
Smoking Mirror

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRE-COLUMBIAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Volume 13 Number 9

May 2006

Editor: Steven F. Daniel (202) 483-8064 / steven.daniel1@verizon.net

FRIDAY, MAY 5

Sumner School

17th & M Streets NW

Washington, DC

6:45 p.m.

THE MASK AND THE KING: A Reencounter With a Maya Royal Face from Palenque, Chiapas

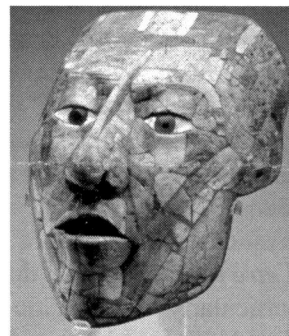
Laura Filloy Nadal

K'inich Janaab' Pakal (A.D. 603-683) was one of the most renowned rulers of the Maya area. He reigned over the city of Palenque, Chiapas, from A.D. 612 until his death. Aware of the fact that upon his demise he would begin the long journey to the underworld, he prepared himself for this odyssey by commissioning the construction of a pyramidal structure with a temple on top in which he could be venerated, and a magnificent funerary chamber containing a rich assortment of jade objects. Mexican archeologist Alberto Ruz excavated this mausoleum in 1952, and discovered the famous jade mask of Pakal.

From the time it became part of the National Museum of Anthropology's collection in 1964, Pakal's mask has rarely left its location in the Maya Hall. In 2001, a routine conservation check was made to review the piece's condition and to assess the feasibility of loaning it to another institution. It was then that we realized the poor condition of the backing on which the mosaic pieces of the mask had been reassembled for display. This situation provided us a unique opportunity to undertake a new reconstruction of the mask, based on a detailed scientific study of numerous factors.

In this presentation I will analyze the manufacturing technique of Pakal's mask. I will then elaborate on its archaeological context and the moment of its discovery in order to understand the distribution of its parts, as well as to identify the taphonomic processes that occurred in the tomb and the etiology of the alterations on its different materials. Discussion will center on the function and significance of the piece during the funerary rites of the king. Finally, I will delve into the information surrounding the discovery of the mask in 1952, its recent history and restoration process.

Laura Filloy Nadal is a Senior Conservator at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, INAH (Mexico City). She received her B.A. in Restoration and Conservation from the National School of Conservation, Restoration and Museography, INAH, Mexico, and her M.A. in Archaeology from the University of Paris "La Sorbonne". She was Head of the Conservation Section of the National Museum of Anthropology from 2000-2004. She has been an invited professor at "La Sapienza" in Rome and at Princeton University. Currently she is a "Junior Fellow" at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library in Washington, D.C.



Suggested readings – see p. 10

<i>In This Issue . . .</i>	
2	Aztec God of Death: A Life Giver – Leonard Lopez Lujan
8	St. John and the Taino
8	Member Travel
9	PCS/DC By-Laws & Call for Self-Nominations
11	PCS/DC Calendar

PCS/DC OCTOBER-JUNE MEETINGS are held at the Sumner School at the corner of 17th & M Streets, NW, Washington, D.C.

Our meetings at the Sumner School begin with a 30-minute social gathering with refreshments. Lectures usually commence at 7:15 p.m. and end by 8:45 p.m.

Depending on the speaker's availability, it is customary after the meeting for interested members to accompany the speaker for a late supper at a nearby restaurant.

APRIL MEETING

Leonardo López Luján

THE AZTEC GOD OF DEATH: A Life Giver

The following text was provided by the speaker

Carlos Navarrete (1982), the famous archaeologist from Guatemala, has examined the roots of the Mexican vision of death, viewed with fascination and curiosity by foreigners. Far from what we might expect, the often cited, celebrated, beloved, and ever mocked myth of death does not date back any earlier than the 1920s. According to Navarrete, in those founding times of the Nation amidst a revolutionary mysticism, there was a search for Mexican *raison d'être* and essence, so that popular arts were revived, particularly the graphic works of José Guadalupe Posada. Sugar skulls, cut-out tissue paper skeletons, and engravings of "Catrinas" (or fancy ladies) thus became exemplary ancestors and sources of inspiration for a multifaceted iconography flooding public buildings, schools, markets, bakeries, and cemeteries every November. In the decades following the Revolution, intellectuals such as Diego Rivera would take up this banner, disseminating the new aesthetic of the great beyond to consolidate the myth that death instills little or no fear in Mexicans.

Based on this vision, many have wanted to find a long, indigenous tradition of friendly, smiling skeletons in the threads of historical continuity. Obviously, extrapolating from the urban context of post-revolutionary Mexico to the pre-Columbian world is going too far. Although it is true that Aztec or Maya world-view have no equivalent to the horrifying image of hell of our Christian heritage, it would be overly simplistic to say that before the arrival of the Spaniards, no one feared death, or that beings such as Mictlantecuhtli (the Aztec "Lord of Death") or God A (his Maya equivalent) did not inspire enormous respect in the believer.

The complex pre-Columbian conceptions of death and the otherworld make any simplistic vision impossible. Numerous studies of indigenous thought reveal elaborate eschatology, as well as gods of death with contradictory traits. Even some divine functions may seem paradoxical from our western perspective. To illustrate this notion, gods of the underworld display a terrifying side in Central Mexico codices, where they appear in scenes of death, sacrifice, and destruction. Surprisingly enough, in other images from the same documents,

these skeletal beings can also be imbued with creative functions, both in the cycle of vegetation, as well as in the conception and birth of human beings.

