

1998 AAA Meeting

AD encourages members to submit sessions and papers for the 1998 meeting. The deadline for abstracts is April 1, 1998. The theme for the meeting is "Population and the Anthropological Imagination," marking the 200th anniversary of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Obviously, archaeology can contribute in substantial ways to any discussion of population. Anyone with procedural questions or just ideas to float is welcome to contact Liz Brumfiel at 517/629-0432; fax 517/629-0509; ebrumfiel@alpha.albion.edu.

The relationship between population and the environment is at the heart of much of archaeology as well as international development projects. It seems logical, then, that Anabel Ford would find a way to link the two together.

Investigations at El Pilar: Cultural-Natural Resource Conservation and Development in the Maya Forest

By Anabel Ford (Project Director, BRASS/El Pilar Program, UC-Santa Barbara)

Conservation of cultural and natural resources is a crucial global long-term goal for the coming century. Yet efforts to accomplish this sometimes compromise important short-term economic needs at regional and local levels. Balancing short-term needs with long-term objectives to attain a viable management framework requires a collaborative program of scientific research, field exploration and development designs.

Composition of the Maya forest today bears the imprint of ancient human habitation and resource management. Rooted in the study of the human/environment relationship, the El Pilar Project seeks to evaluate continuities and shifts through time and across space in the way humans have used the forest environment and, in so doing, find a model conservation design that envisions the viable development of the region. The project's international and multidisciplinary research and development team seeks a conservation plan that incorporates local community needs, government development agendas and international environmental concerns.

The core of the El Pilar vision comes from research on the evolution of the ancient Maya landscape, research that seeks clues to sustaining the complex habitats of the forest in ancient Maya prehistory. The design for the El Pilar Archaeological Reserve for Maya Flora and Fauna in Belize/Guatemala is based on ancient Maya settlement patterns and is aimed at developing a resource management model that conserves environmental diversity and preserves the irreplaceable cultural heritage of the region's ancient inhabitants and contemporary population. This vision has been adopted by an international group of professionals, is supported by the diplomatic community and is endorsed by the governments of Belize and Guatemala.

Scientific Research Base: Archaeological Research

Maya civilization was built on the wealth of their economic base: agriculture. Regional settlement distribution,

local community subsistence patterns and individual household organization of the ancient Maya provide material evidence of the evolution of sustainable economies in the tropics; these data underscore the complexity of the relationships between cultural systems and environment over time.

The Belize River Archaeological Settlement Survey (BRASS) was designed to compile regional settlement data, identify local community patterns and investigate household organization of the prehistoric central Maya lowlands. The research results present a picture of the ancient Maya economic landscape as a continuum of land-use strategies, from densely settled, intensively used uplands with public centers to dispersed and extensively used transitional zones loosely organized around resident elite to unsettled swamps. Evidence of this ancient land-use mosaic is mirrored in the region's contemporary botanical and zoological distributions, which are the result of 30 centuries of cultural selection.

The regional center of El Pilar stretches over an area of more than 40 hectares and was constructed over the course of 15 centuries, beginning in the Middle Preclassic before 500 BC. This important ancient Maya center is composed of several sectors unified by causeways, one of which crosses a contemporary political boundary, linking Belize and Guatemala. Exploration of the construction history of El Pilar details the development of Maya civilization, while survey of the residential sectors details the ancient economic landscape. Stabilizing and conserving the architecture and reconstructing examples of Maya houses within their forest gardens educate local, regional and international visitors in the values of archaeological inquiry. The revival of ancient traditions at El Pilar provides a context for a new perception of Maya prehistory that takes into account the complexity of the Maya forest along with its peoples past and present. This research provides a basis for a new appreciation of the relevance of the past in conceiving alternatives for the future of the Maya forest and people who live there today.

The ecological structure of the modern Maya forest is a result of the dynamic relationship in which humans have played an integral part. This relationship extends back more than 4 millennia to the initial agricultural pioneers of the Maya forest region. The large contiguous stands of forest are a testimony to the efficacy of ancient Maya practices. While the Classic Maya collapse affected the human populations, plants and animals survived only to be threatened with extinction today. Therein lies the ecological lesson that must be learned to build a sound basis for conservation in the future.

