

The Editorial

Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire

Davidson College; AFAR

C. Mathew Saunders

Davidson Day School; AFAR

Harri Kettunen

University of Helsinki

Brainstorming about exciting projects, making plans, and dreaming of possibilities certainly are fun activities. This pretty much describes the process of how we came up with *The Mayanist*. Actually completing a project by following up on said plans is incredibly fulfilling, yet not always as fun. In this, we are extremely lucky, since rearing *The Mayanist* to production has so far been a truly enjoyable collaborative operation. Thus, we are truthfully both excited to deliver this second issue and looking forward to work on the third one with a new team of authors and so, despite the current SARS-2 health crisis.

Producing an illustrated academic journal with the very limited budget of a nonprofit organization can be challenging. Doing so on a tight timeline is even harder. Our success in accomplishing this is entirely due to the hard work of both our volunteers and our talented artist, Aaron Alfano. We are incredibly thankful for Harri Kettunen, our guest editor and photographer, and Joel Skidmore, our layout artist and publication expert, without whom officially making *The Mayanist* a biannual journal would be next-to-impossible.

Just like the first, this second issue of the first volume of *The Mayanist* stems out of one of American Foreign Academic Research's (AFAR) conferences: the 13th Annual Maya at the Playa Conference (M@P2020), held in Flagler Beach, FL, from September 26-29, 2020. Like most of our recent conferences, M@P2020 was unified under a research theme: *Comparative Approaches for Maya Studies*. Besides this topic being a very promising one for our speakers and attendees, it is one of academic value since analogical reasoning is of primary importance for students of the past, and this often means cross-cultural comparisons. Using comparative approaches reflexively is crucial since, to borrow from a recent paper on this topic, "the use of cross-cultural comparative approaches is so engrained in our analogical, archaeological thinking that it is sometimes applied uncritically [... and] despite their omnipresence, there is no shared academic procedure for using comparative approaches" (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020:8). In fact, the desire to build on this theme stems from a forum Lamoureux-St-Hilaire organized for the 2019 Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (held in Albuquerque in April 2019) which featured our editor C. Mathew Saunders and author Rachel A. Horowitz, along with M@P2020 presenter Arthur Demarest.

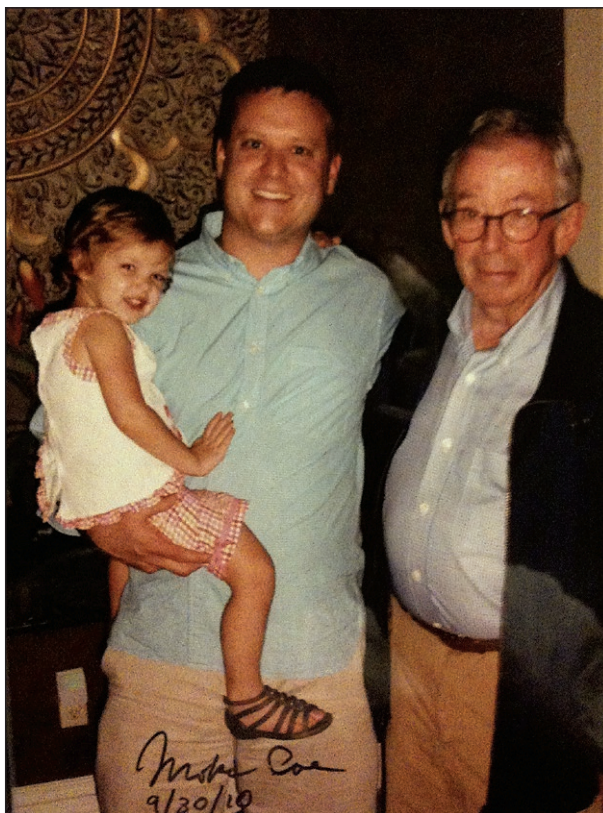
We were thrilled to receive five excellent contributions from M@P2020 presenters for this issue, which cover a diverse array of topics including lithic studies, the development of sociopolitical complexity, landscapes, settlements, agriculture, epigraphy, paleography, mythology, history, ethnohistory, and codicology. A novelty in this issue is the subdivision of contributions in two categories: *Articles* and *Research Reports*. Both categories are equally valuable, but their differences in tone and scope warranted this distinction.

