



Workshop “Breaking Mesoamerican Codes”

January 29, 2015, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Program

12 pm-1 pm:

Report on the current situation/status of the exhibition planning for the Humboldt-Forum overall, and specifically for the module “Graphic Communication Systems in Mesoamerica”

Viola König, Maria Gaida

2 pm - 4 pm:

Developments, Commonalities and Differences between Mesoamerican Writing Systems

Marc Zender

Script and Society: A view of ancient Mesoamericans through their inscribing practices

Javier Urcid

Hieroglyphic name and titles of the fourth Teotihuacan ruler on ceramic shards housed in the Berlin Ethnological Museum

Albert Davletshin

Chair: Elke Ruhnau

6.30 pm

Long Night of Maya films

The films "**Dance of the Maize God**" and "**Breaking the Maya Code**" by the documentary filmmaker David Lebrun will be shown. Between the two screenings, David Lebrun talks to Margarete van Ess (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), Carola Wedel (ZDF) and Marc Zender (Tulane University, New Orleans) hosted by Viola König (Ethnologisches Museum) and will answer questions from the audience. The discussion will be held in English.

The workshop takes place in the frame of the series of workshops “Asking Questions”

Asking questions is the starting point of all projects that the Humboldt Lab Dahlem develops and implements. The issues touch central themes of contemporary museum work: amongst them the handling of a sometimes-problematic collection history, and the development of suitable object presentations as well as the questioning of conventions of representation. The latter is directly connected with the question of participation of various communities and audiences. “Asking Questions” is a series of workshops, symposia and public talks, oriented on the theory, but also on museum and exhibition practices. In conversation with external experts the Dahlem curators reflect on the planned modules for the Humboldt-Forum as well as on the contributions of the Humboldt Lab.

Participating experts

Albert Davletshin completed his Ph.D. thesis “Palaeography of Maya Hieroglyphic Writing” at Knorozov Centre for Mesoamerican Studies, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, in 2003. Since then he has been a research fellow at the university, at the Institute of Oriental and Classic Studies, where he teaches on the topics of Classical Nahuatl, Maya epigraphy as well as Hawaiian, Maori and the Rapanui (Easter Islands) languages. His research centers on the typology of logo-syllabic writing systems and methods of decipherment, the Aztec, Epi-Olmec, Mayan and Zapotec scripts as well as the Teotihuacan, Rapanui and the Harappa culture in Pakistan. In addition he works on the linguistics of Mesoamerica and Polynesia. Of special mention should be his research projects on Aztec script in the years 2007 to 2009, 2007 on proto-Totonacan and from 2012-2014 on the language of the Rapanui. Linguistic fieldwork has taken Albert Davletshin to Veracruz, Mexico to the Pisaflores Tepehua in 2007 and 2011, to the Sym Evenki and Ket in Siberia in 2009 and to the Nukeria in Papua New Guinea in 2013.

Maria Gaida received her doctorate in pre-Columbian studies from the University of Hamburg in 1983 with a dissertation on “The Inscriptions of Naranjo, Petén, Guatemala.” In 1989 she joined the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, initially as a trainee research assistant, and later as curator of the Mesoamerica collection. Since 1999 she has headed the museum’s collections department, and since 2012, also the department for restorations. Since the early 1990s she has been the co-editor of the “Baessler-Archiv,” the museum’s specialist magazine. Maria Gaida was one of the curators responsible for the exhibition “America 1492-1992: New Worlds, New Realities” (Berlin, 1992) and co-curated the international exhibition “Aztecs” (Berlin, 2003). She also co-authored the book “Die Maya. Schrift und Kunst” (Cologne, 2006).

Viola König received her doctorate in pre-Columbian studies from the University of Hamburg. Her research interests lie in Mesoamerican iconography and script as well as the ethnography and material cultures of the Pacific Northwest. She worked at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne. From 1986 to 1992 she headed the Department of Ethnology at the Niedersächsische Landesmuseum Hannover, and from 1992 to 2001 she was managing director of the Übersee-Museum in Bremen. Since 2001 Viola König has been director of the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and, in this capacity, is involved in the development of the new exhibition concept for the future Humboldt-Forum in Berlin. Viola König holds an honorary professorship for cultural studies at the University of Bremen as well as for pre-Columbian studies and cultural anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin's Institute for Latin American Studies. She was also visiting professor at the Department of Art at Tulane University in New Orleans, USA (2000).

Elke Ruhnau received her doctorate in pre-Columbian studies from the University of Hamburg with a dissertation on the "The Political Structure in Pre-Hispanic Chalco." in 1987. She has been lecturing at the Freie Universität Berlin's Institute for Latin American Studies since 1993, where she teaches Classical Nahuatl and seminars on ethnohistory and archaeology of Mesoamerica. Her research centers on the ethnohistory of Central Mexico from the post-classical period (900-1521) to the late colonial era. In 2001 her German translation of "Diferentes Historias Originales" by the indigenous chronicler Chimalpahin, a history of the indigenous peoples of Central Mexico written in Nahuatl, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). At the same time, Elke Ruhnau was consistently active in the museum landscape: at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg and at the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. She was one of the curators for the exhibition "America 1492-1992: New Worlds, New Realities" (Berlin, 1992) and was head curator for the exhibitions "Jaguar and Serpent. The Cosmos of Indians in Mexico and South America" (Hannover, 2000) and "Transregional Entanglements in Latin America" (Berlin, 2014).

Javier Urcid received his doctorate in cultural anthropology with a focus on archaeological archaeology from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1992 with his dissertation on "Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing." After stints at the National Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. and as assistant professor at the Brandeis University's Department of Anthropology in Waltham, Massachusetts, he has held the post of associate professor there since 2003 and is at present departmental head. Javier Urcid's fields of research focus mainly on the social dimension of script in ancient societies, the genesis and the various developments of script traditions as well as decipherment methods for those no longer in use. His research focuses on the region of Mesoamerica. He has

not only published papers on the Oto-Manguean script, including the Zapotec, Mixtec and central Mexican script, but also on archaeological research of the ancient political systems and economies of Mesoamerica.

Marc Zender received his Ph.D. in archaeology from the University of Calgary in 2004 with his dissertation “A Study of Classic Maya Priesthood.” From 2002 to 2004 he taught at the University of Calgary and from 2005 to 2011 at Harvard University in Boston. Since 2011 he has been assistant professor of anthropology at the Robert Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies of Tulane University in New Orleans, where he teaches epigraphy, linguistics and Mesoamerican languages. Marc Zender’s research focuses on historical and ethno-linguistics, comparative studies of different scripts and the deciphering of ancient script, whereby he specializes in languages and script from Mesoamerica, above all on Mayan and Nahuatl. His research findings have been widely published in numerous books and articles. Marc Zender is one of the editors of the specialist magazine “The PARI Journal” and he runs the website “Mesoweb.”