



THE
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Newsletter

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**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDIGENOUS BORDERLAND IN THE
ANCIENT AMERICAN SOUTHWEST/MEXICAN NORTHWEST**

Thatcher Seltzer-Rogers

7:30 PM, Tuesday, February 21, 2023
Albuquerque Museum of Art and History
2000 Mountain Road NW

While archaeologists continue to investigate processes of culture contact and frontier construction in hunter-gatherer and small agricultural societies using models originally created for or applied to ancient states and modern geopolitical discourse, historians have recently begun investigating Indigenous borderlands. In this talk, I present some results of my investigation into several spatially restricted culture areas along the US-Mexico border, including what archaeologists widely perceive to be a northern extension of the Casas Grandes culture, one of the most sociopolitically complex entities in the ancient American Southwest/Mexican Northwest. In so doing, I challenge prevailing interpretations of southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, northeastern Sonora, and northwestern Chihuahua and advocate the need for a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous power and transformation in a lesser studied portion of the American Southwest/Mexican Northwest.

Thatcher Seltzer-Rogers is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, the President of the Archaeological Society of New Mexico, and a Research Associate with the Jornada Research Institute. Seltzer-Rogers is a specialist in the archaeology of the southern American Southwest/Mexican Northwest region with an emphasis on the construction and transformation of Indigenous borderlands. He has extensively published on the region with publications in *American Antiquity*, *Kiva*, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, *Journal of Arizona Archaeology*, and *Pottery Southwest*, among others.

AAS DUES FOR 2023 ARE NOW PAYABLE

If you have not already done so, please fill out the attached membership renewal form and bring it to the meeting or mail it with your check to Treasurer, Albuquerque Archaeological Society, PO Box 4029, Albuquerque NM 87196.

Don't be shy about showing interest in working with a committee or serving on the Board. New people are welcome and much needed!

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY, 2023 MEETING OF THE ALBUQUERQUE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

President Ann Braswell called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. The meeting was held in person at the Albuquerque Museum, and available on Zoom as well. This was the first hybrid (both in-person and remote options) AAS meeting.

MINUTES: There were no additions or corrections to the meeting minutes published in the January 2023 newsletter, so the minutes stand as published.

NEW MEMBERS/GUESTS: Attending were one new member, one student, and two guests.

VICE PRESIDENTS' REPORTS: There are a couple of possible candidates for speaker for the February meeting, with a decision soon to be made.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Tom Obenauf: Income for the month was \$960 in membership renewals and donations, a separate \$500 donation from Diane Roussel-Dupré, and \$7.50 from a Pottery Southwest CD order. Operating expenses for the month were \$15.74 for the monthly Zoom license fee, \$33.90 for postage and \$15.97 for newsletter copying. There were no program expenses for the month. The checking account balance is \$8,277.92.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Membership – Mary Raje: Membership forms are on the table outside the meeting room. People can pay by cash or check.

Maxwell Collections Crew – Karen Armstrong: No report.

Rock Art – Carol Chamberland: The regular crew will be going out in the field on February 2.

Field Trips – Pat Harris: A field trip is scheduled for January 31 to the Sunport to visit exhibits there. There will be a second field trip February 5 to the *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe. The visit will be led by a docent.

Webmaster – Dick Harris will update the webpage, working with Evan Kay.

ONGOING BUSINESS

Steve and Donna Rospopo have agreed to perform the fiscal analysis of the books, with results to be published in the March Newsletter.

Refreshments

A signup sheet is being passed around the room for people to volunteer to bring refreshments for each monthly meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Ann Braswell: The Archaeological Society of New Mexico has asked the AAS if it is interested in hosting the 2024 ASNM annual meeting. Members, both in person and attending on Zoom, were asked. A vote was taken and the majority of the membership approved of doing so. Ann will write the President of ASNM to say that AAS is willing to do so.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Gretchen Obenauf said that people were welcome to take free copies of The Archaeological Conservancy magazine in the foyer. AAS is a big supporter of the organization, and AAS members are encouraged to support it as well.

President Braswell adjourned the business meeting at 7:48 pm.

SPEAKER

Vice President Bob Hitchcock introduced Russell Greaves, the new Director of UNM's Office of Contract Archaeology, who spoke of the contributions of ethnoarchaeology to the understanding of the archaeological record. His talk was illustrated with slides from his long-term ethnoarchaeological work with a group of hunters and gatherers in the savannas of Venezuela. No synopsis was available at press time.

