

LUCIA CHVAŠTULOVÁ

26th European Maya Conference – Ancient Maya Agriculture: From Practice to Mythology

Comenius University of Bratislava,
Slovakia. December 7th – 11th 2021

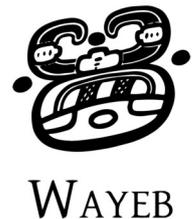
Seven years after the last EMC in Bratislava, the long-awaited annual European Maya Conference (EMC) returned to Slovakia. This conference is one of the most important gatherings in the world focused on Central America, and especially Maya studies. Each year, the EMC brings together an amazing group of academics, scholars, students, and amateurs from all over the world to meet and share knowledge about Maya and Mesoamerican culture. The conference rotates each year among different European countries, cities, and institutions in an attempt to preserve a general and reciprocal inclusivity. The organizers' flag flew in Bratislava for the second time, making it one thirteenth Slovak.

This year the anticipation was even greater as the 25th EMC had been an online conference, and everyone was keen to see each other in person. Sadly, the global pandemic put paid to this and the organizers had to ensure an online conference again. This year's EMC was organized by the Center for Mesoamerican Studies (CMS) at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, in collaboration with ProMaya, a non-profit organization that popularizes Mesoamerican cultures, the European Association of Mayanists – Wayeb, and Comenius University in Bratislava. Thanks to MLV production agency the entire conference was streamed on its webpage (26emc.eu) as well as on Zoom and the CMS Facebook page. The MLV webpage can still be accessed by anyone wishing to watch the Symposium or read the programme and book of abstracts. The conference received financial support from the City of Bratislava, which added to the generally high level of the event.

As usual the conference consisted of two Symposium days and three Workshop days. The conference started with the Symposium on the 7th of December 2021 with a welcoming speech by Marián Zouhar (Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University) that transported us, virtually at least, to Moyzes Hall where the Symposium should have been held; followed by speeches by the organizers, given by Milan Kováč



26th
European
Maya
Conference



WAYEB

(Comenius University) and the president of Wayeb, Harri Kettunen (University of Helsinki). After these short speeches, the Symposium began with papers and presentations about Maya Agriculture.

During the first session, we heard five captivating presentations on cosmology, iconography, linguistic, and ritual practices. The session opened with a contribution by Lorraine A. Williams-Beck (Universidad Autónoma De Campeche), “*Where’s All the Corn Kept? Cosmological, Iconographic, Linguistic, Archaeological and Ethnographic Approaches to Better Understand Maize Storage*”, an attempt to fill the void in archaeology on maize storage through research in the Chenes Region, Campeche. Next we had a presentation in Spanish by Edber Dzidz Yam (Open School of Ethnography and Anthropology) and Harry Thomaß (Freie Universität Berlin) “*Mayas, Medios y Conocimiento – La producción de una pieza multimedia sobre la apicultura entre los mayas yucatecos basada en entrevistas históricas con un especialista ritual*”, in which they presented their project on digitalization and the processing of research conducted in the last century in mesoamerican languages. After a short break, we heard Nicolaus Seefeld’s (University of Bonn) presentation “*Cause and Effect – The Sociopolitical Impacts of Agricultural Intensification and Water Management on Classic Maya Society*” in which he talked about the strategies employed by the prehispanic Maya in adaptation to their natural environment, focusing on hydraulic and agricultural installations. Next in line was Evgeniya Korovina (Institute of Linguistics) with her paper “*The Origin and Development of Maya Agriculture: Some Evidence From Historical Linguistics*” in which she talked about the Mayan language family and the different vocabularies used for plants and processing technologies, which she also compared. The first session was closed by Bodil Liljefors Persson (Malmö University) with her presentation “*Yucatec Maya Cosmology and Agriculture – Permanence and Change in Ritual Practices Seen Through the Books of Chilam Balam and Modern Fieldwork*” in which she focused on cosmology and ritual practices connected to agriculture in the Yucatec Maya religious context in early colonial sources.

