

ANNUAL REPORT: ETHNOHISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN MEXICO 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

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The 2015 team exploring a deep cave at the archaeological site of Guiengola

The 2015 season of the Ethnohistorical Archaeology in Mexico field program was our most ambitious yet, at least in terms of geographical coverage. We started from exploring archaeological and historical sites in Mexico City and its surrounding, followed by a few days in the shadow of the Great Pyramid of Cholula. We then took a long drive up and down from Cacaxtla to the Pacific Coast, to the once powerful Mixtec kingdom of Tututepec. The rest of our time on the coast was spent in Huatulco, one of the most important trade ports in the Late Postclassic and Early Colonial period and a vibrant hub to Pochutec, Zapotec, Mixtec, Chontal, and other ethnic groups. From there we continued to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Zapotec kingdom antagonistic to the Mixtecs, and explored the ruined fortress-temples of Guiengola. The third week was dedicated to the amazing sites, museums, and living cultures of the Valley of Oaxaca, and we even got a glimpse of the Guelaguetza festivity preparations. The last week went by fast in between site-seeing and codex-deciphering in the Mixteca Highlands, which we explored from our home bases at the Yanhuitlan convent and the Apoala scared valley.

While seemingly distant from each other in space and time, these sites and regions are all connected and played an important role in one long and interwoven story. By covering all this vast territory, the students were gradually exposed to the narrative of Mesoamerican literate cultures one region at a time, and at the end could reconstruct a cohesive sequence that started with the Zapotecs of Monte Alban, continued to the Aztecs of Mexico City/Tenochtitlan, and transformed through the encounter with the Spanish conquistadors. Our frequent visits to indigenous villages demonstrated how the story continues today, making southern Mexico one of the richest places on earth to study cultural continuity and change. The long winding drive

from the highlands to the coast, although in parts quite challenging, was particularly revealing as we experienced the different ecological zones and groups that interacted with each other since prehispanic times, including Mixtecs, Triqui, Amuzgo, and Chatinos. This clearly demonstrates the importance of looking at the bigger Mesoamerican picture in any cultural reconstruction, and why it is so crucial to leave the comfort of the classroom and experience Mexico first-hand.

This year we also enhanced the number of ethnographic exercises and group field assignments, just because our students in previous years could not get enough of them! The purpose of these exercises was not only to help students discover their own voice and research interests, but also teach them an interdisciplinary research method that draws from an integration of archaeological, historical, art historical, and ethnographic data sets. This type of thinking 'outside the disciplinary box' is unfortunately all too rare in today's academia, and our methodological introduction and amazingly diverse setting encouraged the students to break those artificial boundaries. Through participant observation and *actually talking* to people, this year's cohort picked fascinating and original research questions such as women use of sea shells in ancient and modern time; public displays of affection in Aztec and Mexican parks; and the cultural implications of Indio Beer labels, among others. As in previous years, we expect that most who participated in the program will keep an active interest in Mexico's past and present, and even carry some of these research initiatives to graduate and post-graduate careers.

As always, the project directors welcomed invitations for public talks and this year we presented at the 'Casa Tilcoatlé' organization in Huatulco on our recent archaeological and historical research in the region. Twice a week we shared photos and short blurbs from the field on our Facebook page. We also distributed copies of our published books, articles, and other information to our Mexican colleagues and village authorities with whom we collaborate.

We have learned much this year from the new places we have seen, new colleagues we have met, and the original work of our students. And in between excursions, hikes, and codex classes, the group also got to try their hand in traditional textile-weaving, pottery-making, and Mixtec ballgame-playing! To see more photos from the summer and get updates on the program and from southern Mexico, follow our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Ethnohistorical-Archaeology-in-Mexico-Program-933476936665520/timeline/?ref=hl>