

# Long-Term Collaborative Research with Lacandon Maya at Mensäbäk, Chiapas, Mexico

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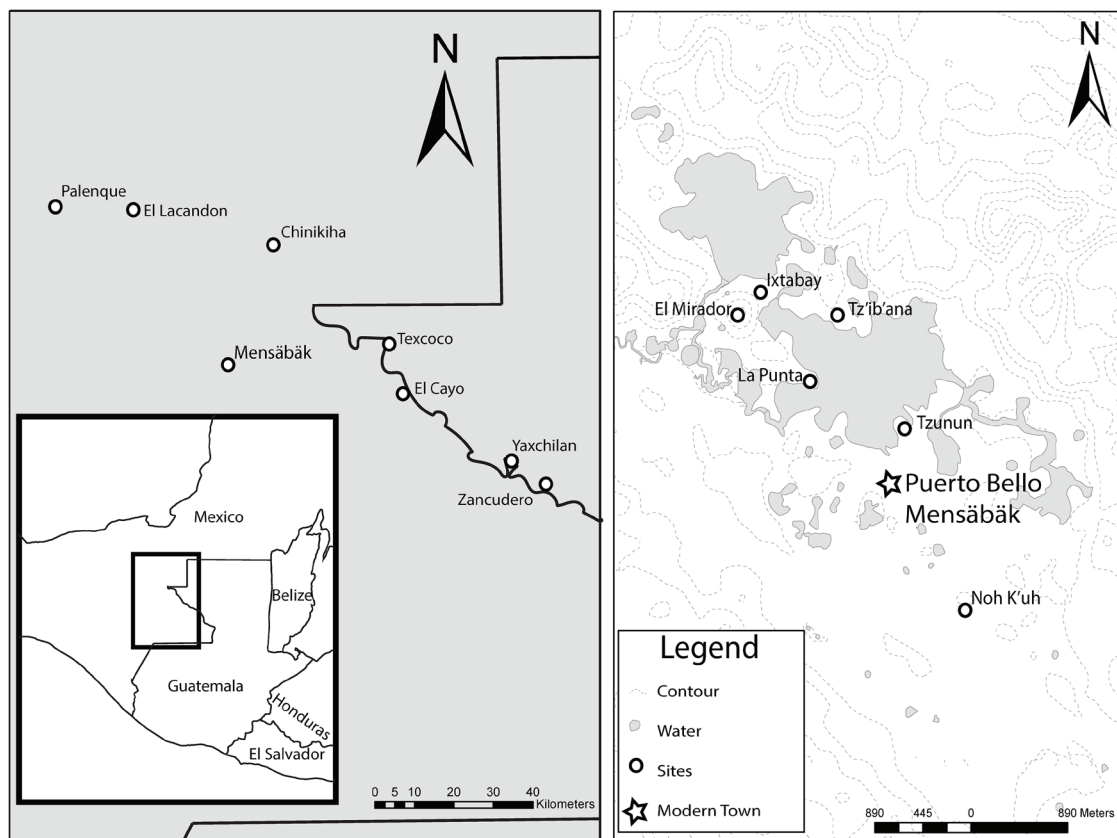
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*The Mensäbäk Archaeological Project collaborates with a local Lacandon community in Chiapas, Mexico, to investigate Maya culture over a long period. Lacandon Maya and researchers plan and carry out the project together, focusing on ancient cultural practices, contemporary Lacandon lives, and community development. Archaeologists work and exchange information with Lacandon community members to learn more about Maya ruins, ritual landscapes, and rock art. Ethnographers collaborate with Lacandon people to acquire insights on their culture and converse with them about the past. An important aspect of the project is the commitment to community goals and needs through long-term interaction. Project members live in the community, providing the opportunity for close collaboration. Results of the project include insights into the occupations of the region over the last two millennia, culturally-nuanced interpretations of artifacts and shrines, and community development, such as forest surveys, economic development, and potable water.*

*Key words: Collaboration, Lacandon Maya, Community, Archaeology, Anthropology*





**Figure 1.** Location of Mensäbäk, Chiapas, Mexico, near known Maya sites and some archaeological sites at the lakes (courtesy of Santiago Juarez).

