



# OLLI: From Guatemala to Champaign

## Week 2. The Politics of Mayan History

Spring 2023; jjayes@gmail.com

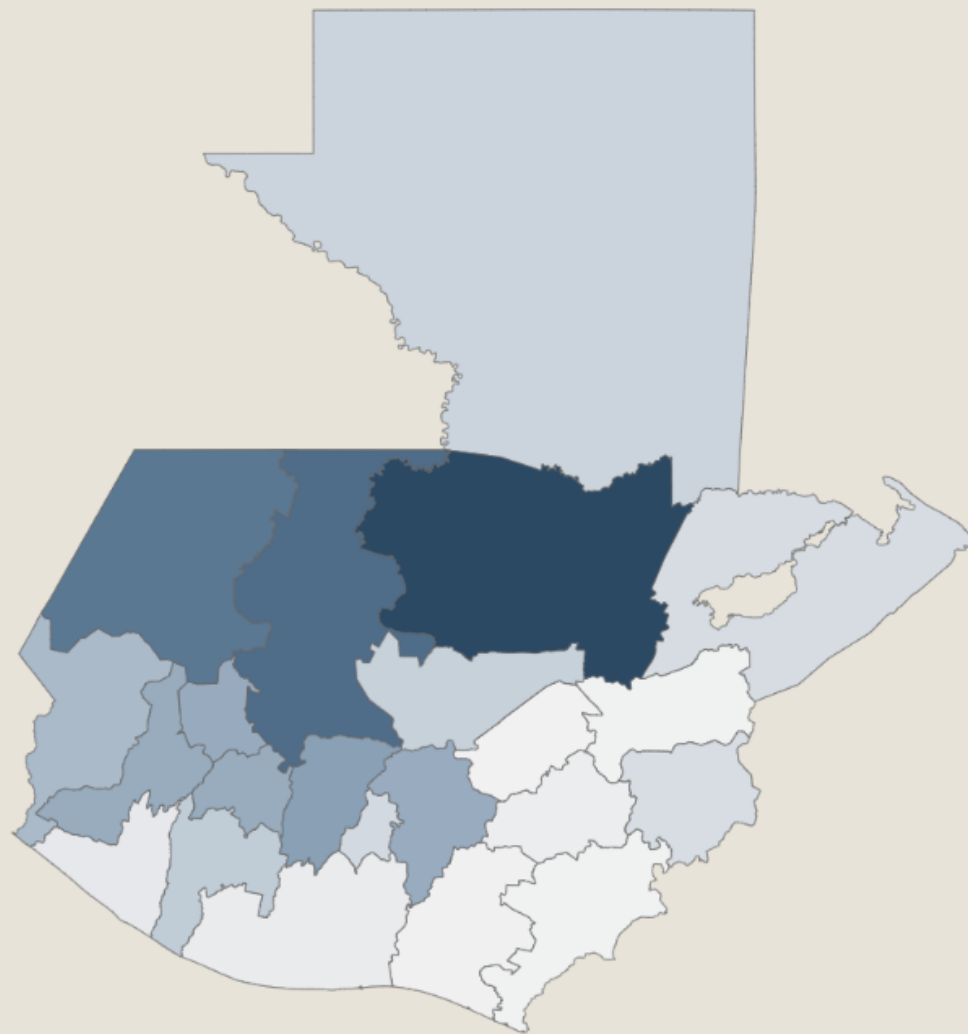


# Indigenous Language Density in Guatemala, 2018

Cultural heritage and survival are pretty geographically specific here.

<https://translatorswithoutborders.org/mayan-languages-of-guatemala-interactive-en/>

## Guatemala: Mayan languages map



# of speakers of Mayan languages

K'iche'	1,680,551
Q'eqchi'	1,370,007
Kaqchikel	1,068,356
Mam	842,252
Q'anjob'al	208,008
Poqomchi'	176,622
Achi	160,858
Ixil	133,329
Ch'orti'	112,432
Tz'utujil	106,012
Chuj	91,391
Akateka	65,965
Jakalteko /Popti'	54,237
Poqomam	46,478
Chalchiteka	33,641
Sipakapense	17,373
Sakapulteka	12,938
Awakateka	12,541
Uspanteka	4,909
Mopan	3,360
Tektiteka	3,317
Itza'	2,926
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,207,503</b>

Guatemala population  
14,901,286

# Of Speakers of Mayan Languages

0  1,129,369

## Speakers of CU languages in Guatemala:

Q'an job'al: 200,000

Akateko: 65,000

Chuj 91,000

Kekchi: 1.3 m

(2010 ish figures)

Q'anjob'al is the primary language in CU, although recent immigrants from El Estor speak Kekchi.



