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**John F. Chuchiak (Department of History, Southwest Missouri State University):**  
**Yaab Uih Yetel Maya Cimil: Colonial Famines, Plagues, and Catastrophes and their impact on Changing Yucatec Maya Concepts of Death & Dying, 1580-1660.**

During the last half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, Yucatec Maya communities in the northern and central part of the Yucatan Peninsula faced multiple series of prolonged epidemics, crop failures, and devastating famines. In combination with a repressive colonial system of exploitation, these catastrophes caused widespread famine. Thousands of Maya either died from epidemic diseases or from starvation while others fled their communities for the safety of the interior. As mortality rates skyrocketed, the Maya confronted the decimation of their population with apocalyptic prophecies. Just as in European chronicles during the time of the Black Plague, Maya documents from the time period are obsessed with death and dying. This paper examines the connection between natural disasters, such as crop failures and widespread famine, and an apparent change in Colonial Yucatec Maya conceptions and practices concerning Death, Dying, and Burial. By examining the ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence available, the paper concludes that Yucatec Maya concepts and notions of Death and Dying became altered not after initial conquest and contact with Christianity, but rather, only after the population decline of the 17th century.

**Markus Eberl (Tulane University, New Orleans)**  
**Buried in stone. On burial customs of Classic Maya rulers.**

During the last decades an increasing number of royal tombs became known where the corpse was either laid down on a layer of flint, obsidian and eccentrics or where the tomb was sealed off by corresponding layers of lithics. To mention only a few examples:

- Tomb 88B-11 (Structure Bv-1) at Buenavista del Cayo,
- Tomb 30 (Structure L5-1) at Dos Pilas, or
- Tomb E-54/9 (Structure E-54) at Altun Há

This phenomenon occurs during the whole Classic period (the earliest example comes from Uaxactun, the latest from Altun Há) and is widespread over the Lowland Maya area (from Piedras Negras in the west to Caracol in the east). Yet, it has not received an adequate comprehensive treatment. This paper seeks to investigate this phenomenon by not only looking into the archaeological record but also into the monumental inscriptions. The burial on or in lithics is one of the few instances where epigraphic data correlates with the archaeological record. It is mentioned as a burial custom most prominently on Altar 5 from Tikal but several other instances are known. The aims of this paper are (a) to analyze the customs that were associated with the burial chamber and (b) to understand these customs as part of the mortuary belief system of the Classic Maya.

**Lilia Fernández Souza (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mérida)**  
**Muerte y Memoria en Chichén Itzá.**

La información sobre prácticas funerarias en Chichén Itzá ha sido elusiva a pesar del importante número de investigaciones llevadas a cabo, posiblemente debido a la forma misma de tratar los cuerpos. El

objetivo de esta ponencia es cotejar información arqueológica e iconográfica para obtener una aproximación a las formas de muerte, tratamiento del cuerpo, y conmemoración de distintos individuos en Chichén Itzá a finales del período Clásico. El punto de partida es la Plaza del Osario y el Sacbé Num 15, excavados por el Proyecto Chichén Itzá, en los cuales han sido hallados tanto restos de personas de élite depositados en una tumba familiar, como restos óseos de individuos sacrificados y colocados a manera de ofrendas. Se hará una comparación con algunos edificios y representaciones iconográficas que muestran las formas en las cuales personajes diferentes eran recordados, conmemorados o exhibidos después de la muerte, según fuera su papel en la sociedad.

**James L. Fitzsimmons (Department of Anthropology, Harvard University)**

**Tomb Re-Entry Among the Classic Maya: Archaeology and Epigraphy in Mortuary Ceremonialism.**

Death rites are points at which bodies, souls, and societies are in transition. They are designed to address the crisis of death by changing and reaffirming the role of the dead in living society. One of the ways in which the Classic Maya dealt with this crisis was through the practice of tomb re-entry, where the dead were unearthed and reaffirmed as ancestors. Rulers would initiate a series of events including defleshing, body painting, burning (*och k'ahk'* 'fire-entering' or *el naah* 'house censing'), bone-removal, and human sacrifice to affirm their sociopolitical ties to ancestors. The present paper combines both epigraphic and archaeological evidence for tomb re-entry in the Maya lowlands to outline the types of activities undertaken within Classic Maya tombs. In so doing, it addresses the ways in which the Classic Maya viewed death, the afterlife, and the physical remains of their ancestors in larger social and political contexts.

