

SPECIAL SECTION: RECENT RESEARCH ON MAYA CAUSEWAYS

## INTRODUCTION

This issue's special section presents a series of papers focusing on recent research on ancient Maya causeways, or *sacbeob* ("white roads"—a reference to their gleaming, plastered surfaces). Often relegated to the status of "minor architectural features," even a casual perusal of the literature quickly convinces one that *sacbeob* were a major feature of the ancient Maya landscape. Throughout the Maya lowlands from at least the Late Preclassic onward, these elevated roads facilitated internal and external transportation within and between Maya centers for a combination of economic, political, social, and ritual purposes. Constructed as an organic element of the built environment, road systems grew in size and expanded in complexity as the Maya centers themselves did (Andrews 1975:89, 323, 428).

The papers offered here depend on both archaeological and historical data to arrive at new insights concerning these fascinating features. Although the causeways of the great southern lowland cities had been swallowed by the jungle by the time of the arrival of Europeans, extensive archaeological research has shed new light on them, their construction techniques, arrangement, and functions. In the northern lowlands, *sacbeob* captured the attention of early Spanish clerics; from the friars Diego de Landa and Antonio de Ciudad de Real in the mid- to late sixteenth century and Diego López de Cogolludo in the late seventeenth century we receive the earliest descriptions by Europeans (Tozzer 1957:185, 191, 225). Modern references to *sacbeob* begin with the great nineteenth-century explorers John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, followed somewhat later by Desiré Charney (Tozzer 1957:187–188, 225). Modern archaeological investigations of ancient Maya causeways had their inception with the Carnegie Institution of Washington project at Chichen Itza, which began in 1924 under the direction of Sylvanus G. Morley (Tozzer 1957:190). The authors whose work we present here build on that foundation and expand upon it in ways that probably would have been unanticipated by the earlier investigators.

In the first paper, **Justine M. Shaw** addresses issues of road classification, practical and symbolic aspects of roadways, and spatial and temporal variations in a sample of 190 *sacbeob*. She

also compares Maya road systems with those of the Inca empire to facilitate greater understanding of both systems. In the following paper, **Arlen F. Chase and Diane Z. Chase** examine the functional aspects of Maya causeways at Caracol, Belize, especially during its expansion in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. They argue that this internal road system was at the heart of an administered economy, allowing control of trade and taxation and facilitating military mobilization. Continuing site-specific case studies, **Rafael Cobos and Terance L. Winemiller** report on the results of research on the causeways of Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico. Considering the spatial patterning and chronological development of the Chichen Itza *sacbeob*, they argue that in the Late Classic-period Chichen Itza was characterized by a nonstratified sociopolitical system and that, in the Terminal Classic period, the roadways reflect a highly stratified system. In the fourth paper, **William J. Folan, Jacinto May Hau, Joyce Marcus, W. Frank Miller, and Raymundo González Heredia** discuss the regional road system of Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico, by presenting a classification of different *sacbe* types. In the final paper, **David Bolles and William J. Folan** analyze references to various types of roadways and related terms found in Mayan–Spanish and Spanish–Mayan dictionaries compiled by Franciscan friars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their analysis places these terms in a broader sociocultural context and provides a deeper contextual means of understanding the archaeological data on *sacbeob*.

WILLIAM R. FOWLER

### REFERENCES

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1975 *Maya Cities: Placemaking and Urbanization*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
- Tozzer, Alfred M.  
1957 *Chichen Itza and Its Cenote of Sacrifice: A Comparative Study of Contemporaneous Maya and Toltec*. Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Vols. XI and XII. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.