

Mayan Esteem Project Report

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More references have been found for the project in Chilón, Chiapas, Mexico. Many of the pictures in Wolfgang Cordan's, Secrets of the Forrest, were taken by Gertrudis DUBY Blom. Her photo archive is at the Na Bolom research center in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas. Hopefully the next trip to Chiapas in early August will turn up more records of artifacts from the site in Chilón by searching DUBY's archive (the name she used as a photographer) and examining the exhaustive notes she and her husband Franz Blom made over many years. It was also learned that the French team of Pierre Becquelin and Claude F. Baudez did a precursory survey of the site in Chilón while working at Toniná. I have been unable to locate a complete set of their, Toniná, Une Cite du Chiapas, as yet, which was published in several volumes.

A meeting was held 12 May 1999 in Chilón to discuss the possibilities of development of the local ruins. In attendance were:

- Jesus Martinez Diaz, principal of the Ninos Heroes elementary school,
- Adella Adavera Garcia, administrative assistant of the Casa de La Cultura,
- Mariano Perez Gutierrez, an observer from the Rancho Libertad,
- Pedro Guzman Jimenez and Candio Gomez Jimenez, both from the office of the president of Chilón, and
- myself, Eric Samson.

We discussed the academic nature of my studies and the long slow process it would take to bring any excavation or restoration to the ruins. The thematic question of the meeting was, "What is necessary for permission to develop the ruins?" I explained that my project could remain academic and never get off paper or that the Mayan Esteem Project could facilitate formal excavation by means of application with the Instituto Nacional de Antropologia y Historia. I made it very clear that the Mayan Esteem Project did not want to do anything against the community's wishes and that community consensus was primary to proceeding with the Instituto Nacional de Antropologia y Historia application. It was decided that I would make an open presentation in early August at the municipal auditorium and that an informal "consulta" vote would be taken a few days later. The general consensus of the meeting was that the community wants to develop the ruins and wants more information.

Among others from the community that I met with that did not attend the meeting were Sebastian Perez Lopez, representative of *Rancho Na Cho'*, Santiago Gomez, principal de la comunidad Tzeltal, Maestra Terry and Paco Vera, director of COBACH (the state preparatory school in Chilón), Dulce Maria Beltran Sanchez, director of the *Casa de La Cultura*, Julio Ali Reyes Moterrera, maestro at the secondary school and anthropologist, and Sebastian Encino Gutierrez, president of Chilón. My visit coincided with a very busy time in Chilón. Those mentioned above were all supportive of a preservation/excavation effort of the ruins but for the many activities associated with the festival of San Juan could not attend the meeting.

No formal board or committee has yet been formed in Chilón.

The need for preservation of the site at Chilón proved imminent with a visit to the ruins. Complete devegetation of the summit of *Na Cho'* and many robber holes are making the site vulnerable to erosion. Cordan approximated the size of the *Na Cho'* edifice as 165 x 55 yards. My rough estimate of the entire surface of the summit of the mountain is 100 x 20 meters. A very disturbing loss of area if our areas of measurement at all correlate.

Another reported edifice, *Muk' tana*, which is just below *Na Cho'*, is very overgrown and does not appear to be as badly disturbed as *Na Cho'*. *Na Tenzun*, the third reported edifice, is on the adjacent mountain to

the east and is heavily covered with vegetation and there are no apparent signs of being disturbed. It should be noted that different people report vice versa names of the edifices on the mountains. I am pretty sure that I have sorted out which is which. Also, a spring emerges between the two major peaks and is a likely site for future excavation.

Some of the disturbance at *Na Cho'j* may have been caused by an academic research team that reportedly spent about five days at the site taking pictures some time in the fall of 1998. No one in Chilón can identify the investigators or the institution they came from other than that they were foreigners. I would like to know of any recent visits to the site at Chilón and caution against test digs without proper permits.

A registration book will be placed in the office of the president of Chilón for any future investigators to sign in. If you are making any on-site investigations please register your name and the nature of your work.

