

'Investigating the Interaction of Biology and Culture Through Bioarchaeological Analysis of Ancient Mayan Skeletons'

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Stanley Serafin is Senior Lecturer in Anatomy at UNSW Sydney. He completed a PhD in Biological Anthropology at Tulane University (2010). He has excavated and analysed ancient human remains in Egypt, Peru and, since 2002, Mexico.

The closing centuries of the Classic period (A.D 300-1000) saw momentous changes in Mayan civilization, some of which presaged developments in the later Postclassic period (A. D. 1000-1500). Hallmarks of the Classic that are no longer present in the Postclassic include the institution of divine kingship and stone monuments glorifying the accomplishments of rulers. In the Postclassic period no individuals are named in texts and there is greater focus in general on more collective forms of identity. In this talk, I present findings from my analyses of recently discovered cemeteries at several Classic and Postclassic period sites to demonstrate that the transition to more collective forms of social identity is also reflected in the treatment of the dead and in the physical remains of the Mayans themselves in the form of body modification, diet and migration patterns. Most broadly, I highlight the utility of multidisciplinary analysis of skeletons and their archaeological contexts to provide insights into larger social and political transformations.

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