My main interest focuses precisely on this dual aspect of the God of Death. My reflections are based on the recent discovery of two exceptional images of Mictlantecuhtli in the ruins of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire. Given the enormous importance of this find in downtown Mexico City, I will refer to it in certain detail in the first section. Building on this foundation, I will discuss the indigenous vision of Mictlan as an evil-smelling place of decomposition, related to sexuality, the feminine principle, passion, and growth.

Between 1978 and 1982, the Great Temple Project excavated fifteen religious buildings of the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan. The House of Eagles is without doubt one of the most interesting in this architectural complex. This building, L-shaped in plan, owes its name to the eagle heads decorating its main stairway. Unfortunately, the last stage of construction, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, is very destroyed and only its platform and stairways have survived.

In 1981, we explored the interior of the last constructive stage, uncovering a substructure that apparently dates to 1470 A.D. In contrast, this older building was found in a magnificent state of preservation. It consists of several rooms decorated with beautiful paintings on an earth surface and long polychrome bench reliefs. Access was by way of two stairways. To reach the main room, one had to cross a door guarded by two ceramic sculptures representing individuals wearing eagle costumes from head to toe. From the main room, occupied by a wide altar, one passed into the next rooms by a narrow passageway, flanked by two ceramic skeletons, unfortunately broken by a colonial foundation. Thus, one reached a rectangular patio limited by two rooms. Each one of them had a small altar and a pair of ceramic braziers decorated with rain god's faces shedding tears.

Thanks to the joint collaboration of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the

National University of Mexico, and Princeton University, we were able to continue fieldwork at the House of Eagles during the last ten years to seek a better understanding of the religious significance and functions of the building. Our first task was to reconstruct the ritual activities which were carried out in this place on a daily basis. We cut-out a tiny cylindrical piece from each square meter of the stucco floor, retrieving in this way more than five hundred samples. By means of microchemical analysis of these samples, we found deposits of carbonates, phosphates, fatty acids, albumin (the main protein in blood) and other compounds. Once it was transferred to the computer, this information helped us to deduce that specific activities took place in particular parts of the building: the offering of food to the gods, self-sacrifice and the burning of incense.

The next task was to detect and excavate all types of features buried beneath the floors of the House of Eagles. For this purpose we used a magnetometer, a resistivity meter, and a ground penetrating radar, instruments which helped us to discover magnetic and electric anomalies produced by several of the buried offerings, a drainage system and a smaller and older building. We continued to excavate in those places showing the greatest anomalies.

After several years of meticulous work, we were able to record in detail and recover, among other things, eight offerings and a burial, which were found beneath floors, altars and staircases.

At the same time, we recorded all the iconographic motifs represented on the walls, for example mural paintings depicting several priests, as well as on the benches with processions of warriors.

We decided later to excavate several tunnels, because the northern half of the House of Eagles is under the street of Justo Sierra. One of the tunnels was dug to locate the main entrance to the north wing of the building. There, the two sculptures of Mictlantecuhtli came to light. We detected first the impressive claw of one sculpture, and immediately after the skull of the other.

The in situ excavation and conservation work took place simultaneously from the very day of the discovery. The restorer's presence was indispensable at every moment, due to the poor state of preservation of the two sculptures. Both the low temperature at which the pieces were fired, as well as the high level of humidity in the subsoil turned the ceramic into a highly fragile material. These two phenomena, combined with the tremendous pressure exercised by the weight of the buildings and vibrations of vehicles passing daily on the street, caused serious damage to the images.

Due to the fact that the sculptures were fractured into hundreds of pieces, we decided to free them from top to bottom, dismantling them section by section. You can see in this slide the hip, and the legs. After five months of work in the tunnel, we managed to completely extract and record them. In the peace of the lab, we continued work. The sculptures' fragility made consolidation of the ceramic indispensable to increase its resistance. The next step was to spread the pieces of each sculpture on the floor to photograph them as a whole. Nevertheless, the most complicated task was assembling the pieces of these huge puzzles. At the same time, a dismountable tubular structure was made that would serve to keep the 280 pounds in weight of this piece standing.

The two images are so similar that it is easy to confuse them. Both are free-standing, anthropomorphic sculptures representing a male figure. They are hieratic, full-bodied representations, whose dimensions slightly exceed average Aztec dimensions: 5.7 feet. All the elements of the body observe strict bilateral symmetry. As for their position, the sculptures are standing, facing the forward, flexed arms extending upward and displaying claws in a position of attack, and with straight legs.

The head is large in proportion to the body, given that its height is equivalent to a fourth of the total height of the image. Dozens of irregular perforations dot the area corresponding to the scalp. The head is distinguished by its prominent ears with perforated lobes. The face is partially fleshless. The sculptures have a bulky skeletal torso composed of eight pairs of ribs. In the lower end of the sternum there are two perforations where a cord was knotted that held the trilobate piece representing the liver (composed of its right and left lobes) and the gall bladder. From the torso emerge two massive arms that are so long that if they were extended downward, they would reach below the knees, which are strong and sharp. The robust quality of the hip, legs, and feet form a striking contrast with the skeletal torso of the images. Clothing is limited to a loincloth and a pair of sandals.

The pictorial decoration merits special interest. Certain parts of the body and clothing share the same color on both sculptures. We refer specifically to the ears, liver, knees, and ties on the sandals, all painted red. On the other hand, the color of the face, arms, hip, legs, and feet was different on each image: on one of them there is a clear preponderance of blue, and on the other, of black. Finally, we would like to mention the presence of yellow circular spots on the face.

It is evident that all of the recently described attributes fully correspond with sculptural and pictographic representations of the Lord of the Realm of the Dead. There is not much room for confusion, given that images of Mictlantecuhtli and God A have stereotypical traits, exhibiting little variation. Although representations of this deity are very common as a skeletal being, figures such as ours with partially fleshless bodies, which are true studies of corpses in decomposition, predominate. As a general norm, instead of a head, they have a skull frequently flanked by large red ears. They often display visible ribs, but the extremities tend to preserve soft tissue. Just as in the case of other nocturnal, terrestrial, and underworld deities, ferocious claws take the place of hands and sometimes of feet. As for his costume, Mictlantecuhtli usually wears a loincloth and sandals.

