Sigma Xi Distinguished Lecture:

Archaeology of Cultural Hybridity in the Maya Lowlands

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4:00pm – SSMB Auditorium, College of Charleston
6:30pm – Grimsley 117, The Citadel

For the last few decades, the concept of hybridity has figured prominently in the scholarship of postcolonialism. Heterogeneous cultural forms produced by a combination of two or more distinct elements, however, have deep antiquity. Exploring archaeological signatures of hybridity in both the shallow and deeper past of the Maya region, we look beyond the surface characteristics of hybridity to examine the factors underlying hybrid cultural forms and their specific fragilities. Two examples of hybridity are examined: the incorporation of five-position calendrical notation (the Long Count) to the charter of rulership during the Classic period (250-950 CE) in the southern Maya Lowlands; and the entanglement of 16th-century Spanish religion, cuisine, and politics with Indigenous Yucatec Maya culture. In a twist on postcolonial discourse, the latter example suggests resistance to cultural hybridity induced by colonization (called cold fusion by some) and a preference for cultural binaries. Critiqued for its “fuzzy, elastic nature,” hybridity nonetheless captures an important part of the human experience—a proclivity towards experimentation.