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### Inside this issue:

**Xkalupococh: A Maler Puuc Site Revisited,** 2,7  
by **Stephan Merk**,  
(continued from the August Explorer)

**Edible Seeds and Edible** 3  
**Fruit of *Gonolobus* Lianas,**  
by **Nicholas Hellmuth**,  
(continued from the August Explorer)

**Maya Origin for the Name** 4  
**Belize,** by **Barbara MacLeod**

**Post Covid-19 Transitioning** 5  
**for Jade of the Americas,**  
by **Mary Lou Ridinger**

**Maya Stereography,** 6  
by **Omar Schwendener**

**Membership Application** 7

**Unbundling the Past for** 8  
**September,** by **Zach Lindsey**

did not mention this group.

Around 100 meters east of Group C, surrounded by other small destroyed ancient structures, I visited a partially-standing building, not reported by Maler, but identified by Prem. It belongs to Group B on Dunning's map of Xkalupococh III. The structure is oriented on a north-south axis and only the northern room is mostly intact while the southern chamber has collapsed. Around the still-standing entrance, a part of the northern room's front façade is still preserved (**Fig. 4**). The latter shows in its lower

*continued on page 2*

### IMS Program on Zoom:

Join us on **September 16**  
at **8 pm**, as we feature  
a presentation by  
**Francisco Estrada-Belli!**  
You'll be able to ask him  
questions in real time!



September 16, 2020 • Maya Ceremonial Era Long Count: 0.0.7.15.6 • 9 Kimi 9 Chen • G9



*Detail of Xkalupococh I by Explorador Maya Eduardo González Arce, 2018.*

This month, we continue our discussion of Structure I at Xkalupococh I from the August IMS Explorer:

In front of the building stands a stone sculpture, which is already visible on Maler's photograph of Structure I in Xkalupococh I (*Fig. 1a*, page 4 in August). This sculpture resembles a classic three-member molding consisting of a row of rectangular stones sandwiched between two apron-type members. Maler supposed that the stone once stood in a building niche, while Dunning estimates it as part of the upper molding. In contrast to this sculpture, the huge head of a bird, executed in stone and/or stucco, that could also be seen on the old photograph, has vanished since then.

On the same platform in Xkalupococh I are two foundation braces in the east and south, as well as a stone mound on the west side, indicating another former vaulted building, a small conical Puuc altar and a chultun.

### Xkalupococh II

As already mentioned, Xkalupococh II was not revisited since Maler saw it in 1889. The early explorer mentions a partly standing two-room building executed in the Late Puuc Mosaic style. A sketch map of the area, done by Maler, places the group around two kilometers north



**Fig. 4:** The standing front part of the building in Xkalupococh III, Group B, showing a double fret design in the upper façade.

of Xkalupococh I, which is about one kilometer roughly north of Xkalupococh III. However, my 2017 search in that area brought no success.

### Xkalupococh III

This is the largest group in Xkalupococh and is divided into three sub-groups (A, B, and C) by Dunning; it is situated about 12 kilometers southwest of the modern village of Santa Elena in the Mexican state of Yucatan. Dunning sees Group C in the north part of Xkalupococh III as the settlement's center. It consists of a courtyard with structures on four sides, all of them badly destroyed and overgrown; two of them are low pyramids. Immediately north of this courtyard few remains of fallen buildings sit on top of a medium to high hill. Maler



**Jim Reed,**  
Editor

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# Xkalupococh: A Maler Puuc Site Revisited by Stephan Merk *continued from page 1*

part some irregularly laid rows of plain veneer stones. Above the rectangular doorway a horizontal three-member medial molding separates the lower from the upper façade. This molding's lower member consists of a row of sloping stones while the central member shows short colonnettes in packs of three alternating with stepped frets; the upper member is a protruding row of flat rectangular stones. The 130-cm-high upper façade was probably decorated with several large double-G frets; only one of those frets is still in place. The two preserved horizontal members of the upper molding resemble the design of the central molding. The building faces Xkalupococh III's central group in the west and is a typical example for the Classic Puuc Mosaic style.

