



**BOUNDARIES,
FRONTIERS
AND DIVISIONS
IN THE MAYA AREA
AND BEYOND**



EMC
WARSAW 2020

25th European Maya
Conference

Warsaw, Poland - online
17 - 21 November 2020

**BOOK OF
ABSTRACTS**



Organizer:

Polish Society for Latin American Studies

Organizing Committee:

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This year's EMC is very special. Not only is the largest and most important Maya-related conference this side of the Atlantic celebrating its quarter-century anniversary, but also, despite the global health situation, it manages to unite the (not only!) European community of mayanists together in a virtual format.

Organized by the members of the Faculty of Archaeology and the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw, the Polish Society for Latin American Studies, and the European Association of Mayanists WAYEB, the overarching theme of this year's EMC is boundaries, frontiers and divisions in their broadest sense. Our primary concern is the Maya area and Mesoamerica as a whole, although comparative perspectives are also represented.

Workshops, 17-19 November

On the Frontier: Relations between Piedras Negras and Yaxchilan

Boguchwała Tuszyńska (independent scholar),
Agnieszka Hamann (University of Warsaw),
Dorota Bojkowska (Jagiellonian University, Cracow).

The workshop is open for participants with little or no prior knowledge of the Maya epigraphy. During the workshop, attendants will be provided with basic information on the Maya writing system, calendar, and linguistics in order to develop their ability to read Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions. The goal of the workshop is to explore relations between two rivals in the Usumacinta region: Piedras Negras and Yaxchilan. We will work not only on the inscriptions from these two important kingdoms but also on texts from several secondary sites in their vicinity, especially El Cayo and La Pasadita governed by sajals. These smaller sites occupied strategic locations and played a crucial role in the control of the boundary between the Piedras Negras and Yaxchilan kingdoms. The workshop will be conducted in English but, on an individual basis, explanations can also be provided in Polish and Spanish.

Migration and Ethnic Complexity at Copan

Felix Kupprat (with support from Shintaro Suzuki)
Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico

This workshop explores an interdisciplinary venue of approaching the issue of ethnic variation in an urban setting in a cultural frontier region. We will focus on epigraphic data from Copan, analysing and comparing localized cultural expressions in texts from the early to the late Classic period as a means of detecting discursive markers that may betray ethnic affiliations and influences. This data will be crossed with archaeological data, particularly that from a series of funerary contexts in the larger Copan area.

Participants should have basic knowledge of Maya hieroglyphic writing. The workshop will include introductory lectures to the historical context of the southeastern borderlands of the Maya area and the methods of bioarchaeology. In hands-on sessions, the participants will analyse a selection of hieroglyphic texts and associated imagery, as well as pre-compiled archaeological datasets. Additional data will be provided in short talks by the instructors. Finally, the analysed data will be discussed in order to reconstruct scenarios of population development and ethnic composition in the Copan region.

Schedule:

November 17: A Maya Colony? Dynastic Origins and Early Classic Cultural Expressions.
November 18: Cults and Religious Transformations as Reflexes of an Intercultural Dialogue.
November 19: Towards a Model of Ethnic Interaction.

Maya Codices: Portals between Natural and Supernatural Worlds

Bruce Love
independent scholar

Addressing this year's theme of boundaries, frontiers, and divisions, I want to explore how Maya codices, in the hands of the *Ah Kins*, served as windows to the spirit world, openings to the supernatural cosmos that allowed skilled practitioners to read the signposts and guide their fellow travelers through the intricate dance of life and death. Codices allow passage between two worlds.

The unfathomable myriad of invisible beings, celestial and terrestrial, that affects every moment of existence on earth appears orderly and manageable in the pages of the sacred books. The general Maya population may be aware of these forces and pays homage and tribute to them, but the Ah Kin with his codices can manipulate and alter spirit energies.

