



# ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

[www.mayaexploration.org](http://www.mayaexploration.org)

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## Powell and Barnhart Speak at MSSU



*Ed Barnhart Speaking on the Tomb of Pakal at MSSU's Webster Hall Auditorium*

This past September, Christopher Powell and Ed Barnhart delivered a week-long series of lectures at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Missouri. The talks were part of a larger program devoted to Mexico. MSSU specializes in International Studies, and every fall semester the university dedicates full attention to one particular country. Mexico was the theme of this year's theater, art, music, and film presentations as well as the focus of every academic discipline. Of the many guest lecturers, Powell and Barnhart were the only scholars to discuss pre-Columbian Mexican history. In an interview with the *Joplin Globe*, Barnhart said, "Most talks this semester are about the last 500 years of Mexico's history. We're here to talk about the other 9500 years."

Professors Sam Claussen, Conrad Gubera, and Linda Hand, who have all

brought students down for MEC study abroad programs, gave Powell and Barnhart glowing introductions before each presentation. They presented five lectures on ancient Maya civilization, beginning with an Introduction to Ancient Maya History by Christopher Powell, followed by Ed Barnhart's explanation of Maya calendar systems. The next day, 21 September, was the fall equinox, and appropriately, Powell lectured on ancient Maya astronomy. On the final day, Barnhart talked about the discovery and mythological significance of Pakal's tomb. Powell ended with a brilliant summary of his groundbreaking research on Maya geometry.

The lectures were attended by over 300 students and were reported by the local media. It was an honor for MEC to be invited to speak at MSSU and a great pleasure to share our knowledge about the ancient Maya with the students and public of the Midwest.



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## Letter from the Director



The rainy season has ushered in a time of renewal and development for MEC. New plans and opportunities are in the works. Speaking engagements are increasing. In addition to the MSSU lecture series, described in this newsletter's lead article, Christopher Powell addressed two archaeological meetings held in the Four Corners area. I have just delivered a paper at the University of Campeche. Next year, we'll be presenting at the annual meetings of the Mathematical Association of America and The Society of American Archaeologists. These speaking engagements increase public awareness of MEC's research and educational programs.

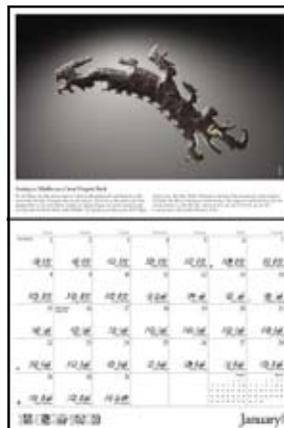
Most of my time this fall has been dedicated to developing our 2006 study abroad programs. I am also engaged in the initial planning stages for three new mapping projects in 2006. By the end of this year we should have our Mexican status established for starting a bookstore in Palenque and for purchasing land. Many other ideas are under

development, but revealing those will be for a future edition of ArchaeoMaya.

This edition of ArchaeoMaya has more good news to share. Kirk French has launched his new hydrology project at Palenque, and MEC successfully delivered our first lecture series in the US. Carol Karasik's fascinating interview with Moises Morales is first presented here as well as exciting news about the decipherment of Inca Khipus. Last but not least is a report of my talk in Campeche where I presented a new theory on Palenque's social organization.

ArchaeoMaya's readership is now over 1000 subscribers, and that number increases daily. Donations are up, and more supporters are doing their Amazon.com shopping through our website. We are still far from our fundraising goal for building the public education center in Palenque, but I am confident that with the support of our growing community network, we will achieve it.

Happy  
Holidays,



## 2006 Mayan Calendars

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## French Begins New Hydrology Project at Palenque

Water is the source of life. For ancient Palenque, it was the source of social prosperity, and the lack of it may have led to the collapse. MEC research associate Kirk French is investigating that possibility. His Palenque Hydro-Archaeological Project is part of his Penn State dissertation and ongoing study of ancient water management systems. Last August, French set up a weather station at the site—the first weather station in the area. He also installed two sleek high-tech monitors, the size of silver trout.

These will measure water flow in the Arroyo Otolum, Palenque's main water supply, past and present. French had to drill into the ancient riverbed to stabilize the monitors, and in order to prevent leaks, he ingeniously crafted a waterproof apparatus from a five-gallon plastic



*French Drilling in the Arroyo Otolum*

jug. His goal is to measure climatic conditions, rainfall, and water flow over a three-year period.

