358547550>

Jon and Pamela (J&P) Voelkel are the author-illustrators of the **Jaguar Stones** series; Pamela does most of the writing and Jon does most of the illustrating. Their books tell the story of a city boy and a jungle girl – a mirror image of Jon's wild childhood in Latin America and Pamela's



Hero Twins Animation

altogether tamer upbringing in an English seaside town. The Voelkels met in London, where they both worked at the same advertising agency, and now live in Vermont.



To research the **Jaguar Stones**, they and their three adventure-loving children have explored over forty Maya sites in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico; canoed down underground rivers; tracked howler monkeys in the jungle; and studied Maya astronomy with NASA. Jon's most frightening experience was being lost and disoriented in the pitch-black labyrinth at Yaxchilan. Pamela's most frightening experience was being interviewed by Al Roker on the *Today* show.

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Bringing the Ancient Maya Back to Life in Classrooms Around the World

by Jon and Pamela Voelkel *continued from page 11*

The Books:

Humor and the Jaguar Stones – J&P Guest Post, Posted by Holly Schindler

We're thrilled to be asked about the humor in the **Jaguar Stones** series, because it's such a large part of the story. Too many books and movies present the Maya as grim and humourless - and that couldn't be further from the truth.

Ask most middle-graders to draw a picture of the ancient Maya, and they'll reach straight for the red paint to depict a human sacrifice. But if you ask them about the Romans, they don't automatically draw a slave being slaughtered in the Coliseum. (In fact, the Maya were nowhere near as violent as the Romans – and they were equally adept at straight roads, magnificent arches and indoor plumbing.)

So one of our missions is to highlight the Maya sense of humor.

When you study Maya art, you can't help but smile. Paintings running round Maya pots often depict scenes from mythology in a style very similar to comic strips. It's not just how they draw the figures, but how they tell the story, captions and all. The scenes are often very funny, with hidden jokes and wild facial expressions.

Another element that inspired us is the slapstick quality of Maya mythology. The good guys usually win through cunning and wit rather than brute strength. This makes a lot of sense when you meet the modern Maya and discover how much they love telling jokes and playing tricks on each other.

But it's not all fun and games. The Maya Lords of Death, a gang of skeletons and putrid corpses, can be seriously scary. So we use humour to diffuse the fear. If you think of the movie *Ghostbusters* and how terrifying

it would be if it wasn't so funny, that's the balance we're aiming for.

Sometimes the Maya do the

Middleworld

"As I see it," said Max, "all that stands between humankind and the end of the world is two talking monkeys, a crazy archaeologist covered in red paint, and a couple of kids with blowguns. Am I right?"

Fate has delivered a challenge of epic

proportions to Max Murphy. But can a teen whose biggest talent is for video games rescue his parents from the Maya Underworld and save himself from the villainous Lords of Death?

Middleworld trailer short video: [Middleworld](#)

The End of the World Club

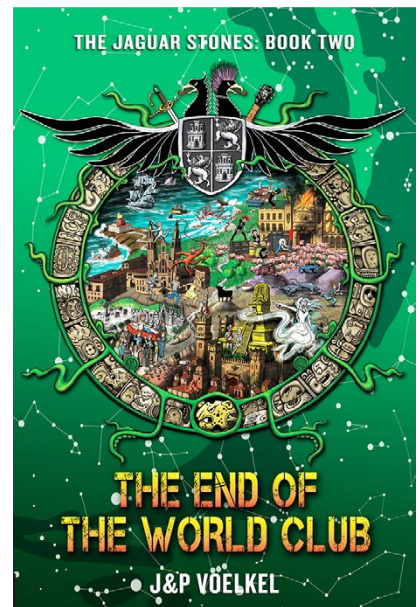
With a pack of hellhounds on their heels and the cape-twirling Count Antonio de Landa in hot pursuit, the teens must face madness and betrayal, bluff and double-bluff, to uncover the terrible secrets of the long-lost Yellow Jaguar. But no matter where they run, all roads lead to Xibalba. There, in the cold and watery Maya

underworld, we finally discover why only Max Murphy can save the world from the villainous Lords of Death.