At the heart of Maya religion and belief system is the *tsolkin* or *chol kij*, that never-ending cycle of 260 *naguales* derived from thirteen numbers and twenty day names. This workshop will put intense focus on the *tsolkin* and its foundational role in Maya religion and will de-emphasize astronomy and mathematics; Maya astronomy, after all, is really astrology, a celestial world of omens and portents. The magical universe of Sun, Moon, and planets, when appearing in the codices, is tied directly to the *tsolkin* and its effect on every-day lives.

Boundaries between natural and supernatural are blurred. Codices are religious instruments, sacred relics in their own right, yet they are also technical manuals for the practicing *Ah Kin*, reference works, guide books that allow him to peer across the frontier separating secular life with the spirit world.

Day 1:

An introduction to the four Maya codices, their contents and subject matter, what we know about their provenience, where they are today, and who has written about them.

The *tsolkin*, codex almanacs, and the art of divination. Examples of almanacs and their variants from the Dresden, Madrid, and Paris Codices. The gods of the Maya codices and how they rule the days of the almanacs. The texts of the almanacs and what they say. Ethnographic examples of Maya divination from present-day Guatemala and Yucatan are presented to help understand how the codices were used.

Work projects:

Students divide into teams and begin work on creating almanacs with topics of their own choosing.

Day 2:

Year bearers, co-mingling the haab and the *tsolkin*. Year bearers, which are days in the *tsolkin*, carry the prognostic load for the 365-day year. The Dresden New Year pages are a prime example of the power of year bearers. They have been studied by many students of the Maya and warrant further review in this workshop. Their counter-parts in the Madrid and Paris codices will also be studied, as well as accounts in Landa and examples from the Books of Chilam Balam.

Group exercise:

Groups will be assigned almanacs from the Madrid codex that have unusual layouts and patterns (and errors), and will try to understand how they work.

Maya astrology, understanding stellar and planetary phenomena in terms of their divinatory aspects. The Paris Codex constellation pages, the Dresden Codex lunar pages, the Dresden Codex Venus pages, the Maya Codex of Mexico (Grolier) Venus pages. The "eclipse glyph" in the codices is de-bunked. Maya "astronomy" is de-mystified and made understandable to the lay student. The concept of a Maya zodiac is debated.

Work projects:

Students continue in their groups developing their almanacs and preparing for presentations on the last day.

Day 3:

Fascinating miscellanea: Serpent numbers, how they span eons; ring numbers, how they take us back into the mythological era; multiplication tables, used by calendar specialists to enter into the almanacs.

Work projects:

Students continue in their groups developing their almanacs and preparing their presentations.

Student presentations and wrap up.

Note: A workbook will be provided as well as multiple digital resources (PDFs). Some basic understanding of Maya epigraphy and the calendar are assumed but not required.

Older Peripheral Nahuatl workshop

Szymon Gruda and *John Sullivan*

Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of "Artes Liberales",
University of Warsaw

November 17 from 17:00-18:30 and from 19:00-20:30 CET

November 18 from 17:00-18:30 and from 19:00-20:30 CET

Prerequisites: 1. Participants must have: 1) an intermediate or advanced reading level in any variant of Nahuatl; 2) a gmail account in order to perform classwork in a shared Google Doc.

Szymon Gruda and John Sullivan will coordinate a workshop on older Mexican peripheral Nahuatl. Participants will collectively transcribe, translate and analyze two manuscripts, one from southern Mexico (Soconusco, Chiapas) and another from western Mexico (Tlaltenango, Zacatecas), focusing on the lexical, morphological and syntactic aspects that distinguish them from similar texts in Central Mexico.



Symposium, 20-21 November

The Lowland Maya Frontier and the Terra Incognita: Post-Conquest Maya Identity in the Borderlands and Beyond - Introductory Lecture

John Chuchiak, Missouri State University, USA
Harri Kettunen, University of Helsinki, Finland

