

The Editorial

Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire

Mount Royal University; AFAR

maxlamsh@gmail.com

Matthew Longstaffe

University of Calgary

and

C. Mathew Saunders

Davidson Day School; AFAR

This eighth issue of *The Mayanist* kicks off our new submission format. For the first seven issues, our papers all stemmed out of an AFAR conference—either Maya at the Playa or Maya at the Lago. However, this issue is the first to stem from a concise submission project headed by our co-editor Matthew Longstaffe (Ph.D. Candidate, University of Calgary). If you, *reader*, are interested in proposing a thematical issue for *The Mayanist* and in acting as a future guest editor, please do email the editor-in-chief (see above) with a detailed suggestion.

We, *The Mayanist* team, are thus doubly excited to introduce this new, concerted issue on the theme of *Ancient Maya Intermediate Elites*. Issue 8 contains two articles and two reports, along with one book review. The two articles, by Melissa Burham and John Walden, respectively address intermediary elites among the Preclassic and Classic Maya. The first report, by Matthew Longstaffe and colleagues, focuses on the architecture of an intermediary elite group from the site of Yaxnocah. The second report, by Xanti Sirani Ceballos and colleagues, centers on residue analyses from vessels associated with intermediary elites from the site of El Palmar. Altogether, these four papers nicely bridge the Preclassic to the Classic periods and span the entire Central and Southern Lowlands, covering sites located in modern Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. The book review, by Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire, discusses Kenneth Selligson’s brand new *The Maya and Climate Change* (Oxford University Press).

We are once again proud to feature the *ajtz’ib* Walter Paz Joj, who collaborated with our authors to produce more beautiful original artwork. As usual, publishing *The Mayanist* would be impossible without our layout maestro, Joel Skidmore. Our team has grown again, now featuring a team of four dedicated copy-editors from Mount Royal University headed by Kento Ammond and including Morea Carle, Gregory Gaves, and Adam “A.B.” Brotherton. We now turn to our Guest Editor, Matthew Longstaffe, so that he may break down the theme and papers from this issue.

From Our Guest Editor

This special issue of *The Mayanist* explores the topic of intermediate elites, a term we introduce to broadly refer to the heterogeneous subset of people in ancient Maya societies that occupied an intermediary social position between apical rulers and the commoner masses (Elson and Covey 2006:2). I have long been interested in this topic, and it has been my great privilege to bring together current research on this important, although understudied, aspect of ancient Maya social organization. As you will see, the authors approach this theme with different questions in mind, the result of which is a series of articles and reports that touch on diverse areas of inquiry, including sociopolitical dynamics, social and ritual-religious integration, urbanization, foodways, socioeconomics, and so much more.

What differentiates “elites” from “non-elites,” and how clear are these divisions? These are fundamental yet unresolved questions with implications for how we approach the study of the ancient Mayas. Until relatively recently, past Maya societies were thought to be structured by a rigid, two-stratum social system of elites and commoners. Although some scholars have been raising doubts about this characterization for decades (e.g., Chase and Chase 1992; Sharer 1993), it is today more evident than ever that the Mayas’ social reality was far more complex than these cut-and-dry categories suggest. Ancient Maya communities were complex social arenas made up of various sub-groups and factions with different (and often competing) goals and objectives in mind. In addition to rulers and those broadly referred to as “commoners” (Lohse and Valdez 2004), communities included people whose social station fell somewhere in between. One of the aims of this issue is to bring attention to these myriad intermediary social actors who intersected the complex systems and institutions that structured and rationalized aspects of the ancient Maya world.

Although this issue is structured around the topic of “intermediate elites,” our intent is not to introduce yet another rigid *a priori* category to the analysis of Maya social organization. Instead, I – and encourage others to – think of this term as a heuristic wherein the social position of intermediary actors is relative, depending on the historically contingent community and institutional context(s) of analysis. This approach allows recognition of many different types of intermediary actors who contributed (in various ways) to the social complexity and richness of Maya societies. Thus, intermediate elites should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis; this is clearly illustrated by the articles in this issue, which I am pleased to introduce.

The first article in the issue, *Becoming an Intermediate Elite: Ritual Cooperation and Urbanization at Late Preclassic Ceibal*, by Melissa Burham, delves into the social relations and processes that gave rise to incipient intermediate elites at Ceibal, Guatemala. The Late Preclassic was a time of increasing urbanization, social stratification, and political centralization. Burham considers the evidence to argue that incipient intermediate elites at Ceibal oversaw the construction of, and activities at, outlying minor temple groups to support social cohesion as these processes unfolded. Drawing on several years of excavation data and analyses, this article provides an invaluable perspective on the role of intermediate elites as social agents during a period of emergent

sociopolitical complexity.

Next, John Walden's *The Political Roles of Inter-Hierarchical Agents in the Classic Maya Lowlands* offers a theoretical take on intermediate elite agents to explore the dynamics of Maya political systems. While most scholarship on Classic period political organization focuses on the actions of apical elites situated within royal courts, this article considers political actors who occupy an "inter-hierarchical" social position – that is, somewhere between the bottom and the top of the social ladder. Walden articulates an agent-focused framework that charts intermediate elites' shifting and variable relationships as they interact with suzerains, peers, and subordinates, effectively "peopling" the middle hierarchical level. These relationships are envisaged as intermediate elite "faces": a downward face projected to client commoners, a lateral face to peers, and an upward face to apical elites. Recognition of intermediate elites' shifting strategies speaks clearly to the notion that Classic Maya polities were dynamic arenas of political competition, populated by subgroups and factions with competing discourses, goals, and intents.

Next, my colleagues from the Proyecto Arqueológico Bajo Laberinto (PABAL) and I contribute a report titled *Managing the Marketplace: The View from Ximbal Che, an Intermediate Elite Architectural Group at Yaxnohcah, Campeche*. We synthesize data from our ongoing field investigations to describe the developmental history of Ximbal Che and to reconstruct the integrative socioeconomic practices of the people who lived at this architectural group. Building on a growing body of knowledge on ancient Maya marketplaces and socioeconomic systems more broadly, we explore the possibility that during the Late Classic, Ximbal Che was the residential and administrative site of an intermediate elite corporate group that structured day-to-day life around organizing and administering Yaxnohcah's Sakjol marketplace, located next door.

Finally, *Ancient Maya Standard-Bearers' Foodways: Chemical Residue Analyses of Ceramic Vessels at the Guzmán Group of El Palmar, Campeche*, by Xanti Sirani Ceballos and colleagues, offers insights on intermediate elite foodways. The article focuses on the Guzmán Group, El Palmar, Campeche—an outlying courtyard group notable for once being home to a *lakam* ("standard-bearer") named Ajpach' Waal. This report, which presents the results of a geochemical prospection study on ceramic vessels from various contexts at this group, gleans insights into Guzmán Group standard-bearers' food-related practices in everyday life and on more ceremonial occasions.

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