End of the World Club trailer: [End of the World](#)

job for us. Take Ah Pukuh, the god of violent and unnatural death. He rules the deepest, darkest layer of the Maya underworld and wears a necklace of human eyeballs. But, happily for us, he's also known as Kisin – the farter. It's not often you get to write characters that are pure evil and insanely fun at the same time, but that's Maya mythology for you.

The other reason for including so much



continued on page 13

Bringing the Ancient Maya Back to Life in Classrooms Around the World

by Jon and Pamela Voelkel *continued from page 12*

The Books:

humor in the books is the age of our readership – wonderful, imaginative, giggling middle-schoolers who never heard a fart joke they didn't like. But more than that, most kids are wired to look for the funny. I've seen my own kids joke around where I've just wanted to cry: like, for example, when our car broke down recently on a freezing night in the middle of winter on a deserted New England road at just the point in the valley where there's no cell phone signal.

Kids are brave, creative and naturally funny. That's not to say they don't whine, but they seem to shrug things off faster than adults. That's why Max and Lola, our teenage main characters, can usually find reasons to laugh, even as they're battling the fearsome Death Lords.

It's a fine balance, because we never make light of the modern Maya. They've endured centuries of oppression, their culture was almost destroyed and, as Lola points out, access to further education and healthcare is still limited. There's nothing funny about any of that. Of course, we can't be sure if our readers absorb the social messages in amongst all the fun and adventure. But, at the very least, we hope they realize that the Maya are still around – and still finding things to laugh about.

A note about the Jaguar Stones:

The Jaguar Stones as a series was inspired by Jon's wild childhood growing up in Central and South America. He used to tell our children bedtime stories based on his experiences and the books came out of those stories. The five fictional jaguar stones were partly inspired by a jade carving that was found in a tomb at Altun Ha in Belize. This volleyball-sized head is carved



out of a single piece of jade and is the largest jade object ever discovered in the Maya area.

The River of No Return

Soon Max is back in Central America and reunited with the only ones who can help him in his battle – Lola, the mysterious Maya girl, and the howler monkeys, Lord 6-Dog and Lady Coco. Once again it's up to the four of them to save the

world as they fight off mutant cave spiders, zombie warriors, and, of course, the twelve villainous Death Lords. With the hurricane about to hit land, Max and Lola embark on a one-way journey to danger down the blighted Monkey River. They take shelter in a subterranean hotel, only to stumble upon Death Lord central. Torn between rescuing themselves and rescuing one of the last wild jaguars of the Monkey River region, Max and Lola find themselves drawn into an ever more bizarre series of tests, culminating in a terrifying ballgame that they can never win.

The River of No Return trailer: [River of No Return](#)

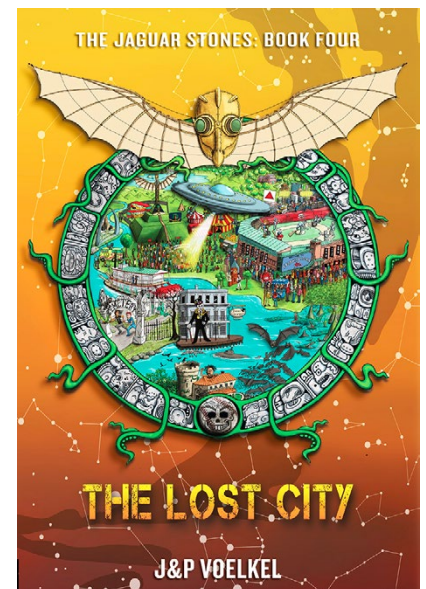
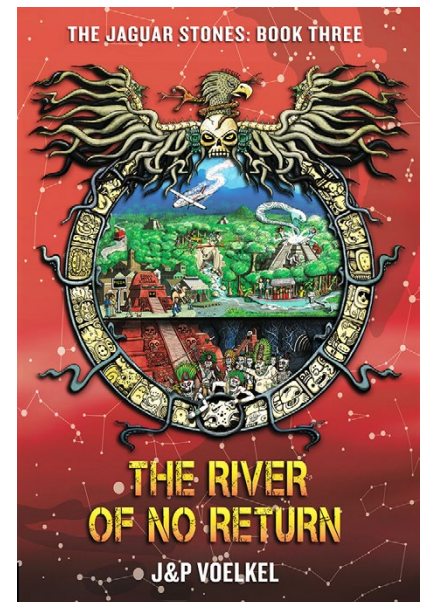
The Lost City

With his parents in jail and his best friend ignoring him, fourteen-year-old Max Murphy was pretty sure things couldn't get much worse.