The European Conquest of the New World brought dramatic changes to the lives of the Indigenous people of the Americas. In the Maya lowlands, the Conquest formally ended in 1697 with the subjugation of the Itza kingdom in the Peten. However, all over the lowlands, there were groups of Maya who had decided to move to the borderlands, away from the Spanish influence. Through the early colonial encounters, both violent and transactional, the Maya and the Spaniards began to re-formulate and re-construct their notions of what it was to be Maya. Colonial accommodations, Christianization, and social reorganization meant that those Maya who settled in Christian communities, the “hahil Maya uinicob” or “True Maya people” became juxtaposed with the fearful “other” ethnic group, the Ah Chun Kaxob, or forest dwellers, a loosely-knit group of lowland Maya “barbarians, infidels, idolaters, and apostates.” A so-called “pagan frontier” began to exist in the colonial imagination, a frontier in which the acceptance or rejection of the European colonial order decided the shifting borders of regions and towns of “good Maya” versus those on the opposing side of this shifting line who rejected Christianity and all things Spanish. This introductory lecture examines the lowland “pagan” Maya frontier as part of a historical and cultural crossroads where the blurred boundary between the traditional and transformed Maya identity is in constant flux.

Changing Boundaries, Shifting Fortunes: Nakum and Its Neighbours through Time

Jarosław Żrałka, Jagiellonian University, Poland
Christophe Helmke, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Nakum is a secondary Maya centre located in north-eastern Guatemala excavated most recently by the Jagiellonian University project. This research showed how the site evolved from the Middle Preclassic to the Terminal Classic and how it interacted with other neighbouring centres. Nakum is situated in a very strategic location – a zone of political influence between two mighty Maya kingdoms, namely Naranjo in the east (which for a long part of its history was a vassal to the so-called Snake or Kanu’l dynasty) and Tikal to the west. As such, Nakum was situated in a strategic location that can be described as a buffer zone between these two powerful kingdoms. We will first consider the models of earlier scholars concerning the place of Nakum in the geopolitical fabric in the region, before exploring the changing fortunes of Nakum, by focusing on the Classic period when the site had very close connections with both Naranjo and Tikal. Based on archaeological (especially ceramic) material supplemented with epigraphic texts we will show how Nakum changed its political patrons from Naranjo to Tikal, to finally emerge as an independent centre that dominated the region towards the end of the Classic period. These geopolitical changes are reflective of and translated into fluctuations into evidently fluid frontiers, which were subject to continual transformation.

“In the Land of Divine King”: Analysis of the Territory and Boundary of Classic Maya Polity of Uaxactun

Alexander Safronov, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia
Milan Kováč, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia
Tibor Lieskovský, Slovak University of Technology, Slovakia
Dora Maritza García Patzán, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia
Alexandra Rášová, Slovak University of Technology, Slovakia

Studying of the Classic Maya political structure traditionally involves reconstruction boundaries of the polities – Maya kingdoms. A number of methods have been used as universal models for the marking frontiers of mass of kingdoms, such as Thiessen Polygons method (N. Hammond, P. Mathews), Central Place Theory (J. Marcus), Gravity

Model (A. Anaya). However, a series of our research shows it is impossible to accurately assess the territory of many or several polities at once. Each polity is unique in its history, vector of development and a set of historical sources, so it is necessary to approach the assessment of its territory individually. We believe that the definition of the territory of a separate Maya kingdom should begin with the definition of its internal structure, primarily with the localization of secondary administrative centers and the definition of the territory under its control. The results of the research of the Regional archaeological project of Uaxactun over the past 12 years provide excellent material for studying the principles of determining the boundaries of Mayan polity. A detailed survey of small archaeological sites around Uaxactun, the distribution of ceramic material, supplemented by LIDAR scanning data, allows you to form the necessary database for studying the territorial structure around Uaxactun. The next stage is the implementation of a GIS-approach to the resulting database, in particular, spatial and 3D analysis methods, which allows you to create a comprehensive view of the territory and boundaries of the Classic Maya polity of Uaxactun.