Yellow circles, such as those found on the face of our sculptures, are attributes of Mictlantecuhtli himself. Frequently they are represented as yellow spots with red dots, signs of blood and bone matter.

In pictographs, there are other distinctive attributes of the God of Death not found on the sculptures from the House of Eagles. Nevertheless, the idea that they once may have had them cannot be discarded for if they were made of perishable materials, these elements would have long disappeared with the passage of time. The most obvious case is that of the curly, black hair characterizing Mictlantecuhtli and other nocturnal deities. As we mentioned earlier, our images have dozens of perforations on the head, where natural hair was surely inserted. Similarly, we can imagine that the two sculptures originally displayed ear ornaments, paper decorations over the forehead, and on the nape of the neck, white paper rosettes, banners, and stoles.

Without doubt, the figures of Mictlantecuhtli, just as the other four sculptures that flanked the entrances to the House of Eagles, are the work of true experts in the art of clay working. Thanks to petrographic studies and neutron activation analysis, we know that they were made with clays and sands obtained in the vicinity of the island of Tenochtitlan. Therefore and due to the great formal and technical similarities between them, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the six sculptures discovered to date come from the same workshop in Tenochtitlan.

Due to their large format, the sculptures had to be planned in four large parts, which would have been assembled using a mortise and tenon system: the head and the neck; the torso, hip, and arms; the

right leg, and the left leg. A fifth piece, which represents the liver and gall bladder would later be hung from the chest cavity, perhaps with the help of a strong, fiber cord.

When the sculptures were placed in their final position, the artists proceeded to apply a fine layer of whitish stucco covering the imperfections of the ceramic and at the same time, hiding the areas where the piece was joined. With this same material, the loincloth of the images was fashioned. Then, the sculptures were decorated with blue, red, black, and yellow pigments. Finally, the entrance was decorated with beautiful mural paintings of skull and crossed bones, marking symbolically an entrance to the Underworld.

I should mention that, during the excavation of one of the ceramic images, we removed the earth covering it and found a gritty substance on the head, shoulders, arms, and back. It was a thin layer, maroon in color, the distribution of which suggested a fluid that had been poured from above. Several samples of this strange maroon-colored material were taken, based on the supposition that they were bloody remains in a very poor state of preservation. After a first battery of analyses, high concentrations of iron and albumin were detected, that is to say, the main components of blood. Later, a series of studies were conducted by *electrophoresis* and immunology. These analyses allowed the indisputable identification of the presence of hemoglobin of human origin. Thus, it was corroborated that the images of the God of Death were bathed with large quantities of blood from sacrificed individuals. It is worth mentioning that this same practice is represented in a scene from the *Codex Magliabechiano* that is amazing for its extraordinary parallels with the rite that took place in the House of Eagles.

Mictlantecuhtli and the World of the Dead

Few divinities can share with the God of Death his preeminent place in the intricate Mesoamerican pantheon. A ubiquitous figure in sculptures and codices of ancient Mexico, the skeletal or partially fleshless image of this god is already present in the Preclassic art of Tlatilco and Izapa. With the exception of Teotihuacan, where his representations are scarce, it is during the Classic Period when gods of the underworld and their symbols acquired orthodox forms and are repeated profusely. In Maya sculpture skeletons are frequently represented, as well as crossed bones, mandibles, and "night eyes." Later, the complete image of God A would be converted, together with those of Gods B, D, and E, into one of the most recurrent images in Postclassic Maya codices.

Nevertheless, no art would display such a great obsession with death symbolism as that of the Aztec. In a unique way, Aztec sculpture alludes to physical death, the extinction of life, reproducing with mastery the placid features and postures of the deceased individual. On the other hand and in contrast, there is an insistence on representations of terrifying deities that speak to us of the fear of believers and of the transcendence of this cult.

Mictlantecuhtli, also known as "Broken Face," "Scatterer of Ashes," and "He who Descends Upside Down," was not the only deity of death worshipped by the Aztecs. Although of lesser importance, deities such as Mictēcacihuatl, Yoaltecuhtli, and Yoalcihuatl belonged to this same complex.

The calendar is a good example of the influence of Mictlantecuhtli on the daily life of the Aztecs. In the 365-day cycle, he is present at the double festival composed of the twenty-day periods of *Miccailhuitontli* and *Huey Miccailhuitl*. In the 260-day cycle, Mictlantecuhtli appears simultaneously as the sixth Lord of the Day, fifth Lord of the Night, patron of the day *Dog*, of the thirteen-day period beginning with *1 Flint*, and his image is the sign of the day *Death*.

In codices *Borgia* and *Vaticanus B*, Mictlantecuhtli and Quetzalcóatl are represented as opposite, complementary principles, as life and the exhalation of life forming the basic cycle of the universe. This same role is evident in the *Leyenda de los Soles* and the *Popol Vuh*, where the gods of death confront and are mocked, albeit briefly, by Quetzalcóatl in the first case, and by the divine hero twins in the second.

As we indicated at the beginning, Mictlantecuhtli exercises functions that may seem to be paradoxical such as the granting and fostering of life. In this respect, Gordon Brotherston (1994) has analyzed the protagonistic role of Mictlantecuhtli in scenes referring to penetration, pregnancy, cutting the umbilical cord, and lactation contained in the codices *Borgia*, *Vaticanus B* and *Fejérváry-Mayer*. The explanation of this strange protagonistic role resides in the regenerative power of bones-seeds, evident not only in the celebrated journey of Quetzalcóatl to Mictlan, but also in the *Codex Vienna*, where the founding fathers, the goddesses of *pulque* and the personified cornfield, possess skeletal features.

