

# The Editorial

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This past year has been a rocky one for basically anyone involved in academia, but it's probably been hardest on younger, emerging scholars – especially those with families. The pandemic state of things has seriously impacted all of our lives, adding grief, illness, stress, and anxiety to daily routines while simultaneously saturating our brains with pixels and axing our traditional social outlets. It has also endangered both our continued relationships with our Latin American colleagues and threatened the economic well-being of the many archaeological professionals based in the Maya world. Meanwhile, thanks to the marriage between the administrative overburden of higher education and an endemic fiscal austerity, job insecurity has reached a historical level across disciplines, disproportionately affecting emerging scholars. A certain relief has been provided by a handful of institutions, and colleges across the world have tried to provide technical support for all and to lower expectations for their tenured faculty. Yet, emerging, non-tenured scholars have had to continue investing time in writing dissertations, books, and papers, analyzing data, preparing and teaching online courses, while all applying for the same few jobs. These scores of weekly work hours are either underpaid or unpaid, and many even end up being wasteful. Weighing cautiously-optimistic-to-downright-fatalist thoughts about an uncertain future in academia against realistic perceptions of the extra-academic job market has thus become a ubiquitous balancing mental act for emerging scholars (even more so than before). While many senior scholars have helped by providing moral support and opportunities for their younger peers, they too face the same pandemic-related challenges and very personal trials.

*The Mayanist* cannot do much to alleviate this crisis. Yet, as a team, we endeavor to offer a thorough-yet-personable and attentive review and editorial process, an outlet for all scholars and,

most importantly, quality papers which are open for all to access. We are currently doing our best to elevate the voices of diverse authors, support artists, and encourage equitable practices in our discipline. We are also working hard to offer the same articles in both English and Spanish in order to increase access to scholarly resources for our colleagues in Latin America.

Despite the adverse conditions cited above, we are proud and happy to offer you the second issue of the second volume of *The Mayanist* – even if it is a little shorter than normal. This issue stems from our 14<sup>th</sup> annual *Maya at the Playa Conference* (M@P Web edition) which focused on indigenous Maya writing and literature. Fittingly, our three papers – further introduced below – straddle the ancient, colonial, and contemporary eras, highlighting the diversity, depth, and resilience of Maya writing traditions. This issue is beautifully illustrated by Michael Thomas, an art teacher at Davidson Day School and the artist behind the majority of the AFAR visuals. Before we give the floor to our instrumental guest editor, Jocelyne M. Ponce, we want to acknowledge the volunteers who allow us to make *The Mayanist* a reality: our layout maestro, Joel Skidmore; our copy editor, Jack Barry; and our several generous and punctual reviewers.

### **From our Guest Editor**

It has been a privilege to be the guest editor of this fourth issue of *The Mayanist* and I am honored to introduce its articles. This issue gives a wonderful glimpse on indigenous Maya writing and literature from linguistic, archaeological, and contemporary perspectives. It has been a great pleasure to collaborate in this issue with Guatemalan and North American colleagues, including a Kaqchikel scholar. While I wish my Kaqchikel language skills were better, the time I spent learning the language and culture in Antigua, Guatemala, made me realize – more than ever – the inequalities that pervade academia in Latin America and beyond.

Maya archaeology in particular has been historically dominated by American, European, and non-indigenous Latin Americans. Academia has long been exclusionary, and the Maya continue to be underrepresented in academic circles and in interpreting their own historical past. Ideally, academia should serve society by forming future leaders that include a diverse array of scholars (see Dupree and Boykin 2021). The increased involvement of indigenous researchers in different fields is crucial to overcome the academic inequality that has pervaded anthropology and related fields around the globe. Different perspectives will help surpass western biases and will lead to richer interpretations. It is time for change, and it is our role to encourage and facilitate academic transformations. I look forward to being part of a more inclusive academic environment in which everyone's viewpoints will enhance our understandings of past and modern indigenous cultures.

I am delighted to see increased participation by Maya scholars in anthropological research in

Latin America and beyond. The 2020 M@P Conference was a step towards a more inclusive academic model through diverse participants that presented their perspectives and research on Maya writing and literature. The upcoming 2021 Maya at the Lago is yet another step in that direction. As a Guatemalan scholar, I am also delighted to see articles in *The Mayanist* being published both in English and Spanish. Open-access journals such as this one are instrumental for bridging the academic gap between scholars of different backgrounds. Prices on academic publications represent an enormous obstacle for access and production of knowledge. Publishing in both languages is a worthwhile effort and we will see results with the new generations of students.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic hindered us from an in-person M@P, it was not an obstacle for outstanding virtual presentations. The first paper in this volume “Voices and Narratives beyond Texts: The Life-History of a Classic Maya Building” is my contribution to the current issue written alongside Caroline A. Parris, Marcello A. Canuto, and Tomás Barrientos Q. Our paper presents a case study of a ceremonial building at La Corona, Guatemala. The study highlights how archaeologists can reconstruct Maya historical narratives without relying solely on epigraphic texts. While abundant epigraphic data at La Corona provide us with details on the political history and lives of ruling elites, we use a life-history approach to inform on different interpretations of the building by a broader range of participants.

In the following article, Judith Maxwell presents the use of Kaqchikel “zombie” words, or words that fell out of active use by the 1900’s and have come back to life for new purposes. Words taken from colonial texts have allowed a new generation of speakers to use Kaqchikel to express modern realities. Although not all words are currently used daily, these will slowly make their way through as Guatemalan education policies stimulate the use of the language and hopefully increase the number of new speakers. If the word *kematz’ib’* (letter-weaver) replaced computer, I wonder if Kaqchikel terms for tablets or smartphones will soon come into vernacular use.

Walter Paz Joj’s paper discusses the importance of Classic Maya writing for the contemporary Maya. Classic period texts are currently being used for political, social, and artistic purposes. His paper highlights how Maya scholars are increasingly adopting leading roles in epigraphic workshops, academic talks, and other educational outreach events that are key components of the cultural revitalization process. Walter Paz Joj emphasizes the importance of empowerment of indigenous scholars, as well as close collaborations with non-indigenous and foreign scholars. Lastly, Jillian Jordan presents a captivating book review on *The Real Business of Ancient Maya Economies: From Farmers’ Fields to Rulers’ Realms* edited by Marilyn A. Masson, David A. Freidel, and Arthur A. Demarest. Her review highlights the main contributions of this book which is perfect for both avid Maya readers and scholars interested in ancient economies more broadly.

### **Reference**

Dupree, Cydney H. and Malik Boykin

2021 Racial inequality in Academia: Systemic Origins, Modern Challenges, and Policy Recommendations. *Policy insights from the behavioral and brain sciences* 8(1): 11-18.