For over fifteen years, the Mensäbäk Archaeological Project (MAP) has relied on the informed consent of Lacandon Maya at Mensäbäk (also Puerto Bello Metzabok) and built collaborating relationships between researchers and community members. We join colleagues in creating collaborations with local communities to complete academic and public projects (Ardren 2002; Atalay 2012; Colwell 2017; McAnany et al. 2015; Sandlin and Bey 2006). Our project members consulted the community on project plans since the beginning and we have reached our goals by working and living together over the long term (McGee 2002). This ongoing interaction with Lacandon families and community officials has allowed us to mold our investigations and public outreach projects at Mensäbäk.

Mensäbäk, Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 1), is a national protected area and home to about 100 northern Lacandon Maya. Mensäbäk contains several lakes, the two largest being Tzibaná (also Tz'ib'ana) and Mensäbäk, and is dominated by the Mirador Mountain (Figure 2). We investigate Protohistoric (ca. 1400 – 1700 C.E.) and Late Preclassic (ca. 300 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.) sites found

in the area. Mensäbäk is an ideal place to collaborate with Lacandon Maya to learn about Maya culture and give back to an indigenous community. We work with the Mensäbäk community to get permission for research, ask their input in planning the investigations, and share resources and insights. The people of Mensäbäk have always expressed great interest in collaborating. They allow us to live in the community and they extend permission to do research with them. The Lacandon provide us with their perspectives on the sites and the past, in addition to deciding with us which sites to excavate. At the same time, we discuss our findings with them, provide project information, and address community concerns.

This article discusses our collaboration with the Mensäbäk Lacandon community. We have passed much time together, which has facilitated partnerships spanning several years to decades. Time has deepened our knowledge of our work as well as the lives of Lacandon collaborators in Mensäbäk. Most of what we have learned comes from living in the community on a daily basis for long periods. We have shared our insights with Lacandon and Tzeltal Maya residents while sitting in house gardens, participating in family dinners, during excavations, and walking through forests rather than formal, short-term interviews. Besides living in the community and engaging with people on a day-to-day basis, archaeologists also work and live with ethnographers to enhance collaborations and understandings with Lacandon Maya. Here we discuss our collective experiences in addition to providing individual highlights on living with, learning from, and sharing with our Lacandon collaborators (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Mirador Mountain (*Chak aktuun*) with its red-stained, east cliff (courtesy of Sebastián Salgado-Flores).

## The Mensäbäk Archaeological Project and Community Collaboration

The genesis of the project can be traced to development work by Sánchez and Hollingshead where they established relationships with community members as directors of the Na Bolom cultural center, which is dedicating to helping and learning about Lacandon communities (Figure 4). Mensäbäk was known for rock paintings and ossuaries, but no archaeological sites had been investigated. Although cultural anthropologists had lived in Mensäbäk, no one knew about the vibrant Protohistoric Maya settlements at the lake (depicted on the paper's cover illustration), in addition to the large and unique Preclassic sites there. In 2003, community members Rafael Solórzano and Mincho Valenzuela, together with Sánchez (2005) and Hollingshead, traveled in a canoe across the lake to visit a plaza surrounded by structures at the site of Tzibaná. The following year with members of the Jaguar Speleological Group, Sánchez and Hollingshead made a rough map of the site and spent a night talking with Enrique and Mincho Valenzuela, respected community members, about what we had seen and what an archaeology project might mean for the community. Subsequently, Palka, who excavated Lacandon sites in Peten, Guatemala (Palka 2005a), brought the investigators together, and he and Sánchez became the project directors with Hollingshead, McGee, Juarez, Lozada, and Hernandez as co-directors. Balsanelli, who has done ethnographies at Mensäbäk, now collaborates with us, and Salgado continues his dissertation work on ancient forest ecology. Other archaeologists, ethnographers, physical anthropologists, and students participate in the project.