Two kinds of ethnocentrism/racism shape Western depictions of the Maya:

One, the historic disregard for “el indio” in a racially and culturally stratified world

But second, a tendency for the West to depict Mayan peoples as an idealized antipode to Western failings..

Both put the depiction of the Maya at the service of Western cultural needs.

[https://www.academia.edu/42104950/Tikal\\_Maya\\_Geography\\_and\\_Culture](https://www.academia.edu/42104950/Tikal_Maya_Geography_and_Culture)



It is useful to think of history in “facts” that orient us.

For example, the Guatemalan city of Tikal, active 350 bce to the 900s ce; with one recorded dynasty of 33 kings, and records of conquest by the Toltecs, from Teotihuacan near today’s Mexico City.

But which facts we choose, and when, tell a different story.



## Copan Stela



The debate over the Maya inseparable from English-Spanish competition for the New World

After the fall of the Aztec capital in 1521, Spaniards and their allies moved south.

1524 Conquest of Guatemala helped by disease.

\*Where were the builders of these ancient cities?

\*How responsible were the Spanish for the eradication of the Mayans?

(anti Catholicism, anti Iberianism...)

One historic source: the *Annals of the Kakquichel*, recorded in 1571 by a Spanish colonist, found in a Soloma convent in 1840s.

2. Xtinu ibah a quitzih ri ki he nabey ka tata ka mama a avitz rubi, Çactecauh ru bi hunchic, he oh quitzih que cha a haka palouh xoh pevi, pa Tulan ru bi huyu, xoh alax xoh aholax vi pe ruma ka tee, ka tata, yxka ahol, quecha ri oher tata mama, a avitz, Çactecauh qui bi, ri ki xepe pa Tulan he cay chi achij heri xoh boço, oh Xahila.

