

The Editorial

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It has been a privilege to work with the 18 authors involved in the creation of this first issue of the third volume of *The Mayanist*. Building upon our virtual 10th Annual Maya at the Lago Conference (M@L), this issue rises to explore many dimensions of community-engaged anthropology in the Maya World. As our discipline slowly cuts its extractive roots, we anthropologists must endeavor to adapt our practices to truly collaborate with the people we study and the heritage communities of sites we excavate in our quest to generate knowledge. An innovative approach to the production of knowledge is what drives Patricia A. McAnany, Iván Batún Alpuche, and their Cenotes Project team. In close partnership with teachers and students, they are finding ways to simultaneously study human perceptions of cenotes, empower young Yucatec@s, and help preserve instrumental natural resources. This approach highlights how community-based participatory research (CBPR) in anthropology must also emphasize the return of results to communities through adequate channels. While we cannot achieve so much as a journal, we can certainly help circulate the results from these projects widely, freely, and in compelling fashion.

The Cenotes Project is led by InHerit, a nonprofit dedicated to Indigenous heritage and directed by Patricia McAnany, who received the lifetime achievement award at our 10th M@L. Her InHerit team and former students provide us with five excellent papers which, along with 3 more contributions, make this issue the biggest we've produced, with a total of three research reports and five articles. Another former student of Patricia McAnany now Assistant Professor at Kenyon College, Claire Novotny, has done a remarkable job as our guest editor (more from her below). We are also proud to have convinced our longtime friend and author, the *ajtz'ib* Walter Paz Joj, to illustrate the entire issue. And we remain fortunate to be able to rely on our dedicated layout maestro, Joel Skidmore, our prompt reviewers, and our copy editor, Jack Barry.

All the papers in this issue are written in English. But that doesn't mean we have given up on our

goal to increase the accessibility of scientific literature in Latin America—quite the opposite. In fact, we just published Spanish translations for three papers from the first issue of our second volume (Batún-Alpuche 2020; Cojti-Ren 2020; Palka et al. 2020). These recent translations are available on our renovated webpage, which now allows our readers to download every individual article. The Spanish versions of the articles span the exact same page-range as their English siblings, which simplifies citation of their content (by simply substituting the English for the Spanish title). We are committed to pursuing the translation of more of our English articles—an endeavor only possible thanks to our dedicated authors and to our amazing, previous guest editor Jocelyne Ponce. We sincerely hope current and future authors will continue to help us achieve this goal.

While, as a team, we are proud to contribute to the open-access dissemination of inspiring community-engaged research, we cannot ignore a sobering and distressing reality. The current pandemic, which will soon have stretched over four calendar years, is disproportionately impacting poorer nations, for a lack of a better term. This includes the countries that are home to the Maya. We are saddened by the tragic loss of research partners, friends, and families in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Our hearts remain with our many colleagues still facing incredible insecurity as Covid-19 suspends the lives of entire communities. The double impact of the health crisis and its cooption of the economy has seriously endangered the lives and livelihoods of the people we wish to resume working with. The future of community-engaged research must feature innovative ways to use our presence, influence, and funds to contribute meaningfully to communities that will all have suffered from these cruel years. We must seek to develop our projects from the grounds-up with our community partners, in concert with Indigenous scholars, and with objectives of sustainability and mutual success.

From our Guest Editor

I am grateful and honored to be the guest editor of this issue of *The Mayanist*. I am especially excited to introduce an edition that grew out of the 2021 Maya at the Lago conference honoring my doctoral advisor, Patricia A. McAnany. Through these papers we can see the impact that she has made on the field of Maya archaeology through her collaborations with multiple partners, students, NGOs, and colleagues.

The term “Mayanist” comes out of a late 19th century way of referring to the study (mostly philological) of ancient civilizations (i.e., Egyptologist, Assyriologist). To be frank, it has never felt like a comfortable designation, or a professional identity that I felt proud to claim. While it remains an accurate description of our field in terms of identifying the culture that we study, it conveys a sense of distance between researcher and subject. The descendant community of Maya people are dynamic, diverse, political people who are eager to play a more purposeful role in the production of knowledge about the past.