The “What” is in Constant Flux: Meditations on the Problems of Scale and Archaeological Perception

Helen R. Haines, Department of Anthropology, Trent University, Canada
Alec McLellan, Trent University Archaeological Research Centre (TUARC), Canada
Kerry L. Sagebiel, Department of Anthropology, Northern Illinois University, USA
Elizabeth Graham, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK

Interpretations of a city's importance and socio-economic strength are often directly influenced by our ideas regarding the size of both the urban core and the geographic area under its political control. However, our ideas about boundaries often are size-dependent in that where we draw a boundary being influenced by the social scale in which we are interested: community, polity, sphere, or region. Therefore our divisions, whether based on house clusters or ceramic spheres, may or may not reflect how people in the past thought about themselves. Moreover, such divisions may reflect only one facet of identity. Ka'kabish, Lamanai, and the intervening settlement share some material culture attributes (e.g., ceramics, tool types, architecture) while simultaneously demonstrating differential adoption of new styles, sources, and raw materials. Thus the variations in material culture between Ka'kabish and Lamanai, and at settlements in the corridor that connects them, raises several questions: Do the differences we perceive in the material record reflect the reality of inter-community relations or intra-community class divisions? To what do we attribute the reshaping over time of cultural material boundaries? At a distance from the political centre, is the influence of the centre less tangible than the influence of a neighbouring community? Were borders more porous and socially nuanced than has been previously appreciated? Thus, using this area as a case study, we discuss the many different ways that social and political boundaries can be perceived on the archaeological landscape.

Disrupting Discourses on Maya Boundaries, Borders, and Frontiers: A Standpoint Narrative from Alabama, Belize

Meaghan M. Peuramaki-Brown, Athabasca University, Canada
Shawn G. Morton, Grande Prairie Regional College, Canada
Jillian M. Jordan, Boundary End Archaeology Research Center, USA

In our increasingly globalized world—characterized by greater mobility and fluidity than at any previous point in history—discussions across the social sciences have underscored the existential fragility of boundaries, borders, and frontiers. Such studies critically evaluate the contextual dynamism of such entities, both conceptually and as more-or-less concrete experienced realities. There is no a priori reason that we should expect any less complexity among the ancient Maya. Indeed, the notion that the ability of Maya paramount elite to exert sovereignty over either territory or population varied drastically across the Maya world and through time—best expressed in Marcus' dynamic model—should encourage us to avoid interpretations that essentialize the experience of these entities from any particular perspective. We should expect that the boundaries, borders, and frontiers relevant to the largest sites and the most socio-politically elevated of peoples—precisely those sites and classes privileged in both the epigraphic and traditional archaeological records—

would be significantly different from those of smaller sites or of individuals occupying alternative socio-political-economic positions. Couched within a narrative structure, in this paper we marshal archaeological, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic data to speak to such an alternative perspective. We invoke standpoint theory as our primary heuristic tool as we explore the complex heterarchies and nested hierarchies of boundaries, borders, and frontiers from the perspective of a middle-status household at the small, Late-to-Terminal Classic boomtown of Alabama, Stann Creek District, Belize.

Origin of Young Maize God: Different Versions of the Narrative and their Areal Distributions in Mesoamerica

Albert Davletshin, Institute for Oriental and Classical Studies, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia

Geographical distributions of mythological texts and motifs are not accidental. They make up mythological provinces separated by the boundaries which can be defined thanks to consistent differences in realization of certain plots and motifs in adjacent oral traditions. Mythological provinces reflect (also remote) prehistoric migrations and cultural contacts, they are similar but not identical to linguistic dialects and thus they give us independent sort of evidence for reconstructing the past. Up to date, I was able to locate a dozen texts about Young Maize recorded among the peoples of the South-East Mesoamerica in the XX-th century. I will analyze different versions and motifs of the texts under discussion and show that, first, the myth is a local variant of the so-called Vengeful Heroes plot widely spread in both North and South America; second, five main geographical versions of the text can be identified in Mesoamerica, and, third, their distributions and indirect evidence imply that the Young Maize narrative emerged on the Gulf Coast and only later it was borrowed into the Maya area in the south and into Huasteca cultures in the north. I will also consider the potential of the identified mythological motifs for interpreting Maya iconography. Expectedly, they clarify a number of enigmatic scenes related to the Classic Mayan Young Maize God.