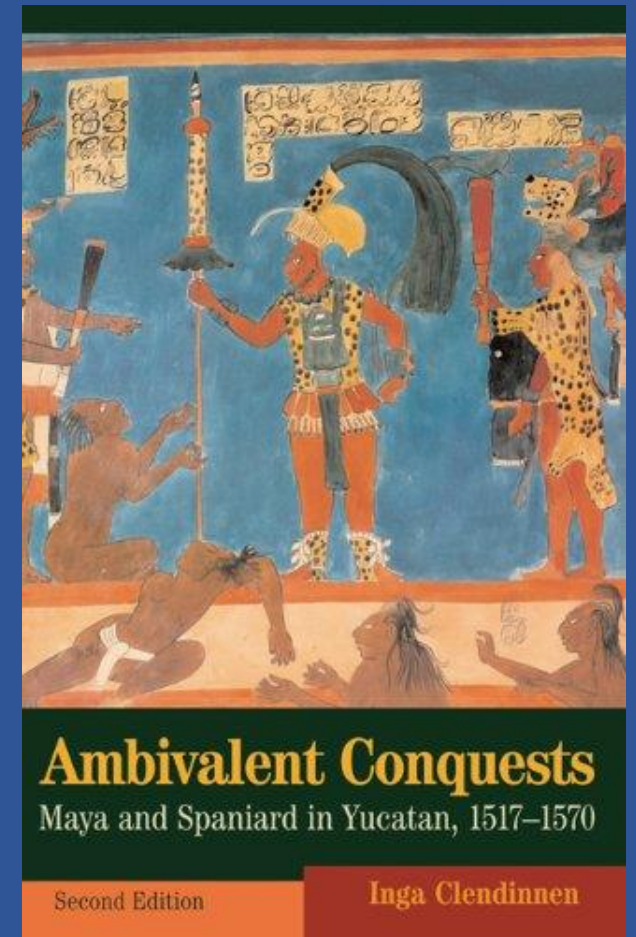
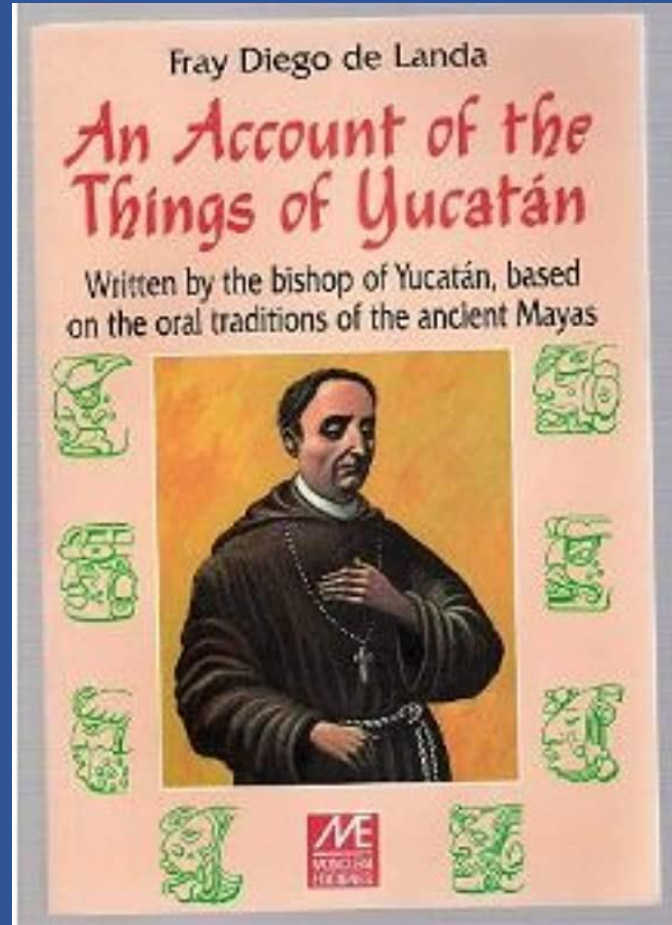
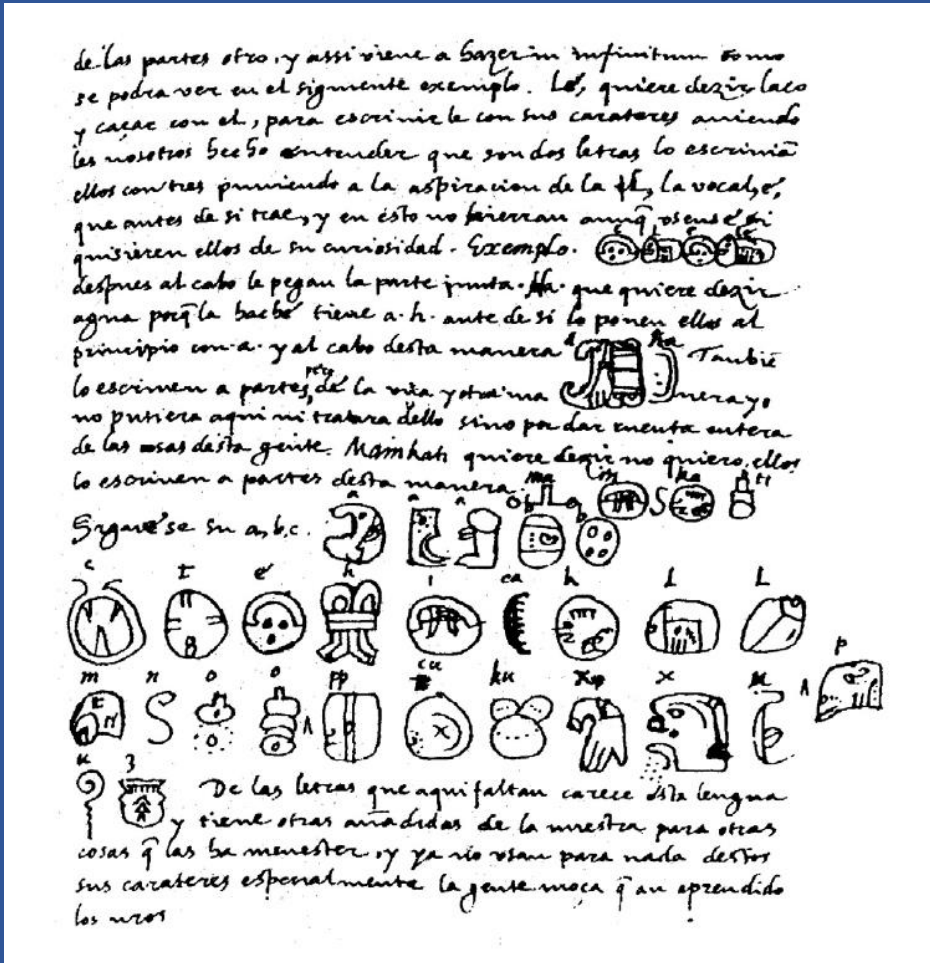
2. And I shall write the sayings of our earliest fathers and ancestors, Gagavitz the name of one, Zactecauh the name of the other; and these are the sayings they spake as we came from the other side of the sea, from the land of Tulan, where we were brought forth and begotten by our mothers and our fathers, oh my children, as said of old the fathers, the ancestors, Gagavitz and Zactecauh by name, the two heroes who came from Tulan and begot us, the Xahila.



