



# Towards a Labor History of Mexican Archeology: Exploring the Representation of Native Workers

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## Introduction

- Archeology is a field that studies human history through material remains, typically achieved through excavation with a team that includes researchers, excavation directors, site supervisors, and workers.
- Workers are often local to the archeological site that is being explored, and under the rule of white American male archeologists and site supervisors. While there are extensive historical records of archeologists who venture into foreign places to uncover history, there is a lack of knowledge regarding those who worked for them, despite them being natives to the archeological site, and despite them often maintaining the site under research and working with the site traditionally through generations.
- The purpose of this study is to discover what can be revealed about the experiences and perspectives of underrepresented workers in archeological labor during the 20th century.

## Methods

- In this study, I examine the workers of Ancient Mexican sites during the 20th century by noting specific interactions and communication between them, exploring the role of relationships, the obstacles faced by them, and the perspective of local people and of foreign workers on native people of the site through close readings of primary sources.
- I do close reading on two primary sources written by two American white women, wives of archeological site supervisors during the 1930s. One source is a diary, *Piedras Negras Diary*, written by Margaret Satterthwaite and another is a book, *Digging in Yucatan*, by Ann Axtell Morris.
- With these two works, I note findings on their experiences as women working in archeology, and I uncover what can be revealed about the native workers in Ancient Mayan sites in Mexico and Guatemala. I also focus on comparing both works regarding the way the author's experiences differ or relate, and in the ways other archeological workers are described or mentioned.

## Photographs from Piedras Negras Diary



Painting of Chichen Itza

## Discussion

So far, from both works, I have noted differences and similarities that involve the representation of workers that consider 1) their work ethic, 2) their culture and language 3) their knowledge, skillset, or intelligence 4) how they perceive the workers. For example, for difference in perception, workers are described in greater depth in the book *Digging in Yucatan*. Photographs of workers are followed with captions of their names or details on who they are as individuals such as “Tarsisio, our gardener, watch mender, barber, tinsmith, etc.” and “Remedios used to buy “love potions” (Morris 96). By contrast, such details are not revealed in *Piedras Negras Diary*. Most workers go unnamed except for one, and not much can be extracted about who they are or how they were like. The little or much revelation on the workers from two authors of similar background differ according to how connected the authors were to their field and how much they valued the culture of where they were excavating.

## Conclusion

Through my reading of both works, *Digging in Yucatan* and *Piedras Negras Diary*, I am currently still in the process of finding answers to the questions: To what extent did these underrepresented workers feel a connection to their work? What were their motives behind working in an archaeological project? What role did kinship play to be involved? Another trajectory for this project I would like to explore in the future is exploring the North American perspective and the presence of economic superiority and exploitation. I would also like to focus on more recent findings and the present state of workers in archeology who are native to the archeological sites as it would be more accessible to explore the role of kinship and family tradition in archeological labor.

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## Bibliography



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