

2026 Mesoamerica Meetings Speakers

Heather Hurst

Skidmore College

Title: TBA

Bio: Heather Hurst has participated in over twenty years of fieldwork in Mesoamerica, including the sites of Bonampak, Copán, Holmul, Oxtotitlán, Palenque, Piedras Negras, and Tikal, with research interests including artists' materials and practice, architecture, and conservation. Pairing illustration, archaeology, and materials science, she has focused her research on the outstanding corpus of murals at San Bartolo, Guatemala, from 300-100 BCE. Through this interdisciplinary approach, Hurst has earned the accolades of a MacArthur "Genius" Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 2018, Hurst became the director of the San Bartolo-Xultun Regional Archaeological Project, an international, multi-institutional collaboration. In 2026-2027, she is the Weatherhead Fellow in residence at the School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe.

Thomas G. Garrison & Yesenia Rubi Landa

University of Texas at Austin

Title: "Fortresses, Fields, and Fresh Water: Landscape Management in Ancient Mutul"

Abstract: Lidar acquisitions of Tikal over the last decade have presented a more complete picture of the ancient landscape of the Mutul kingdom. A drastic increase in the known number of structures in the region has implications for interpreting settlement dynamics as well as population estimates. Equally intriguing is the amount of landesque and military infrastructure revealed to be surrounding the city center. Numerous city walls and strategically located fortresses encompass and surveil not only a dense population, but also critical water resources, wetland field systems, and transportation corridors. Geospatial modeling combined with recent archaeological fieldwork allows us to hypothesize a complex landscape management system that evolved over time. The emerging Early Classic dynasty, perhaps influenced by foreign martial strategies, appears to have coercively drawn the kingdom together through communal works and absolute control of critical resources. The Late Classic Tikal revival took a more dispersed economic approach and integrated the polity through a complex market network where outlying populations appear to have accumulated a certain amount of local wealth in exchange for their loyalty.

Bio: Thomas G. Garrison is a Maya archaeologist who specializes in applying digital technologies to the study of the past. He has edited three books and published dozens of articles and chapters. Since 2016 he has served on the archaeology advisory committee of the Pacunam Lidar Initiative and is currently a collaborator with LidArc—two of the largest archaeologically focused lidar projects in the world. A National Geographic Explorer, Dr. Garrison's research is featured in the series *Lost Treasures of the Maya* on the National Geographic Channel and Disney+. Since 2019 he has served as a geospatial advisor to the Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal (PAST) and in 2026 began a new

program of field research at Naranjo, Guatemala. He is currently Assistant Professor of Geography & the Environment at the University of Texas at Austin and director of the Lidar and Landscapes of the Ancient Mediterranean and Americas (LLAMA) Lab.

Bio: Yesenia Rubi Landa is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography & the Environment at the University of Texas at Austin and a member of the Lidar and Landscapes of the Ancient Mediterranean and Americas (LLAMA) Lab. Her research focuses on the hydrologic landscapes of ancient cities and in developing geospatial methods for hydrologic modeling in ancient urban settings with the Maya city of Tikal, Guatemala serving as a principal case study. Her hydroarchaeological approach to understanding water management at Tikal, Guatemala, examines how the city's reservoirs and surrounding landscape captured, stored, and retained water based on dynamic climatological data in order to refine sustainable population estimates based on water consumption. Since 2022 she has conducted geoarchaeological and geospatial research with the Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal (PAST), following her masters work at the Tikal-affiliated fortress of La Cuernavilla. Her research has been supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and a McNair Fellowship.

Simon Martin

University of Pennsylvania

Title: “The Missing Middle: Reconstructing the Middle Classic Period at Tikal, 480-600 CE”

Abstract: Tikal famously boasts a rich collection of monuments that played the central role in revealing its dynastic sequence and political history. But from the earliest days of that research, it was clear that while the record for Early and Late Classic Periods was strong, that for the years straddling these eras was meager by comparison. This fact played an outsized role in the concept of a pan-regional “Middle Classic Hiatus”—a sociopolitical downturn that presaged the full collapse in Classic Maya society a few centuries later. Much has changed since then. On the one hand, we now know that Tikal’s reduced output coincides with the rise of a powerful regional rival, Dzibanche, and on the other that Tikal was more politically active and successful than previously realized. This talk sets out how and why our understanding of Tikal’s Middle Classic is being significantly revised.