The second session on the first day consisted of three presentations, starting with Joanna Asia Jabłońska (University of Bonn), María Rosalía Couoh Chalé, and Anselma Chalé Euán on “*Las señoras de la miel – el manejo de Meliponas, las abejas sagradas, como el ejemplo de la recuperación de la memoria biocultural*” and concerned with the meliponines or stingless bees and their role in Mesoamerica, with help from doña Anselma and her daughter from Kuchil Kaab, Xcunhá, Yucatán, México. The next speaker was Michal Gilewski (University of Warsaw), co-author of the paper “*The Archaeological Evidence of Prehispanic Agriculture at Tak’alik Ab’aj, Retalhuleu, Guatemala*” in which he presented the archaeological site of Tak’alik Ab’aj and all their new findings, primarily on agriculture. The last presentation in this session was by Jakub Adámek (Comenius University) on “*Ancient Maya Agriculture at Uaxactun: Research Findings and Models of Agricultural Practices from the Preclassic to the Terminal Classic Period*” in which he discussed the latest results of research conducted at Uaxactun and the use of GIS, LiDAR, archaeology, and anthropology.

The first day of the Symposium and the 26th EMC ended with a keynote lecture by Marc Zender (Tulane University) “*Agriculture and Arboriculture in Maya Art and Writing*”. This lecture attracted the biggest number of attendees, unsurprisingly, as Marc Zender is a renowned anthropologist, epigrapher, and linguist with many publications and co-authorships (Zender 2017, 1-48; Stone and Zender 2011).

The second day started with a presentation by Edwin Braakhuis (Utrecht University), namely “*The Maize Queen and the Mountain’s Daughter*”. He discussed depictions of Maya kings and queens dressed as a Tonsured Maize God and the reasoning behind this. Dominik Čisárik (Comenius University) followed on with his “*Maya Utilitarian Plants in the 17th Century Extirpation of Idolatry: Rituals and Practices Related to Plants from the Perspective of the Novohispanic Missionaries – The Case of Informe contra los adoradores de ídolos del Obispado de Yucatán by Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar*” where he talked about the second phase of Novohispanic evangelization and the refutation of religious syncretism. The next speaker was Daniel Salazar Lama (Université Paris) on “*La Subestructura IIC de Calakmul: el lugar del descenso de Chaahk y el surgimiento del maíz*” in which he told us about Structure II C from Calakmul and its architecture as well as the contextual values of its images. The last speaker in the first session of the second day was Ana Kondic (Max Planck Institute) on “*Thipaak, God of Maize with Contemporary Huastec Maya*” in which she talked about Thipaak, the maize lord in the Huastec commu-



nity, based on her experiences as a documentary linguist.

After a short break, Mauricio Roberto Díaz García (City University of New York) and Dora Maritza García Patzán (Comenius University) started off the second session of the second day with “*The Hydraulic Canals in Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala – an Irrigation System for Crop Fields: New Findings From Mound C-IV-4 Area*”. They spoke about the most recent findings from Kaminaljuyu and the complicated nature of archaeology nowadays. This was followed by Anabel Ford’s (University of California) “*Cultivated Landscape of the El Pilar and the Maya Forest*” in which she talked about how the Maya used the landscape and the type of soils they worked with. The session closed with a presentation by Philippe Nondédéo (Le Centre national de la recherche scientifique), co-author of “*Landscape, Settlement Patterns, and Agrarian Strategies: The Case of Naachtun and its Hinterland During the Preclassic and the Classic Periods*”, in which he talked about the interdisciplinary research that is ongoing in Naachtun and its vicinity.

The last session was opened by Richard D. Hansen (Idaho State University), co-author of “*Ancient Agricul-*

tural and Hydraulic Strategies of the Preclassic Maya in the Mirador – Calakmul Karst Basin, Guatemala”. He spoke on behalf of the whole group about their current research in the Mirador – Calakmul Karst Basin, on bajos and the reconstructions of Petén. The next speaker was Milan Kováč (Comenius University) on “*Antropogoníade la calabaza. Los mayas lacandonos y la mitología del origen de la humanidad*”. He returned to his previous research among the Lacandon people and their mythology and cosmogony which could prove helpful when studying the ancient Maya people. The comprehensive Symposium programme ended with John F. Chuchiak IV’s (Missouri State University) “*Canumiae, lay u cal caxtlan patan lae’* Colonial Tribute and Maya Nutrition, 1542-1812: A Study in the Impact of Conquest and Colonization on Maya Diet and Nutrition *Our Suffering, this Harsh Castillian Tribute*” in which he spoke about the different types of tribute, for instance corn, cotton, and honey that were paid before and after conquests.