Honoring Michael D. Coe (1929-2019)

As great as M@P2020 was, a shadow was soon cast on the conference as we mourned the loss of Michael D. Coe, who entered the road the day before opening night. As a group, we lost a mentor and a leader whose work and encouragements contributed to our vocation and passion for archaeology. We cannot exaggerate how big an impact Mike has had on Mesoamerican studies. Yet, as we toasted him at the closing dinner, it was apparent that – beyond academia – Mike had positively affected many in distinct facets of their life.

I (Saunders) was lucky to have Mike as a good friend for over 12 years, for which I am very grateful. He was always eager and willing to help out in any capacity, whether it dealt with the conferences or personal projects. It was always a great feeling to see Mike quickly respond to an email and an almost euphoric one when he would write me out of the blue. Mike, along with the late George Stuart (1935-2014) – as advocates for public outreach and community engagement – are in many ways responsible for the offerings I've been able to contribute to the field. Not only did they inspire me, but they also provided invaluable tips and directions. I sincerely hope to continue standing upon their shoulders to provide quality contributions to the field of Maya research for many more years.

The theme of comparative approaches was custom-fit for Mike, who engaged with cross-cultural research strategies long before most of us. In fact, nine years ago Mike delivered the keynote lecture, *Angkor and Maya: A Tale of Two Civilizations* at the fourth, M@P2010 Conference. It was then that I (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire) was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Coe – during my first foray into Mat's then newish conference. I had first learned of his work through my undergraduate advisor, the late Dr. Louise I. Paradis (1945-2017), who was one of Dr. Coe's Ph.D. advisee at Yale. As soon as I sheepishly introduced myself, he looked at me, smiled, and said "Just call me Mike" – words which still resonate in my mind. Mike Coe may have been famous, but he was incredibly humble and always kind with students. The following evening, I had the incredible privilege of sitting next to George Stuart to listen to Mike deliver his keynote address on *Angkor and the Maya*. This was a surreal and inspiring experience for a young M.A. student. I simply cannot imagine how different my academic life would have been had Mike not been Louise's advisor, and had I not been invited to present at M@P and met him, George, Mat, and even Harri – our guest editor – to whom we now give the table.



Mat and Sophie Saunders with Mike Coe at the residence of Kevin and Barbara Kennedy, Palm Coast, FL, on the opening night of M@P2010. Photo by Kevin Kennedy.

From our Guest Editor

The current issue of The Mayanist is dedicated to the memory of Mike Coe, a great scholar, friend, and an international man of mystery. My contribution to the current issue of The Mayanist, a research report on *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, has interesting ties to getting to know Mike. It all happened right after my visit to Saint Petersburg in 1998 to meet with Yuri Knorozov. A short “interview article” that followed the encounter (Kettunen 1998), caught Mike’s eye and we started corresponding via e-mail. However, it was not until M@P2010 that I finally got to meet Mike in person, and to discuss the other man of mystery, Yuri Knorozov (or, as Mike always referred to him, “our mutual friend”). Following this, I invited Mike to the European Maya Conference in Helsinki two years later, to receive the Wayeb Lifetime Award for his contributions in Mesoamerican studies, and to discuss his previous life as a spy.

Another enigmatic figure – and the character tying Mike to “our mutual friend” – is Diego de Landa. Echoing Erich von Stroheim, he’s “the man you love to hate.” Demonized by some and praised by others, he remains a controversial figure amongst Mayanists. Politics aside, I wanted to show Landa *wie es eigentlich gewesen* on this issue’s cover. Obviously, the result is an idealized image of the encounter of Landa and his Maya informant (be it Juan Cocom or Gaspar Antonio Chi), trying to figure out the obscurities of Maya writing. The rendering is by Aaron Alfano, and I would hereby like to thank Aaron for his amazing work both on the cover illustration and marginalia of the current issue – and his eternal patience during the long discussions on the details of these images. Both of us also thank John Chuchiak for his insights on all things Franciscan in the 16th century. The artistic license and all misinterpretations – deliberate and unintentional – are ours, not his.

Introducing the Contributions to this Issue

The articles and research reports in the current issue of The Mayanist are wide-ranging and give an excellent glimpse into the scholarly breadth of Maya studies. In her contribution, Rachel A. Horowitz explores how sedentism affects tool form and specialized tool production and how these are connected to economic exchange networks. Horowitz points out that although outwardly a topic of interest only to lithic specialists, tool production has broader economic implications, including understanding trade and exchange systems, marketplaces, and the accumulation of wealth in sedentary societies. She also observes that it was possible to achieve material wealth through lithic production and access to raw material sources. Furthermore, as in modern societies where most tools and devices are produced by specialists, a decrease in skill level among non-specialists can be observed among past sedentary societies, including the ancient Maya. Interestingly, as pointed out by Horowitz, this may have led some lithic producers in the Maya area to make bifaces purposefully thicker than one would expect them to be – with their reliability in mind. This practice is, of course, opposite to the *planned obsolescence* of utensils in the modern world.