Lacandon people in Mensäbäk have a significant interest in a collaborative project focused on archaeology and anthropology. They knew of ruins and cave shrines around the lakes but wanted to



**Figure 3.** Palka testing a Lacandon bow with a collaborator (courtesy of Joel Palka).



**Figure 4.** Sánchez and a collaborator examine plants at Mensäbäk (courtesy of Fabiola Sánchez).

know who had lived there and when, and why there were many human bones found in cave shrines. Many Lacandon also expressed a desire for more people to visit the lake to learn about the reserve and bring in resources. Locals wanted research, tourism, and development projects at Mensäbäk and felt that we could help. Some Lacandon also stated that they live in one of the most beautiful areas in Mexico and that people would want to visit. The mountains, caves, and lakes have made Mensäbäk an important ritual landscape for Maya people. We wanted to know about the importance of this area to the Lacandon and their perspectives on the archaeological sites. We consulted with the community while we designed the project. The directors and community members decided to investigate the large archaeological sites and rock art shrines first. Thus, the project was launched with colleagues, community members, and students from Mexico and the U.S.

A key value guiding our work is community participation, and we have forged a collaborative relationship with local Lacandon Maya. We also collaborate with Tzeltal Maya at Mensäbäk who have intermarried with Lacandon families. Members of the Maya community generously share cultural knowledge and we try to reciprocate. Importantly, the project team strives to contribute to community well-being. We prioritize transparent, respectful and continuous communication with our host community. The project provides salaries for community members, both men and women, who work on the excavations and in the lab. We also help with education, health care, and the arts, including photography (Figure 5). The non-profit organization Xanvil, directed by Sánchez and Hollingshead, has secured financing for sustainable development projects that take a gendered perspective. Projects include supporting the work of community artisans and marketing community products from Lacandon women through fair trade networks. Project members have also secured funding for specific community infrastructure and construction needs, such as potable water.



**Figure 5.** Photograph of boa constrictor climbing trees to hunt (courtesy of Rafael Solórzano).

### **Landscape Archaeology and Lacandon Culture at Mensäbäk**

One substantial collaboration consists of the examination of ritual landscapes. Lacandon Maya take visitors to significant landscape features around the lakes and discuss histories and mythologies related to these places (Palka and Sánchez 2012). The most prominent landmark is Mirador Mountain (see Figure 2), or *Chak Aktuun* (Red Cave/Hollow Stone), which dominates the lakeshore and has a red cliff on its east side. Many caves are found in the mountain, including a large vertical one on the summit. Archaeological evidence indicates that Mirador Mountain was an important ritual landscape for Maya people. Maya believe such mountains contain water, food, souls, and things people need (Pitarch 2010; Vogt 1993). Lacandon people state that this mountain was split by a rock or star hurled by the deity Mensäbäk, who is associated with rain and the land of the dead. We demonstrated to the community that Late Preclassic Maya focused rituals at a major pilgrimage shrine on this mountain (Palka 2014).

Members of the Lacandon community know that past Maya concentrated their rites in caves and cliffs. They have retained cultural knowledge regarding landscapes and ritual that helps inform the past. Visitors go to these sites with Lacandon to learn about how their guide's family members also used these places for ceremonies, including curing and agricultural rites. Another important place for the Lacandon is the Tzibaná cliff, which contains many rock paintings, including hand prints, animals, human figures, and painted hieroglyphs. Lacandon state that this is the house of Ts'ibajnah, the god of the house of painted writing, showing possible connections to past beliefs

regarding the cliff. Lacandon also believe that souls of dead people travel through the Tzibaná cliff to reside in the house of Mensäbäk, which is a cliff with rock art to the north. Mensäbäk is a Lacandon god of rain, keeper of dead souls, and one of the central deities at the lakes. Human bones rest on the surface of Mensäbäk's shrine and our investigations informed the community that men, women, and children were interred there during Protohistoric times. Locals have interesting cultural interpretations of the bones collected at this and other shrines: they are the bones of people who passed through the cliff to live with Mensäbäk, the bones of gods who went to the spiritual realm, or the remains of people who died during epidemics. Lacandon believe that a design on the cliff depicts Mensäbäk, who is associated with clouds, rain, the lakes, and the land of the dead. The design resembles the google-eyed Tlaloc, the Mesoamerican god of storms, conflict, and the realm of the dead, which shows the Lacandon have information about archaeological sites (Palka 2005b).