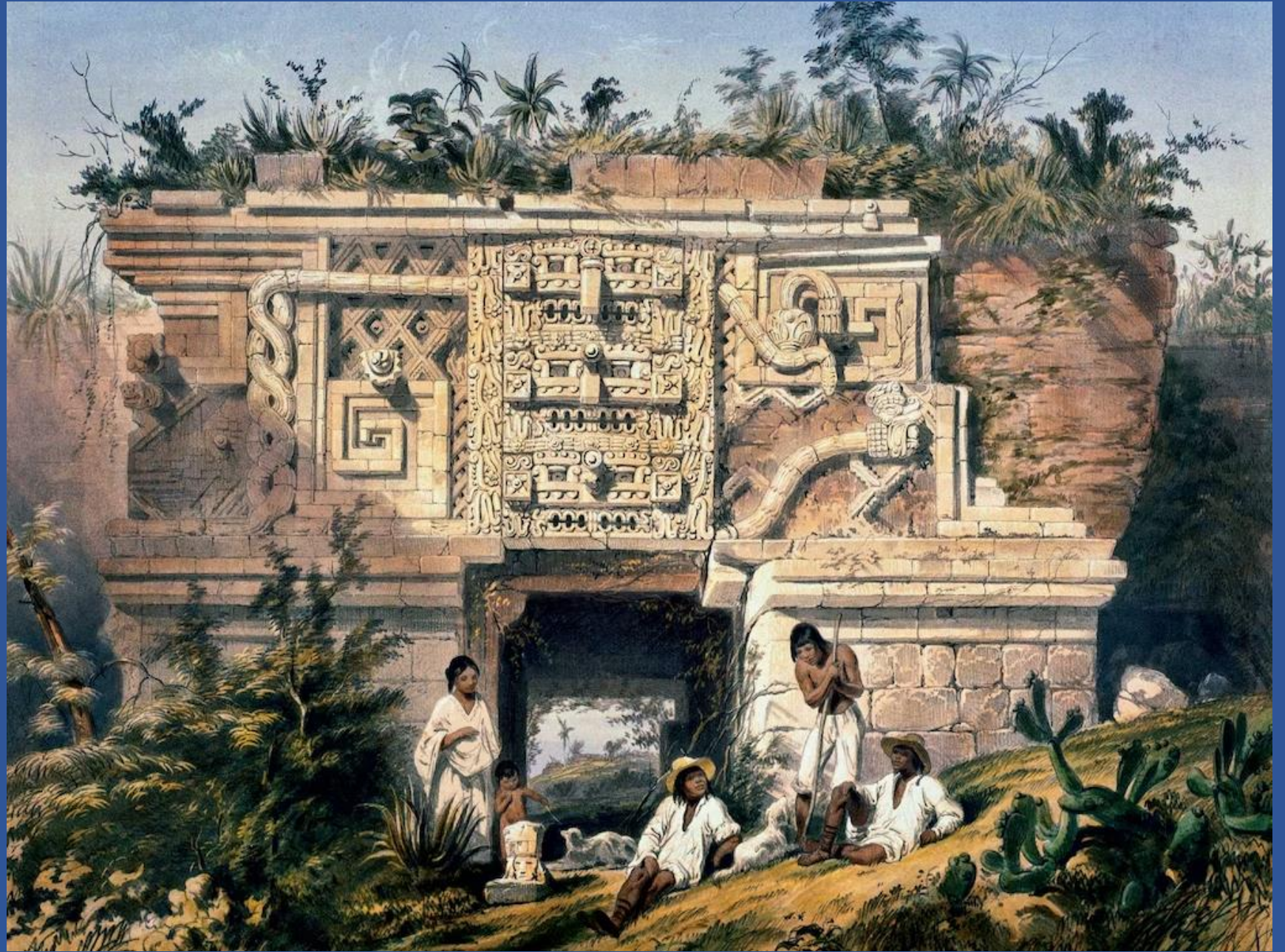
1800s growing European interest in histories of the Maya.

