Pandemics Then and Now

Our Summer Newsletter is reaching you in a time of global crisis and uncertainty. We are currently experiencing how disease can turn the world upside down, which makes history scarily tangible. Five hundred years ago the first smallpox epidemic raged in Mexico and led to the fall of Tenochtitlan. While we were still contemplating at Dumbarton Oaks how to best address the ambivalent anniversary of the Spanish invasion and its impact on the indigenous societies of the Americas, life taught us a lesson. Our planned events had to be cancelled and we continued the academic year in a virtual reality. As a result, this newsletter is less rich in reports and announcements of upcoming activities than expected, but it will still give you an idea of how fruitful this year was for the Pre-Columbian program.

Change in Dumbarton Oaks Leadership

Jan Ziolkowski will leave the directorship of Dumbarton Oaks on July 1 and this fall, will be a Member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. Thomas B.F. Cummins, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of the History of Pre-Columbian and Colonial Art at Harvard University, will serve as interim director, and a search will be conducted for a full-term director. The Dumbarton Oaks community expresses heartfelt thanks to Jan in due recognition for his achievements and gives a warm welcome to Tom, the first Pre-Columbianist at the helm, wishing him a successful start and a steady hand in steering the ship through the year ahead.

Fellows 2019-2020
This year’s fellowship cohort in Pre-Columbian Studies included Stephanie Strauss (Savannah College), Saburo Sugiyama (Arizona State University), and Loa Traxler (University of New Mexico) as fellows, and Gina Buckley (Pennsylvania State University), Victor Castillo (University of Arizona), Sarah Kennedy (University of Pittsburgh), and Michelle Young (Yale University) as junior fellows. James Almeida, Trenton Barnes, and Felipe Ledesma-Núñez from Harvard University were supported with Tyler Fellowships. Postdoctoral fellow Iyaxel Cojtí Ren joined the group for most activities and scholarly events. Together they created a memorable ambience of communication and intellectual exchange, engaging with each other’s research interests and supporting one another in their individual projects.

While at Dumbarton Oaks, the fellows undertook various offsite activities. These included a visit to the Cultural Resources Center of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Suitland, Maryland, during the fall term. Curators Emily Kaplan and Antonio Curet kindly showed us around the collection. In February, all fellows attended the one-day conference Materializing the Transcendent: Maya Works in Limestone, Clay, and Jade organized by the current Kislak Chair Simon Martin at the Kluge Center of the Library of Congress; speakers included Mary Ellen Miller, Stephen Houston, David Stuart, James Doyle, and the organizer. The event included a visit to the Kislak Vault led by the curator of the collection, John Hessler.

The Pre-Columbian fellows enjoyed multiple social events organized by Dumbarton Oaks as well
as by the program, until social distancing and stay at home orders became the norm. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic outbreak, some fellows returned to their homes in March, while others endured the disruptions caused by the closure of the campus and diligently continued their research from their Fellowship House apartments, taking solace from routine visits to the Dumbarton Oaks Garden -- which remained accessible to them. The pandemic could not cancel spring!
PC Fellow Loa Traxler, social-distancing underneath the cherry blossoms in the spring of 2020
(Photo: Thaisa Way)

In Memoriam Colin McEwan
Colin McEwan demonstrates Donna McClelland's process of drawing Moche iconography at ICFA (Photo: Lisa Trever)
It was with great sadness that we received the news about the passing of former Director of Studies Colin McEwan on March 28, 2020. Colin lost his yearlong battle with leukemia that he had fought so courageously. He was co-symposiarch of this year’s Pre-Columbian Symposium, which he sadly was unable to attend, and kept working on several publications that will come out with Dumbarton Oaks in the coming years. A moving tribute to Colin’s life and work at Dumbarton Oaks was written by Daniel Boomhower, Director of the Library and close colleague of Colin - “In Memoriam Colin McEwan”.

Fall 2019 Symposium: Waves of Influence: Revisiting Coastal Connections Between Pre-Columbian Northwest South America and Mesoamerica

Participants of the Pre-Columbian symposium 2019 (Photo: Joe Mills)

For the fall symposium, Christopher Beekman and Colin McEwan brought together scholars from all over the Americas to reexamine the evidence for Pacific coastal contacts from western Mexico to northern Peru. Held on October 11-12, 2019, “Waves of Influence: Revisiting Coastal Connections between Pre-Columbian Northwest South America and Mesoamerica” asked questions about long-distance voyaging and alternate modes of movement along the coast and explored how dynamic and overlapping social networks connected such distant geographical areas. Contributions discussed the technical possibilities of voyaging and how sea travel would have been affected by the El Niño phenomenon, identified different markers for this coastal
interaction sphere through time, and looked at specific goods that may indicate the existence of long-distance trade including the movement of ancient cacao from South to Central America and the role of spondylus. With 125 participants, the event was fully booked, and the audience engaged in lively discussions with the speakers.