The structures Teobert Maler found in 1895 and described as Xkalupococh III are situated on a large platform in the valley floor. Dunning refers to them as Group A. They are around 350 meters south of Xkalupococh's main group (Group C). Maler writes about a line of rooms built into the platform's east end side; these chambers are today fallen and only a large pile of debris remained.

The main building, Structure I, sits on the western end of the platform and consists of ten rooms arranged on all four sides of a solid core. This building measures 18 meters from north to south, and is almost 12 meters wide (**Fig. 5**). It was erected in various stages: The three rooms in line on the eastern front side represent an earlier construction in the Classic Puuc Colonnade style, to which the other rooms of the structure were added later.

This eastern row of chambers is the building's best preserved part. Its single-member base molding is mostly covered with debris and earth. The plain lower walls are two meters high and show six horizontal rows of veneer stones; these rows vary considerably in height. All of the three rooms on the east side are almost intact, including their rectangular



**Fig. 5:** The Classic Puuc Colonnade style front façade of Structure I in Xkalupococh III, Group A, with its flying staircase. Photo by Stephan Merk.

entrances. The medial molding above the doorways' lintels has three members: the lower one is of

apron-type, followed by a continuous row of short colonnettes and, on top, is a third, rectangular projection. The upper wall is exclusively filled with vertically laid and centrally banded colonnettes. The upper molding corresponds to the medial molding and probably had an additional fourth member of sloping stones on top.

At some later point, a so-called flying stairway – that is a staircase with a passageway below, which allows access to the central room – was built in front of the eastern rooms in a central position, reaching to the structure's roof. If the builder's intention was to erect a second floor, this was never done; there is no

*continued on page 7*

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Image courtesy of Proyecto Arqueológico Holmul

## 9-16-2020 • The IMS begins “Zoom” presentations!

8 pm

You can use the “chat”  
feature and text in  
your questions



Francisco will be  
there in person and  
answer your questions  
in “real time”!

Register on [Zoom.us](https://www.zoom.us)  
soon!

# The Holmul Kingdom and the Rise of a Maya Empire with Dr. Francisco Estrada-Belli

Join us for the fun! Contact Keith Merwin at < [keith@merwin.com](mailto:keith@merwin.com) > to be added on the list to receive the **Zoom** invite.

He can also help you get registered on **Zoom.us** or trouble-shoot to make sure you don't miss this event.

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## Ignored, Forgotten, or Simply Not Recognized? Edible Seeds and Edible Fruit of *Gonolobus* Lianas by Nicholas Hellmuth

continued from the August IMS Explorer, page 2

The Pokomchi Maya family who helps us learn about edible and usable plants in southern Alta Verapaz also sent some recipes to us. Norma Cho Cu even said that *Gonolobus* fruits are sold in local Maya markets in villages near where she lives.

An herbaria database is essential so we can be aware where specimens have been collected previously (Yaxha, Tikal, Izabal, Alta Verapaz, etc.). A research library is essential (I am literally surrounded by stacks of botanical books on my desk, plus an e-library of over 3000 articles, reports, theses, and PhD dissertations). But, when I wish to learn the reality, I ask the Q'eqchi', Kaqchiquel, Pokomchi Mayan-speaking team who work together with FLAAR Mesoamerica. Plus, I telephone Teco in Peten: and in 15 minutes with each individual, I learn more than is in all the peer-reviewed journal articles and "thousand-page monographs" on edible plants of the Americas.

There are between three and six species of *Gonolobus* in each area of the Maya Lowlands or Maya Highlands. There are also other genera of the plant family *Apocynaceae* that are close relatives of *Gonolobus*: the relatives we are interested in all are woody vines (liana). Some are edible, others not. Our Q'eqchi' Maya plant scout has *Gonolobus* literally growing all over the rain forest in the Alta Verapaz mountains where she lives, but, not one species is eaten in this area.

Yet in other areas of Guatemala, some are medicinal; others not. And most have a white latex that is toxic (as do many other plants of the family *Apocynaceae* that are common in Mesoamerica; there are many genera in this plant family of importance in Mesoamerica).