(Fits with ideology of national origins sweeping Europe)

Diego de Landa's 1566 "Account," translated in 1866.



Stephens and  
Catherwood's  
"Incidents of  
Travel in the  
Yucatan" and  
"Central  
America" 1842  
and 1843



# Manifest Destiny?

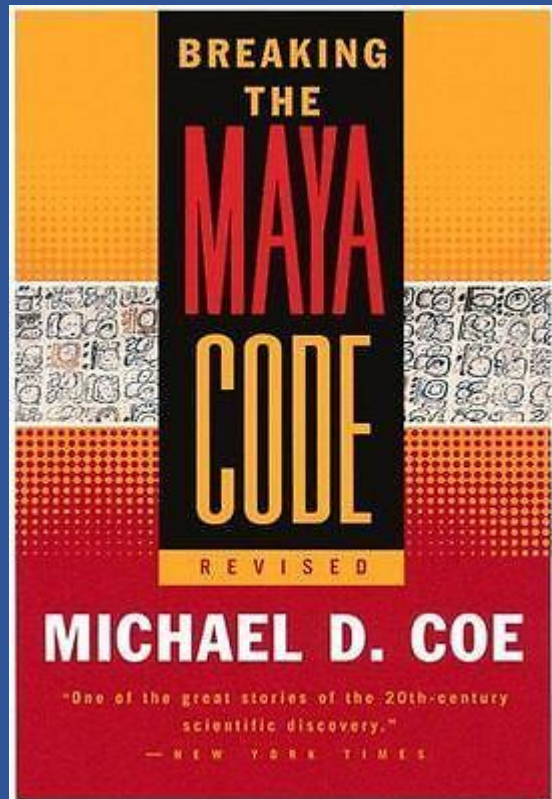


# Eras of modern Mayan Studies

- 1890s-1920s Indigenismo in the Americas
- 1950s-90s “Development” as a Cold War tool for modernization
- 1960s-90s Civil War – just too dangerous in Guatemala
  
- 1990s – Present a Revival in Mayan studies, with Mayan voices
  
- (Role of Tourist driven Mayan restoration as well)