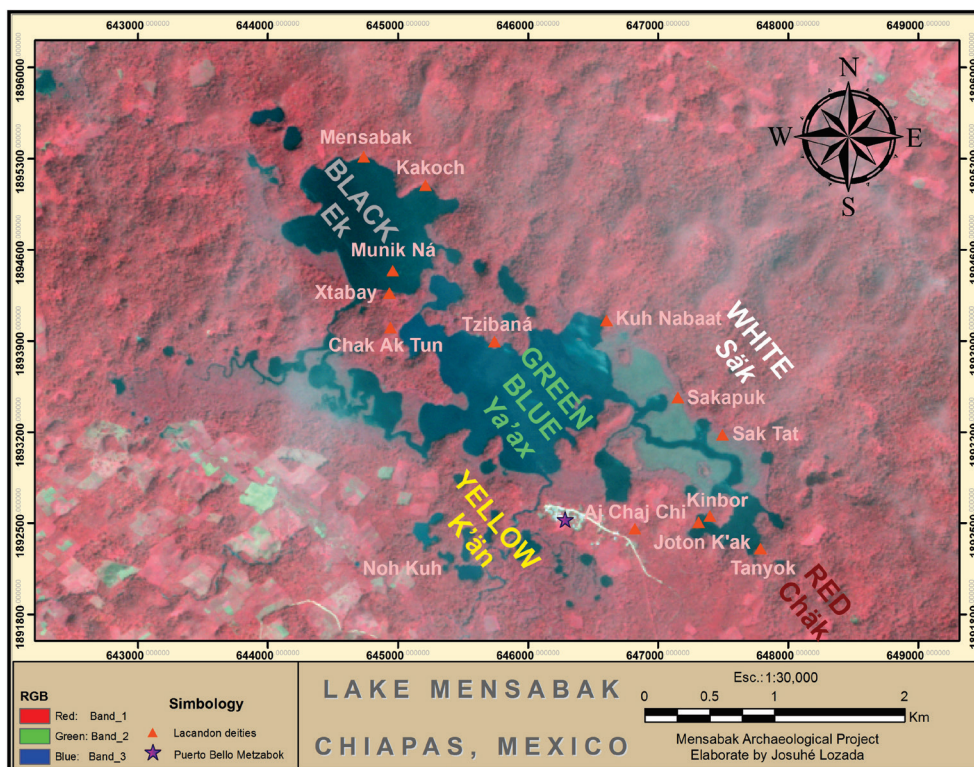
We have undertaken investigations of rock art at Mensäbäk (Lozada 2017a, 2017b; Palka 2005b; Sánchez 2005) where we identified diverse designs, including representations of deities associated with water, abstract symbols, anthropomorphic figures, zoomorphs, and hand prints. Project members studying the hand prints drew and measured the hands of men, women, and adolescents in the community, which were compared to the hand prints on cliffs. This methodology follows the statistical studies of modern handprints and handprints in rock art to ascertain the sex and ages (including children's prints) of their authors (Nelson et al. 2017). The results indicate that, during the Protohistoric Period, men, women, and children created these handprints on the cliff faces, likely during rituals. Community members took interest in these findings because many Lacandon felt that the prints were made by male ancestors or deities.



Recording oral histories and mythologies has enriched our fieldwork and knowledge of Lacandon culture and rock art at Mensäbäk. We are fortunate that Lacandon Maya share their insights with us. Speaking with older people at Mensäbäk has provided important information regarding the past. The qualitative data compiled by Lozada and community members suggest that rock art at Mensäbäk presents symbolism and worldview, where each direction in the Maya universe is associated with a color and a deity (Figure 6).