We can now add another source of edible seeds and edible fruit that allowed the estimated "millions" of Classic Maya suggested by LiDAR to survive. You don't need to cut down



*Gonolobus* fruit, Aldea Cruz Blanca, San Juan Sacatepéquez. Photo by Rosa Sequen.

the forest to grow *Gonolobus*. It is very adaptable and grows by itself. In the ethnobotanical research garden that we have around our office building in Guatemala City, *Gonolobus* vines wander around all over the fences, up the side of the building, and along branches of the trees. So you don't need slash-and-burn agriculture for hundreds and hundreds of edible flowers, edible seeds, edible leaves and stalks, and edible roots, tubers, and rhizomes. As I write this article, I am eating *bledo* (leaves of a native *Amaranthus* species that grows in front of my door (my "kitchen garden").

Another of our plant scouts, university student Ericka Garcia, was today photographing *kala* where she lives near the Río Polochic, near Telemán, southeastern Alta Verapaz. This edible plant, also called *junco*, looks identical to *guano* palm (but is not a palm nor even a relative, despite its misnomer: *Carludovica palmata*). You just walk through the forests, pull off a fresh green shoot, and eat it raw. Other parts are also edible. No milpa required for this palm-like and palm-sized "tree" whatsoever. It grows readily throughout Alta Verapaz and southern Peten.

In February, the local government of Livingston asked us to assist them by undertaking a project to study



This *Gonolobus* fruit opened by itself in our Ethnobotanical Research Garden, Guatemala City. We did not cut it whatsoever. If we had cut it, white latex would be dripping out. Since it just opening, the seeds are not yet visible. Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR, April 14, 2020.

local flora and fauna throughout the northeastern portion of Izabal. So, we are finding all kinds of plants here. Indeed we returned from our second week-long field trip in mid-March just a few hours before Guatemala was put on shut-down: airports, highways, etc.

But, in our February field trip and March field trip we took thousands of photographs and are posting the pertinent plants on [www.maya-ethnobotany.org](http://www.maya-ethnobotany.org) and the butterflies, crabs, and waterbirds, on our [www.maya-ethnozoology.org](http://www.maya-ethnozoology.org). The Municipio de Livingston has remarkable biodiversity since it rains here much more than in Peten. 🏠

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Enlarged detail of map of British territory in the Yucatan from 1840 that features the “Balize” of that time. From the Berghaus Physikalischer Atlas.

## Maya Origin for the Name Belize by Barbara MacLeod

I’ve been meaning to share this li’l tidbit with you for a while, and Jim Reed’s reminiscences of living in Belize in the three most recent *IMS Explorers* reminded me of it.

While I lived in the country (’71-’75) as a caver for the Peace Corps, I spent enough time in Belmopan to pick up many scraps of gummint gossip and opinion. My boss, the Archaeological Commissioner Joe Palacio, filled me in one day on the various theories as to the origin of the name “Belize”. He seemed to favor the English surname Wallace, which I did not openly dispute (but did not favor myself).

The term *baliz/balis*, translated as a Maya word for “muddy water” was also suggested, but I have never seen that in any Mayan language dictionary. The spelling “Balize” (which I had seen previously) appears three times on a map reproduced on page five in the August *IMS Explorer* (detail above), and it seems appropriate to explain it here.

Obviously “Belikin” – “the road (*beh*) to the east (*lik’in*)” doesn’t match well enough, in spite of the romantic appeal. Regarding *BELIKIN*, we have “(AH) *BELIS WINIK*: *caminante o viandante de a pie*. *BEELIS*: *caminante de a pie y cosa que se anda por tierra*” (Cordemex, pg. 49).

Many other rivers in Belize have names – usually Maya – that make sense in spite of the British tendency to weird spellings (*Sarstoon* for *sastun* “quartz crystal”; *Sibun* derived from *sib* “a spring” (referring to the many springs and caves along its tributaries). So, I’ve long thought “Belize” must have a Maya origin. The “Balize” spelling has made me suspect another weird British twist, using the letter a for the /ey/ sound, we Mayanists would normally write with the letter e, as in the word *che* “tree”.