**Cancellations**

The COVID-19 crisis affected all events the Pre-Columbian program had scheduled for the spring. The 2020 Spring Colloquium “Heritage and Its Missions” organized by Cristóbal Gneco and Adriana Dias could not take place as planned on April 2. The event was meant to bring together scholars with a specialty in Catholic missions in the Americas to discuss the role of such colonial missions in heritage politics, thereby connecting the colonial indigenous past with present-day concerns. At this moment, the colloquium has not been rescheduled.

The public Spring lecture on April 9 has been deferred. Matthew Restall would have drawn from his recent book *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, in which he offers a new perspective on the Spanish-Aztec encounter. The lecture was meant to be one of several events that had been planned at Dumbarton Oaks to address the quincentennial of the Spanish invasion. The concert of the Vivaldi opera Motezuma that had been scheduled in the music series unfortunately had to be cancelled as well.

Two museum exhibits may temporarily be planned to be accessible online. Humanities fellow Norman Storer Corrada has put together a display “Imagining Montezuma: Representations of The Huey Tlatoani in Popular Culture” that features a collection of ephemera and critically assesses how the image and name of the Aztec emperor were used in popular culture. Another exhibit currently being prepared by Tyler fellow Felipe Ledesma-Núñez features the “Epidemic Outbreaks in Tenochtitlan, 1520” using materials from the Rare Book Collection to explain the role the smallpox outbreak played in the fall of the Aztec capital.

**Awards**

*One-Month Research Awards*

In the fall semester, the program welcomed Céline Gillot from the University of Montréal, who specializes in Mesoamerican archaeology and architecture and is currently undertaking research on ancient Maya construction practices. During her time at Dumbarton Oaks she analyzed ancient Maya knowledge on processes of extracting and working limestone. This research contributes to a larger project, which explores how construction activities are entangled with social dynamics.

*Short-term pre-doctoral awards*
Two short-term pre-doctoral residencies were awarded this academic year.

In November, we welcomed Ben Schaefer from the University of Illinois at Chicago, who conducted research for his dissertation project. Ben seeks to study the Inka expansion in the Lambayeque valley through epigenetic change, focusing on how violence and imperialism may have shaped health and gene regulation in the Muchik population.

We regret that the residency of Omar Aguilar Sánchez from Leiden University, who was meant to join us in March, had to be cancelled due to the travel restrictions.

Bliss Awards

This year Dumbarton Oaks awarded five students with travel awards that allowed them to attend the Pre-Columbian symposium in October. These awards were originally only open to Harvard students but have now been expanded to include advanced undergraduates and graduates from US and international academic institutions. The awardees included Aime Cichero and Ji Mary Seo (both Harvard University), Anthony DeLuca (University of Texas at San Antonio), Alanna Radlo-Dzur (The Ohio State University) and Kellie Roddy (University of California, Los Angeles).

Publications
We are happy to announce that two new volumes have come out in the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian symposium series. *Sacred Matter: Animacy and Authority in the Americas* edited by Steve Kosiba, John Janusek, and Thomas Cummins summarizes the results of the Pre-Columbian symposium held in 2016. The volume examines animism in Pre-Columbian America, focusing on the central roles objects and places played in practices that expressed and sanctified political authority in the Andes, Amazon, and Mesoamerica. Contributions look at both how animacy was attributed to matter by giving life to grandiose buildings, speaking with deified boulders, and killing valued objects and how things and places animated people by demanding labor, care, and nourishment. The publication was overshadowed by the passing of co-editor John Janusek in
Only weeks later the publications department released the accompanying volume to the 2017 symposium *Teotihuacan, the World Beyond the City* edited by David Carballo, Kenneth Hirth, and Barbara Arroyo. With a population of over one hundred thousand, Teotihuacan was a city of major importance and developed a network of influence that stretched across Mesoamerica. The volume provides the first comparative discussion of Teotihuacan’s foreign policy with respect to the Central Mexican Highlands, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the Maya Lowlands and Highlands. The
contributors develop a synthetic overview of the urban, political, economic, and religious organization of this key power in Classic-period Mesoamerica.