Over the next three days, (December 9th–11th) four simultaneous workshops took place. These were on Mesoamerican scripts and Maya hieroglyphs. The organizers had arranged three levels of workshop and one special workshop.

The Beginners workshop was led by Dorota Bojkowska (Jagiellonian University of Kraków), Maria Felicia Rega (Sapienza University of Rome & Comenius University), and Boguchwała Tuszyńska (Independent Scholar) under the title “*From Sowing to Crops: The Chok Ritual in the Maya Inscriptions*”. In the workshop, attendees were provided with basic information on the Maya writing system, calendar, and linguistics. After a short introduction to Maya hieroglyphs, attendees started working on Classic Maya texts related to the scattering ritual that may symbolize the act of sowing maize seeds.

The Intermediate workshop was tutored by Albert Davletshin (Universidad Veracruzana), Daria Sekacheva (Russian State University for the Humanities), and the president of Wayeb, Harri Kettunen (University of Helsinki). This workshop, “*Eating and Drinking in Mesoamerican Scripts*” was focused on a discussion of food, drinks, their social functions, and known recipes found in Mesoamerican hieroglyphic texts. The attendees worked with both Maya texts and Aztec tribute lists, other Mesoamerican scripts, and even modern ethnographic records.

The Advanced workshop was led by Sergei Vepretskii (Russian State University for the Humanities &

Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography), Ivan Savchenko (Independent Researcher), and Sandra Viskanta Khokhriakova (Russian State University for the Humanities) under the title “*The Force Awakens: History and Politics of Early Kanu’l*”. In this workshop, the attendees examined all the important hieroglyphic texts relating to the early Kanu’l kingdom and tried to solve the puzzles related to this dynasty.

The Special workshop was led by Dora Maritza García Patzán (Comenius University in Bratislava) and Maurício Díaz García (City University of New York) under the title “*Comiendo como dioses, viviendo como reyes: aportes de la agricultura mesoamericana al mundo*”. This workshop was probably most affected by the shift from onsite to online as the tutors had planned to bring ingredients from Guatemala and use them to prepare traditional recipes for the attendees. With the change of plan, the tutors gave presentations on the history of different ingredients used in Mesoamerica as well as pots and utensils used to prepare these meals. Several of the attendees cooked simultaneously with the tutors, following the recipes provided. The workshop was in Spanish, and Dominik Čisárik (Comenius University) helped out by translating into Spanish and Slovak whenever needed.

At the end of the last workshop day, the conference held its annual flag ceremony, a ceremony in which the hosting institution passes the Wayeb flag to the next EMC hosting institution. In 2022 the European Maya Conference will be held in Moscow, Russia, and it will be dedicated to Yuri Valentinovich Knorozov (1922-1999). The famous Russian scholar who “broke the Maya code” and who would have celebrated his 100th birthday this year (Kettunen and Helmke 2020, 10-11; Grube and Robb 2000, 195-196).

REFERENCES

- Grube, Nikolai, and Matthew Robb. 2000. “Yuri Valentinovich Knorozov” *Written Language & Literacy* 3 (1): 195-196. <https://doi.org/10.1075/wll.3.1.13gru>.
- Kettunen, Harri, and Christophe Helmke. 2020. *Introduction to Maya Hieroglyphs*. 17th Rev. Ed. Wayeb. <https://www.mesoweb.com/resources/handbook/IMH2020.pdf>.
- Stone, Andrea, and Marc Zender. 2011. *Reading Maya Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Maya Painting and Sculpture*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Zender, Marc. 2017. “Theory and Method in Maya Decipherment.” *The PARI Journal* 18, no. 2: 1-48. <https://www.mesoweb.com/pari/journal/archive/PARI1802.pdf>.