

A Community History of Tulum, Quintana Roo, Mexico: Recovering the Maya Past
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a. Proposal Abstract:

I propose to write a community history of early twentieth century Tulum, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Tulum was a Maya village that became a key political and religious site for Mayas during the mid nineteenth century Caste War of Yucatan (1847-1901). Although the archeological ruins adjacent to the village are now one of Mexico's leading archeological sites and tourist attractions, the history of the adjacent village and its residents remains largely unwritten and unrecorded. Local residents, especially elders, have significant knowledge of the early twentieth century in Tulum, and it is crucial to recover this knowledge as soon as possible. This knowledge will contribute to understanding Maya culture and the socio-political relations that Santa Cruz Mayas had with Mexicans and other outsiders during the first half of the twentieth century.

I propose to use oral histories of community elders, members of Tulum's founding families, and a broad range of other people familiar with the region to reconstruct the early twentieth century history of Tulum. I will further use historical photographs to supplement the interviews and evoke memories about socio-political relations and cultural practices. I will ask about a variety of topics, including socio-political relations and military roles, religious structures and ideology, work and economic production, kinship, marriage and family, and education. This research will make a significant contribution to understanding the socio-cultural and political-economic processes that defined and shaped Santa Cruz Maya communities during the first half of the twentieth century.

b. Report Abstract:

I collected oral histories from members of the founding families, business leaders, and school administrators, in addition to identifying and/or collecting photographs and other artifacts. I visited archives for the INI (National Indigenous Institute), and interviewed former residents of Tulum in a neighboring town, Felipe Carrillo Puerto. I was also able to collaborate with several colleagues and institutions in the area. The director of the Casa de Cultura in Tulum introduced me to a professor of Anthropology and several students at the Universidad de Quintana Roo, and a student from a university in Cancun who was completing her degree's service requirement at the Casa de Cultura. We shared information and collaborated on our projects, and I was encouraged to develop my project into a museum exhibit for the new Center for Mayan Culture and Ecology which is being developed jointly by the State of Quintana Roo, University of Quintana Roo, and INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History).

I have begun to draft a report and develop exhibit resources on the early twentieth century history of Tulum. Using Family Tree Maker, a genealogy software program, I began to create family trees for the town's founding families. In addition, I have begun to write narrative histories of the founding families and of the region's key cultural practices and socio-political relations. To produce a pictorial history and exhibit of Tulum, I still need to visit the archives at the Smithsonian Institute, the Peabody, and several Mexican archives in Merida, Nuevo Xcan, and possibly in Mexico City.

c. Publication(s) and museum exhibit still being developed.

d. None.

e. Support for development and display of museum exhibit still pending from the Center for Mayan Culture and Ecology, Tulum, Quintana Roo, Mexico.