A request for proposals has been prepared for a surveyor/cartographer to get preliminary mapping of the site started for the INAH application. One response from James E. Franklin, a surveyor from New Hampshire, has led to an agreement that he will do research to help in the regional and local mapping. Mr. Franklin has agreed to do this research gratis. On-site measurements will be taken this August to help prepare a site map.

A slide show is now available of some of the information accumulated so far about the site at Chilón. Presentations can be scheduled upon request. There will be a public presentation some time next fall during a yet to be scheduled fundraiser.

The art contest in Chilón was very successful as an outreach program. The theme of the contest was to depict the local ruins and their Mayan culture as they must have been before the ruins were deserted. The contest took place in April and had close to 1,000 participants. Winners and honorable mentions were awarded to age categories from six to fourteen years old. All participants received pencils from the Mayan Esteem Project for their efforts and the winners received prizes generously supplied by Archaeology Magazine through Charlene Sugihara, advertising director (1-212-732-5154, ext. 21). This contest was done with the cooperation of the Casa de La Cultura and the Chilón public schools. The works will be exhibited at a yet to be determined location next March during the Maya Meetings in Austin, Texas.

Private contributions to the Mayan Esteem Project of approximately \$6,000 have helped with basic needs but we are still underfunded. We did not receive funding from the City of Austin for an art grant to exhibit the works from the art contest due to administrative problems arising from my being in Mexico during the review process. Amanda Krebs, a technical writer from Austin, has volunteered to act as an administrative assistant to help avoid future lapses in communication. We will be applying for further funding when our IRS tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status is granted.

I have been provisionally accepted into Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas for graduate work anchored in the Spanish department and majoring in inter-disciplinary studies. My exit thesis will be in Spanish describing the work of the Mayan Esteem Project, with class work in other departments to facilitate my needs in carrying out the Mayan Esteem Project. This university affiliation answers one of the major requirements of the INAH application. With preparation of the INAH application, will come a close to the feasibility phase of the project. Submission of the application may take place as soon as year end. It may not be too ambitious to consider plans to move from landscape to "dirt" archaeology. Such plans will most probably include RFPs for student and professional projects.

In March I attended the Maya Meetings at the University of Texas at Austin and had the opportunity to study Chol grammar with Nick Hopkins and Kathryn Josserand. Also in March I attended a week-long colloquium in Mexico City on the works of Eduard and Caecilie Selser which was sponsored by INAH, the Goethe Institute of Mexico, Universidad Nacional Antonimo de México and the Institute of German-

Mexican Intercultural Investigations. Doctora Renata von Hanffstengel of the Institute of German-Mexican Intercultural Investigations has been very resourceful to the Mayan Esteem Project with her knowledge of Wolfgang Cordan.

I am still filling in holes of Cordan's investigations at the Chilón site and would greatly appreciate any knowledge anyone has to share about his career, location of his notes, addresses of family in Germany and his affiliation with the University of the Yucatan. Perhaps someone knows if Cordan's companion, Lampo, is still living?

Other than meeting and talking to people in Chilón and exploring the site I also spent some time in Tuxtla Gutierrez inquiring about an inquisition Cordan reported was held on the robbery of artifacts from the Chilón site. This investigation was not fruitful and does not look very promising so I will focus on the Doby photographs in August. I will also be following up on reports of artifacts from Chilón at the anthropological museum in Tuxtla.

It was reported to me that an artifact from the Chilón site exists in Bachejon. I have not been able to investigate yet but will on the next trip.

This and future reports of the Mayan Esteem Project will be available in Spanish.

Francisco McFarland has accepted an associate professorship in Colorado and intends to resign from the oversight board. When his letter of resignation is received his seat will have to be filled. Any interested parties should submit for board consideration at year end.

If you have come by this report and are not on the mailing list and want to receive future reports please make notification by snail mail or voice mail at the address or telephone number below. My frequent travel supports my being e-mail dysfunctional.