The Maya word *beelis* (*beh* + -VI+ -is) means “foot traveler”, “*caminante*” in Spanish. The -is suffix is one that



The most popular beer in Belize, *BELIKIN*, featuring a pyramid from Altun Ha, seems appropriate.



Barbara continues her work and stays engaged in spite of the virus. Photo by Elaine Schele.



The Belize River actually begins its journey east to the coast, lazily meandering from the Peten as the Mopan.



Photo submitted by Barbara MacLeod.

first came to light in the Classic script as occurring on unpossessed objects that are normally possessed, like *k’ab-is k’uh* “handgod” and *wahyis* “nagual”. I had seen the suffix in Yucatec, but

never really understood it until it entered the script lexicon (work by Marc Zender originally).

I am still finishing up my book on Naj Tunich; the COVID curtain has slowed things a bit but I am close. Amid all my work on trade routes and reasons for long-distance travel to the cave from El Palmar, Calakmul, Altun Ha and their ties to central Peten politics, I took renewed interest in the rivers. I have always loved rivers and have quite a lot of time on them in small boats in several countries; I’ve done twelve raft trips down the Usumacinta from Sayaxche or Frontera to Tenosique, and other long trips on the San Pedro, the Lacantun, the Jatate, and more. I grew up canoeing rivers in the Ozarks. I had an aluminum canoe when I lived in Belize, and I saw many sections of the main rivers and tributaries.

It’s no surprise that the Belize River corridor was in fact “the road to the east” in the Classic. It was a maritime “road” but, of course it had major foot-roads on both sides that served all the little towns along the way. In fact, most of the travel along the corridor was likely by foot, but all the heavy cargo would have been moved by canoe. It’s clear to me that Altun Ha wanted – and achieved – control over the main inland waterways of Belize in addition to controlling the Caribbean coast. They traded with Copan and no doubt helped El Palmar lord Aj Pach’ Wa’al (of the new stairway) go to Copan.

Amid all this, I realized that – surprise! – Belize takes its name from the river, and the name of the river in Maya meant “foot traveler(s)” – even though, of course, it carried travelers in river craft.





# Post Covid-19 Transitioning for Jade of the Americas



The "Maya: The Exhibition" at the Cincinnati Museum featured more than 300 artifacts, including this jade work from Nebaj. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Guatemala. (Presented "flipped horizontally" for dramatic effect by the editor.)

**Editor's note:** In 1974, long-time members of the IMS, Jay and Mary Lou Ridinger rediscovered the ancient source of Maya Jade in the Motagua River Valley of Guatemala and solved a long-standing archaeological problem... Where did the ancient Maya get their jade? C-19 has seriously hit Guatemala, and now their Jade endeavors have had to be downscaled. But, a beautiful new website offers a bright future for us all. In a personal correspondence, Mary Lou submitted this revealing essay...

Jay and Mary Lou  
Ridinger standing  
on the Tectonic  
Plate Boundary  
in 1974.



"After laboratory tests verified the jade's authenticity, we researched the world jade market and then asked ourselves: 'Why should we send Guatemalan jade to China, where it will provide jobs and be exported to the world as Chinese jade? Why not teach the descendants of the Maya how to carve jade in the tradition of their ancestors, make replicas of jade treasures from museums around the world, and sell it to tourists in Guatemala...Why not create a local industry to bring back the jade culture and tradition to the people of Guatemala, all of whom knew nothing about their history with jade?'"

"Our decision was a gamble. We lost money for 11 years and our friends, Guatemalans, and visiting tourists, all said: 'Everybody knows there is no jade in Guatemala, these gringos are crazy!'"

"When the *National Geographic* article, 'Jade; Stone of Heaven' was published in 1987, Guatemalans decided... 'maybe we DO have jade in Guatemala.'

