

## The Editorial

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This new *The Mayanist* differs from our previous five issues, as it is entirely populated by articles devoted to the anthropology of contemporary Maya Peoples. This issue stems from the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Maya at the Playa Conference, primarily organized by Harri Kettunen (University of Helsinki), and which revolved around the broad and exciting topic of Mesoamerican foodways. The four papers in this issue explore the foodways of the contemporary Guatemalan Highlands and Belizean Lowlands from diverse perspectives. Half of the papers are authored by emerging Indigenous scholars from Guatemala—Dora Maritza García Patzán and Miguel Cuj. Their unique perspectives on Kaqchikel and K'iche' culinary and commensal traditions make this issue invaluable. The other two excellent papers—by Mark Wright and Kerry Hull and Allen J. Christenson—address the symbolic and medicinal value of both domesticated and wild plants among the K'iche' and Mopan. Together, this research report and three articles—primarily anchored in cultural anthropology, ethnobotany, and linguistics—draw a multifaceted portrait of the foodways of three distinct Maya ethnolinguistic groups. Additionally, C. Mathews Samson wrote an insightful review for the recent and important *Mayalogue* monograph by Jakalteq author Victor Montejo.

The timely production of this issue would have been impossible without our devoted guest editors, Shawn Morton and Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown. They further introduce the issue's four contributions below. We are incredibly fortunate, once more, to feature the original artwork of the singularly talented *ajtz'ib* Walter Paz Joj. Our layout maestro, Joel Skidmore, has once again done swift and irreproachable work in producing our beautiful journal. Finally, we must also thank Jack Barry for his attentive work as copy editor and all of our timely and efficient peer reviewers.

Beyond the current issue, we are glad to report that we have launched the next step of our

translation effort. Our enduring collaborator, Jocelyne Ponce (Tulane University), has agreed to step in as editor of the Spanish Language version of the journal. Two exceptionally qualified and generous linguists—Abril Jimenez (Davidson College) and Julio César López Otero (University of Houston)—have been hard at work for months translating articles previously only available in English. Abril, Julio, and Jocelyne are almost done translating the journal’s first issue. The newly available Spanish language papers (Kidder et al. 2019; Parker et al. 2019; Selligson 2019) are freely downloadable on our website. Thanks to Joel Skidmore, these translations have the same length as their English counterparts—thus facilitating their citation (see the bibliography below for the simplest way to cite them). A few short weeks after posting these translations, we are happy to report that they’ve been downloaded over 450 times—over half of which occurred in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. The objective is to continue this process until all our papers become available in both languages. As stated in the previous issue’s Editorial (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire et al. 2021), this effort aims to elevate our journal’s accessibility in a way that transcends linguistic and political borders. Indeed, paywall-protected academic literature can be challenging to access for our colleagues based in Latin America.

### **From our Guest Editors**

When we heard that the topic chosen for the 15th Annual Maya at the Playa Conference was food, we were eager to attend and excited to participate. Food is the perfect subject for anthropological research, not only for its inherent universality but also for the breadth of studies to which we can subject it. We might seek to understand the creation and consumption of food as a social activity, an economic and technological process, an expression of creativity or conformity, piety or blasphemy, or a political statement (the apocryphal but catchy “Let them eat cake!” comes to mind). Food speaks to health and wellbeing. Immediately, we appreciate it for its sensory qualities. One step removed, it is also the subject of artistic representation and literary description through which we can explore a whole other world of meaning and history.

Food is something in which many of us are inherently interested. We think about it. We talk about it. We remember it. And we plan for it, often, during the act of eating it. Food is one of the most photographed subjects on Instagram. Heck, some restaurants these days, in recognition that we taste first with our social media popularity, make their food, plating, and lighting—first-and-foremost—“Instagramable”. There is no mystery to this phenomenon; we are interested in food because there are few things more human than the creation and consumption of food. Our closing presentation at the conference was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, reporting on a preliminary examination of Maya archaeologists’ field-food preferences in Belize. However, our ultimate conclusion remains relevant to this issue: not only is it true that “you are what you eat,” but you also “eat what you are.” We’ve successfully turned a biological necessity into the ultimate expression of human culture.

As noted above, each of the contributions presented in this issue deal with food as culturally specific and value-laden from the perspective of contemporary peoples. Mark Wright and Kerry Hull open the issue by considering plants or forest botanicals—many of which are foods—and their effects on the quality or nature of blood and its relationship to overall wellbeing among Mopan Mayas. Specifically, they focus on such understandings in the Mopan village of San José in the Toledo District of southern Belize. They delve into how the Mopan use their specific knowledges and methods to strengthen or build blood, both metaphorically and scientifically. Wright and Hull also explore how broader Mopan concepts of wellness and disease relate to these understandings regarding equilibrium within blood. They conclude that forest botanicals continue to play a significant role in the daily lives of the Mopan of San José, despite increasing accessibility to Western pharmaceuticals and medical practices

Dora Maritza García Patzán then addresses the complex and nuanced themes of tradition and authenticity in food from the compelling perspective of her own life experience, family, and hometown. Following a brief account of the pre-colonial and colonial histories of San Martín Jilotepeque, she presents recipes for two traditional foods: the Pul'ik and Sub'anik. She relates when they are made and consumed, which ingredients and methods have pre-colonial origins, and which are introductions from the colonial era. García Patzán reinforces the dual concepts that 1) food cultures change through internal and external processes, and 2) food is one of the principal ways that people connect with their cultures and pasts.

Allen Christenson carries the conversation into a discussion of the role of Maya ceremonial feasting in the creation and maintenance of beings (humans) who act as mediators between this world and the ancestral and sacred realms. In particular, he highlights the critical and historically specific relationships between maize, humans, ancestors, deities, and associated ceremonial foodways among the highland Maya. Christenson builds the resulting narrative around translations of various historical documents, such as the Popol Vuh, alongside ethnographic studies from the 1970s. Among his many observations, he highlights the vital role of ceremonial feasting in creating and maintaining humans as sustainers and providers for the world. Recognition of this role guides the fundamental principle—respect—in the relationship between highland Maya Peoples and their traditional foods, especially maize.

Finally, Miguel Cuj sets an ambitious agenda for his contribution by examining how Mayan languages—specifically K'iche'—imbue food with a persistent legacy of meaning. Cuj relies on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Totonicapán to explore interconnected dimensions of K'iche' foodways. Invoking sociolinguistic theory supported by a wealth of archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence, Cuj delves deeply into the broader cultural context of these meanings as (re)constructed from the past in the present.

## References

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