But that was before a parade of Maya monsters crashed through his house and the Queen of the Bats tried to sink her fangs into his neck... This epic conclusion to the Jaguar Stones series

takes Max and Lola on their wildest adventure yet, north from the teeming rainforest to the lost city at the heart of America's past.

The Lost City trailer: [The Lost City](#)



The Jaguar Series books are available now in hardcover, paperback, and Kindle. Books can be found at Amazon or in bookstores. (If they are not in stock, the store will be happy to order them for you.)



The Classroom Connection:

*How two children's book authors have made their website
a leading resource on the ancient Maya for teachers around the world*



The long and short answer to “Why the Maya?”

Some words from the heart by J&P continued from page 13

Teachers often ask why we're so interested in the Maya – and why we work so hard on our Maya-themed educational resources, only to give them away free. The short answer is that it's the least we can do. For a start, we know it's not easy for teachers to find reliable facts about the Maya, because we remember how hard it was for us when we started researching Middleworld. Many of the canon textbooks are out of date now, and there's so much nonsense about the Maya on the Internet, it's hard to separate fact from fiction. But the real turning point for us happened on our first research trip to Guatemala, many years ago.

We were exploring a site called Yaxha with a local guide, when a group of Maya teenagers started following us. It turned out they wanted selfies with our son who's very tall by Guatemalan standards. (They also took photos of his size 14 feet.) Our guide watched for a while, then stepped forward and made a speech in Spanish: “Yes, remember these people,” he said, “but not because their son is tall. Remember them because they're writing a book about you – and soon, children in the United States will be reading about your history and your culture.” The gum-chewing, hoodie-wearing Maya teens stared at us in surprise for a moment, then burst into applause.

We were horrified. Our plan had been simply to write an exciting adventure set in the jungles of the Maya. Now we were suddenly being tasked with something much bigger – to tell a story that would honor those kids at Yaxha. Worse still, we knew our guide was right. The fact is that the Maya have been exploited, lied about, and oppressed ever since the first European explorers arrived on their shores. They didn't need us adding to the pile on. So however well-meaning our intentions, we knew our first job was to get our facts straight. We ended up learning to read and write Maya glyphs, befriending archaeologists, hanging out at digs, studying Maya astronomy with NASA, getting to know modern Maya people, even doing school visits in the



Jon arrives at the 7 Bridges school dressed as a Maya king. There's another presentation to do!



Scary or beautiful, the young students love Jon and his award-winning smile!

mountains of Chiapas. We've been helped by so many people and had so many amazing experiences, it seems only fair to pass on the knowledge we've acquired. *cont. on page 15*



Click on the hyperlinks to lead you to: **Maya Topics**

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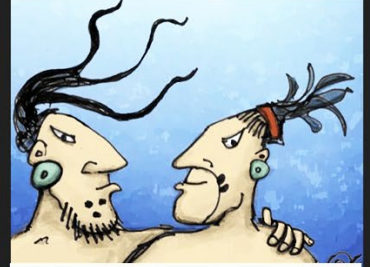
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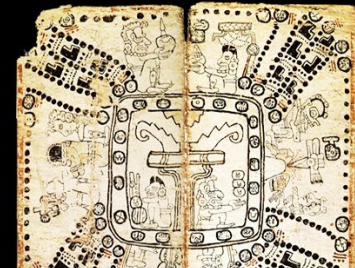
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[Best Maya Websites](#)

The long and short answer to “Why the Maya?”

