2017 Midwest Conference on Mesoamerican Archaeology and Ethnohistory

General Program for the Conference (Friday, March 10 and Saturday, March 11)

Friday night
Mar 10

Opening Reception –
Wine, cheese, crackers, & fruit
5:00-6:00 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

2017 - 40th Anniversary Keynote Address
“Reflections on Mesoamerican Archaeology: Five Decades and Five Topics”
Barbara Stark, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University
6:00-7:00 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Post-talk dinner options (Friday night)
7:00 -9:00 pm
Suggested walkable restaurants:
- Maccabee's (American)
- Chartreuse (New American)
- Cass Café (bar/food/art)
- Shangri-La (Chinese)
- Seva (vegetarian)
- Wasabi (Japanese)

Saturday morning – Mar 11

Continental Breakfast –
Coffee, juice, fruit, and pastries
8:15-8:45 am
Community Arts Auditorium

Welcome to Wayne State –
Associate Dean Robert Aguirre
8:45-8:55 am
Community Arts Auditorium

Conference Roadmap –
Thomas Killion, Wayne State Anthropology
8:55-9:00 am
Community Arts Auditorium

Conference presentations –
(see Schedule of Presentations)
9:00-11:15 am
Community Arts Auditorium

Break –
11:15-11:20 am
Community Arts Auditorium

Conference presentations –
(see Schedule of Presentations)
11:20-12:45 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Lunch –
12:45-2:15 pm
Suggested Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) cafeteria

Saturday afternoon

Conference presentations –
2:20-3:50 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Break –
3:50-3:55 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Conference presentations –
(see Schedule of Presentations)
3:55-5:30 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Professor Christopher Pool, University of Kentucky
Summary comments
5:30-5:50 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Business Meeting –
5:50-6:10 pm
Community Arts Auditorium

Reception -
6:30-8:00 pm
Traffic Jam (TJs) Restaurant
### 2017 Midwest Conference on Mesoamerican Archaeology and Ethnohistory

**Saturday, March 11**

**Schedule of Presentations**

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<td>Jack Briggs, et al</td>
<td>Congenital anomalies as evidence of biological affinity among Maya burials in caves and rockshelters in Central Belize</td>
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<td>Christopher Pool</td>
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Brandy Norton (University of Chicago)
bnnorton@uchicago.edu

A Categorization and Comparative Analysis of Maya Body Part Caches

The aim of this paper is to examine a particular type of ritual deposit of the ancient Maya, called a body part cache. Based on the examination of the body part caches, which have been recorded in numerous archaeological site reports, I created a categorization system of eight types of body part caches. These are skull pits, skull rows and deliberately arranged skulls, single skull caches, skull pairs and skull trios, tooth caches, phalange caches, infant and juvenile caches, mixed caches, and a category of questionable caches. Further study of religious ideology, modern ethnographies, and sixteenth century sources aided in the interpretation of the cache deposits. It was suspected that each type of deposition was the result of a different ritual and served different religious or ceremonial aims for the Maya. Each category of body part caches revealed at least one possible purpose. The interpretation of these cache types will allow for future archaeologists to identify the cache types during excavation and understand what rituals or ceremonies were possibly being performed at the site.

Helen Perlstein Pollard (Michigan State University) and Dorothy Washburn (Independent Investigator)
pollard@msu.edu

Burial goods in the Lake Pátzcuaro Basin as Evidence of Social Change

In 1999 I proposed that the burials of the Pátzcuaro Lake Basin, mainly from the site of Urichu, reflect the changes in the nature of the elites from the Classic to the Late Postclassic periods (Pollard and Cahue 1999). The new ways in which elites were defined reflected the new political economy that emerged with the Tarascan state, and evidence of this change was mainly based on different sets of burial goods. In the present paper, this analysis is expanded with evidence from (1) the burials of two additional sites in the Basin, and with (2) a symmetry analysis of the decorated ceramics from these three sites (Erongarícuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Urichu) and others in the region. Patterns of symmetry are part of the design style that does not reflect motifs and elements, but the structural arrangement in terms of geometric pattern-plane symmetries that organize and repeat elements and motifs. In a sense it focuses on the grammar of style, rather than individual words. This approach has come to be known as symmetry analysis (Washburn, Crowe, Ahlstrom 2010: 243). Importantly, as with all aspects of style, particular patterns of symmetry that define a ceramic style vary across time and space, and large changes in these patterns have been associated with parallel changes in societies. Through these additional lines of evidence the previously proposed model can be reassessed.