Submitted by Susan King, Secretary

BOOK REVIEW

Códice Maya de México. Understanding the Oldest Surviving Book of the Americas, edited by Andrew D. Turner. The Getty Institute, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2022. ix + 86 pp., 31 figures, full size facsimile of the codex, and references. \$24.95 paper (ISBN 9781606067888).

Reviewed by Marc Thompson*

The average cost of an edited academic text is \$100. These are often collections of conference papers of uneven quality. This slim, high-quality, volume at one-quarter of the average price is affordable. The Codex Maya de México (CMM), formerly Grolier Codex, is an *Early* Postclassic period (AD 1000-1200) screenfold book, one of four surviving and similar Maya documents on *amate* (fig-bark paper). The Dresden, Madrid, and Paris Codices, appear to be of Late Postclassic age (AD 1200-1521). The CMM also represents triumphs of discovery, preservation, research, scholarship, and scientific authentication.

The text of the CMM is presented in four sections: *Códice Maya de México: Bookmaking, Scribal Arts, and Astronomy, circa 1100; Mesoamerican Calendars; The Archaeological Research of Códice Maya de México: The Oldest Surviving Book Produced in the Americas; and Patrimony of Mexico: A History Recovered; and Reading Códice Maya de México.*

The codex was reputedly looted from a cave in the Mexican state of Chiapas nearly equidistant between the Central Mexican Highland Toltec site of Tula, Hidalgo and the northern Lowland Maya site of Chichen Itza, Yucatan. The painting style and content appear to be a hybrid from these regions, part of an unresolved tale of two cities, and perhaps a precursor to the "International" or Mixteca-Puebla style of the Late Postclassic period evident in both Central Mexican and Maya codices.

The narrative from discovery in the early 1960s to this publication covers three *katunob* (a plural Mayan word for periods of twenty years). This history is rife with controversies, including ethical considerations, ownership, and issues of cultural patrimony. The original provenance and location of the cave remain enigmatic. The late Michael D. Coe exhibited the codex in a private New York club. In the decades following the exhibit, he and former students at Yale studied the document. Eventually the Codex was repatriated to Mexico, a case similar to "jade" artifacts dredged from a cenote at Chichen Itza and kept at Harvard for seven decades. Additionally, Coe faced strident disbelief on the authenticity and age of the codex from many, including Sir John Eric Sydney Thompson KBE the preeminent "Mayanist" of the 1930s to 1960s. Coe eventually prevailed and the CMM serves as an epitaph to his scholarly efforts, persistence, and memory. I never met Coe, but I corresponded with him and reviewed his most recent books in previous issues of the AAS Newsletter. Additionally, approaching my fourth *katun*, I empathize with Coe's struggles and efforts to demonstrate the validity of the CMM. I experienced similar skepticism in the early 1990s when I first presented and published research on figurative Mimbres painted pottery. Initially I received comments from "Maybe" to "That can't be right." Concepts such as allegory, metaphor, and duality did not fit with the naturalistic paradigm of explanation, e.g. "These are scenes from everyday life." Such is the nature of analytic and interpretive frontiers.

There is little to criticize and much to praise in the presentation of CMM. It is written for a general audience without archaeological jargon often present in academic books and articles. Astronomical principles are explained and illustrated for the planet Venus, the primary subject of the ancient book. A synodic period refers to

the time it takes a planet to come back to the same alignment with the sun and the earth. For Venus this is 584 days. The ancient Maya understood and recorded that five Venus cycles equal, to the day, eight solar years ($5 \times 584 = 8 \times 365 = 2,920$ days). Naked eye Maya astronomers calculated that the Venus cycle of 584 days intermeshes with the solar cycle of 365 days at a ratio of 5:8, and a recorded Venus station was bound to occur on the same date in another eight years. It should be clear from the CMM, and other published research that the Native American Venus was male, associated with warfare, death, and destruction, the polar opposite of the Roman Venus personified as a female deity of love and physical beauty (Thompson 2006).

Page six of the CMM is striking. All of the anthropomorphized depictions of the Venus calendar appear to wield weapons (primarily darts and dart throwers) and are engaged in acts of ritual violence, sacrifice, and destruction. One (page six), depicts Venus as evening star in the guise of the death god, freeze-framed in the act of decapitating a bound captive. In this case he grasps a stone blade depicted elsewhere in Maya iconography. Moreover, the blade is held in the left hand. The other nine figures appear to be right-handed. A parsimonious and naturalistic explanation for this discrepancy could be the statistic that ten percent of humans are left-handed.