But whatever creative faculties Mictlantecuhtli may possess, it is his fearful character that predominates in pre-Columbian cosmivision. We recall for a moment, images such as those in the House of Eagles, partially fleshless, with threatening claws, and in many cases, related to

animals such as the spider, centipede, scorpion, owl, and bat. The God of Death is, above all, an insatiable devourer of human flesh and blood.

In pictographs, he appears as an active sacrificer, armed with an axe or a flint knife and ready to extract the heart of his victims. Furthermore, his nose and tongue adopt the form of sharp blades in codices such as the *Borgia* or in skull-masks discovered in the Aztec Great Temple. In Maya polychrome vessels and codices, God A has been painted participating in executions and God A' in sinister scenes of self-decapitation, violent death, and sacrifice. Therefore, it is not strange that the Lord of the Realm of the Dead inspires so much terror in the indigenous imagination. Perhaps for this reason, in plate 22 of the *Codex Dresden*, God A bears the sign of the skull followed by the glyph *bi*, composed of what could be read as *xib(i)*. As we shall see, this word is close to the Yucatec word *xibil*, related to the idea of fear.

For the Aztecs, Mictlan was a spacious, barren, extremely dark place, a "place with orifices for smoke to escape." In this tenor, it is highly interesting that fray Alonso de Molina has recorded in his Spanish-Náhuatl Dictionary the phrase *yuhquim micqui itzinco* as a way of saying something dark and frightening, which literally means "as in the ass of death." Obviously, Aztec conceptions are not the exception in Mesoamerica. The Maya, for example, used the term Xibalba as one of the names of the underworld. In Quiché this word means "place of fear," while in Yucatec *xibil* means "trembling with fear, to be frightened or to have (your) hair stand on end."

Mictlan, the ninth level of the underworld, is also defined as a fearful, stinking place of torments, where pus is drunk and sorrows are eaten. After Torquemada, Tlaxcaltecs believed that in the underworld the souls of common people were converted into "weasels, and filthy scarabs and small animals that emit very fetid urine." The Maya Quiché coincided, because they speak to us of the courageous mythical hero Xbalanqué, who upon defeating the Lord of the Dead, gave him a kick and said: "Return and all that is rotten and thrown out and stinking is for you."

In light of what has been discussed, the sculptures from the House of Eagles do not offer any difficulties with respect to their identification and their meaning. Their horrifying appearance and their possible link with a blood ritual are in full consonance with Aztec beliefs from the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, what remains to be explained is the presence of the prominent liver.

German researcher, Eduard Seler (1992), was the first to note the existence of images with an

organ projecting from below the chest cavity. He made this observation by analyzing the illustrations of the *Codex Mendoza*, where the skeletal costume of *quetzaltzimitl* belonging to the Aztec generals appears. Seler noticed the presence of a cut crossing the chest from side to side, an incision by way of which emerged what he interpreted as “a heart or blood.” Although it is true that on occasions Mictlantecuhli is represented with a heart coming out of his thorax, in the majority of cases the liver is the organ that appears in this position, as noted by Seler’s intellectual enemy, Hermann Beyer (1940), a famous researcher also born in Germany. As Beyer noted correctly, the heart has a conventional form in pre-Columbian iconography that does not correspond to the organ of the *quetzaltzimitl* uniforms. It is easy to distinguish the heart thanks to the fact that on its upper part it has cut-off ends corresponding to the upper vena cava and to the aorta and pulmonary arteries. In addition to this upper dentate edge, sometimes it has a yellow transversal band that imitates the adipose tissue of cardiac ridges.

According to Beyer, what is hanging from the *quetzaltzimitl* uniform is a red liver with yellow tips, and a blue gall bladder. He arrived at this conclusion after phonetically analyzing a toponym drawn in the *Codex Mendoza*. We refer to the glyph of Tampatel, a Huastec site conquered by the Aztecs. This toponym is composed of a hill glyph, named *tam* in Huastec, which is crowned by an inverted liver, named *-el* or *elli* in Nahuatl. So Tampatel means “Hill of liver or courage”. By studying the *Codex Xólotl*, he also noted the similarities of the toponym of Tampatel with the glyph for Tlacaélel, a name of an Aztec viceroy that is also composed of the particle *-el*, meaning “liver” and “courage”. Later, other scholars have coincided with Beyer’s identification. For example, this organ was recognized in the image of Tzitzimitl from the *Codex Magliabechiano*. You can see a big liver below a necklace made of human hearts and hands.

The compelling question is: why is the liver present in representations of underworld beings. It is unnecessary to insist here on the importance of this organ, which is the largest gland in the human body. We suppose that one of the characteristics of the liver that could have attracted the attention of pre-Columbian peoples the most is the large quantity of blood it contains. Blood flows provided by the hepatic artery and the portal vein perhaps induced indigenous people to associate this organ with the heart, another one of the receptacles of animistic entities. The movement of the heart synchronized with respiration shown by the liver due to its proximity to the diaphragm may be added to this.

For the Aztecs, the *ihiyotl*, one of the three souls of the body, resided in the liver. Alfredo López Austin (1988) points out that for the Tzotziles and Nahuas of today, each one of the animistic entities is closely linked to a certain sector of the cosmos and the nuclear family.

This allows us to understand why the head, the main site where the *tonalli* resides, was given the name of *ilhuícatl* (“sky”) in pre-Columbian times and the reason for the strong link between the Sun and the human heart. We might also find a relationship between *ihiyotl* and the earth. Farming was considered the inevitable aggression of man toward the Great Mother, which the tiller had to wound by inserting the planting stick. “Tilling the earth” is *elimiqui(n)* in Nahuatl, which literally means “to injure the liver,” precisely the liver, the seat of the *ihiyotl*.