# The Mayan Long Count Calendar

all dates in days from 3114 b.c.e.  
base 20 and base 18 system

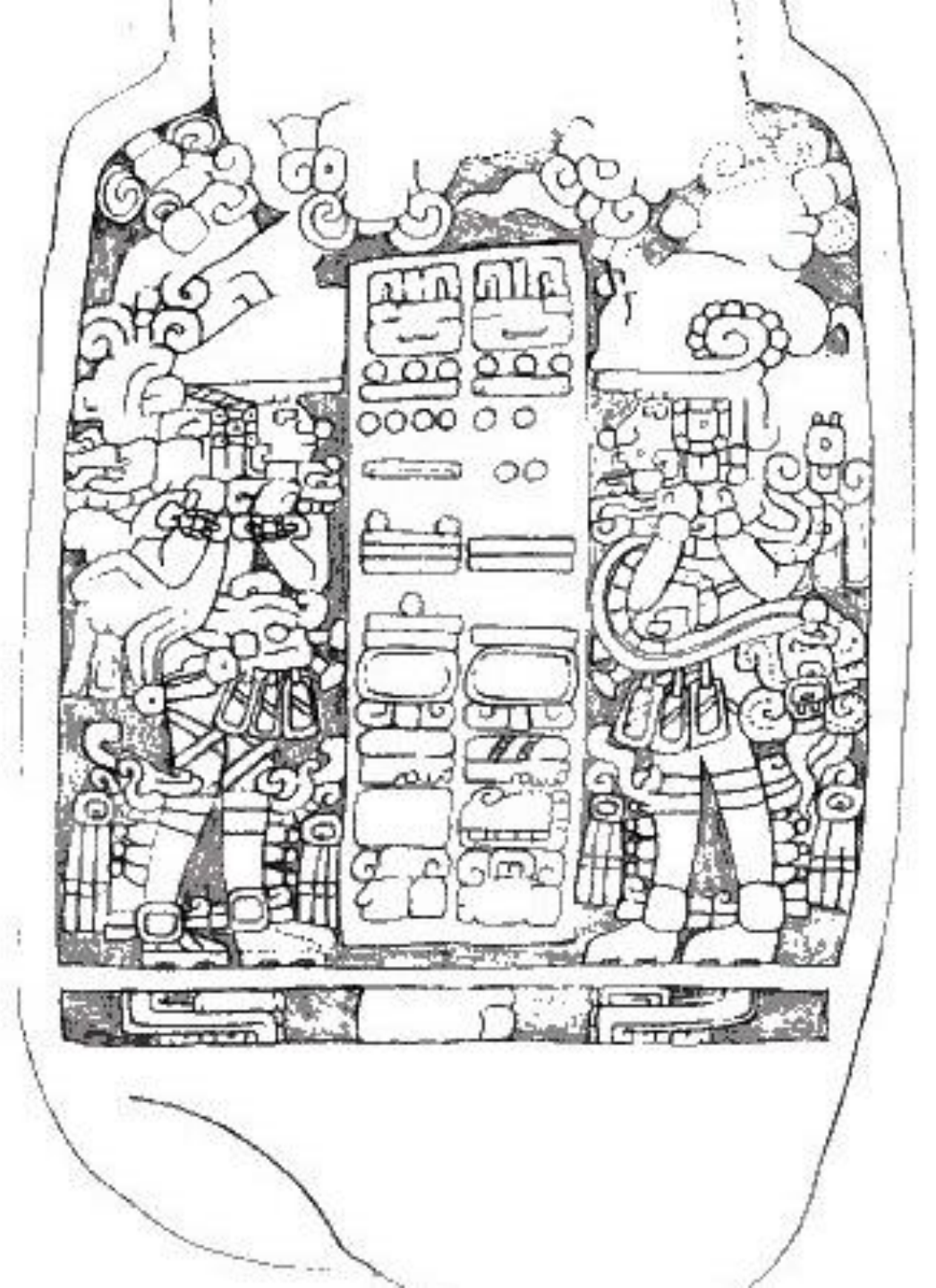


0	1	2	3	4
	•	••	•••	••••
5	6	7	8	9
—	•	••	•••	••••
10	11	12	13	14
—	•	••	•••	••••
15	16	17	18	19
—	•	••	•••	••••