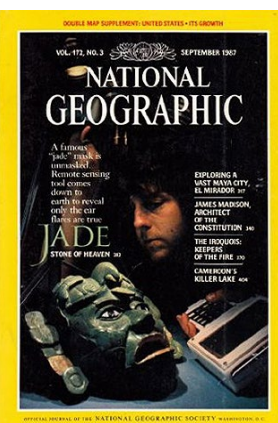
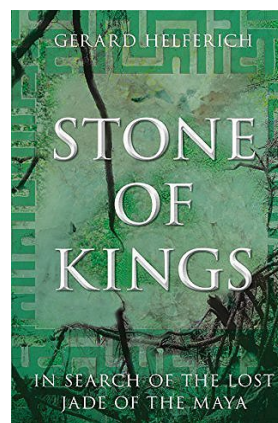
"We reached many milestones over our 46 years in Guatemala, discovering eight different sources of jade, including Rainbow jade and Olmec Blue jade. Our mining techniques are environmentally friendly. We don't dig for jade. We only do surface collection, just as the Maya did for three thousand years.



This Preclassic Jade Maya mask was miraculously recovered for Guatemala.

"We started a non-profit, 'The Maya Conservancy' and have started international conferences on Maya culture and provided well-paid jobs to hundreds of Maya people, and built long-term relationships, in the Maya world including the 'Pro Peten Project' with 'Conservation International' and various other community development projects.

"I was instrumental in recovering a Preclassic Jade mask, which had been stolen from a government-run museum on



*Stone of Kings: In Search of the Lost Jade of the Maya*, by Gerard Helferich (2011) is available on Amazon; The story that launched enthusiasm for real Jade in the Americas, *National Geographic*, September (1987) Vol. 172, No. 3.

Guatemala's south coast, and returned it to the Guatemalan government... a landmark... the first time a national treasure was recovered and returned... EVER! Usually a theft of an important artifact means that the treasure will end up on the New York art market within 48 hours.

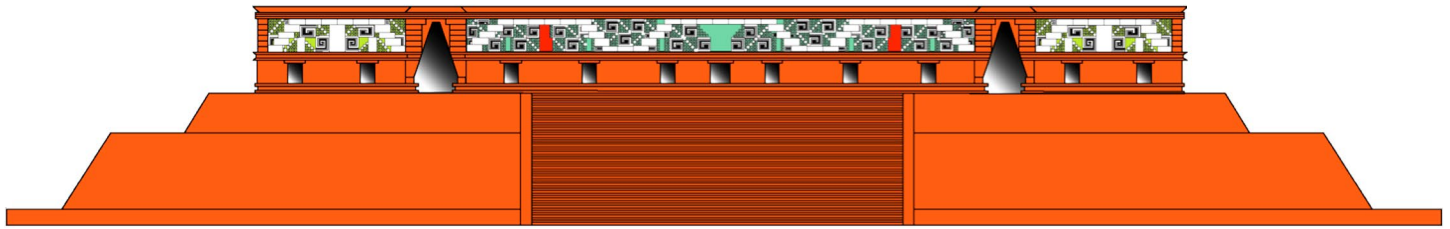
"Our adventures have been told in the book; *Stone of Kings*, by Gerard Helferich. The *Wall Street Journal* calls it: 'a compelling tale'.

"Covid has hit our business so hard that we are transitioning to a new website, which tells our story and has wonderful exciting new designs and products and bargains and discounts."

Support Jade of the Americas at the new website: [www.jademaya.com](http://www.jademaya.com)



**Editor's note:** For more than a K'atun, I've always invited Maya enthusiasts, scholars and non-scholars alike, to share what interests them with others. This article by Maya enthusiast Omar Schwendener of Guatemala fits the bill. Omar believes he's stumbled upon an imaginative, yet plausible idea. He's even invented a little "stereo-viewing" device that he plans to patent. For now, just keep an open mind... and cross your eyes!



If you cross your eyes, you'll see how the blank rectangles, go up and down, and there are several moments where they coincide, possibly forming an image in 3-D, that looks like a coiled snake... finally, in the two far-end parts of this structure, the face of a geometric snake that jumps out to bite.