In fact, not only the liver and the gall bladder were symbolically associated with the lower part of the universe. Cecelia Klein (1990-1991) has discovered that all viscera of the abdomen were related to death and the underworld. This is evident in pre-Columbian codices where disembowelment, excrement, and noxious gases are seen, together with the deceased and deities of death.

Today we have several studies on the interesting semantic complex of *ihiyotl*, which joins the ideas of underworld, femininity, growth, passion, and carnal sins, excrement, trash, and death as part of a same logical structure. According to the Aztecs, the concept of the area below --both in the human body as well as in the cosmos-- was where passions and positive and negative forces joined; vigor/laxity, creative power/impotence, bravery/cowardness, joy/sadness, and sexual desire/lack of desire. This explains, as we shall see later, why the waste from the womb was a vehicle of invigorating forces, as well as noxious exhalations.

From the liver, the *ihiyotl* simultaneously controlled life, vigor, sexuality, and the digestive process. There strong emotions also had their origin, mainly ire. In this sense, fray Bernardino de Sahagún describes the bile secreted by the liver as “thick, green, blue, our place of anger, it irritates people, it swells in anger at people.” At the same time, the *ihiyotl* possessed the power of growth.

The pre-Columbian *ihiyotl* has its colonial and modern equivalent in the “winds” or “night airs.” Contemporary indigenous groups from Veracruz, Puebla, and Chiapas believe these are the noxious spirits of the dead returning to the face of the earth. For example, the Nahuas of Veracruz, famous for their cut-out bark paper figures, represent the airs with skeletal bodies. The Chortis from Honduras, in turn, called this spirit *ijiyo*. They say

that it is a vaporous substance that has the quality of abandoning the living body or the corpses of the dead. *Ijiyo* is radiated by jealous, irritated, agitated, or exhausted people, as well as by sorcerers and women in menstruation. All the preceding would explain why deities related to the powers of the lower half of the cosmos were commonly represented with large livers.

Recently Jill McKeever Furst (1995) has demonstrated how ancient beliefs about the soul were based on careful observation of nature, and particularly the human body. In a certain sense, the animistic forces of the indigenous imagination were perceived by way normal experiences; they could be felt, touched, and even smelled. In this regard, the case of the *ihiyotl* is particularly illustrative. In Molina's *Vocabulario*, the noun *yhyotl* is defined as "breath or blow" and the verb *ihiotia* as the action of "breathing, or to break wind, or to draw a breath, or to be resplendent or to show off rich garments."

Based on these meanings, Furst has been able to characterize the soul of the liver as a resplendent and foul-smelling air. In her opinion, the Aztec definition of *ihiyotl* as a photic and bad-smelling entity has its origin in natural phenomena perceived by Pre-Columbian people and coherently integrated into their cosmivision. As for the first "tangible" attribute, Furst analyzes the phenomena known as *ignis fatuus*, consisting of "floating" lights that oscillate and change direction continuously. These lights of blue, green, violet, or yellow color generally are perceived at night on pools or puddles on solid ground during the rainy season. In very different traditions from all over the world, the *ignis fatuus* has been interpreted as the presence of spirits.

The phenomenon is explained scientifically as the spontaneous ignition of methane generated by anaerobic bacteria in moist vegetation or corpses in the process of decomposition. Methane is also present in gases produced by man during the digestive process. It has the peculiar property of burning itself with atmospheric electricity, giving rise to a blue, low temperature light. Based on Furst, the inhabitants of the Basin of Mexico could have associated this cold fire with the *ihiyotl*, the underworld, and the deceased, contrasting it with the hot fire of the *tonalli*, the soul of the heavens. In the same way, she proposes that methane or resplendent blue flames (the product of luminescent chemical reactions in decomposing bodies) could have been interpreted as the soul trying to leave through the skin.

The *ihiyotl* was not only perceived with the sense of sight, but also with that of smell: fray Alonso de Molina says that the *ihiyotl* was a kind of breath. Nevertheless, its foul-smelling exhalations

must be attributed to ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, products also associated with the metabolic action of anaerobic bacteria. Both are also produced in the digestive tract. According to indigenous logic, the person who ate a lot would have many gases and as a consequence, a vigorous *ihiyotl*, coveted by thin and sick people. Similarly, pregnant women would feel this animistic entity within, confusing the first perceptible movements of the fetus with the internal flow of fetid gases that come with pregnancy. And they would provide good auguries for the happy conjunction of the future infant and his insufflated strength from the *ihiyotl* and death.

Fetid emanations have a closer relationship with the decomposition of corpses. In cemeteries, mortal remains emit methane and fetid gases of decomposition. These come up to the surface easily, giving the sensation that the soul escapes from the inert body in the form of light and stench. Anyone who observes a body in decomposition will notice that within a couple days after death, the womb produces blue-green dots. A week later, these dots cover the entire body. At some moment and suddenly, the skin changes from blue-green to black in color, a phenomenon that immediately reminds us of the two predominant colors of our sculptures. Then and in a way resembling pregnancy, the body swells.

The fetid internal gases move it and the deceased individual seems to come alive again. Its navel becomes scandalously bloated, just as in Maya representations of God A, and finally emanations from the decaying matter are freed. Is this the escape of the *ihiyotl*?

This makes it clear why some names of the God of Death refer to putrefaction. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, the Tarahumaras from Chihuahua gave the Lord of the Underworld the name of *Huitaru*, "He-who-is-shit." The Lacandons and Maya of today call the god of death *Cizin*, that is to say, "The Flatulent One." The pre-Columbian origin of this appellative is clear in this glyphic complex, whose phonetic translation is *cizin(i)*.