Alexandre Tokovinine

University of Alabama

Title: “The Stones that Keep on Giving: Re-examining Tikal Monuments in 3D”

Abstract: This presentation explores the potential of digital documentation – 3D scanning and photogrammetry – and visualization to uncover new details of previously studied and recently discovered monuments celebrating the deeds of Tikal rulers. For the Early Classic period, the discussion centers on Tikal Stela 40 that the author documented with the *Atlas Epigráfico* project, an overdue update on one of the longest Tikal texts. For the Middle Classic, the presentation highlights the analysis of a hieroglyphic step from the archaeological site of Benemérito Primera Sección that reveals Tikal’s diplomatic efforts during the so-called ‘hiatus’. For the Late Classic period at Tikal,

newly documented details of the inscription on the Maler Causeway rock carving provide insights into the regional political history and shed light on the ancient Maya written discourse and its material contexts.

Bio: Dr. Tokovinine is an anthropological archaeologist and specializes in Maya archaeology and epigraphy. His doctoral dissertation at Harvard University (2008) centered on Ancient Maya landscapes. Before moving to Alabama, Dr. Tokovinine worked as a lecturer and research associate at the Department of Anthropology and the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions (CMHI) at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. Dr. Tokovinine's primary research interest concerns the transformations of ancient complex societies in the context of the Maya civilization. He has been relying on a combination of archaeological, textual, and visual data to explore the indigenous concepts of place, memory, and identity, as well as specific historical trajectories of individual polities and broader regional networks. Dr. Tokovinine has been an early and enthusiastic adopter of 3D scanning and photogrammetry and has amassed a vast collection of 3D models of Ancient Maya portable artifacts, monuments, and architecture is an important educational and research resource.

Andrew K. Scherer

Brown University

Title: "Within and Beyond the Burials: Recent Bioarchaeological Research at Tikal"

Abstract: Since 2019, excavations by members of the Proyecto Arqueológico Sur de Tikal (PAST) have recovered human remains from a range of contexts, including both a Late Preclassic deposit deep within the South Acropolis as well as Early Classic architectural groups with material culture and architectural connections to Central Mexico (Groups 6D-III, 6D-XV, 6D-XXI). Many of these contexts do not conform to what we expect of a "typical" precolonial Maya mortuary space and would instead have been classified as problematic deposits by prior projects at Tikal. This includes the placement of infants and children in ritually charged places and lenses of human bone mixed with a range of other materials. Among the few primary adult burials recovered in these contexts, at least one (PAST Burial 10) shows strong affinities with Central Mexico. Bioarchaeological analysis of the human remains excavated by PAST has sought to make sense of these contexts through a mix of standard osteological analysis, taphonomy, and stable isotope analysis. These findings are framed relative to prior bioarchaeological research at Tikal to make sense of the complex treatment of human bodies at Tikal during the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods, particularly in light of the city's connections to the greater Mesoamerican world.

Bio: Andrew Scherer is an anthropological archaeologist and biological anthropologist with a geographic focus in Mesoamerica (Maya). He co-directs an interdisciplinary archaeological research project that is exploring Classic Maya polities along the Usumacinta River in Mexico and Guatemala. Scherer has conducted bioarchaeological research at Maya sites throughout Mexico and Guatemala, including Lacanja Tzeltal (Sak Tz'i'), Piedras Negras, Tikal, El Zotz, and Yaxha. Scherer's research interests include mortuary archaeology, bioarchaeology, landscape archaeology, ritual practice, warfare and violence, political practice, and diet and subsistence. He is the author of *As the Gods Kill: Morality and Social Violence among the Precolonial Maya* (2025) and *Mortuary Landscapes of the Classic Maya: Rituals of Body and Soul* (2015). He is the co-editor of *Substance of the Ancient*

Maya: Kingdoms, Communities, Objects, and Beings (with Thomas Garrison, 2024), Smoke, Flames, and the Human Body in Mesoamerican Ritual Practice (with Vera Tiesler, 2018) and Embattled Bodies, Embattled Places: War in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the Andes (with John Verano, 2014).