Agricultural Design and Technology: Implications for the Structure of the Maya Forest

Traditional production systems in the tropics worldwide focus on the household and are as diverse as the environment within which they developed. Systems, such as that of the Maya, evolved mimicking the forest structure a polycultivation system that minimizes instability, prevents degra-

ation and integrates both intensive and extensive labor techniques to maximize production. Heterogeneous and biodiverse, households' forest gardens constituted the strength of the Maya community in the past, as well as today, and rely on the traditional knowledge of local farming households. This knowledge is reflected in terms that describe a continuum of economic qualities of the forest and a long human coexistence with the forest. For example, Kanan K'ax describes a "well-cared for" forest, evoking a concept of stewardship; K'ax il kab refers to a forest with beehives; and Ka'kab K'ax, a forest with good agricultural soil. But today, villagers are rapidly abandoning time-proven methods in exchange for introduced technologies.

At El Pilar, development of a polycultivation design is a process based on a household plan that includes annuals and perennials interspersed with tree crops. This will provide an ongoing source of innovation for the community and foster resource conservation and community development that aligns with, rather than opposes, natural regenerative processes of the tropical forest. Through farmer participation and networking, shared experience and knowledge will extend beyond the boundaries of the reserve to help restore the local landscape to a state of greater biological diversity. Traditional polycultivation strategies involve an "industrious evolution" of skilled labor rather than an industrial revolution based on scarce capital. This was the foundation of the Maya civilization, and it provides an alternative for the future.

Community Involvement, Investment and Stewardship

To accomplish the goal of improving living standards and self-sufficiency, short-term needs of families must be incorporated into the long-term agenda of sustainability. Further, to thrive and meet conservation goals the local population must assume a stewardship role.

A cooperative association has been established with Amigos de El Pilar, a community-based organization promoting local participation in the reserve. Their goal is to develop community enterprises in tourism and agriculture that increase villagers' economic stake in the reserve. Through education and participation, links between the community and the reserve will strengthen local investments in conservation and develop stewardship responsibility. The leadership role they are assuming and self-determination they are gaining is key to the success of the El Pilar model.

Promoting Ecotourism at El Pilar

The tourism industry has increasingly focused on traditional communities and cultures as well as natural environmental wonders. Mesoamerica, and especially the Maya world, is now a flourishing travel destination for adventurers and ecotourists. Links between specialty travel firms in the international arena and regional travel services in the Maya area are essential to the development of this market, and new destinations contribute significantly to its appeal.

The El Pilar Program has set the stage for ecotourism with local guides and hotels, regional publications and international promotion in media and tour books. The program has worked through the village council and Amigos de El Pilar in education and training workshops, school lectures and tours and by encouraging participation in local archaeological research. The program has hosted events, such as the annual Fiesta El Pilar, that draw national and regional attention. Lectures and articles in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico have increased knowledge and appreciation of the site. Public relations information has been circulated to international guidebooks, has been reported in professional journals and is posted on the World Wide Web. Funding from international agencies, such as the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has also elevated the visibility of El Pilar on the global front, providing a springboard for development.

Foundation for the El Pilar Model

Park management and planning is fundamental to the reserve's future. Informed designs are based on assessments of ecological and cultural resources within the protected area. Further, identification of stakeholders, incorporation of public interests, articulation of the mission and a clear set of objectives for sustainable maintenance of the reserve is essential. Finally, the extent of conservation goals, issues of access and education and long-term funding needs must be developed. To address these requisites, the program organized the Mesa Redonda El Pilar in January 1997 (sponsored by the Ford Foundation) that brought together 28 professionals in research and development to initiate the master planning process. This plan is scheduled for publication this year by the World Monument Fund and US Man and the Biosphere Program.

El Pilar is a resource divided by a troubled border, and the management plan must take into account its location between Cayo, Belize, and El Petén, Guatemala. This unusual setting impacts every aspect of research and development activities at El Pilar. The archaeological reserve has been established in Belize and is part of the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya in Guatemala. The overall size of the civic center is presently unknown as the most comprehensive studies have thus far concentrated in Belize. Preliminary surveys of the Guatemalan section of El Pilar demonstrate its importance. Interviews in Guatemalan communities suggest that there is considerably more monumental architecture to be inventoried. Still, the El Pilar Archaeological Reserve has already made considerable progress toward its main objective: a program that promotes long-term environmental sustainability while seeking development that is locally informed and rooted in the ancient history of the Maya and their forest.

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