Beliefs regarding the ritual rock art sites present evidence for color symbolism associated with the cardinal points. The eastern direction situated at the rock art panel of *Jo'ton K'ak* can be associated with the god *K'ak* or the Lord of Fire and Hunting. East is associated with the color red or *chäk* in Lacandon Maya culture. Lacandon Maya state that *chäk* or red is the color of the east, dawn, and where the sun is born, like the east face of Mirador Mountain. In this case, fire, heat, and blood can be linked to the east along with concepts of the creation of life and courage (Vargas 1998:103). The center, according to the colors of Maya cosmogony, corresponds to the color *Ya'ax*, a term meaning green and blue. Green is represented by the color of the lake. *Ya'ax* is also the blue color of the sky and the center represents the zenith. Green is linked to the equinoxes, the central path of the sun, and the growth of life forces (Vargas 1998:106). The northern direction towards the cave is where the god *Sakapuk* lives and where Lacandon petition for cures for sick people. Lacandon Maya relate white to death, aging, dryness, sadness, and fear. Lacandon stories mention that white is associated with death and indicates the destruction of the world. When this moment occurs, they say that





**Figure 6.** Lacandon Maya directional color symbolism and ritual landscapes at Mensabäk (courtesy of Josuhé Lozada).

celestial jaguars will be released to eat people. These jaguars are called *säkapuk*, described as white jaguars, although they sometimes translate the term as ‘white destructor’ (Vargas 1998). The cliff shrine to *Sak Tat*, another deity associated with white and the underworld, is found nearby and it has many human bones. White is *säk* and the color of the northern direction where the sun goes during the summer solstice. Black, *ek*, is the color of the west where the sun enters the world of shadows and the night.

The western direction marks the site of the Mensabäk rock art panel represented by the god *Mensabäk*, the deity associated with the land of the dead that makes black gunpowder and dark clouds. *K’an*, or yellow, is the color of the annual death of vegetation when the sun dies and is reborn during the winter solstice. Yellow is the associated color of the south and is linked with dryness (perhaps dry, yellow corn), happiness, and youth. This direction and color are related to people’s skin, flesh, muscle, and corn (Vargas 1998:105). It may be because of this symbolism and favored place in the cosmogram that the Lacandon decided to establish their settlement and corn fields south of the lakes. The Lacandon call this southern region *Noh K’uh*, which is the name of a deity associated with agricultural fields and perhaps yellow maize.

## Collaborative Remote Sensing at Mensäbäk

Project investigators and community members wanted to map the reserve, which encompasses 3368.35 ha. We determined that aerial mapping would be the most effective way for an area this size, and Hernandez approached the National Center for Airborne Laser Mapping at the University of Houston (NCALM) about conducting an aerial LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) survey (see Chase et al. 2016; Fernandez-Diaz et al. 2014; Garrison et al. 2019). To initiate the LiDAR project, we decided the first step was to continue our dialogue with the community on how the remote sensing could benefit the Lacandon (e.g., Atalay 2012; McAnany et al. 2015).

Our collaborative methodology drew inspiration from McAnany et al.'s (2015) community-based mapping in Guatemala. They highlight that “[c]onversations about archaeological findings and their importance or relevance, especially to descendant communities, has not been a high priority among archaeologists” (McAnany et al. 2015:9). This is a critical issue because indigenous activism asserts that marginalized descendants care about how their heritage is utilized (Breglia 2006; Colwell 2017). Consequently, we presented a mapping plan at a community gathering where Palka and Hernandez discussed aerial LiDAR. The meeting was held in the community structure and we showed slides to discuss past field seasons and plans for LiDAR (Figure 7). The use of illustrations was important because many people in the community can not read, and using imagery was stressed by local collaborators who warned that a lot of text could alienate community members.