Stephen Houston

Brown University

Title: "Time @ Tikal: Exploring Temporal Meaning in the Classic Period"

Abstract: The dynasty at Tikal was well aware of the effects of time and its calendrical structure. Time could be configured variably, as spans and as moments. Beings of ancestral or exotic import populated prior existence, leading to a reverberant world that framed the present in terms of earlier dispensations. This talk touches on a few of those temporal meanings and the personages associated with them. It examines day and month signs at Tikal as evocations and instigations of events. It then explores the concept of "temporal depth," showing how, in certain texts, as needed, time could be compressed or elongated. Finally, the presentation discusses a select group of ancient beings, variably or debatably human. Some were "royal founders," but all served as ineluctable precursors for regal governance at Tikal.

Bio: Stephen Houston holds the Dupee Family Professorship of Social Sciences at Brown University and is the Chair of the Senior Fellows, Pre-Columbian Studies, Dumbarton Oaks. Author of *Vital Signs: The Visual Culture of Maya Writing* (2026), he has also written *The Maya*, with Michael Coe (2022, 10th ed.), *The Gifted Passage: Young Men in Classic Maya Art and Text* (2018), along with many other works. A MacArthur Fellow, Houston gave the 72nd Andrew W. Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art and was awarded, by the President of Guatemala, the Order of the Quetzal in the grade of Grand Cross, that country's highest honor. He conceived and co-founded the journal *Ancient Mesoamerica* and has also been the inaugural Jay Kislak Chair at the Library of Congress, the inaugural Barbara Tedlock Fellow at the School for Advanced Research, a Guggenheim Fellow, a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Cambridge University, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at CASVA, the National Gallery of Art, recipient of the Order of the Pop from the Universidad Francisco Marroquin and, most recently, the Distinguished Research Achievement Award from Brown University.

PROYECTO PAST

Edwin Román-Ramírez, Director

Title: "The Construction of the Sacred Landscape of Tikal During the Classic Period (AD 250–900)"

Abstract: The sacred landscape of Mesoamerican cultures, including the Maya region, is widely studied; research shows that these landscapes are defined not only by physical features such as caves, rivers, roads, and mountains but also by historical and mythological events. This talk will examine

how Tikal shaped its sacred landscape during the Early Classic Period (250-550 AD) by constructing a cosmogram—comprising causeways and temples extending toward the four cardinal directions—that radiated outward from the rulers' palace. It will also show how this landscape changed during the Late Classic period (600-900 AD), when the cosmogram's architecture was renovated and new historical narratives were incorporated, reflecting that these spaces were never static but were instead shaped through constant construction and negotiation between rulers and their communities.

Bio: Dr. Edwin Román-Ramírez is an archaeologist who graduated from the University of San Carlos of Guatemala (2006). He earned a master's degree in 2011 and a doctorate in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin (USA) in 2017. He has participated in ten different archaeological projects in Guatemala and currently leads the South Tikal Archaeological Project, which focuses on the study of interregional relations in Mesoamerica.

Dr. Román Ramírez has also served as a visiting professor at Skidmore College (USA) in 2018 and at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala in 2020 and 2021; in 2025, he was appointed Tinker Visiting Professor at the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He has numerous publications to his credit, including co-authoring the book **El Templo del Sol Nocturno: una tumba real de El Diablo, Guatemala**, and publishing in books and scientific journals—most notably his recent article "A Teotihuacan Altar at Tikal." Additionally, he has written for non-academic audiences, contributing to books and newspapers.

Juan Carlos Pérez Calderón

Title: “El Templo de las Inscripciones de Tikal: Nuevos datos para pensar y re-pensar el VI: las excavaciones 2024 – 2025”

Abstract: Las recientes investigaciones arqueológicas llevadas a cabo en el Templo VI como parte del PAST y lideradas por Héctor L. Escobedo y Juan Carlos Pérez revelan una serie de datos que evidencian rituales dedicados a las estelas asociadas al templo, así como aquellos realizados en honor a la fundación de la subestructura recientemente descubierta y que se presenta también en esta plática.