## Maya Stereography by Omar Schwendener

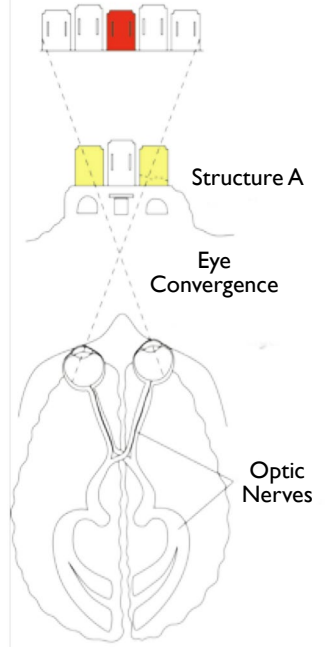
Independent Maya Researcher

One of the great contributions made by the Maya was the use of building façades, mainly in the Chenes and Puuc regions, with huge geometric designs that could be viewed with crossed eyes, and that when observed using this technique, were observed in 3-D. These images possibly evoked an animated character to the observed designs and geometric figures.

There are numerous examples, ranging from the Preclassic to the Late Classic, and among them are the sites that stand out for their large number of stereographic panels. One of these is the Palace of the Governor at Uxmal. Perched atop a large artificial mound platform, and with a width of 100 meters, the structure could be seen from a great distance, up to several kilometers away. When crossing the eyes, the far-end extremes form a mythological monster, possibly a snake, and in the center there are inverted triangles that emulate the "slithering" of a Chalpate snake (*bothrops asper*), in addition to several strategically placed anthropomorphic



▲ A view of Structure A observed from Pyramid C at Nakum. We see that the architectural elements are symmetrical, and work well with the crossed-eyed "Eye Convergence" technique. ►



At left and above, Omar demonstrates the intended use of his stereography invention with his prototype Photos by Antonio Caspolan.



built to the east and seen from Structure C. Covering the sun and emulating a solar eclipse, these effects possibly served to observe activity in the high solar corona during an artificial eclipse. Remember, ancient Mesoamerican beauty standards used to promote crossed eyes!

Today, the crossing or converging of the eyes is in disuse, so the use of the ©arqueostereoscópio is proposed. The device is designed to produce the effect of observing these ancient Maya structures and their architectural features without the need to cross the eyes. Despite little support from the Guatemalan government, a prototype printed in plastic is being worked on and I hope to be able to offer the device to the public very soon. ▲



Omar always wears a mask and a face shield when venturing out. He lives in Villa Nueva, Guatemala, which is down the highway that takes you through Esquintla to the beaches. Covid cases are still very high in Guatemala.



# Xkalupococh: A Maler Puuc Site Revisited by Stephan Merk

continued from page 2

evidence of a room on top. The steps of the flying stairway have fallen since then, but the passage, constructed with a half vault, is well preserved.

All the other outer walls of the building are no longer preserved, but the vaults are still partly standing. The structure's western back part had three rooms in a row while the southern lateral side shows two small rooms side by side. On the other hand, in the north there are two large rooms, one behind the other; the front room on this side had a



**Fig. 7:** On top of a high hill in Group A this piece of wall, presenting a one-member medial molding, also supports the presence of Early Puuc style for the Maya site of Xkalupococh. Photo by Stephan Merk.

**Fig. 6:** One lateral end wall is all that remains from the Intermediate style Structure 2 in Xkalupococh III, Group A. Photo by Stephan Merk.

(now fallen) multiple entrance formed by two doorway columns.

Directly southeast of Structure 1 and in a right angle to it, are the remains of the mostly fallen Structure 2 in Group A with three rooms in a line along an east-west axis. The former rooms had their entrances on the north side towards the courtyard. Only the western chamber is partly preserved. Its side end wall has no medial molding; the upper façade projects out beyond the lower wall and slopes slightly upward (**Fig. 6**); on top, the lower member of a likely multiple member upper molding is visible. One finds this façade design in so called Intermediate style buildings, as classified by George F. Andrews (1995: 95).

Around 150 meters south-southwest of the two described buildings in Group A is a high hill that carries on its top two fallen buildings. Only one piece of a wall is still standing; on the outer side it has a one-member medial molding, typical for Early Puuc style structures, and on the inner side the minor rest of a vault (**Fig. 7**).