**Figure 7.** Community meeting to discuss LiDAR mapping and research at Mensäbäk (courtesy of Chris Hernandez).

The meeting involved explanations of LiDAR technology and how it is used on an airplane. Next, we explained why this data collection could be useful for creating topographic, archaeological, and forestry maps for the community and researchers. We discussed how the data would be managed, including the Mexican federal requirements for data sharing. We covered a range of topics, including consideration of how LiDAR could benefit everyone. After the discussion in Spanish and Lacandon Mayan, we asked locals for permission to map the reserve with LiDAR. Many Lacandon expressed that they saw benefits for researchers, as well as their community. A phrase we heard was “it would be nice to have a record of the community”. Many community members saw the LiDAR as a snapshot of the protected area that could be passed to future generations. Many families also anticipated economic benefits, including from tourism.

The processing of the LiDAR data is ongoing, and plans include an engagement with locals in geospatial analysis. We want to provide training for locals in GIS software and the analysis of digital geospatial information. In particular, Armando and Chankin Valenzuela have expressed interest in the LiDAR data to carry out agricultural and forestry research. They have experience in mapping and interpreting spatial information from working with Hernandez at the site of Tzunun. Many Lacandon are concerned with the preservation of the biosphere reserve. Maps of the community will allow people to monitor local flora and expand their investigations. Their work can provide inspiration for other Lacandon to develop skills in geospatial analysis for local benefits.

### **Community Archaeology and Information Exchange**

Archaeologists frequently undertake research according to their interests rather than those of Maya communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). In addressing this issue, project members have spent time living in the community before excavations began, talking to community



**Figure 8.** Lacandon women excavators and supervisors at Noh K’uh, Mensäbäk (courtesy of Santiago Juarez).

members to understand how they view the ruins and the past, and asking them what questions they have about their ancestors. Salgado-Flores identified an interest in ancient Maya environmental management among younger Lacandon. He subsequently tailored his doctoral thesis to examine firewood selection in the Late Postclassic period and the present. To initiate this investigation, he collaborated with Armando Valenzuela who studied in a university forestry program. Together they conducted a tree species survey at an abandoned Lacandon homestead. They continue to plan tree surveys and charcoal identification with the community to learn about firewood consumption over time.

In our project, we have worked with Lacandon, Tzeltal Maya, and colleagues and students from Mexico and the U.S. in excavations at Mensäbäk. Sustained work has been undertaken at sites prioritized by the Lacandon and us with Juarez and Salgado-Flores at Noh K'uh, Sánchez, Hernández, and Lozada at Tzibaná, Palka at Mirador Mountain, and Hernandez at Tzunun (see Figure 1). Noh K'uh is located about 2 km south of the community (Juarez, Salgado-Flores, and Hernandez 2019). At nearly 200 ha, Noh K'uh was a moderately sized center during the Late Preclassic period (400 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.). Over 300 mounds are located on low hills within a floodplain, with only 187 mounds currently recorded. Survey and excavations organized by Juarez indicate that the site's most recent phase dates between 395 and 1 B.C.E. Noh K'uh's occupation zones overlap with Lacandon fields, due to the flat surfaces of the ancient constructions.

Recent findings by Juarez and community collaborators indicate that many of these Preclassic structures have earthen fill, and stone masonry was limited to the monumental core. Community members recognized the monumental structures at Noh K'uh's core as evidence of ancient beings, but the smaller mounds were too ambiguous to decipher. Most community members were initially unsure about how the subtle features of Noh K'uh related to the temples. Before excavation, Lacandon collaborators described the mounds as remnants of supernatural beings. Interpretations vary, but residents described them as homes of the gods or their resting places. Given the Maya tradition of burying ancestors within households, both interpretations are applicable. Furthermore, community members recounted stories about their fathers digging into mounds, possibly at Noh K'uh. These stories often began with descriptions of dreams, where non-humans spoke to men to call them to dig into a certain mound. The entities behind these calls ranged between benevolent and malevolent, but they all inspired fear. Some men described how they accompanied their fathers in the past in the excavations of mounds. When they encountered bones, they universally described a sense of dread and the digging as a transgression against a powerful being. Excavators refilled the mounds and made their best attempt to replace the earth and stone.