Bio: Licenciado en Arqueología por la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (2003) y Máster en Áreas Protegidas y Desarrollo Ecorregional por la Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional de Costa Rica (2019). Es Académico Numerario de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala (ingresó en 2022). Actualmente es Director de campo en el Templo VI de Tikal, como parte del Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal, asesor del Proyecto Paisaje Piedras Negras Yaxchilán en el Parque Nacional Laguna del Tigre, Guatemala y parte del equipo internacional de investigadores de la iniciativa MAYACOSTA. Es actualmente miembro de la Comisión Organizadora del Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala; de la Organización del Gran Caribe para Monumentos y Sitios, Presidente de Asociación Tikal y Presidente de ICOMOS Guatemala. Ha desarrollado investigación arqueológica colonial en el Convento de Santo Domingo, La Antigua Guatemala, arqueología en el altiplano de Guatemala en el sitio Piedra Parada, y trabajos de antropología forense. Fue codirector del Proyecto Arqueológico regional Waka', sitio El Perú, Guatemala; Asesor del Programa de Desarrollo Regional del Valle de Copán, Honduras; fue Coordinador de la Unidad Técnica del Parque Nacional Tikal, Director del Proyecto Templo IV

de Tikal, Jefe del Departamento de Monumentos Prehispánicos y Coloniales; Director General del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural; y Viceministro del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural de Guatemala, así como miembro del Consejo Técnico de Arqueología de Guatemala, miembro titular del Consejo para la Protección de La Antigua Guatemala, miembro titular del Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas e invitado al Consejo del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de Guatemala. Fue director del Museo Regional de Arqueología Rubén Chévez van Dorne en La Democracia, Escuintla, Guatemala. Entre los años 2008-9 y 2020-2024, fue catedrático universitario en la Escuela de Historia y en el Centro Universitario de Retalhuleu, ambos de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.

Lorena Paiz Aragón

Title: “Enterrando el pasado. Investigaciones en el Grupo 6D-XV de Tikal”

Abstract: Definida como una montaña-pirámide, el grupo 6D-XV se ubica 300 m al sur del Templo 5, en un área rodeada de grupos residenciales del Periodo Clásico. Su evolución constructiva va desde la modificación de la roca madre, rellenos extensos de tierra caliza molida, fachadas recubiertas con un fino baño de caliza hasta los típicos edificios estucados, algunos pintados, todo ello cubierto de manera intencional con un relleno no uniforme que le dio su aspecto de cerro natural. Pero debajo de esta fachada natural se halla un grupo residencial del Clásico Temprano que permite adentrarnos en la vida de las personas extranjeras que residían en Tikal para la época.

Bio: Licenciada en Arqueología por la Universidad de Valle de Guatemala y con una maestría en Estudios Latinoamericanos por la Universidad de Texas en Austin. Con más de 15 años de ejercer como arqueóloga ha sido parte de proyectos tan diversos como arqueología de rescate, arqueología para desarrollo urbano y proyectos de investigación científica. Fue co-directora del proyecto Altar de Sacrificios del año 2016 hasta 2023 donde el enfoque del proyecto fue la investigación de áreas residenciales. Ha trabajado en sitios como Naranjo, La Falda, Kaminaljuyu, Aguateca, Altar de Sacrificios y Tikal. Sus intereses incluyen el conocimiento de los patrones de asentamiento, el uso de vehículos no tripulados para la documentación de sitios arqueológicos y las dinámicas sociales del Período Clásico.

A lo largo de su carrera ha sido autora y coautora de diversos artículos científicos, publicados a nivel nacional e internacional. Por más de 15 años ha sido parte fundamental del Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, siendo primero colaboradora del evento hasta ser parte de la actual Comisión Organizadora. También ha sido editora de las memorias impresas de dicho evento y socia activa de Asociación Tikal.

Actualmente trabaja como co-directora del Proyecto Arqueológico Plaza Este de Tikal, cuyo enfoque principal de investigación son dos conjuntos arquitectónicos del Clásico Tardío.