Provinces Delimited, Cuchcabalob and Hallowed Symbolic “Culture Areas” Implied: A Brief Survey of Peninsular Maya Geographical Strategies, Envisioned Frontiers, and Consecrated Spatial Configurations Through Time

Lorraine A. Williams-Beck, Universidad Autónoma de Campeche, Mexico

This paper addresses the Mayan and Non-Mayan parameters for delimiting politico-administrative Vice-Regal entities, for defining both ephemeral and more permanent geopolitical and organizational aggregation strategies with their corresponding primary and secondary spatial and/or geographical manifestations, and for discovering revered ritual religious jurisdictions intentionally crafted and recognized by pre-Hispanic peoples through time. My research focuses on the theoretical and practical notions of negotiated spatial configurations through cuchcabal sociopolitical and ritual-religious jurisdictions seen by both Mayan and European perspectives through primordial land titles, as well as an innovative, multiple-sources method for amending the “culture-area” concept, to revise this highly critiqued classificatory tool for understanding social space in the Yucatan Peninsula’s heartlands. The peninsula’s southwestern fringe, and northwestern reaches also complete this brief survey. Archaeological data, ethnohistoric sources, hieroglyphic, iconographic and sculptural imagery, as well as particular environmental niches combine to yield new meaning for particular spatial clusters during specific time periods in the Ah Canul, Canpech, Cehpech, Champoton, Cochistan, and Cupul “provinces” as well as the Chenes Region. Finally, some of these negotiated spatial configurations among corresponding peoples’ origins continue to demarcate modern state geopolitical designs between Campeche and Yucatan.

Indigenous Borderlands North of Mesoamerica: Defending the Boundaries of the Yoreme World

Cynthia Radding, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA

The concept of indigenous borderlands expresses the spatial and historical dynamic of changing territorial boundaries and community formation among different indigenous

ethnic clusters in the context colonialism and Spanish settlement in northwestern New Spain. This contribution to the Maya Conference will present my analysis of land titles and complementary documentary and anthropological testimonies that provide an avenue to a new interpretation of the history of the Yoreme communities in the Mayo river valley of present-day southern Sonora. Its thesis underscores the historical significance of the ecological and cultural borderlands of the coastal and piedmont biomes between the Sonoran Desert and the subtropical regions of western Mesoamerica.

No Cores or Peripheries: A Network Approach to Southeast Mesoamerican Prehistory

Edward Schortman, Kenyon College, USA

Patricia Urban, Kenyon College, USA

Words matter. This is certainly the case for Southeast Mesoamerica. Whether called a frontier, boundary, or periphery, the area composed of western Honduras, eastern Guatemala, and El Salvador has traditionally been seen as marginal or irrelevant to major sociopolitical developments occurring in the Maya lowlands to the west. The present paper briefly reviews how this impression was born of the theoretical constructs used to frame the region's prehistory, constructs that continue to shape how we ask questions and pursue answers to them in Southeast Mesoamerica. An alternative view that reframes relations within and beyond the Southeast is offered in the remainder of the presentation. This perspective draws on network theory to reimagine the area's past as shaped by power contests waged at varying spatial scales as some drew resources from diverse places to exercise dominion while others mobilized assets to resist those efforts. There are no cores or peripheries in this account. Rather the histories of all societies are linked though their trajectories often diverged depending on what resources were deployed where by whom, and to what effects. Examples drawn from our research in several portions of northwest Honduras are used to illustrate these points.

Addressing the Shared Frontiers and Cultural Milieu of the Maya Area, the Isthmo-Colombian Area, and Caribbean

John W. Hoopes, University of Kansas, USA

The relationships, both direct and indirect, between the Mayas and their non-Maya neighbors in the territories of eastern Honduras, western Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and farther south were longstanding and complex. There are hints of Maya seafaring contacts with the Antilles and south along the Pacific Coast that merit careful consideration. There is also linguistic and genetic data that hint at migrations from the south into Maya territory and at the introduction of key cultigens, such as cacao, or practices, such as ritual decapitation, with South American origins. This paper will examine models for how pre-Hispanic Mayas may have conceptualized peoples who were "barbarians of the hinterlands" to them. It will examine aspects of the art and archaeology of the region occupied by predominantly Chibchan-speaking peoples of southern Central America and northern South America as well as the circum-Caribbean that provide paths into non Mesoamerican perspectives on Maya beliefs and practices.