Stela 5 and  
Altar, at Tak'al ik  
Ab'aj,  
Guatemala with  
date of 126 ce

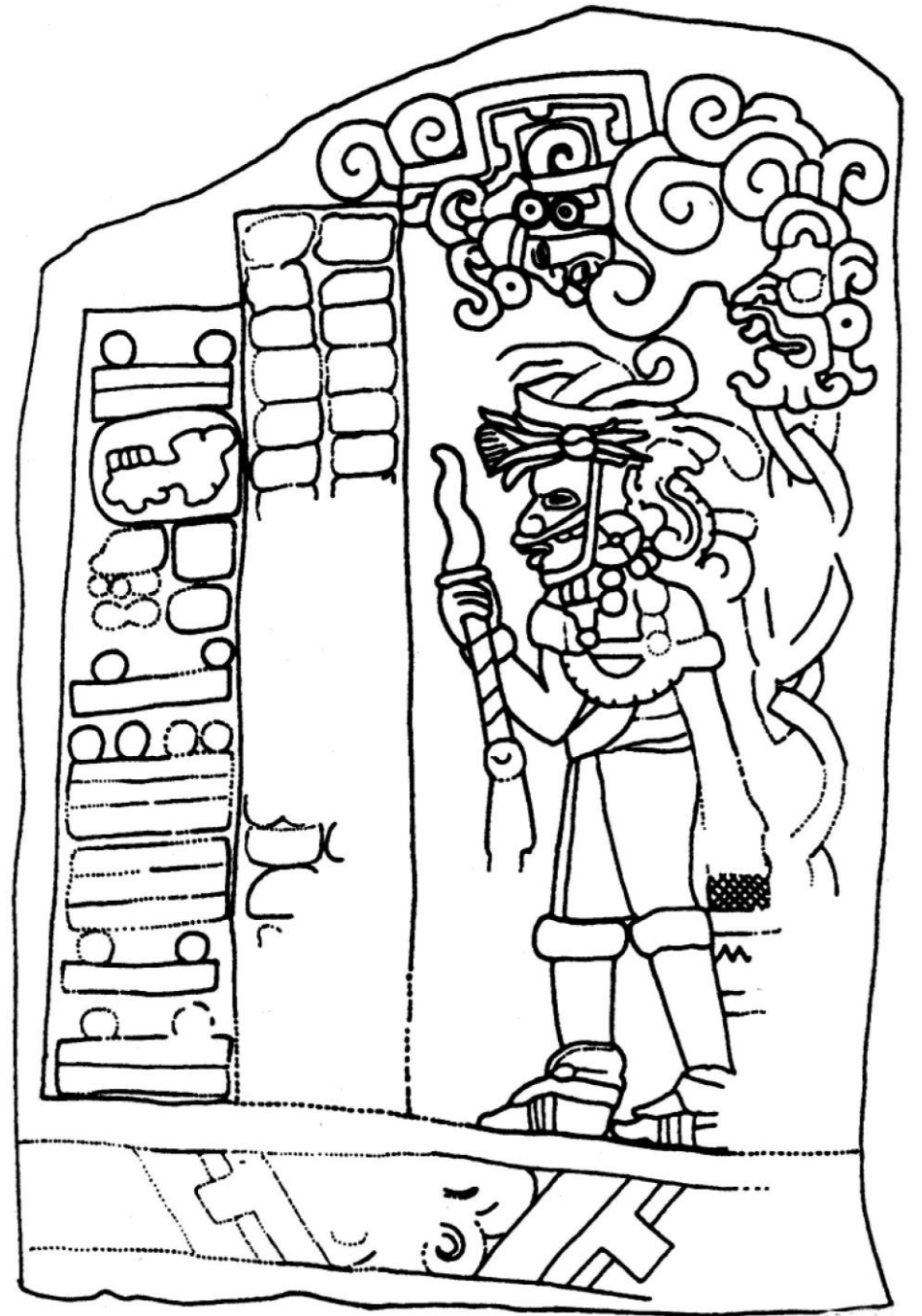
Commemorating  
transition between  
Kings?