What does a Mayanist of the 21st century look like? Can we reclaim this title? I think that the papers collected here exemplify the ways in which our field is starting to transform. We see here the move away from the traditional, unidirectional, colonialist gaze epitomized by the term “Mayanist” towards an archaeology of inclusivity and engagement. Mayanists are no longer antiquarians or collectors but people who are self-aware about their positionality in relation to Indigenous people.

Dylan J. Clark, Diane L. Slocum, and Nancy Strickland Fields start their article, “Interweaving Knowledge and Foregrounding Local Interests: Reflections on Building Collaborative Partnerships with Indigenous Communities” with a helpful overview of anthropological thinking related to engagement. They situate InHerit in its intellectual context and discuss two of their recent efforts—the *Cultural Heritage, Ecology, and Conservation of Yucatec Cenotes* and the *Amplifying Native Voices in North Carolina History* projects. Both illustrate elemental principles of CBPR, namely the centering of Indigenous voices and concerns and the continuous dialogue necessary among collaborators working towards a common goal. One notable outcome shared by both projects was that local educators were interested in teaching about archaeological heritage but lacked the resources and accessible information to do so. Closing this information gap became a goal of each project; indeed, making archaeological knowledge accessible is a hallmark of InHerit programs since their inception.

Kristin Landry Montes, Patricia A. McAnany, and Iván Bátun Alpuche expand on the results of the Yucatán Cenotes Project in their piece, “Decolonizing the Classroom and Centering the Biocultural Heritage of Cenotes in Yucatán, México”. The authors braid together environmental conservation and cultural heritage to convey “the interconnectivity of people and place”. The project collaborated with middle school students and their teachers to conduct CBPR on local perceptions of cenotes. A focus of this article are insights garnered from survey responses collected from students and teachers at the beginning and end of the project. The initial surveys were crucial in shaping the content and aims of the project and the final surveys gave a sense of the challenges faced, especially by teachers. A strong message was the desire for knowledge about cenotes and archaeological heritage presented in a local, Indigenous manner instead of one suffused with settler colonialism.

I want to highlight the importance of InHerit’s assessment of their community-based projects throughout the Maya region (see McAnany 2016). Though community archaeology is gaining ground in the Maya area, examples of evaluating the processes of collaboration are few. It is difficult to overstate how crucial it is to hear from local and Indigenous voices about their perceptions of archaeological heritage and the challenges they face in accessing knowledge. Landry Montes and the InHerit team are setting important standards for other projects in the region.

Engagement across learning institutions is also a strength of community-based efforts, as illustrated by Rubén Morales Forte and his collaborators on the *Maya Scripta* project. In their paper, “The Maya Scripta Project: Museum, University, and Community-Engaged Scholarship in

Dolores, Petén, Guatemala”, the authors outline their community-engaged approach to effectively disseminate epigraphic information to museum patrons and local students. The *Maya Scripta* project aims to make Maya epigraphy accessible to descendant communities and other interested people through an open-access, online database. Working along three axes—local museum, school, and marketing—the project was able to increase visitors to the museum through marketing and increase local understanding of Maya epigraphy through targeted workshops with students. The project’s assessment of their outcomes provides another example of the importance of feedback in shaping future engagements with the community.

Community-engaged projects are sometimes critiqued for being overly preoccupied with the political present and thus not maintaining scientific neutrality. Maia Dedrick challenges this critique in her article, “Community-Engaged Archaeology and the Question of Rigor”. Dedrick closely examines the different motivations that archaeologists may have for joining the field, proposing different “veins” of motivation for practicing archaeology. She argues that it serves us well when we are aware of why we find the past alluring. This point is supported by the convincing example of Sylvanus G. Morley, an early archaeologist working among Yucatec Maya laborers whose heritage he was excavating. Dedrick shows that Morley was simultaneously exploiting Maya history and their labor while affecting their treatment as laborers by describing their perceived work effort to government agencies. Morley’s reports shaped U.S. government policy and other researchers’ attitudes about contemporary Maya people during the 20th century. It is a clear example of how one’s positionality and motivations for conducting research bleed into the way that knowledge about the past is produced.