The monitors are now recording valuable data about Palenque's rainy season. French will return every few months to download data from their onboard digital interfaces. By collecting climatic and hydrological data, he hopes to learn more about the functions and capabilities of the city's aqueducts. The collected data, along with models of the early terrain, should show the importance of public water works in the city's growth. His innovative approach, grounded in hard science, is sure to provide a new perspective on Maya hydro-engineering as well as climatic change.

## Prayers for the Dead in Tikal



*Praying for the Dead in Tikal's Main Plaza, October 10*

The hurricanes that devastated the southern United States also wreaked havoc on the Caribbean, the Pacific coast of Chiapas, and the Guatemalan highlands. When a MEC tour arrived at Tikal on 10 October, hundreds of Maya from those devastated regions were gathered at the ruins. They had made the arduous journey to this sacred pilgrimage site to offer prayers for the dead

who had perished in the mudslides around Lake Atitlan the week before. Dressed in traditional costumes, the long procession of mourners filed into the main ceremonial plaza. There they chanted, offered incense, and wept. At the end of the ritual, a giant bonfire blazed in the middle of the plaza and the crowds circled the flames. Afterwards, shamans guided small groups through the temple complexes, where they recited prayers.

In the afternoon, dozens of Maya families toured the ancient city, taking photos of the massive temples and stelae erected by their ancestors. Few foreign visitors were at the ruins that day. That day, the site belonged to the Maya, and it seemed that in honoring the dead, they had brought Tikal back to life.

Though there is much social progress still to be made, Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala is to be commended for opening Tikal National Park to this important ceremony. In darker periods of the country's history the Maya people were severely persecuted. Today, they are able to practice their cultural traditions in the sacred places of their ancient ancestors.

## MEC Interview with Moises Morales Marquez

*Pilot, farmer, naturalist, explorer, Moises Morales Marquez has led many unorthodox lives. His passion for the Maya led him into the jungle, and to lifetime friendships with the Chol and Lacandon. He cleverly sidestepped positions at universities, the pressures of publishing, and the world of college degrees. Yet few scholars have made so great an impact on our understanding of Palenque. As Palenque's first guide, he played an enormous role in increasing awareness of the ruins. Host of the first three Palenque Round Tables, patient archaeoastronomer long before that field of study was born, Don Moises has been at the forefront of new ideas for 50 years. His intellect, philosophy, and willingness to share have affected people on a global level. Moises' wisdom and advice inspired the conception of MEC's mission, and we are proud to present some of his stories and thoughts here. Carol Karasik's interview with the 80-year-old raconteur was conducted on his forested land, El Panchan. To see the full interview, log on to [www.mayaexploration.org/resources\\_interviews.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/resources_interviews.php)*

I was born in Mexico City in 1925, but after World War II, I moved to Sonora. I was an aviator and went to Sonora to start a farm in the desert. I lived in the desert for eleven years. We had success, but thanks to the change in prices for cotton, we lost everything. And so we had to search for another place to farm. That is how I came to Palenque. When I was in the Air Force, I flew over Palenque and saw a white spot on the mountain. "What is that?" I asked my commander. He told me to look at the map. "It's the archaeological zone of Palenque, idiot!" I never thought that I would live near that white spot on the mountain. My coming to Palenque was totally fortuitous.

We were from the north and not at all like the people of Chiapas. There was always animosity between us. There were no professionals living in Palenque, only cattle ranchers from Emiliano Zapata. The place was full of ignoramuses.

Despite the unfriendly people, I decided it was a good place to stay. The village was beautiful, the nature was exceptional. And there was a possibility that with my little English I could be a guide. There were no guides, just one boy called El Tigre, who played the role of guide. He knew how to walk quickly across the grass from one temple to the other. At the time there were no trees in the ceremonial center. There was a little orange tree on the southwest corner of the Palace where the tourists could sit in the shade. But there were no ceibas or big trees by the North Group. There was nothing but



*Moises Morales in Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions*

limestone, with no vegetation, except in the mountains surrounding the archaeological site. That was Palenque.

Alberto Ruz, the archaeologist who discovered the tomb in the Temple of the Inscriptions, was already feeling the glory of the discovery, and he was still working on the minor details. I met him, but he was more difficult than the archaeologists of today. He was always closed. He was not interested in providing any information, except in his speeches. And that was the beginning of the epoch we live in now. Archaeological investigation has always been the private property of the archaeologists.