# El Baul, Guatemala Ballgame Stela

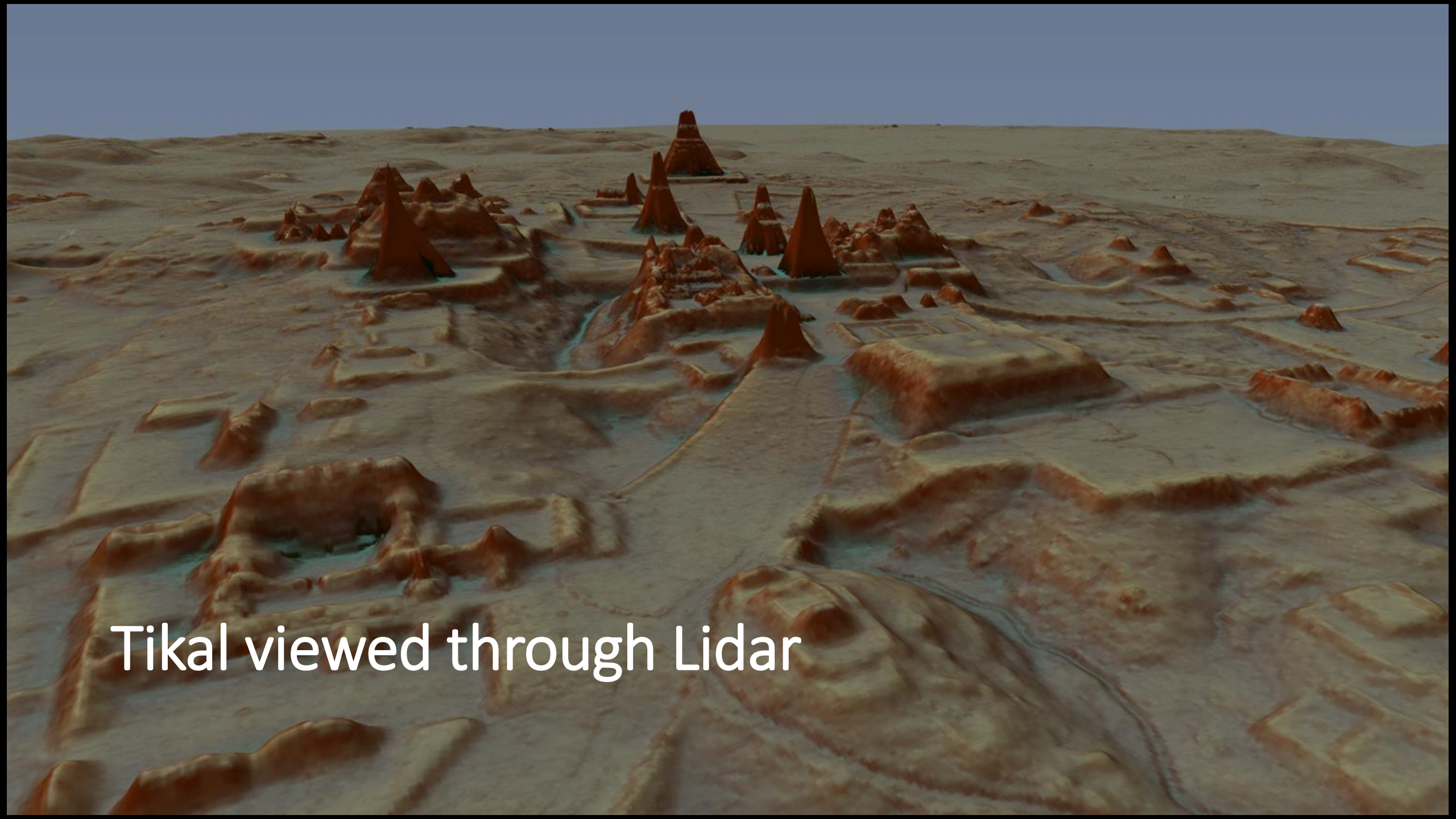


El Baul, Guatemala stela,  
dated 37 ce









Tikal viewed through Lidar



# Cave and Cenote Explorations

# Colonial Guatemala

The first capital  
(now Antigua)  
abandoned after  
earthquakes in  
the 1770s







Plaza,  
Antigua  
Guatemala

**Santa Eulalia,  
Huehuetenango,  
Guatemala,  
established 1529**



Many of the hamlets outside of Santa Eulalia vulnerable to road closures in the rainy season.





Climate change increasing the frequency of torrential rains, flooding, landslides.

(Facebook page for Barillas, hometown for many from CU)



Barillas Noticampo  
March 12, 2022 · 🌐

Última hora.

El cierre de la ruta de Barillas a Río Espiritu, continúa hoy sábado, si tiene planes de viajar en el transcurso del día por la ruta, tome en cuenta nuestra información, ya que por el momento, aún no se ha confirmado el horario, en que se reanuda el paso.

[See Translation](#)



👍 😱 20

4 shares



Nuevo Queja, July 2021 (traversing a landslide field)

# Syncretic Religious Practices another area of cultural survival

Photo: Antonio Turok.  
Church of San Andres  
(Chiapas) 1992

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLVDC\\_dYJTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLVDC_dYJTg)  
Deer Dance on Corpus Christi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR8PyhFshu8>  
UNESCO film on Rabinal Achi, feast of St. Paul





Shadow wood, Champaign IL, 2020