**Stanley Guenter (South Methodist University, Dallas)**

**Fire Mountain and the Headless Kings of Tikal.**

When archaeologists excavated the North Acropolis of Tikal they found two very unusual royal tombs, Burials 85 and 48, whose principal occupants were missing their skulls. Our increasing understanding of Maya iconography, archaeology, and history can now shed considerable light on why these ancient kings had literally 'lost their heads'. It will be shown that the Maya had a history of venerating ancestral bones, and that in death kings were apotheosized as specific deities. The occupant of Burial 85, now identified as the dynastic founder Yaax Ehb' Xook, can now be shown to have been identified with the ancient Maya God of Fire and his funerary pyramid, Structure 5D-22, was anciently named the Fire Mountain. The succeeding kings of Tikal carried this head of the founder/Fire God in their most sacred rituals, and included numerous representations of it in their monumental art, which can finally be understood with this information.

**Kerry Hull (Dept. of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin)**

**Journey from the Tomb: Ropes, Roads, and the Point of Departure.**

This paper investigates the notion of the Maya tomb as a point of departure for the soul of the dead. I show how Maya tomb construction, iconography, and location clearly map eschatological conceptions relating to this journey onto architecture. Epigraphic evidence will be presented that significantly clarifies the ancient Maya's view of the transition of the soul from death to the next world. I will argue that the center point of tomb's roof was the portal for the inception of the journey of the soul along a specific rope or road (concepts that I will contend were synonymous at times to the ancient Maya) that can be identified as the ecliptic. Vestiges of this rope iconography, beginning from the Classic Period, together with extensive ethnographic data from modern Maya groups, provide a new ideological framework for interpreting the postmortem transition and travel of the soul in Maya thought.

## **Emiliano Melgar (Archaeology, INAH, México)**

### **Water Sources for Death: Bones, Sacrifices and Cremations at Cenotes.**

The funerary cults performed by the pre-Columbian and Contemporary Mayas have built, throughout time, a "sacred geography" over caves and water bodies. This cognitive process denotes a particular structure and dynamics that represents their social reality, as well as their cosmogonic identity. Among the recovered objects from cenotes (natural wells), lakes and caves are the famous "bones of the sacrifice's victims". These funerary objects have symbolic and not fully-understood connotations. In this paper, from a cognitive archaeological research, we analyze these human remains appearing into cenotes and the rituals involved them in their journey to the underworld, the Xibalba. For this purpose, we use, as archaeological evidence, the bones from the Sacred Well of Chichen Itza and the Skeleton's Cenote at Mayapan, compared with the Skull's Cenote at Punta Laguna and San Antonio well at Homun - presently researched by México's National Institute of Anthropology and History.

## **Elisabeth Wagner (University of Bonn)**

### **White Earth Bundles - The Symbolic Sealing and Burial of Buildings among the Ancient Maya.**

One practice known from archaeological contexts throughout the Maya Area is the embedding of a building in a matrix of white clay before being covered by the following building or abandoned. This has a clear parallel in burial practices where white clay is used to cover the human remains and grave-gifts. Only buildings containing the tombs of important ancestors are treated this way.

In this paper I will discuss the various ways of sealing these buildings and evaluate the concepts behind this ritual by using ancient Maya written and iconographic sources as well as modern ethnographic data. The embedding in white clay is a principal component of a complex purification ritual. This is linked to other transitional rites where the opening and closing of sacred bundles of white cloth is the principal act. Sealing a building turns it into a white bundle. This ritual is deeply embedded in the Maya belief of balance and harmony.

## **Estella Weiss-Krejci (Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna)**

### **The Maya corpse: Body processing from Preclassic to Postclassic times in the Maya Highlands and Lowlands.**

Death not only bereaves, it also creates problems. The risks that emanate from decaying corpses are clearly more preponderant in a hot environment, such as encountered by the ancient Maya. Immediate burial or temporary storage of the corpse is one solution, but what if it was not possible?

A pre-industrial society could inhibit or delay putrefaction through dehydration, excarnation and cremation of the corpse. Cremation is most efficient, but archaeological evidence shows that it was only introduced in the Maya area at the Classic-Postclassic transition. This suggests that ideology and attitude towards death have inhibited such practice. Cross-cultural research shows that cultures with resurrection ideologies developed complex treatments of the corpse. Defleshing and mutilation was practiced by the ancient Maya, but archaeological and iconographic evidence also suggests attempts to embalm. Removal and separate treatment of internal organs may have been practiced by the Highland and Lowland Maya from Preclassic through Classic times.