

(Re)inventing Mesoamerica: Indigenous Epistemologies, Cultural Practices, and Construction of the Past

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Section language:

English and Spanish

Call for Papers:

In recent years, the study of Mesoamerica has increasingly moved beyond traditional narratives centered primarily on political history and monumental civilizations toward a more complex understanding of knowledge systems, ritual practices, and cultural memory. This shift reflects broader transformations in the humanities that foreground the plurality of epistemologies, the politics of heritage, and the methodological implications of digital research tools. Within this evolving landscape, the Mesoamerican past appears not as a stable historical object but as a field of ongoing reinterpretation shaped by new analytical frameworks, interdisciplinary approaches, and technological innovations. At the same time, these developments have prompted renewed reflection on how knowledge about the Mesoamerican past is produced and transmitted.

This panel focuses on processes of (re)invention in the study of Mesoamerica—understood not as distortion but as the continuous (re)interpretation of cultural practices, religious systems, and social identities through changing scholarly perspectives; (re)invention and (re)interpretation that resonate with broader debates about uncertainty, knowledge production and shifting epistemological paradigms in the humanities. In this sense, Mesoamerica offers a particularly productive case study for examining how our image of the past emerge from the interplay between fragmentary evidence, interpretive frameworks and the cultural or political contexts in which research is conducted.

Particular attention has been given to the role of cultural-and specifically, religious-practices, and the construction of identity, cultural memory, and knowledge in shaping both historical record and its later interpretations. Ritual performance, sacred landscapes, calendrical knowledge, art, songs, and sacred narratives functioned as fundamental modes of producing and transmitting knowledge about cosmology, political authority, and social norms.

The panel will therefore address several interrelated questions. How do new archaeological, textual and digital sources reshape our understanding of Mesoamerican societies? In what ways do



historiographical traditions, disciplinary boundaries and theoretical paradigms influence the construction of narratives about the region? How are scholarly interpretations challenged or transformed in an era characterized by rapid information circulation? Possible topics include, but are not limited to: (re)interpretations of ritual and religious practices; new perspectives on social and political organization; the role of material culture and iconography in reconstructing belief systems; transformations of Indigenous historical traditions; and the circulation of academic narratives and myths about the Mesoamerican past. By bringing together contributions from history, art history, anthropology, philology, archaeology, and digital humanities, this panel aims to highlight how new methodological and theoretical approaches are transforming the study of Mesoamerica. More broadly, it seeks to engage with the ongoing debates about knowledge production, cultural memory, and the continual reinvention of historical understanding in the contemporary humanities.

Associated Research Groups:

Centro de Estudios Mesoamericanos+ (CEM+)

The team brings together specialists in the history, ethnohistory, culture, and religion of Indigenous peoples of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica and other regions of pre-Columbian America. The research activities of the CEM+ team encompass history, historical memory, and phenomena of intercultural contact.