Some words from the heart by J&P *continued from page 14*

Above all, we want to share the one glaring truth that shines out of our research: namely, that the Ancient Maya were incredible – and every bit as deserving of in-depth study as the Ancient Greeks.

Why do we feel so strongly about this? For Pamela, perhaps it's because she went to school in England and was taught only European history. She cringes to remember, years later when she was working in a London advertising agency, accepting without question the myth that the Maya vanished overnight – and using

it as a fun hook for a car promotion. Even Jon, who grew up in Latin America, had only a hazy knowledge of the people who built those towering pyramids in the rainforest. Now that we both know better, it feels only right to be creating educational resources for today's schoolchildren – so they'll know better too.

We still often think about those teenagers at Yaxha, especially as one of them inspired the character of Lola in the **Jaguar Stones** books.

KO'OX! (That's Yucatec Mayan for “Let's go!”)

continued on page 16



Bringing the Ancient Maya Back to Life in Classrooms Around the World More Teacher's Tools and Videos:

by Jon and Pamela Voelkel

continued from page 15



Be sure to check out the new Jaguar Stones collection of Maya teaching resources, researched and compiled by J&P Voelkel. We know how hard it is to find reliable, up-to-date information about the ancient Maya, and we've listened to teachers' requests for more deep dives into specific topics. We hope you'll find these lesson plans and projects informative, inspiring and easy-to-use in your classroom. Click on this hyperlink: [Teaching Resources](#)



[Official Trailer](#)



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[Meet Lord 6-Dog](#)



[Making your own Stop Motion Videos](#)



[Sounds of Howler Monkeys](#)



[Jon teaching Maya Math](#)

Be sure to attend Jon & Pamela's event on November 23. Meanwhile, check out: JaguarStones.com

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

by Zach Lindsey

16 November 653 CE: On 9.11.1.2.0 9 Ajaw 3 K'an'k'in G4, K'inich Kan Bahlam entered a cave under the watchful eyes of local Palenque gods G1 and G111. He was eighteen years old, and he wouldn't become king for decades. Yet years later, he memorialized this date on the Cross Group tablets at Palenque. Cave enterings in the Maya area were important ways for leaders to commune with underworld spirits. Even today, many indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans have profound relationships with caves. If the ancient ceremonies were anything like the modern ones, he was accompanied by musicians and religious leaders who would have spent a few days with him in the cave while he performed rituals.

19 November 1761 CE: On 12.7.5.4.12 11 Eb 10 Ch'en G2, Jacinto Canek spoke about colonialist violence at a church ceremony in Cisteil to beg local Maya people to rebel against Spanish oppression. It was the

Name glyph of K'inich Kan Bahlam II.

beginning of an uprising that would lead to Canek's death a month later. Like many revolutionary figures, Canek was complex, but he seems to have developed a deeply anti-Catholic belief system after abuses at the hands of Franciscans and saw rebellion as the only way of relief from Spanish oppression. Canek believed in the importance of revitalizing Maya culture, and took the name Canek as a reference to previous Maya rulers. He actually took over the church at which he gave his address a few days earlier, but waited until the 19th to give the address. This makes me wonder if the date was intentional: Eb was and is an important day for new undertakings, meaning he may have chosen this day for its ritual significance. 🏰



“Lives of the Gods: Divinity in Maya Art”

**November 21,
2022 – April 2,
2023 at the
Met Museum
in New York City**

In Maya art, the gods are depicted at all stages of life: as infants, as adults at the peak of their maturity and influence, and as they age. The gods could die, and some were born anew, serving as models of regeneration and resilience. In “Lives of the Gods: Divinity in Maya Art”, rarely seen masterpieces and recent discoveries trace the life cycle of the gods, from the moment of their creation in a sacred mountain to their dazzling transformations as blossoming flowers or fearsome creatures of the night.

Maya artists depicted the gods in imaginative ways from the monumental to the miniature – from exquisitely carved, towering sculptures to jade, shell, and obsidian ornaments that adorned kings and queens, connecting them symbolically to supernatural forces. Finely painted ceramics reveal the eventful lives of the gods in rich detail.