So, the images of Mictlantecuhtli in the House of Eagles, terrifying, eager for blood, partially fleshless, with prominent livers and colors related to putrefaction, fit into this eschatological conception of the underworld. These exceptional pieces transport us to a dark, gloomy, fetid underworld, which at the same time was an inexhaustible source of creative power.

Bibliography, see p. 10

Do not cite without prior permission of the speaker

St. John and The Taino - Scott & Lucy Wilson

Given the allure of warm sunshine, sandy beaches, fish-filled reefs and rum-filled drinks, few visitors think of archaeological sites when visiting the US Virgin Islands. But there is archaeology here because there were ancient people here. This is Taino country, the people who peacefully greeted Columbus and today archaeologists are beginning to understand more about these early inhabitants and to display their recently-excavated artifacts.

St. John is one of three islands that make up the US Virgin Islands. The guidebooks tell of the area's colorful post-1492 history. Columbus bumped into these islands on his second voyage in 1493 but never settled here. The English and French attempted to colonize as early as 1625, and other European powers including the Knights of Malta, held sway at various points. Ultimately, it was the Danes who took control and ruled St. John as a large sugar plantation for nearly 250 years. They sold the island, along with St. Thomas and St. Croix, to the United States in 1917. Our government's interest in the area was purely strategic; it took Laurence Rockefeller to see the beauty of St. John and to put it on the tourism map. He bought up extensive acreage, built an estate (now the very upscale Caneel Bay Resort) and then donated about two-thirds of the island to the National Park Service.

In the National Park at Reef Bay there is a freshwater pool and waterfall marked with a large number of enigmatic petroglyphs that have long been a tourist stop on the island. Recent analyses of these petroglyphs, along with archaeological work at three other sites, add to our knowledge of early peoples on St. John.

St. John's coastline is a series of sheltered bays and reef coves—excellent for swimming and snorkeling. Trunk Bay is regularly awarded the best beach in the Caribbean prize, but Maho, Lameshur, and Salt Pond Bays all have their champions. One of the prettiest beaches on the island is the wide curving Cinnamon Bay, which is part of the National Park and site of current archaeological work where evidence of a pre-Columbian culture is being discovered under the direction of NPS archaeologist Ken Wild.

Wild excavated a 2x2 meter test pit in 1992 and found a number of remains demonstrating that this was an *in situ* site. Systematic investigation of the Cinnamon Bay site began in 1998. A 1-meter thick cultural deposit was found, being the result of consecutive deposition. The

latest work has revealed ceremonial artifacts (portions of carved three-pointed zemi stones—the term for Taino deities and for the stone or bone fetishes representing them—a carved stone head, a ceramic rattle, petaloid stone celts, stone pestles, and a carved ceremonial stone axe). Also uncovered were personal adornments (ball belt fragments, shell beads, a gold disc, shell discs, carved teeth) and lithic and shell tools. The excavation has yielded evidence of a circular temple structure, which Wild thinks is a chief's "caney", marking the site as a ritual location. Wild feels this could be a major, possibly the only, ceremonial site on the island, and believes he has evidence for ancestor worship, as a mechanism for moving from a largely egalitarian society to a more complex, hierarchical society. Overall, these materials—carbon dating showing a temporal range of AD 1000 to 1490—are providing evidence of cultural chronology, subsistence, religion, and culture change of pre-Columbian people of the Virgin Islands.

The earliest lithic remains in the Caribbean date to around 4000 BCE, and researchers suggest those who left them are likely to have come from the Central American mainland, moving west to east. The ancestors of the Tainos arrived much later, around 400 AD. At their apogee the Taino had settled all of the Greater Antilles and the northern half of the Lesser Antilles.

An oft-repeated view of the Taino sees the "Classic Taino" of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola as the most complex, with "western Tainos" (Jamaica and Cuba) and "eastern Tainos" (the Bahamas and Virgin Islands) as less developed. But this view is being questioned by analysis of cultural materials at Cinnamon Bay and other sites on St. John. Materials uncovered appear to suggest Classic Taino occupation. The Lameshur Bay site shows lithic remains. Trunk Bay materials date to AD 700-1000, with primary occupation around AD 900. Habitation apparently shifted to Cinnamon Bay at AD 1000-1200 and the site was active for almost 500 years, continuing in the same ritual uses.

The Cinnamon Bay site used to be some 250 feet from the ocean, but storm-driven erosion has moved the beach inland and now endangers the site. Continuing erosion and other tourism development enforce an emphasis on salvage archaeology, and contributions are needed to further these efforts.

Further readings, see p. 10

Viajes - Rosemary Lyon

Thinking of a trip to Mexico, Peru, or another Mesoamerican/Andean destination? Many Pre-Columbian Society members travel frequently, and a few

of them have offered to share (see below) their reactions about recent trips. Please feel free to contact Rosemary (rdlyon@verizon.net) with other suggestions.

Recent Member Travel

Elderhostel

In June 2005, PCS/DC members Trudy and Gary Peterson, and Michael and Ann Grace, spent two weeks on an Elderhostel trip to the North Coast of Peru and to Machu Picchu. Both of these couples, who are widely traveled, found that the trip more than met their expectations. The Petersons reported that it was one of the best trips they've ever taken. The pace and the compatibility of fellow travelers/accommodations were both "right," the Petersons commented, and the quality of the guides was quite high. In general, they found that sufficient attention was given to the important sites (and sights) that they were to see, and they observed that the trip did not feel overly rushed. Trudy and Gary are pleased to answer any specific questions about their experience with Elderhostel. Contact them at THPArchives@aol.com. Another PCS member, Christine Blazina, participated in a similar Elderhostel trip to Peru in February 2006. Her experience was also positive.