Next, we turn from lithics to language: Emily Davis-Hale examines the past, present, and future of paleographic analyses in Maya epigraphy and explores the potential of cross-cultural comparisons within the study of world’s writing systems, particularly Sumerian and Chinese. Although the study of the formal evolution of signs is an integral part of Maya epigraphy, very few (and no exhaustive) studies have been published since the pivotal work of Alfonso Lacadena in 1995. In the aftermath of digital revolution, using artificial intelligence to analyze large corpora sounds rather uncomplicated. However, we still need the humans to tell computers what we want. Paleography has a lot of potential, especially if we are careful with our analyzes and are open to new ideas. Comparative studies are the key here, as has been the case in understanding ancient writing systems in general and Maya and Mesoamerican writing systems in particular. The prerequisite to a

successful paleographic analysis is a careful archaeological and art historical chronology, combined with reliable reproductions of texts. The corpus of texts from the Maya area is, fortunately, large enough – and the timespan of texts long enough (ca. 18 centuries) – to produce meaningful patterns. The situation is comparable to cuneiform and the Chinese script – both of which were, or have been in use over three millennia. Davis-Hale’s “comparative corpus paleography” is a much-needed but also challenging endeavor; one which requires expertise in epigraphic methods, in the study of the evolution of writing systems, and an open-mindedness to interdisciplinary coordination.

In the following article, Jayur Madhusudan Mehta and Haley Holt Mehta examine the cultural similarities and differences along the Gulf Coast of Mexico, extending their analyses from the Mesoamerican cultural sphere to the Southeastern United States. They discuss the shared cultural features of the area, pointing out to the fundamental mythological and cosmological similarities within the region. Yet, we can also see distinct cultural developments leading to different cultural manifestations, especially in the way rulership is manifested and depicted in the Southern Gulf during the Formative Period. In contrast, in the Northern Gulf, early monumental architecture and its driving forces are far more difficult to reconstruct, lacking the representational art so common in the south. Intriguingly, as Mehta and Mehta point out, monumental construction *precedes* sedentism and agriculture in the northern Gulf Coast, suggesting a very different sociopolitical development from the southern neighbors.

In the following contribution, Harri Kettunen reports his codicological research on *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, ascribed to Diego de Landa, pointing out that the manuscript is older than previously thought. Based on the use of transillumination photography, Kettunen has exposed several hitherto unidentified details of the manuscript, most importantly 36 watermarks that can be dated to the latter part of the 16th century. These watermarks, along with paleographic analyses, will help us date this multi-authored manuscript. Interestingly, although the paper and most of the text seem to date to the late 16th century, one section of the compilation was written during the latter part of the 17th century – on empty folios of the manuscript. Later, the manuscript was bound in a non-chronological order and the late handwriting was sandwiched between the older ones. These details, along with the stylistic features and contents of the manuscript, will help us better understand this important work.

Finally, Gyles Iannone presents the objectives, findings, and implications of the *Socio-ecological Entanglement in Tropical Societies project* (SETS). Rather than being confined in one cultural area, the project analyzes the developments and characteristics of pre-industrial state formations in the monsoonal tropics, concentrating on nine geopolitical areas, whereof one (Belize) is in the Maya area and the rest are in tropical South and Southeast Asia. The differences between these two areas are great – but similarities are also striking. Besides distinct cultural developments and historical processes, shared environmental factors shaped both areas. Consequently, an extensive and long-term interdisciplinary project with a comparative focus is crucial for better understanding both areas. Furthermore, an important – and timely – objective of the project is to link the past with the present in order to understand issues regarding both the vulnerability and resilience of tropical zones around the world.

References

- Kettunen, Harri
1998 *Relación de las cosas de San Petersburgo: An Interview with Dr. Yuri Valentinovich Knorozov, Part I. Revista Xaman*, 3
- Lamoureux-St-Hilaire, Maxime
2020 Comparative Approaches and Analogical Reasoning for Mayanists: Where to Go? *The SAA Archaeological Record* 20(1):8-13.