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# Mayan Esteem Project Report

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Spring

Eric Samson, Project Director

2005

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## INAH Proposal on Track

The Mayan Esteem Project is finally poised to submit a proposal to the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) for excavation and preservation of Mayan sites at Chilón, Chiapas. After more than seven years of investigations, landscape archaeology and public relations a proposal is compiled and in the review process before formal submission to INAH late this spring.

Proposed is to begin excavation at Bolon Kin where iconographic painted murals were discovered in the spring of 2003 by French team Robert Tamba and Chloe Andrieu. Tamba, a geologist, and Andrieu, an archaeologist who has studied with Pierre Bequelin, were conducting a site inspection for the Mayan Esteem Project when they discovered the murals. (See more on the Bolon Kin murals inside.)



Why is this kid so happy? See the back page to find out why.

Bolon Kin has been wracked with looting over the years so the site is inspected and looter holes are filled at every opportunity. For several years signs posted by the Mayan Esteem Project asking for respect for the ruins and to preserve Bolon Kin for future generations were torn down and new looter holes emerged every field season. But attitudes in Chilón have changed and no new looter holes have been found in the past year. And as recently as the Christmas season all signs remained posted.

With INAH approval the Mayan Esteem Project will be able to undertake earnest preservation of Bolon Kin and its murals. The murals, and other evidence in private collections, put Mayan occupation at Bolon Kin in the Middle and Late Classical periods (see earlier reports on our newly redesigned web site at [mayanesteem.org](http://mayanesteem.org) – look under archival photos and newsletters). Given the location of Chilón between Palenque and Toniná and its proximity to the general boundary of the Maya world, excavation of Bolon Kin holds very exciting possibilities.

The INAH proposal is to work first at Bolon Kin, one of Chilón's three known Mayan sites, and later move to the Na Choj, Na Tenzun, Muktenah complex where the Mayan Esteem Project hopes to eventually facilitate the establishment of an archaeological park on par with Palenque. Chilón's third known site, Chi Ko Tan (also known as Monte Pio) will be reserved for future exploration and advances in archaeological methods.

And all those looted artifacts? The Mayan Esteem Project is working to coordinate a museum in Chilón and collect donations from private collectors in the area to begin a permanent collection. The local high school has already begun a pilot program and started a respectable collection from public donors. Anthropologist and teacher, Ali Reyes and his students built a small building to house the museum. The Chiloneros solicited donations of artifacts and curated exhibits from a wide range of material remains of Mayan civilization. It's a start!

The Mayan Esteem Project hopes to begin its first field season of excavation and preservation at Bolon Kin for the spring and summer of 2006. Keep your ear close to our web site for field study opportunities.

## The Bolon Kin Murals, a Recent Discovery in Mesoamerica: A Preliminary Report Prepared for the Maya Esteem Project

by Fabian Dominguez. (email: cacao\_sacbe@yahoo.com)

Here is a description of some recently discovered Maya Murals from the site of Bolon Kin in Southern Mexico. The site is located near the village of Chilon, in Chiapas. This is about 40 miles



Photo:  
Tamba &  
Andriau

northeast of San Cristobal de las Casas. These stucco murals are a rare archaeological treasure that merit further research and funding. Only a few well-preserved Maya Murals have been discovered so far, so it is important for the readers of this essay to be properly impressed with the wonderful fact of their existence. The author of this essay has prepared a drawings based on photographs that were provided by members of the Maya Esteem Project. The photographs were taken during the field season of the spring of 2003.

The site of Bolon Kin has already been identified by the French archaeologist Pierre Bequelin who performed excavations there in the 1990's as part of rescue work during power line construction. The murals themselves are located underground and could only be reached by crawling down a tunnel that had been dug by someone who has tried to loot the site. This tunnel was already present at the site when the 2003 field season had begun and no information is available on what may have been removed. It is a sad fact that many sites in Mesoamerica have been damaged by similar unauthorized excavations. One of the goals of the Maya Esteem Project has been to protect the site of Bolon Kin from this type of abuse and to also find funds to further study at the site under a controlled research project . In discovering these mural paintings the members of the project are lucky to be among the very few people who have located such murals in



Photo:  
Tamba &  
Andriau

such generally good condition. Shortly after it was found, the tunnel that leads to the murals was closed to protect the murals. Due to limitations of time and resources only a brief examination of the murals could

be done in the 2003 field season. Thereafter, the *National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH)* of Mexico was notified of the discovery.

The directors of the Maya Esteem project are currently seeking a new excavation permit and the funding to return to the site so that they may take the necessary steps to continue the important work that desperately needs to occur to correctly protect the archaeological site. Additional funding will be needed to provide the manpower and resources to shine a new light on these murals that have seen so much darkness for many centuries. Persons who wish to make donations to this significant endeavor may contact the project director, Eric Samson, at

eric@mayanesteem.org.

This report provides only a preliminary discussion of

the murals. The primary goal is to make the photographs and drawings accessible to the Maya Esteem Project and to any other interested persons who may want to learn more about the project. These photographs and drawings are best that can be provided at this time, especially given the odd circumstances with how the murals were discovered. If the readers of this essay will carefully study the photographs before they look at the drawings they will see that many small details can be seen. However, the photographs were taken at close range and unfortunately some details are lost in the shadows. As such, this author has had to constrain the drawings

to the lines and curves that can be most easily identified. The photos shown here have been enhanced in Photoshop software. The drawings were done by tracing the outlines in the vector based illustration software FreeHand and CorelDraw. Beyond these issues, a study of the pre-Columbian, Maya art style and writing system did assist with the interpretation of the iconography. After completing this work this author takes complete responsibility for the accuracy of the end results, as well as any errors that may



Bolon Kin Stucco Mural, Panel 1

Chiapas, Mexico

Composite drawing by Fabian Dominguez  
based on photos from Robert Tamba

have occurred. The 2003 photographs were taken in 2003 and the tunnel was closed, so a second chance to take better photographs will not occur until the structure is re-opened with the appropriate permission or a full excavation project is funded. If better photographs become available, or direct access to the actual murals occurs then this author will gladly make himself available to produce better drawings.



Bolon Kin Stucco Mural, Panel 5  
Chiapas, Mexico  
Composite drawing by Fabian Dominguez  
based on photos from Robert Tamba

The first public presentation of the Bolon Kin Murals occurred at the 2004 Maya Meetings conference in Austin, Texas, USA during March 11-20 of the same year. The initial, un-enhanced photographs were placed on a wall in a small exhibition area and some knowledgeable scholars offered their opinions on the subject. It should be an obvious point that what was discovered could be just the tip of the iceberg. It is possible that a much larger set of murals await a better day for their full glory to be appreciated.

There are probably many more words that could be written about these murals at this time. For now though, the photos and drawings presented here should speak for themselves as testimonials to the great legacy of the Maya culture.

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**So why is this kid so happy?**

**Because he knows that his drawing will raise funds for the Mayan Esteem Project! Go to our web site [MAYANESTEEM.ORG](http://MAYANESTEEM.ORG) to see how you can buy AUTHENTIC MAYAN ART and help support the Mayan Esteem Project. Just click: Fund Us!**

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Many thanks to our new web master, Edward Lai. And many thanks to our first one, Amanda Krebs.

**MAYANESTEEM.ORG**