Elderhostel (www.elderhostel.org or telephone number 877/426-8056) is one of the world's largest not-for-profit organizations running educational travel programs for persons age 55 and above. (It also has programs for adults and their grandchildren.) The trips vary in focus and intensity. Most Elderhostel trips are geared to a moderate pace, but the organization also offers "specialty" and "active outdoor" programs.

Far Horizons Archaeological and Cultural Trips, Inc.

Beginning with an emphasis on Mesoamerica, Far Horizons now sponsors travel worldwide. Trips with a focus on archaeology include a knowledgeable archaeologist as leader. Among Far Horizons' offerings for 2006 is a July trip to Peru, entitled "The Inkas and Their Ancestors." Dr. William Sapp, who studied at UCLA under noted Moche scholar Christopher Donnan, will be the accompanying scholar. Many Pre-Columbian Society members, including Vice President Paula Atwood, have had very good travel experiences with Far Horizons. For further information, check out the website (www.farhorizon.com) or call 800/552-4575.

BY-LAWS OF THE PRE-COLUMBIAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

The text proposed by the Executive Committee as published in the April 2006 issue of the Smoking Mirror reflects changes in the operation of the organization over the last several years. The principle changes reflect the Society's 501(c)(3) status; addition of a Society Web Master, and designation of Dumbarton Oaks as the recipient of Society assets in the event of the Society's termination.

The by-laws will be proposed for adoption by the membership by a mail vote as part of the annual election process.

CALL FOR SELF-NOMINATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Nominations, which are usually submitted in the form of self-nominations, are now being accepted for the annual election of the eight-member Executive Committee of the Pre-Columbian Society of Washington, D.C.

The offices (and a brief description of their associated duties) are as follows:

- **President** (charged with running the Society's monthly meetings and periodically convening and running Executive Committee meetings);
- **Vice President** (charged with securing speakers and introducing speakers at the Society's monthly meetings);
- **Secretary** (charged with keeping minutes of monthly and Executive Committee meetings,;
- **Treasurer** (charged with collecting and

depositing Society receipts, maintaining a membership list and making all Society disbursements); and four

- **Four Members-At-Large** (charged with assisting the Executive Committee as a whole with the task of running the Society).

Help make our elections *elective* by throwing your hat in the ring and running for office yourself. If you are willing to serve in one of the offices of the executive committee, please provide me with your brief biography and a statement of goals not later than May 15, 2006.

Mailing address: Paul Parsons, 118 Fleetwood Terrace, Silver Spring MD 20910
Telephone number: 301 587-0377

Further Readings

Suggested readings from p. 1:

- Benson, Elizabeth P. 2004. "Varieties of Precolumbian Portraiture", in Elizabeth P. Benson *et al.* *2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits*. New Haven, Yale University Press/San Antonio Museum of Art/National Portrait Gallery/Smithsonian Institution/Museo del Barrio New York, pp. 56-71.
- Filloy, Laura and Sofía Martínez del Campo Lanz, "El nuevo rostro de Pacal", in *Arqueología Mexicana*, México, Editorial Raíces, v. IX, n. 51, January-February 2002, p. 12.
- Martínez del Campo Lanz, Sofía and Laura Filloy, "The restoration of the Jade Funerary Masks. A

Reencounter with the Faces of the Past", in *Arqueología Mexicana*, Edición Especial, "Rostros Mayas. Linaje y poder, México", Editorial Raíces, n. 16, 2004, pp. 12-13.

- Ruz Lhuillier, Alberto. 1953. "The Mystery of the Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque". *Archeology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring), pp. 3-11.
- Ruz Lhuillier, Alberto. 1965. "Tombs and Funerary Practices in the Maya Lowlands", en R. Wauchope y Gordon R. Willey (eds.), *Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 2: The Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica, I*. Austin, University of Texas Press, pp. 441-461.

Bibliography from p. 7:

- Benson, Elizabeth P. (ed.). 1975. *Death and the Afterlife in Pre-columbian America*, Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks, pp. 87-104.
- Beyer, Hermann. 1940. "El jeroglífico de Tlacaélel", *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos*, t. IV, n. 3, pp 161-164.
- Brotherston, Gordon. 1994. "Huesos de muerte, huesos de vida: la compleja figura de Mictlantecuhtli", *Cuiculco*, nueva época, v. 1, n. 1, pp. 85-98.
- Klein, Cecelia F. 1990-1991. "Snares and entrails. Mesoamerican symbols of sin and punishment", *RES*, n. 19/20, pp. 81-103.

López Austin, Alfredo. 1988. *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press.

- López Luján, Leonardo. 1999. "Water and Fire: Archaeology in the Capital of the Mexica Empire", *The Archaeology of Mesoamerica. Mexican and European Perspectives*, Warwick Bray and Linda Manzanilla (eds.), London, British Museum Press, 1999, pp. 32-49.
- López Luján, Leonardo. 2001. "Death Deities", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, David Carrasco (ed.), New York, Oxford University Press, v. 1, pp. 318-320.
- López Luján, Leonardo. 2006. *La Casa de las Águilas*, Mexico City, FCE/INAH/Harvard

Further readings from p. 8:

- Douglas Armstrong, "The Shoreline Settlement at Cinnamon Bay: St. John, Danish West Indies."
- Fatima Bercht, et al., editors, 1997. *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*. New York: Monacelli Press
- David Knight, 1999. "A Documentary History of the Cinnamon Bay Estate: 1718-1917."
- Irving Rouse, 1992. *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ken Wild, "Investigations at Cinnamon Bay, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands and Social Ideology in the Virgin Islands as Reflected in Precolumbian Ceramics."