Bradley E. Ensor (Eastern Michigan University)
bensor@emich.edu

The Mounds of Islas de Los Cerros, Tabasco, México

Islas de Los Cerros is a site complex spanning five mangrove islands and the peninsula of El Bellote near the mouth of the Mecoacán Lagoon along the Gulf Coast of Tabasco. Prior to the Proyecto Arqueológico Islas de Los Cerros (PAILC), the site complex was the subject of brief visits by few archaeologists leading to speculative interpretations on the nature of features. For example, an enduring belief is that Islas de Los Cerros was a Formative period occupation comprising concheros (shell middens). Using PAILC surface collections, excavations, and opportunistic profiles of cuts from erosion and sediment mines, this presentation
addresses hypotheses regarding the period affiliations of the platforms and mounds, their construction, and their functions. The results demonstrate that although Formative period features once existed, all extent platforms and mounds were clearly constructed in the Late Classic period - by displacing and redepositing Formative period deposits for residential, ceremonial, and collectivized production purposes. Another observation was that the "shell mounds" - actually a minority category on the islands - were mostly constructed with earthen deposits. These clarifications on features at Islas de Los Cerros should guide questions and analyses on features in the region, particularly where pottery of different periods are found in association.

Alanna Radlo-Dzur (University of Chicago)
simone53@gmail.com

The Spider in Her Web of Time, Space, and the Body: Plate 72 of the Codex Borgia

Cornered by four fearsome supernatural serpents, each coiled around a different deity, a tiny arachnid creature hovers at the center of Plate 72 in the Codex Borgia. Unique in the corpus of Precolumbian manuscripts, both in its composition and its divinatory confluences, this image has been overlooked despite a century of scholarship on the narrative sequences and more didactic almanac pages and calendar tables of the Borgia manuscript. By unpacking the image’s multilayered iconography, this study reveals a complex almanac that describes a network simultaneously connecting cycles of time and four-dimensional space to sites in the body. This cosmological framework revolves around the arachnid creature, now identified as one of the Tzitzimimeh. She is the key to the network of interconnected divine forces, each with the power to nourish, heal, and protect, as well as to punish, destroy, and cause disease. Situated within the larger manuscript, Plate 72 introduces a framework that serves as a guide to interpreting the somatic almanacs that follow. Like Anake, the Greek personification of inevitability, compulsion, and necessity, the Tzitzimitl sits like spider in her web, tying together the interconnected network of forces that trap people into their destinies.

Claudia Brittenham (University of Chicago)
brittenham@uchicago.edu

Is the “Toltec Pectoral” really a butterfly?

One of the most distinctive attributes of regalia worn by warriors at Chichen Itza and Tula during the Terminal Classic period was an oblong pectoral, frequently depicted as blue in color. This “Toltec Pectoral” has often been interpreted as a stylized representation of a butterfly, and connected to Central Mexican ideas about butterflies and warrior souls from Teotihuacan to Aztec times. This paper will consider the historiography of the identification of this pectoral as a butterfly, and present new speculations about its iconography and materiality.

Amy J. Hirshman (West Virginia University)
amy.hirshman@mail.wvu.edu

Ethnographic Perspectives on Tarascan Household Ceramic Production

We have little direct archaeological information on the specifics of the organization of household ceramic production from the Mesoamerican archaeological record. This is especially true for the west Mexican Late Post classic Tarascan state (AD 1350-1522), as very little in the way of household archaeology has yet been done in the region. However, we do have a rich ethnographic record for ceramic production in descendant P’urépecha and Mestizo communities within the region from the 1940’s into the 21st century. The
goal of this paper is to improve our understanding of this outstanding ethnographic record in order to refine models of the organization of household ceramic production in the Tarascan state.

Joel Palka (University of Illinois Chicago)
jpalka@uic.edu

Where There’s Fire, There’s Smoke: Lacandon Burning Rites and Maya Cremation Symbolism

One of the highest concentrations of cremation burials in Mesoamerica is found in eastern Chiapas, Mexico, and in the adjacent Guatemalan highlands. Postclassic and historic Maya people in this region cremated their dead and placed the ashes in ceramic water jars and urns, which were then deposited in caves or temples. The reasons for the increased frequency of this burial practice in Post classic times, and why some people were cremated and others were not, merit further attention. Aztec ethnohistory provides clues towards understanding Maya cremations through Central Mexican influence. However, ethnographic data on Lacandon burning rites involving human effigies as nourishment for gods give further insights. I argue that the life-death cycle of slash and burn agriculture with its fire/sun, smoke/air, water, and earth symbolism help us interpret Maya cremation urn burials. However, the increasing importance of metallurgy in the Post classic period and its role in material transformation also have to be considered.

Scott Hutson (University of Kentucky)
scotthutson@uky.edu

Ancient Political and Economic Dynamics along the Uci-Cansahcab causeway, Yucatan, Mexico.

