Richard M. Leventhal is a Professor in the University of Pennsylvania Department of Anthropology, Curator in the American Section of the Penn Museum, and Director of the Penn Center for the Preservation of Cultural Properties. In addition, he is the former Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. He received his B.A. in 1974 and his Ph.D. in Anthropology in 1979, both from Harvard. He has done extensive field research in Belize, Mexico, and other parts of Central America for over thirty years. This fieldwork has resulted in several monographs and books on the ancient Maya. His most recent projects include the detailed excavation and study of Xunantunich, a Classic period Maya site in Belize and a new project focused on the Caste War of the Yucatan.

Dr. Leventhal’s previous positions include President and CEO at the School of American Research in Santa Fe; Director of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA and Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, UCLA; Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of New York at Albany, and Director of the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies at the same institution. His professional activities include Trustee, Archaeological Institute of America.

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“Preserving the Ancient Maya: Who Gets to Decide?”

Mel Gibson’s 2006 movie, *Apocalypto*, is simply the most recent attempt by non-Maya and Americans to create a Maya past and a cultural heritage. One can see earlier versions of this control with the Spanish accounts from the 16th century and the early ‘discovery’ stories from John L. Stephens and other 19th century explorers. For the past 100 years, American archaeologists have excavated ancient Maya sites and translated ancient Maya texts to create a new picture of the ancient past.

Leventhal examines the nature of our understanding of the ancient Maya past, the battle for the control of the cultural heritage of the ancient and modern Maya, and the impact of cultural tourism on this battle for the past, for the present, and for the future of the Maya.