Of course, who else was going to come to Palenque at that time? There were no beaches, no restaurants, and only ten hotel rooms, very cheap rooms, for tourists. The railroad came five years before I arrived, but it was far from town and not very practical. There were no highways. There were only twelve cars in the village that would take people to the archaeological site. The road was a gravel road, and very bad. There was the little airstrip, and every morning, Tabasquena Airlines, route 27, landed very, very punctually. That was our great hope. So who was coming to Palenque? Not the kind of tourists who come to count the steps. No, the ones who were coming to Palenque were strange people who were interested in the culture. That is the only thing we had to offer. We had only seven visitors per day, so it was simple to make a natural selection of the visitors. Of the seven visitors per day, two or three were really exceptional people: millionaires, politicians, presidents, prime ministers, industrialists like the Mellons, the Rockefellers. We were very proud that we were attracting the most important people of the world, because they were the ones most interested in culture. That lasted until five years ago when

massive tourism began. Now we have 1500 visitors a day. Now we have everything. Now we have people who feel proud for not even going to the ruins, because they are having so much fun in town. But in the old days, the picture was different. Exceptional people came to Palenque, and I had a chance to meet them because I was the only guide and the only one able to speak English.

CK: *How does the new generation of scholars and archaeologists compare to the older generation?*

Anthropology is a humanistic science par excellence. An archaeologist is nothing but somebody who studies a branch of anthropology. Consequently, he has to concede importance to humanity, not to business, not to collections, not to titles, not to the beautiful things that happen in the meetings he goes to in the course of the year. It's not to write an important book that produces a lot of money, it's not to have scholarships for the children; it's something else. It's a humanistic science, and it's a crime to reduce it. We have to get back on track. We have to tell the children that there are dark ages in the history of man, and we are at the end of one of them. We no longer have to suffer the archaeologists who didn't leave any poetic descriptions of such a beautiful place as Palenque. Who mentions something nice about Palenque? Che Guevara wrote a beautiful poem about the site of Palenque. A famous Mexican songwriter promised to compose a symphony for Palenque. He never did it, because he was making money selling horrible songs. No one had the quality to create a musical monument, a beautiful poem, or a beautiful book for Palenque. So Palenque is waiting. Palenque is not in a hurry. It's going to watch all those people disappear, people who were necessary to create a new class of people.

CK: *Do you think that scientists, humanistic scientists, can understand the ancient Maya?*

Of course not. How can you understand Maya culture if you never lived with mosquitoes every day, if you never lived in the swamp as they did, if you never suffered the sicknesses they had, if you never saw what they saw—all the animals and birds that were so different from what writers on the subject see today. Man is a product of his context. He is conditioned by his senses, his eyes. Tropical people are the product of their exotic context, the exotic fauna, and the inconveniences of the extreme life. Here everything lives! You have to be a person who looks around. An archaeologist first has to go and live in the environment, to appreciate what is a monkey, a butterfly, a tick, a fallen tree. Then he will start to understand the Maya. If he never does that, he

will never understand. He can read many books, but he will never learn through the heads of the others. He has to think about the conditions of the Maya people in the seventh century, go to a place that still has those conditions, and live with the scars and discomforts that the Maya had at that time. Once you experience that kind of life then you can try to understand the lives of the manipulators and the lives of the oppressed ones. Then you can try to understand life in the palace and life in the huts in the Tulija Valley. There was an elite and the servants who were part of the elite, like the writers, the scribes, the shamans, the thinkers, the astronomers, people whom the noble class found convenient to support, because they were tools to use to wash the brain of the profane, tools to maintain political power.

Maya culture was one of the most beautiful manipulations in history. They didn't do exceptional things. Maya architecture is not that great. Maya buildings are based on gravity, which is a primitive way to construct. They did it very well, but when I listen to people talking very highly, I know it is not like that. They were exceptional at mathematics and the calendar. But if you give me an Indian who knows nothing of nothing, in one day over four months I will make a person who will understand the year and the seasons and the cycles of the moon across in the sky. It's a lie that all that is difficult. What you have to have is good wits in your head.

CK: *And now we have thousands of people who believe the Maya possessed profound secrets about the universe.*

People will buy anything. The problem is that because of the lack of knowledge it was easy to idealize the Maya. When archaeologists began to learn more, through better techniques, better instruments, and better ways of analyzing the findings, they realized they had to be idiots to idealize the Maya. The Maya were not the first inventors of the zero, for example. Thompson, Morley, all of them said the same thing. But all of them were wrong, and all of them were part of the same mistake. Now you have to take the hand of your child and say, "I'm sorry about what we did, we are asking you to be honest when we were dishonest. Please accept my mistakes and let me go with you and help you to discover what was. I will help you to self-educate yourself and then you will put me on the proper level." That way we will have a stronger education. Never with the pontification of the one who made a mistake, but earned a good salary and achieved prestige and now wants to have that for eternity. If it was not enough, he wants to use his children to continue his grandiosity. That is the perfidy of most of the scholars.