The Uci-Cansahcab Regional Integration Project (UCRIP) has devoted seven field seasons to researching economic, political, and social transformations that anticipated and resulted from the construction of an 18km-long causeway linking four towns and several rural settlements in northern Yucatan, Mexico. As a durable stone construction with three segments that enchain the settlement they connect, the causeway represents up to three historical episodes of regional integration. UCRIP has excavated at eight sites and conducted systematic survey along the entire length of the causeway. The causeway segments were built in the Late Preclassic period and during this same time, Ucí, at the western terminus of the causeway, grew to become the largest settlement in the micro-region in terms of both monumental architecture and the number of residential platforms. The second largest settlement in the region, Ucanhà, located along the causeway 13km to the east of Ucí, was less than half the size of Ucí but nevertheless pursued its own ambitions of regional authority. This paper reviews the results of recent excavations at Ucanhà, Ucí, and elsewhere in the region in order to discuss economic and political changes over time as well as strategies for gaining and maintaining power.

James Meierhoff (University of Illinois Chicago)
jmeier3@uic.edu

A Tale of Two Carmichaels; Nineteenth Century Exploration of Tikal, Guatemala.

Ever since their official discovery in 1848, the ancient Maya ruins of Tikal have been drawing attention to themselves. Despite the remote location of Tikal and the difficulties of reaching the site, not to mention the much-fretted water issues once you got there, there was a surprising number of visitors to the site after its initial discovery in 1848. Perhaps even more surprising is that many of these accounts were published. Archaeologists, botanists, chicleros, government officials and even simple tourists
made the trip. However, it was treasure that lured the earliest known visitor to Tikal. Most sources claim that a John Carmichael visited Tikal on a number of occasions, the first of which being 1869. While not only the earliest, this trip would have most likely occurred while the Caste War refugee village at Tikal was occupied. This presentation will largely discuss the adventures of John Carmichael (Jr., it turns out), but will include a discussion of the more relevant explorations of Tikal; those which are pertinent to either the refugee village itself, or the site formation processes that may have altered the 19th century village prior to its archaeological investigation. Included in this discussion is an examination of the historic disturbances, probing and looting of Tikal that was subsequently blamed on Tikal’s refugee inhabitants by later explorers and archaeologists (but may have in fact been perpetrated by other explorers and archaeologists!).

Jeffrey R. Parsons (University of Michigan)
jpar@umich.edu

Reflections on the Valley of Mexico Survey, 1960-1975

This presentation considers the objectives and accomplishments of a pioneering survey project in light of the various intellectual and methodological contexts in which the fieldwork was conceived and operationalized. I reflect on the principal individuals involved in the formative stages of this research tradition, not only in Mesoamerica but also in the Andes and Mesopotamia where parallel efforts were underway. I then focus more closely on the Valley of Mexico itself: who was involved in the fieldwork, how did we develop our research strategies and tactics, what we did right, what we did wrong, what did we achieve, and what did it all lead to in terms of providing a foundation for future archaeological investigation.

Jennifer Kirker Priest (Northern Illinois University)
jkirker@niu.edu

Storytelling and Solidarity Activism: museum anthropology in the 21st century—An Example about Guatemala

At Northern Illinois University’s Pick Museum of Anthropology, anthropological methods and social theory combine with museum practice to craft compelling stories, make connections between campus and global communities, and promote active and thoughtful citizenship. Exhibitions are developed to be inclusive and multi-vocal, with representation from source communities, experts and target audiences. Solidarity activism, as an integral component of exhibition development, amplifies the ability of the community co-curators to sustain meaningful dialogues with diverse audiences and furthers the museum’s mission to promote active and thoughtful citizenship. A new exhibition on Guatemala and migration will illustrate how this model works to build awareness, empower students, and strengthen community.

Jack Biggs, Amy Michael, Gabriel Wrobel (Michigan State University)
biggsjac@msu.edu

Congenital anomalies as evidence of biological affinity among Maya burials in caves and rock shelters in Central Belize

Congenital malformations of the skeleton can be used to explore biological relatedness of past populations, supplementing data traditionally derived from archaeological evidence of mortuary behavior. Two Maya individuals from the
Sapodilla Rockshelter (SDR) in the Caves Branch River Valley, Belize yielded evidence of Tarsometatarsal Coalition (TC). Similarly, two individuals from Je’reftheel (JRH), a cave site in the neighboring Roaring Creek River Valley, exhibited TC while a third individual presented with talo-navicular coalition, a related condition. Two other individuals at JRH exhibited a range of embryological pathologies in the vertebral column – one individual showed occipitalization of the first cervical vertebra and slight spina bifida, while a second individual presented fusion of the C2 and C3 vertebrae indicating a possible case of Klippel-Feil syndrome. Previous regional bioarchaeological research on concluded that many caves and rockshelters were used as mausoleums and cemeteries by extended family groups. This interpretation was based primarily on archaeological evidence informed by ethnohistoric and epigraphic analogy. The presence of rare congenital conditions shared by members of small mortuary populations demonstrates further evidence of biological affinity, and thus providing important data for reconstructing and interpreting patterns of mortuary ritual in central Belize.