

ADDRESSING MEXICO'S COMMITMENT TO MAKING ARCHAEOLOGY RELEVANT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

JULIA BENDÍMEZ
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA E HISTORIA
CENTRO INAH BAJA CALIFORNIA

We have always understood that it is imperative to develop and permit societies to participate in the conservation of our cultural heritage. Local grass-roots involvement with the preservation of archaeological resources is growing in Baja California. This is evident in organizations such as the CAREM and some organized communities. Up to now, our work in the field of archaeology has provided tangible educational values for the community and has strengthened the sense of belonging. It has heightened a sense of responsibility for the environment and helped to celebrate the cultural diversity and common heritage of the Californias.

The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) was established in 1939 to conserve, study, and diffuse information about our cultural heritage. This includes not only archaeological and historic sites and zones but also the memories in ethnographical records, language, dance, artistic expressions, folk art, and social organization as well. The presence of a principal organism of a national scope has been necessary to protect and promote the participation of the society in general to carry out this work.

The Federal Law of Archaeological, Artistic and Historic Zones and Monuments, established in 1972 by the Federal government, provides the legal basis for the cooperation of state and municipal governments and society in this endeavor. But the emphasis of this law is placed on archaeological and historic sites. One way we differ from the resource management structure in the United States is this: in Mexico, there is only one agency that oversees the conservation of our archaeological and historical heritage. So, for example, if someone were to find an archaeological site or object on their property or in their community, they are required to report the site to INAH's local authorities and under no circumstance do anything that would alter its context, such as excavating, which is strictly prohibited by law and could make the person liable to serious sanctions. An INAH Center (there is one located in each state of Mexico), when approached by a member of the community and told of the existence and location of a site, then sends an archaeologist to inspect and evaluate it. If it is found to be of an archaeological nature, the next thing is to record it and then contact the municipal authorities so that they are aware of its existence and do not give any permit to construct there until salvage archaeology is carried out. Of course, the owners of the land on which the site is located are notified as soon as its nature is confirmed.

In any case, all archaeological projects are to be carried out only by licensed archaeologists, who need to have their project approved by INAH's National Council of Archaeology. In all cases, the archaeologists submit their proposal and wait for written permission. They cannot start before that. Usually this process takes at least a month; in some cases where it is urgent, the go-ahead may take less time.

With permit in hand, the programmed fieldwork is done, and the final report must be submitted again to the Council, which analyzes its content and accepts it or may ask for additional information.

Prehistoric, protohistoric, and paleontological sites are overseen by INAH's Coordination of Archaeology, where we have scientific research, conservation, cataloging, technical and legal protection, laboratories, and maintenance of archaeological zones. Students and graduates of several academic institutions have participated in Baja California projects, including those from the

National School of Anthropology and History, the University of Veracruz, the Autonomous University of San Luis, the University of Zacatecas, and the University of Baja California, through programs of social service.

Now, in the case of having archaeological objects in our possession, an individual may not sell or, of course, destroy them; these are grave offenses. The artifact collection or objects must be registered in INAH's National Public Registry of Archaeological Zones and Monuments. This undoubtedly helps to keep track of important prehistoric objects made of a wide range of materials.

For conservation measures to be effective, archaeological resources must first be identified, and much of the work by investigators of INAH and other organizations has been directed towards developing an inventory of the resources we have. In Baja California since the year 2000, we have in operation our Geographic Information System that contains data from 1,272 archaeological sites, including 18 missions, 21 paleontological zones, and 16 prehistoric and historical burial sites. As I mentioned before, all of these are in the databases of the National Registry of Archaeological Zones and Monuments.

Up to now, our work in the field of archaeology has provided tangible educational values for the community and has strengthened the sense of belonging. It has heightened a sense of responsibility for the environment and has helped to celebrate the cultural diversity and shared heritage of the Californias.

Local grass-root involvement with the preservation of archaeological resources is imperative in their conservation. These grass-roots efforts help INAH to educate the public, to see that sites are not destroyed, and to communicate to INAH authorities any activity that puts a site in danger, such as vandalism. One example is that of the Sierra de San Francisco, rich in rock art sites with the Great Mural style. Luz María Gutiérrez established a management plan beginning in the 1990s, with a strategy that includes local ranchers who are INAH-trained by means of workshops. They would take tours of visitors on mule trips to see the paintings in the canyons of the majestic Sierra de San Francisco. The visits are only conducted by authorized guides; the groups must be no larger than 25, and the same camp sites are always used. Noteworthy is the fact that in the Sierra de San Francisco there are at least 320 sites recorded by INAH out of 1,530 in total for Baja California Sur.

Another successful program oriented to protect archaeological sites is that carried out by Carlos Mandujano with ranchers of the Sierra de la Giganta in Baja California Sur. This vast region is far from the eyes of INAH, so a management plan has been implemented whereby ranchers who live close to sites are recognized by INAH as honorary "site keepers." As in the case of the Sierra de San Francisco, they benefit directly from the tours they lead, while at the same time they make sure that the sites are preserved.

A Historic Corridor strategy called Camino Real Misionero de las Californias (CAREM) was founded in 1996 at the initiative of INAH's Baja California Center, to articulate a series of partnerships with other Federal agencies, local government, universities, and grass-roots organizations. Through this organization, a community museum was founded in Tecate to create awareness of prehistoric sites in Kumiai territory and concerning their culture in modern times. Another area in which CAREM has been of great use has to do with the establishment of citizen groups at each mission site to provide for its care and conservation.

From 2009 up till recently, INAH and the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) have worked together on a program that benefits communities with scarce resources. It is known as a Temporary Employment Program, or PET. In the case of our state, we have worked since 2005 with several communities on archaeological and historical sites. This work has included excavations, conservation measures on paleontological specimens, signage and visitor walkways, and community museums, as well as maintenance of Dominican mission ruins. The work of Antonio Porcayo and Andrea Guía is noteworthy in this respect.

Working hand in hand with native communities such as the Paipai from Santa Catarina and the Kumiai from San Antonio Necua and San José de la Zorra through the projects of Enah Montserrat Fonseca and Daniela Leyva, the conservation of archaeological sites in and around native Baja Californian Indian communities has been secured to a certain degree.

Archaeological, anthropological, and historical conferences in Baja California have provided an important channel for communication among researchers interested in Baja California's prehistory and between them and other audiences. Of particular note is "Balances y Perspectivas," a symposium on the anthropology and history of the peninsula organized by INAH's Center in Baja California. The symposium has been held annually since 2000 and has brought together specialists in the region from Mexico, the United States, and Canada. It is important to note that these meetings create an atmosphere where specialists exchange and reflect on different topics related to the anthropology and history of Baja California, and through their research they find strategies for the conservation of natural and cultural resources of our region.

A few final notes on the significance of the archaeological work we are trying to do. In Mexico, archaeology plays an important part in our collective memory of our past and in our sense of national and local identity. Friendly professional collaboration between Mexican and U.S. archaeologists is valuable at a time when border issues are hotly contested. And the need for collaboration along the border is evident. One specific example is related to the construction of the border fence between Baja California and Arizona. In this case, we never worked with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to protect sites that are now divided by the metallic wall. We should look into this problematic situation and learn more about the sites affected. On a more positive note, INAH is currently working with U.S. archaeologists interested in prehistoric Lake Cahuilla, which straddles the border, to pool our research data, expertise, and management strategies more effectively.