Current archaeological investigation of Noh K'uh is altering how the community views the site. Many excavations have been conducted and supervised by Lacandon men and women (Figure 8). Locals now see the mounds as something worth protecting, but were unsure about their origins and sought to learn about their age and general function. Using personal experience, the Lacandon Maya visualize these mounds as ancient homes. Most Lacandon excavators are eager to learn archaeological methods to understand the past. During excavations, community members identified ancient objects because many people had seen similar tools and materials within their lifetime.





**Figure 9.** Contemporary Lacandon stone and earth house platform at Mensäbäk (courtesy of Santiago Juarez).

Pottery, stone projectile points, *manos*, and *metates* are not foreign to the Lacandon, as several collaborators described their everyday use. Thus, community members were able to interpret evidence of domestic life as it was excavated. The Lacandon also recognized construction techniques to make mounds as similar methods are employed today (Figures 9 and 10). Such knowledge and expertise also benefit archaeologists who now have the opportunity to communicate with people who have seen similar building techniques and material culture.

The collaboration between archaeologists and the community is a process, and the effects of this cooperative relationship are ever changing. First, community members now discuss how the mounds are manifestations of ancient activity. Second, archaeology has altered the local workplace by allowing field assistants to cite their experience and demonstrate their ability to create and supervise their own businesses. Both women and younger Lacandon discuss their experiences of filling field forms, processing data with computers, and serving in supervisory positions as evidence that they are capable of advanced work in different fields. Finally, the interactions with the community provide archaeologists with first-hand experience in Maya traditions, which helps bridge the cultural divide between researchers and the local population.

### **Long-Term Ethnographies and Lacandon Culture**

Ethnographic research with the community examines Lacandon lives, worldview, concepts of ‘person’ (*winik*), archaeological artifacts, and ritual landscapes since the first collaborations between the directors, McGee, and Lacandon people. Recently, Balsanelli has focused on Lacandon souls, bodies, the cosmos, and their perceptions of animals, plants, landscape features, and persons

(Balsanelli 2019a; see also Descola 2012; Latour 2007; Viveiros de Castro 2010). Balsanelli has talked to the Lacandon about what we call ‘objects’ in their ontology, in addition to understanding their cosmology by living day-to-day in their homes for long periods. Lacandon people have supported Balsanelli’s and McGee’s, and others’ presence in the community by allowing them to stay in their homes, participate in domestic activities, and visit fields and forests together with family (Balsanelli 2019a; McGee 2002). The Lacandon community has treated project members as friends and many of us like an extended family. The immersion into their culture resulted in Balsanelli and McGee’s learning about their lives through informal conversations in Lacandon (*jach t’an*) and not in interviews in Spanish where Lacandon concepts cannot be described. In this manner, insights on Lacandon lifeways has come from women at home, children in the village, and men in the forest and milpas in ways that Lacandon people live them. As a female ethnographer, Balsanelli has spoken to Lacandon women about lesser-known topics, including the preparations of ritual meals and associated taboos, pregnancy and menstruation, female gods, and how to sing to children’s souls to help cure them (Figure 11). McGee has acquired a deep understanding of Lacandon rituals, mythologies, histories, changing economics, and social organization after decades of collaboration.

In the analysis of things and souls, Balsanelli has examined artifacts made by humans, which according to the Lacandon are animate subjects with souls that, like people, are born, grow, get old, and die. These subjects have language and complex emotions and they interact with similar animate subjects/objects. We can, therefore, reexamine Lacandon effigy incense burners (*u lak’il*



**Figure 10.** Reconstruction of an ancient Maya house platform and household at Noh K'uh, Mensäbäk, with the peak of the Mirador Mountain in the background (courtesy of Santiago Juarez).