Created by master artists of the Classic period (CE 250–900) in the royal cities of what is now Guatemala,



LIVES
OF THE GODS
DIVINITY IN
MAYA ART

Honduras, and Mexico, the 120 landmark works in Lives of the Gods evoke a world in which the divine, human, and natural realms are interconnected and alive.

The exhibition is made possible by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, the Placido Arango Fund, the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund, the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund, the Mellon Foundation, and The International Council of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Kimbell Art Museum.

Marquee: Maya artist. Whistle with the Maize God emerging from a flower (detail), Mexico, Late Classic period (600–900 CE). Ceramic, pigment. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection 🏰



**Precolumbian Society of Washington DC
Webinar:**

November 4, 7 pm EST

**“Wari Power and Local Encounters
in Middle Horizon, Cusco, Peru”**

with **Véronique Bélisle**, PhD,
Associate Professor, Millsaps College

In the Andes, the Middle Horizon (600-1000 CE) has traditionally been interpreted as a period during which a strong Wari imperial state conquered several provinces and tightly controlled local populations. In the Cusco region of southern Peru, research conducted at large Wari installations has long guided reconstructions of Wari power, leading scholars to argue that Wari presence resulted in the loss of local autonomy and the reorganization of economic activities. In this talk, our speaker uses regional surveys as well as excavation data from the local center of Ak'awillay and from the Wari site of Kaninkunka to test this model.

Dr. Véronique Bélisle is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Millsaps College. She is interested in state expansion, its impact on local lifeways, and the strategies that state colonists develop to interact with the communities they meet. She is working on a book that uses a bottom-up approach to understand Wari impact in Cusco.

Access this hyperlink to register for the event:

[Wari Power and Local Encounters](#)

IMS October Third Wednesday Recording:

**“Preserving Underwater Maya Finds
Using 3D Technology”**

with **Heather McKillop**, Louisiana State University



Heather McKillop is the Thomas and Lillian Landrum Alumni Professor in the LSU Department of Geography & Anthropology and founder-director of the LSU DIVA Lab, which stands for Digital Imaging and Visualization in Archaeology. She is best known for her research into ancient Maya coastal trade routes and for her related discoveries of a roughly 1,200-year-old wooden canoe paddle and jadeite scraping tool, both found underwater in a mangrove peat bog below the sea floor in Belize.

Access this hyperlink to view the recording:

[Preserving Underwater Maya Finds](#)



IMS EXPLORER

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

Dumbarton Oaks Webinar and In-Person:

December 1, at 6 pm EST

**“Rulers from the West:
Teotihuacan in Maya History
and Politics”**

with **David Stuart**, PhD

This program will revisit an important historical and archaeological topic familiar to many Mesoamericanists, yet sharing a few new insights and interpretations. Hope some of you can attend.

Registration is here, either virtual or in person:

<https://bit.ly/3MO2j6b>

IMS October Fourth Wednesday Recording:

**“Living Under the Canopy: Lowland Maya
Urban Studies in the Age of Lidar”**

with **Dr. Damien B. Marken**,
Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania



*Dr. Marken excavating a
cached ceramic vessel
from the El Perú-Waka'
hinterland settlement
T19-1, Tres Hermanas
District. Photo by
D. Menéndez, 2019.*

Archaeologists of the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka' (PAW) have spent the last twenty years investigating the ancient Maya city of El Perú-Waka', Peten, Guatemala, mapping its structures, studying its water management systems, and excavating its buildings, large and small.

Damien B. Marken is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Criminal Justice, and Sociology at Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania. In 2011, he received his PhD in anthropology from Southern Methodist University. A National Geographic Society grantee and Explorers Club Fellow, he has actively participated in field studies across the Maya lowlands.

Access this hyperlink to view the recording:

[Living Under the Canopy](#)

It's official... save the date!

**18th Annual Tulane Maya
Symposium and Workshop
Inequality Among the Maya
March 16-19, 2023**

Stay tuned for more announcements soon!

tms.tulane.edu tms@tulane.edu