Library

The Library made several additions to the Pre-Columbian Rare Book collection, including a 1929 reproduction of the Codex Saville, a 1943 catalog of sculptures held by the Museo Nacional de Mexico, and a 17th-18th century record book and constitution of the Cofradia de los Naturales, in San Juan de la Penitencia, in Ciudad de México. The Library digitized an illustrated file on a land dispute between a ranch owner and his Nahua neighbors that includes records dating from 1563 to 1814. The manuscript is featured in Harvard University's Colonial North America digitization project, which aims to make available approximately 650,000 digitized pages of all known archival and manuscript materials in the Harvard Library that relate to 17th- and 18th-century North America.

In response to the unprecedented COVID-19 situation, Library staff moved to remote operations by late March. The library continued to support Pre-Columbian Fellows as they finished out their research term.

Additionally, the Library made arrangements for the acquisition of a second edition of Ignacio de Salazar y Olarte's Historia de la conquista de México, población, y progresos de la América Septentrional, conocida por el nombre de Nueva España (1786) and Francisco de Toledo's Ordenanzas de Minas del Peru (1678).

Kerr Archive
The migration of the Justin Kerr’s rollout photographs of ancient Maya ceramics from mayavase.com into HOLLIS has made significant progress this year. Post-doctoral fellow Lyaxel Cojti Ren has been working closely with the Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA) to develop specifics for cataloging the photographic collection and making it available to the scholarly public. Instead of providing detailed descriptive narratives, we are focusing on tagging searchable key terms of the depicted iconographic elements that will allow researchers to find the image in HOLLIS. In addition, Kerr’s original descriptions are preserved and will remain searchable. To date more than 350 photographic records of Maya vessels and other objects have been updated and published in HOLLIS Images. As an example of the ongoing work, we would like to share the record of polychrome cylinder vase K1743.

A "Humboldt" at Dumbarton Oaks
“Ruins of Miguitlan or Mitla in the province of Oaxaca,” Vues de cordillères, vol. 2, f. 49r

In 2019 the world celebrated the 250th birthday of Alexander von Humboldt and we would like to use this occasion to highlight one of the Dumbarton Oaks treasures. Our Rare Book Room has an original edition of Humboldt’s Vues des cordillères, the massive two-volume opus from 1810 that illustrates the famous “America journey” the Prussian explorer and scientist undertook between 1799-1804.

His voyage took Humboldt from Venezuela down the Orinoco through Amazonia to Ecuador and Peru, where he embarked on a ship to Mexico and then continued onwards to the United States. The journey laid the basis for most of Humboldt’s scientific discoveries and made him perhaps the most influential scholar of his time. His mission was to understand the cosmos and all therein. Humboldt documented, recorded, collected, and classified everything he came across. He filled dozens of journals and sent more than 60,000 plant specimens back to Europe. He was the first to describe the climate and vegetation zones of the Andes, and climbing the Chimborazo
concluded that everything in nature was connected, forming one big “web of life,” which makes him the father of modern ecology and environmentalism.

But Humboldt also had a fascination with the indigenous societies of the Americas, describing their lives, history, and religion, and searching for people “unspoiled by colonization.” He studied native languages and admired Ancient American art and architecture. His impact on Pre-Columbian Studies is rarely discussed, although many scholars and explorers who shaped the field were influenced and motivated by his work and publications.

*Vues des cordillères* gave European readers a first image of Ancient American cultures. The second volume includes color plates of superb reproductions of ancient monuments and documents, including the Aztec calendar stone from the Templo Mayor in Mexico City or the first drawn copies of pages from the hitherto unknown Codex Dresden. Through his publication, Humboldt made the images known to a wider audience and gave these cultures a historical presence. “This people, who based their festivals upon the movement of stars and who engraved their celebrations upon a public monument, had likely reached a higher level of civilization than that accorded to them ... by all the historians of the Americas” he wrote about the Aztecs. Humboldt was a modern thinker who openly criticized colonialism and slavery, and who advocated for the democratization of knowledge.

Even while our Rare Book Room remains closed, you can see Humboldt’s remarkable book in our digital collection.

**Help Us Remember!**
Dear Dumbarton Oaks Alumni,

Searching through our photographic records, we realized that while we have plenty of pictures of scholarly events and parties, there are very few records of Dumbarton Oaks daily life – fellows
working the library, engaging in conversations over lunch, enjoying relaxation in the garden, or making use of the museum collection. We would therefore be very grateful for any pictures of the scholarly community at Dumbarton Oaks that you may have taken during your fellowship, residency, or visits and that you are happy to share with us. We would certainly credit you, should we decide to use them in a publication. If you are willing to contribute to our photographic record of past fellows, please contact us at Pre-Columbian@doaks.org.

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