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## Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for September

### by Zach Lindsey

**10 September 640 CE:** On 9.10.7.13.5, the Lady Sak K'uk' of Palenque entered the White Road and died. Mother of Pakal (which makes her grandmother to at least two and possibly three later kings of Palenque), this master politician helped re-invent the Palenque dynasty. After the government of Palenque was interrupted by attacks from the Snake Kingdom, Sak K'uk' returned normalcy – though she may have done so as a vassal to the Snake Kingdom, according to David Freidel. It's unclear how much political sway the Snake Kingdom held in Palenque during and after the reign of Sak K'uk', but she clearly carved a place for herself. Her son was one of the most prolific builders in Palenque's history, and for many years he held the title of longest-reigning monarch in the world!

**15 September 320 CE:** On 8.14.3.1.12 1 Eb 0 Yaxk'in G5, a leader danced with celts around his waist. On one of these celts, he wore the date, one of the earliest surviving long count dates in the Maya region. It is, of course, the Leiden Plaque, in use for nearly eight hundred years. While we don't know much about the ruler who first wore it, his name was probably Way Ko(?) Chanal Chak Wak.



The Leiden Plaque, #2909. Visit Justin Kerr's "A Precolumbian Portfolio" at: <http://research.mayavase.com/kerrportfolio.html>

For many years, researchers thought he was from Tikal, but there simply isn't enough evidence to say much about him. But the Leiden Plaque isn't a bad legacy to have. 🏛️



Oval Palace Tablet from House E, Palace. Lady Sak K'uk' offers the drum major headdress decorated with a jester god of rulership to her son K'inich Janaab Pakal. Check out the Linda Schele Drawing Collection at: <http://www.famsi.org/research/schele/index.html>

## Sept. 16 • 8 pm • The IMS begins “Zoom” presentations!

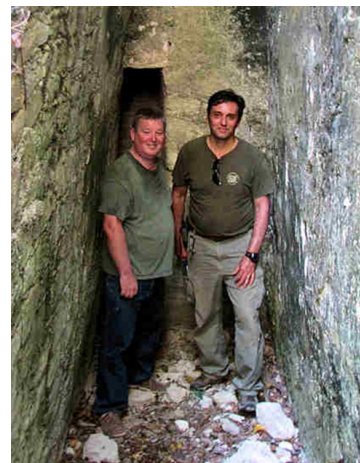
*Join with us as we begin in a small way, but with a “big-way” speaker!*

### The Holmul Kingdom and the Rise of a Maya Empire with Dr. Francisco Estrada-Belli

The discovery of a spectacularly decorated and inscribed building at Holmul brought this site to the forefront of Classic Maya history. Finds like this come to fill perhaps the largest gap in our knowledge of it, the sixth century CE. This was a time of great turmoil in the lowlands. It has been referred to as the “Tikal Hiatus” because of the dearth of historical texts at Tikal and elsewhere. New information has now revealed the existence of a royal lineage at Holmul with connections to both Tikal and the Kaan kingdom – and the role Holmul played during the initial phase of the two rival's long-lasting confrontation.

Our **Zoom** presentation on 9-16 will feature a video of this program by Francisco Estrada-Belli when he appeared for us at the Miami Science Museum, but Francisco will be with us “live” on **Zoom** to present himself, narrate the video, and answer questions that you can “text” into him.

Join us for the fun! Contact Keith Merwin at < [keith@merwin.com](mailto:keith@merwin.com) > to be added on the list to receive the **Zoom** invite. He can also help you get registered on **Zoom.us** or trouble-shoot to make sure you don't miss this event. Also, check our IMS Facebook page for updates!



IMS webmaster Keith Merwin and Francisco Estrada-Belli pose within a vaulted room at Holmul. 🏛️

## IMS EXPLORER

Join the **Explorer-ation**! Scholar or not, we welcome submissions from IMS members and other Maya enthusiasts. Share what interests you with others. All articles and news items for the **IMS Explorer** should be forwarded to the newsletter editor at: [mayaman@bellsouth.net](mailto:mayaman@bellsouth.net)