

Outside the Hacienda Walls: The Archaeology of Plantation Peonage in Nineteenth-Century Yucatán. ALLAN MEYERS. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012. Pp. xi+219, maps, diagrams, notes, b&w photos, tables, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper. ISBN 978-0-8165-2995-7.

Meyer's book, representing some twenty years of fieldwork and research in the Yucatán Peninsula, is an excellent example of the power of interdisciplinary scholarship. This volume is primarily about Tabi, one of the many privately owned towns that dotted the Yucatán landscape between Mexico's independence in 1821 and the Mexican Revolution beginning in 1910. Although Meyers does discuss and describe in some detail the hacienda compound of Tabi, he is interested in the core buildings of Tabi (the owner's palace, the sugar mill, the church, and so forth) only to the extent that they shed light on the social conditions of households that lived in debt peonage outside the hacienda's walls. His goal is to reconstruct the plan of Tabi – its roads, households, parcel boundaries – and the social hierarchies of individuals and families revealed through the analytical methods of archaeology supplemented by oral histories and other historical records. In Meyer's opinion, the latter is elitist, constructed by literate actors (what Redfield would have called part of the great tradition), but archaeology is democratic, unearthing the material relics of daily life and thus allied to the little tradition of the masses.

The author introduces the reader to Tabi's layout via the one old surviving map of the estate that dates to 1817 and is found in Tulane's Latin American Library. That map is a rather stylized representation of the hacienda not drawn accurately to scale. Antonio Benavides Castillo, a Mayanist Archaeologist, carried out an archaeological investigation of Tabi in the 1980s. His survey was unscientific, but it did reveal a number of occupied blocks arranged in a grid pattern around a central plaza. Thus, the stage is set, and we can see that Meyers is taking on a huge project to reconstruct an accurate spatial plan of Tabi. Fate, however, also aided Meyers in his project. The Yucatán Caste War (1847-1855) was an extremely violent Maya revolt against high taxes and encroachment on their lands by Yucatecos (whites and mestizos residing in the Yucatán), and sugar haciendas like Tabi, located just south of the Puuc Ridge in north-central Yucatán, were a prime target. Although Tabi was damaged in the war, its main buildings were largely spared, possibly because the hacienda served as a headquarters for Jacinto Pat, one of the Mayan leaders in the revolt. The hacienda gradually recovered only to have the Constitutional Army of the Mexican Revolution in 1915 torch the cane fields and peon debt records and then order the inhabitants to leave forever. That man-made disaster helped preserve Tabi in a Pompeii-like state. Finally, the State of Yucatán converted Tabi and several thousand acres around it into an ecological reserve. When the State transferred control to the Yucatán Cultural Foundation, an NGO, archaeology was included in the heritage management, opening the door to a team of researchers from Texas A&M University to locate Tabi village structures.

Meyer's analysis of Tabi begins with the historical record, which provides a fairly rich account of the individual owners and the estate's changing areal extent and production statistics. He reviews the apparent origin of the estate in 1733 as a cattle ranch and its enlargement and transformation by the 1780s into a sugar hacienda whose labor requirements led to large-scale debt peonage. The hacienda probably peaked in size and resident laborers in the 1890s, but despite a modernization of production methods, debt peonage persisted. The historical record, unfortunately, is spotty with regard to the debt peons. Meyers finds the oral history records from court documents and the like sparse and contradictory. Censuses, taken irregularly, do not reveal the occupations of the peons. Although census data do indicate a good deal about the ages and family status of the villagers as well as the presence of imported Korean and Chinese laborers and significant ethnic intermarriage, the demographic record sheds no light on the spatial arrangement of Tabi village, either physically or culturally.

Where history stops, archaeology starts for Meyers. The meat of this book, what sets it apart, is his discussion of some twenty years of intermittent fieldwork, starting in 1996, to locate and delineate the roads, plazas, cemetery, property boundaries, house foundations, backyard patios of Tabi. After receiving permission to dig in some house sites, Meyers and his team used a transect method to establish equidistant sample points in selected residential blocks. Pits were then dug and the exhumed soil sifted for artifacts, mainly potsherds of earthenware, most coarse but some refined. The former were correlated with stockade-cottage plots of the peons and the latter were associated with masonry-house plots of salaried workers, principally *mayacoles* (field foremen). Other evidence of social distinctions included bone-species diversity and rim sherds (remnants of vessels), all more prevalent in the masonry-house plots, which were found adjacent to plazas or along main roads. To further refine his spatial model of the village plan, Meyers draws on the studies of rubbish by Hayden and Cannon, Thomas Killion, and Rani Alexander to test for soil phosphorous of organic residues of human activity. This field method facilitates the estimation of household size and the delineation of specialized areas within houselots (e.g., cooking areas and rubbish zones) where no visible surface traces remain.

Although rather specialized, this volume is highly readable and well illustrated. Students of geoarchaeology will get a good sense of how a field project in the Yucatán is developed, organized, and effectively executed over many years. They also will come to envision haciendas, at least those in late-colonial and nineteenth-century Yucatán, as integrated in a world economy of commodities and labor. Researchers considering an investigation of one of the many other haciendas in Mexico can benefit from a study of Meyer's methods for artifact and soil-chemistry sampling. If we want to better understand the full historical meaning of peonage, its diversity, and its subtle spatial expressions, this reviewer is persuaded that we need more archaeology of haciendas and their villages.

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