Tanya Carias

Title: “Volcanic glass in the Lowlands: a study of the obsidian artifacts at Tikal’s Teotihuacan Neighborhood”

Abstract: Obsidian is one of the main industries for both utilitarian and ceremonial artifacts for the ancient Maya Society. However, since this is a volcanic rock it’s not available locally in the Maya Lowlands. Its access relied on long-distance trade routes connecting Tikal to Highland Guatemalan sources (El Chayal, San Martín Jilotepeque, Ixtepeque) and Central Mexican Sources (Pachuca, for green obsidian). Since 2019, the Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal (PAST) has excavated Tikal’s Teotihuacan Neighborhood (Groups 6D-III, 6D-XV, 6D-XVII and 6D-XXI), recovering a rich amount of obsidian artifacts. To accurately determine raw material provenance, some projectile points were subjected to portable X-Ray Fluorescence (pXRF) spectrometry. Additionally, techno-typological analysis reveals that the sample of obsidian gathered from Tikal’s Teotihuacan Neighborhood consists mainly of finished artifacts with minimal evidence of local manufacturing debris. Furthermore, contextual evidence indicates that there was unrestricted socioeconomic access to obsidian across both elite and non-elite households. These results suggest that despite the long-distance trade routes, local distribution mechanisms in the neighborhood were highly accessible and not strictly controlled by the social elites.

Bio: Tanya Carias is a Guatemalan archaeologist specializing in lithic analysis within Maya society. She is currently working with the Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal (PAST), her research focuses on techno-typological analysis to address broader questions of trade, manufacturing and consumption of lithic artifacts at Tikal. One of her main interests is archaeometric analysis of both lithic and metal artifacts. She holds an undergraduate degree in archaeology from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala.

Pamela Rosales * (co-authored with Rony E. Piedrasanta Castellanos)

Title: “The Birth of a Sacred Mountain: The Preclassic Origins and Architectural Evolution of Tikal’s South Acropolis”

Abstract: While Tikal is celebrated as one of the most prominent centers of the ancient Maya lowlands, foundational scholarship has predominantly emphasized its Classic-period apogee, while our understanding of its Preclassic origins has relied almost exclusively on well-documented sectors such as the North Acropolis and Mundo Perdido. Consequently, the formative development and ideological role of the South Acropolis have remained largely understudied. This study argues that rather than isolated development, the North Acropolis, Mundo Perdido, and South Acropolis formed the primary triad of foundational sacred spaces that directed the urban and symbolic origins of Tikal, each exhibiting distinct spatial arrangements suited for specialized ceremonial and ideological programs.

Drawing on recent investigations into its earliest construction episodes, this study traces the architectural and stratigraphic evolution of the South Acropolis from its Preclassic foundations into a monumental sacred landmark (*mitz*). It evaluates the persistent presence of a triadic architectural template and its ritual connotations across successive building phases, examining how this early

sacred mountain configuration endured before transitioning into a more secular, administrative, and political sphere by the Late Classic period. By integrating these new stratigraphic and architectural data, this presentation contributes to a broader understanding of Tikal's formative urban landscape and highlights the central role of the South Acropolis in the long-term relationship between ritual monumentalism and civic governance.

Bio: Pamela Rosales is a Guatemalan archaeologist graduated from the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) and researcher for the Proyecto Arqueológico del Sur de Tikal since 2019. Specializing in Maya monumental architecture and material culture analysis, she has conducted archaeological fieldwork across major Petén centers, including Tikal, Río Azul, Naranjo, and El Zotz.

Alejandrina Corado Ochoa

Title: "Ceramics in Ritual Contexts during the Classic Period (250 CE – 850 CE) on Tikal South Platform"

Abstract: In pre-Hispanic times, ceramics held significant material and cultural importance, used in contexts ranging from daily life to ceremonial deposits, funerary rituals, and caches. At Tikal during the Classic period, several ritual contexts have been identified in which ceramics were crucial for establishing chronology, indicating economic status, revealing knowledge of other cultures, and documenting trade. This presentation examines two ritual contexts through ceramic analysis of three residential groups on the South Platform: 6D-XV, 6D-XVII, and 6D-XXI. These contexts indicate that foundational and funerary rituals found in this area were uncommon in other sectors of Tikal during the Classic period, demonstrating that its inhabitants had knowledge of and connections with other regions of the Maya area and Mesoamerica.

Bio: Alejandrina Corado is a Guatemalan archaeologist who graduated from the University of San Carlos of Guatemala and has a decade of experience in archaeological research across Guatemala's Central Highlands, Middle Motagua region, and Maya Lowlands. In addition, Alejandrina Corado has focused on Lowland Maya Ceramics, specifically helping define the differences between Late and Terminal Classic ceramics from Ixtutz. Currently, Alejandrina Corado is analysing the ceramics recovered by the Southern Tikal Archaeological Project.