**Figure 11.** Lacandon woman making tortillas in a kitchen at Najá, Chiapas, Mexico (courtesy of Alice Balsanelli).

*k'uj*), the incense burner renewal rite (Tozzer 1907), and ritual copal and rubber figurines (*tu lis k'ik*; McGee 1984). Lacandon people consider these things as animate beings parallel to humans (Cuevas 2007; Marion 1994). The incense burners' lives are over when they are substituted for new ones; the old ones are ritually killed and the new ones animated during ritual (Marion 1994; Tozzer 1907). As a person must be buried to transition to the next realm, people place the dead incense burners inside caves. Since Maya caves serve as entrances to the underworld, it is logical that the caves and niches in cliff bases at Nahá and Mensábäk are final resting or burial places of these once living things.

In this vein, project members have studied landscape features in Mensábäk, visiting caves in the forest and near the lakes, and talking to Lacandon people about their religious significance (Figure 12). McGee and Balsanelli have accompanied people on visits to discuss the landscape with Lacandon Maya in their language. Caves, like other Lacandon subjects, are considered beings with life, as are the rocks inside (Balsanelli 2019b). These animate forces protect the offerings in the cave and punish anyone who does not behave properly in these significant places. Furthermore, owners (*winkil*), or lords (*yumil*), reside in caves and lakes and protect them (Thompson 2006). These entities can extract souls from persons acting inappropriately, such as letting women into sacred places, visiting a cave after contact with a pregnant woman, or throwing stones and shouting in caves. The main duty of the owners is to protect the human remains, incense burners, and things of ritual use in these places. Interestingly, older collaborators do not consider old bones and

things in these places as human creations, but as ‘bones of the gods’ (*u baker k’uj*) or the ‘work of gods’ (*u meyaj k’uj*). By extension, what we view as natural stone (*tunich*) and ruins (*u yatoch k’uj*; ‘the house of gods’) at Mensäbäk, the Lacandon define as homes of spiritual beings. Ancient Maya did not distinguish between natural and cultural things (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006); the Lacandon follow a similar ontology since rocks contain spiritual powers: people see rocks, but gods see cities and palaces (Boremansé 1998). Hence, natural and constructed places made by gods and humans at Mensäbäk are juxtaposed for the Lacandon, who make no distinctions between them.

### **Conclusions: Living and Working with Lacandon at Mensäbäk**

Project members have developed close ties to the community and we have witnessed children grow into adults, graduate from high school, enter university, and form families of their own. With regret, we have witnessed the passing of community elders and knowledge holders. The relationships that have been established between members of the Lacandon community and the MAP team go beyond employment and project cooperation to one of close friendship. Each field season brings new opportunities to exchange information. Traditional knowledge is often closely guarded information that is not shared lightly. Earning trust and confidence takes many years of relationship building, sharing and continually seeking informed consent. There is always more to learn in each conversation, which are punctuated with interesting insights on the world, updates on life events, and a sense of humor.

When new researchers join the MAP team, an important step is the introduction to community



**Figure 12.** Young Lacandon men in a dugout canoe in Lake Najá (courtesy of Alice Balsanelli).



members. The project members share knowledge, facilitate conversations, and provide continuity for the community. For example, last year one of the lakes dried up; therefore, community members have been speaking to us about acquiring information on droughts, climate change, and water resources, which we readily provide. Recent years have also brought new channels of communication that have allowed us to stay in touch and exchange information. Before, community members would travel hours to Palenque to make a phone call. Now, a paved road is traversed in under two hours and many people are connected to the world through satellite internet available in the village.

The project established a laboratory and storage facilities belonging to the community, utilizes a community ecotourism facility as its base of operations, and is supporting the development of a community museum. Community members have become specialists in survey and excavation and in supporting the work of students and researchers. Currently they are helping make things like traditional pottery (as depicted in the paper's *marginaliae*), bows and arrows, cigars, bark beaters, and ceramic incense burners for study and display in the community museum and future culture center (Palka 2020). The Lacandon community is the keyholder of the material culture from excavations and they are proud and protective of their ancestral legacy. After years of close cooperation, living at Mensäbäk, and having the community actively engaged with the MAP team, we remain grateful that they continuously welcome us as we move our collaborations forward.

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