Sinistrality (left-handedness) is a hallmark of Native American iconography associated with violent death and decapitation. Additionally, there is ample evidence of left-handedness for the younger, second-born, Hero Twin depicted in Mesoamerican, Southwestern, and Southeastern motifs including traditional tales. On Late Classic Maya media (AD 600-900) the incidence of sinistrality associated with decapitation, including self-sacrifice, approaches 80%, nearly the reverse of 90% right-handedness (Thompson 1999:118-120). These depictions are intentional, common, and evocative of Panamerican ideology (see Thompson 1996:Figures 7, 8). Examination of a recent publication on the Mississippian Spiro Site in Oklahoma illustrates, but does not comment on, numerous engraved shells with depictions of the Hero Twins as right- and left-handed. Additionally, pictographs at Picture Cave, Missouri (ca. AD 900-1000) record the Hero Twins in confrontation with a monstrous giant who wields a monolithic or hafted hatchet in his left hand. The twins have dispatched this adversary with two arrows, and both carry bows in their *right* hands (Singleton and Reilly 2020:164).

A final, and minor note on page six of the codex concerns reference to the evening star/death god by the central Mexican term *Tlahuizcalpanecuhli* (Nahuatl for morning star, lord of the dawn) described on page 75. As is clearly stated the individual conducting the decapitation represents the evening, not the morning star. Also curious is scant reference to the significance of evening star so prevalent in Late Classic Maya iconography, epigraphy, and architecture, e.g., the Venus window facing west (not east) at Copan, Honduras. The first appearance of evening star was considered a harbinger for impending warfare among the Classic Maya (see Thompson 2006:Figures 10.6 and 10.7). It may be the case that emphasis changed from the Classic to the Postclassic period from evening to morning star as suggested by depictions at both Tula and Chichen. I was fortunate enough to once observe an initial appearance of Venus as evening star while leading a Smithsonian Odyssey tour of the Maya Lowlands. Following a visit to Tikal, Guatemala, on a bus ride back to our hotel I gazed out the window across Lake Peten Itza. The sun had set on the western horizon and above the glow rose Venus. I stopped the bus so we could all view the event. It was spectacular. The reaction of a few tour members was familiar “Really?” “Can that be?”

References Cited

- Singleton, Eric D., and F. Kent Reilly, III (editors)
2020 *Recovering Spiro. Native American Art, Ritual, and Cosmic Renewal*. National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Oklahoma City.
- Thompson, Marc
1996 Correlation of Maya Lithic and Glyphic Data. *Lithic Technology* 21(2):120-132.
1999 Mimbres Iconology: Analysis and Interpretation of Figurative Motifs. PhD. Dissertation. Department of Archaeology, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. (Available at various online sources).
2006 Precolumbian Venus: Celestial Twin and Icon of Duality. In *Religion in the Prehispanic Southwest*, edited by Christina S. Vanpool, Todd L. Vanpool, and David, A. Phillips, Jr., pp. 165- 183. AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD.

*Marc is a former AAS president and Tijeras Pueblo Museum director who now resides on Amelia Island, FL. He recently published: (2021) *The Mimbres Twins and the Rabbit in the Moon*; (2022) *Found, Lost, and Found: The Knife-wing Icon at Tijeras Pueblo and in North America*, (senior author), both by Amazon; and (2022) *Interpretive Strata at Tijeras Pueblo*. *Kiva* 88(2):248-260 (senior author).

FEBRUARY 18 FIELD TRIP TOUR OF MAXWELL MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS FULL, WAIT LIST BEGUN FOR POSSIBLE REPEAT

The field trip announced by email on February 5 reached its limit of 12 participants very quickly. Field Trip Chair Pat Harris will be working with Kari Schleher, Maxwell Museum Curator of Archaeology and UNM Assistant Professor of Anthropology, to arrange another tour. Because of space restrictions in the collections, it will again be limited to 12 participants. Anyone interested should contact Pat Harris at trips@abqarchaeology.org to be added to the wait list.

CALENDAR CHECK

Conferences

ASNM Annual Meeting May 5–7, 2023 at Ruidoso Convention Center. Preliminary notice.

Pecos Conference August 10–13, 2023 in Flagstaff, Arizona area. Preliminary notice.

ALBUQUERQUE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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www.abqarchaeology.org and www.facebook.com/abqarchsoc

Annual Dues: For emailed newsletter: Student, no charge (provide copy of current ID); Basic Individual \$25; Basic Family \$30. Print newsletter by First Class mail: Basic Individual \$30; Basic Family \$35; Institutions/Libraries: \$10 for print newsletter by First Class Mail, emailed newsletter at no charge.

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