_____, "Understanding the Petroglyphs."

NOTE: The papers listed here are available on a website run by Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park. The address is: www.friendsvinp.org. Information on contributing are on the website.

CALENDAR

May 2006	
<p><i>CONTINUING THROUGH MAY 28</i> National Museum of Women in the Arts 1250 New York Ave. NW</p>	<p>Exhibit tours. "Divine and Human: Women in Ancient Mexico and Peru. Drs. Anita Cook and Joan Gero have each volunteered to lead a tour on yet-to-be-determined dates in May, one on a weekday, one on a weekend. Interested individuals may sign up at the PCS/DC May meeting or contact Lucy Wilson at 703-765-4471 or scott.m.wilson@verizon.net</p>
<p><i>WEDNESDAY 3</i> National Gallery of Art 4:30 p.m. 6th & Constitution NW</p>	<p>Dumbarton Oaks sponsored lecture. David Carrasco will deliver a lecture entitled: "<i>Labyrinth, City and Eagle's Nest: Interpreting Ritual Ordeals in a Mexican Codex</i>" Illustrated. West Building Lecture Hall. Open to the public at no charge. For additional information: call 202-339-6440.</p>
<p><i>FRIDAY 5</i> Sumner School 6:45 p.m. 17th and M Streets NW</p>	<p>PCS/DC's monthly meeting. Laura Filloy will speak on reconstruction of the jade mask from the tomb of Pakal in Palenque.</p>
<p><i>SATURDAY 6</i> National Museum of Women in the Arts 2:00 p.m. 1250 New York Ave. NW</p>	<p>Lecture. Dr. John B. Carlson will deliver a lecture entitled: "Malinche and Her Sisters: Worship of the Great Female Mountains of Ancient Mexico." Reservations are required. Email reservations@nmwa.org or call 202-783-7370. NMWA members \$5.00; Students and visitors over 60 \$6.00; general \$8.00.</p>
<p><i>SATURDAY 13</i> University of Pennsylvania 1:30 p.m. University Museum 33rd & Spruce Streets</p>	<p>Philadelphia Pre- Columbian Society monthly meeting. Dr. Jeremy Sabloff, University of Pennsylvania Museum will deliver a talk entitled, "It Depends on How We Look at Things: New Perspectives on the Post Classic."</p>
<p><i>SATURDAY 13</i> Smithsonian Ripley Center 1100 Jefferson Dr. SW</p>	<p>All-Day Seminar. "The Glory of the Ancient Maya," led by Dr. Michael Coe. Tickets: Gen. Admission \$126, RAP Members \$80, Senior Members \$72. For online registration, go to: http://residentassociates.org/indexes/topicevents.asp?SearchCode=arch</p>
June 2006	
<p><i>FRIDAY 2</i> Sumner School 6:45 p.m. 17th and M Streets NW</p>	<p>PCS/DC's annual business meeting, after which Helene Bernier will deliver a talk entitled, "Moche Art, Artists, and the Expression of Ideology."</p>
<p><i>SATURDAY 10</i> Metropolitan Museum of Art 3:00 p.m. New York City</p>	<p>Gallery Tour. "<i>A Precolumbian Bestiary: Animal Imagery in the Ancient Americas,</i>" led by Lauren Ebin. Meet at the Gallery Talk Stanchion, Great Hall.</p>
<p><i>TUESDAY 13 THROUGH SEPT. 10</i> Metropolitan Museum of Art New York City</p>	<p>Exhibit. "<i>Treasures of Sacred Maya Kings.</i>" Exhibited works include items of kingly regalia, objects that depict their real and mythic actions, and works that were part of these activities.</p>

The DEADLINE for *Smoking Mirror* Vol. 13, No. 10 (June issue) –

May 22

Please send submissions, suggestions, announcements and news to steven.daniell@verizon.net

**PRE-COLUMBIAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC
2005-2006 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

OFFICERS

President: Lucy Wilson (703) 765-4471
2115 Popkins Lane, Alexandria VA 22307
Secretary: Dorothy Rogers (202) 483-8064
3106 18th Street NW, Washington, DC 20010

Vice President: Paula Atwood (301) 345-9363
8032 Lakecrest Drive, Greenbelt, MD 20770
Treasurer: Herbert Drees (301) 774-7148
17332 Evangeline Lane, Olney MD 20832

MEMBERS AT LARGE

Steve Daniel [editor] (202) 483-8064
3106 18th Street NW, Washington, DC 20010
Bill Puppa (202) 686-1165
4514 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008

Ron Frenette [web master] (202) 546-2139
315 E Street SE, Washington, DC 20003
Irmgard Dugge (301) 657-3151
5404 Lambeth Road, Bethesda MD 20814

www.pcswdc.org

SMOKING MIRROR
PRE-COLUMBIAN SOCIETY/DC
c/o Editor
3106 18th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20010-2608

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Comp thru 4/1/2007
Leonardo Lujan
Guatemala 60, Centro
06060. Mexico D.F.

00105/0900 

SMOKING MIRROR is the Newsletter of the PRE-COLUMBIAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC
(A 501C CORPORATION).

The newsletter reports items of interest to pre-Columbianists, both within and outside the Society. If you plan to be in the Washington area when a meeting is scheduled, why not join us, our meetings are free and open to all? We look forward to meeting you. Membership for one year is \$35 for an individual or \$50 for a household. Those living outside a 100-mile radius of Washington, DC, may consider the newsletter-only option for \$20. Send a check payable to the PCS/DC to the Treasurer, 17332 Evangeline Lane, Olney, MD 20832. The postal supplement is \$2.50 for Canada; \$4 for Mexico; \$8 for overseas.

May Speaker

Laura Filloy Nadal

PAKAL'S MASK