At the Edge of the Maze: Fuzzy Spheres, Overlapping Boundaries, and Archaeological Systematics

Kathryn M. Hudson, University at Buffalo, Departments of Anthropology and Department of Linguistics, USA

John S. Henderson, Cornell University, Department of Anthropology, USA

The construct of a Maya world involves at least three kinds of distinctions: those based on the distributions of specific cultural features, those based on language distributions, and those that are categories of archeological systematics. The taxa of archaeological systematics are simplified, schematic representations designed to facilitate reference to complex patterns of variability; they can be more easily represented as bordered. In contrast, distinctions based on fine-grained analyses of variability in complex distributions of language varieties, artifacts, styles, and institutions are best represented as multiple

overlapping fuzzy spheres rather than discrete and neatly bounded territories. This paper explores how these distinctions play out along the eastern edge of the Maya world, a zone of transition into an Ulúa cultural sphere. Many Maya patterns can be recognized there, but Mayan languages and features associated with city-states did not extend so far east. It was arguably a Maya region without Mayan speech, social stratification, kings, or states – and thus a useful context in which to consider linguistic data and distinctions in other kinds of patterning. Should we, for example, resist the temptation to use the seemingly better-established taxa of comparative linguistics to structure our organization of other cultural data? A comparative look at the taxa of systematics and at the multiple overlapping spheres defined by language, economics (obsidian), styles (Usulután and Fine Paste pottery; bar and dot numbers), socio-political features (city-states and their institutions), and conceptual systems (Long Count and hieroglyphic texts) can sharpen critical perspectives on the categories we construct.

Los nahuas sureños en Centroamérica: Historia reciente y actualidad

Werner Hernandez, Colectivo Tzunhejekat, El Salvador

El náhuat es la única lengua nahua hablada fuera del actual territorio mexicano. Se mantiene viva todavía en una pequeña comunidad en el occidente de El Salvador, en Centroamérica, y es el último idioma nativo vivo de los salvadoreños. En esta conferencia se hablará del pueblo nahua más sureño de todos. Su establecimiento en el territorio, el perfil de sus hablantes y de la lengua, además de los hechos de la historia reciente que pusieron en riesgo su desaparición y la serie de esfuerzos de las últimas décadas para intentar revertir el estado de amenaza al idioma.

Peripheries as Centers, Centers as Peripheries: Identity, Exchange, and Innovation in Mesoamerica

Justyna Olko, Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, Poland

Jan Szymański, Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, Poland

A deeply entrenched dichotomy between active centers and passive peripheries in Mesoamerican studies has been recently challenged by a growing number of researchers. This presentation will build on these new approaches inviting us to re-think our understandings of spaces and identities in the past societies of Mesoamerica. We will focus on the so-called Southern Maya Region (SMR) and Central Mexico, taking a broad temporal perspective from the Middle-Preclassic, through colonial times to the present day. We will argue that scholarly classifications (e.g. referring to periodization or cultural areas), with their underlying paradigms, do not provide transparent and epistemologically neutral descriptions, but shape the perceptions of the studied areas and/or cultures. This is evidenced by the so-called SE fringe of Mesoamerica, and the SMR in particular, as well as by modern peripheral “zones of refuge” where indigenous cultures and languages have survived to the present day. Therefore, the widely shared perception of centers as the main loci of innovation and creation should be re-evaluated and revisited. At the same time, we need to re-approach the so-called peripheries and borderlands in Mesoamerican history and, rather than economically, politically and/or culturally marginalized zones, recognize them as hotspots of creativity, interethnic exchange, fluid identities and multilingualism, more resilient against external threats, disruption and cultural assimilation than the highly urbanized areas that are perceived as political and economic centers.



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