## News from Palenque

*Tomb of Pakal Closed*—The Tomb of Pakal has been closed indefinitely to visitors. The reason: to protect it from further deterioration. The closing was among the first decisions made by Site Director Roberto Martinez Aguilar, who assumed the post in August. Before then, visitors could obtain special permission to enter the tomb in the late afternoon. Now the thousands of tourists who come to Palenque this holiday season will leave without being able to view the exquisite sarcophagus lid and final resting place of Palenque's greatest king.

*Plan de Ayutla*—Work continues this fall at the ruins of Plan de Ayutla in Chiapas' Monte Azules Biosphere Reserve. INAH archaeologists have uncovered the tops of temples in the Southern Acropolis, and consolidation is underway. The architecture is both well preserved and unique; one temple has the tallest interior corbelled arch in the region. Though no evidence has been found to validate early claims that it is the lost city of Sak Tzi' ("White Dog"), Plan de Ayutla's size and grandeur clearly identify it as a major city of the Classic Period.

*Khipu Clues Unravelling*—Researchers at Harvard University believe they have identified the first non-mathematical sequence of knots on an ancient Inca khipu. Anthropologist Gary Urton and mathematician Carrie Brezzine call the sequence a "unique signifier," and while they suspect it may be a place name, they admit it may be the author's name or the title of the khipu's subject matter. Whatever it says, the exciting part is they do not believe it to be numerical. Spanish colonial documents state that khipus recorded much more than numbers, but no Spaniard ever learned to read them. Urton and Brezzine may have taken the first step toward recovering the keys to their fuller decipherment.

## MEC Tech Report



The big enhancement to the MEC website is our new association with Amazon.com. Our "Suggested Reading" web page is now linked to Amazon.com, and nearly ever book we recommend can now be purchased with a click of the mouse.

At a five to seven percent referral fee, Amazon's generous profit-sharing plan is helping MEC generate income. Our supporters have responded well to the new web service; over a hundred items were purchased the first month

after the launch. One of the great aspects of MEC's relationship with Amazon is flexibility. When a person enters Amazon.com through a link on MEC's website, we receive a percentage of what they spend, be it one of our recommended books or a big-screen TV. So, please do your Amazon shopping through our gateway. It's easy! Just log on to our page at: [www.mayaexploration.org/resources\\_books.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/resources_books.php) and click on any book. Once you're in Amazon, do whatever shopping you like. Amazon automatically remembers you entered through MEC and credits us accordingly. It's a great new way to support our research without spending an extra penny.

## Barnhart Presents New Theory

The "Encuentro XV - Investigadores de Los Maya," held in Campeche in early November, featured presentations by over 100 leading Mayanists. Among the international list of speakers was MEC Director Ed Barnhart. He chose this important meeting as the forum to present his new theory on Palenque's socio-political organization.

In 1983, anthropologist Evon Vogt wrote about the current system of social organization in the Chiapas highlands, in which affluent members of community neighborhoods serve in rotating posts as council members and cargo holders. Vogt compared this modern Maya practice to ancient Maya settlement patterns. Barnhart expanded on Vogt's theory, using data from the Palenque map, which did not exist in the 1980s. Many residential

zones at Palenque were composed of small "patio" groups clustered around larger residential complexes. This arrangement, Barnhart noted, resembles the large dwelling compounds of modern Maya political officials.

Barnhart supported his argument for ancient Maya council systems with ethnographic evidence from Contact Period Yucatán and with hieroglyphic evidence from Post-Classic Chichen Itzá. Perhaps his strongest pieces of supporting evidence were the Late Classic panels from Copan, Tikal, and Palenque. The bas-reliefs show the rulers of these cities meeting with other local nobles. Not only did Barnhart convincingly argue that councils existed in Late Classic Palenque; he also may have identified where the council members lived. The English version of his paper will be posted on the MEC website by the end of this year.

## UPCOMING TOURS

### *Education Through Exploration*

***New Years in Palenque:*  
*Palenque, Bonampak, Yaxchilan*  
Dec 30 - Jan 5, 2006**

***Around the Maya World:*  
*Belize, Guatemala, Mexico*  
March 22 - 31, 2006**

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Our education programs are enriched by current research and, in turn, on-going research is supported through the funds raised through our education programs. Support MEC's non-profit organization today and help us carve new paths between the ancient Maya and modern public awareness.

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