Brent K. S. Woodfill also explores positionality in his article, “Examining Blind Spots and Assumptions Impeding Community Archaeology in the Maya World”. Starting with his own “blind spots and assumptions”, Woodfill challenges underlying ideas about local Maya communities that may impede archaeological collaborations. He addresses the formation of national parks as locales of environmental preservation and the concomitant characterization of contemporary Maya people as trespassers on a pristine landscape. His analysis draws on his decades of experience working and collaborating with descendant communities in the Northern Transversal Strip in central Guatemala. Woodfill challenges archaeologists to decolonize our discipline by advocating for descendant communities, their land rights, and economic freedom.

Resisting development is a theme in C. Mathews Samson and Alisha Kendrick-Pradhan’s article, “Persisting Worldviews and Conflicted Development along the Ruta Maya”. Samson and Kendrick-Pradhan focus on the resistance of Indigenous Maya communities to development agendas from governments that erode Maya political and economic autonomy and worldview. It is important to consider Maya identity as tied to place and environment and how that sparks motivation for activism against transnational development projects. The authors review two examples, resistance to the *Tren Maya* project in the Yucatán peninsula and *Proyecto Chico Mendes* from highland

Guatemala. Activists in Yucatán and Guatemala share a commitment to sustaining local environmental resources through Indigenous ecological practices conjoined with activism to defend their ancestral relationship with the landscape.

Engaging with archaeological landscapes through the eyes of local people is a theme that runs through several papers. In his paper, “Documenting the Brigades: Oral History of Local Archaeology Experts in the Puuc Region, Yucatán, México”, Tomás Gallareta Cervera relays preliminary insights from an ongoing oral history project in collaboration with local laborers from the Puuc region. For Gallareta Cervera, analyzing Indigenous perceptions of the historical landscape of Yucatán expands and enriches our understanding of the archaeological record by embedding interpretations within the historical context of the region. Gallareta Cervera uses oral history as a method of listening to the voices of two groups of people: the Puuc Angels (*La Brigada Volante*), stewards of archaeological sites throughout the peninsula, and the Yucatán-based masonry crew that reconstructs sites through the Maya region (*La Brigada de Restauración*). The interviews challenge our notions of “expert” in archaeology by showing how these men’s sustained engagement with archaeological resources through their labor makes them experts of the Puuc landscape in the past and the present.

Harri Kettunen and Marc Zender’s paper, “The ‘Month Signs’ in Diego de Landa’s *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatán*” uses Kettunen’s recent transillumination photographs of the original document to make new interpretations about the month signs. The authors argue that these versions of the month names recorded in the colonial-era *Relacion* are similar to names recorded hundreds of years earlier on monuments. The authors argue that instead of interpreting these inconsistencies as incorrect, they should be seen as a bridge between southern lowland spellings and those of the north. The differences observed are patterned and may suggest bilingualism of a northern scribe.

At the beginning of this section I asked what a Mayanist of the 21st century might look like. I think that this collection of papers helps us envision an answer. Many of these authors share the goal of challenging established hierarchies in our discipline by centering the voices of Indigenous community members. Applying CBPR methodologies is clearly one way forward towards reshaping the way that archaeological knowledge is produced. Oral history and ethnography are methods that foreground the expertise and activism of Maya people. Scrutinizing our positionality as researchers provides a starting point for decolonizing and building a more just and inclusive discipline. A 21st century Mayanist does not maintain a false sense of neutrality or distance between expert and subject but stands on an even field, aware of the social and political forces that carried them there, ready to listen.

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