

Chapter 2

On the Threats and Risks to the Archaeological Remains at Chicolá and the Project's Response During the 2004 Season

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The first field season in 2003 revealed to PACH a number of necessities and desirable changes that had to be implemented for the protection of the archaeological relics. The efforts continued during the 2004 season, while simultaneously, new problems and dangers became apparent. The most obvious threat was the construction of houses placed at the base of the prehispanic structures, with the probable destruction of archaeological urban contexts and most certainly, portions of ancient buildings. To emphasize the pressing need to protect the cultural relics, PACH, through the IDAEH, appealed to the Guatemalan government, and with the data derived from the survey and mapping accomplished by the Project, the declaration of the site as a part of the nation's cultural patrimony was petitioned. Other less urgent problems and errands will be described below. The conversations held by the Project Director with Lcda. Yvonne Putzeys Gonzáles, from the Department of Prehispanic Monuments, led to the decision that the IDAEH and the Project developed jointly a concrete plan of alternatives for sustainable growth and for preservation in the modern village of Chicolá. Permanent contacts with local and national authorities will give way to more promising alternatives; Don Diego Macario Coc, municipal mayor of San Pablo Jopopilas, with jurisdiction over Chicolá, has continued to meet with the members of the PACH team and has expressed his will to cooperate in any possible way.

Briefly, the problems derive from the economic situation created by the models of the conquest, of the colony and the post-colony, and recently of globalization, characterized by huge agro-exporter rural establishments that maintain people in utter poverty facing obstacles of a structural and infrastructural nature, in the pursuit of their daily survival. This relationship of economic dependence with production characteristics of raw materials has been historically exacerbated by Guatemalan politicians, interested in preserving the *status quo*. The Project Director has always maintained that scientific investigation cannot be alienated from issues related to the well-being of the local population. The help of the people for protecting the archaeological remains is necessary; therefore, we must explain to them not only why the investigation is important in terms of world patrimony, but also how the studies will produce specific and concrete advantages for them while simultaneously knowledge is gained. The Project hires many people from the community, and therefore there is a concern for the health of its members. We, as Project members and in spite of our status of scholars, lack abundant cultural, ethnographic and historical information on Chicolá and its environment; that is why we encourage an exchange of knowledge, notions and values with the people of Chicolá. Clearly, the impact of this all, is to find a way so that the Project does not remain as the sole judge of the value of history and knowledge, as our aspiration consists in integrating our work with the lives of local people for the good of a model of sustainable growth and for the preservation of the cultural and biological diversity in the region.

The absence of basic services such as the management of garbage characterizes the situation of neglect and poverty of the population. The lack of resources shows in the lack of hygiene and health, mainly evidenced by water contamination, caused in turn by the absence of an adequate system of waste disposal which results in the contamination of the water sources. Certainly, the shortage of financial resources and the difficulties involved in the obtention of loans are the causes that maintain more depressed the daily activity of the people of Chocolá. In addition to the restricted individual productive capacity (most of the farmers own a parcel of 20 ropes) and the shortage of cash that averages Q12.000 a year, the people of Chocolá lack any sort of flexibility to take care of health emergencies or education programs. It is within this scenario that the Project attempts to conduct a “neutral” scientific study program regarding the conditions of a higher-culture society in the past, whose intellectual products will be of scarce relevance for the modern inhabitants of Chocolá. Understanding the living conditions of the modern people of Chocolá is crucial for the success of the Project, which continues with its efforts towards creating alternatives for improving the lives of the villagers.

Garbage and its management

The present problem with the garbage is affecting the project, as it environmentally degrades the village, exerts an increasing pressure over people’s lives and deteriorates the archaeological remains in general. Obviously, the lack of a garbage management system damages the health and the lives of the local dwellers. In addition, it damages the possibility to develop alternatives for a sustainable growth. With this in mind and in addition to the fact that the production of coffee yields increasingly poorer revenues, the Project has approached the villagers by means of assemblies to emphasize the importance of ecotourism and archaeology developed for exhibition. The Project has stressed to the people the need to show a clean Chocolá to the visitors from other regions. In 2003, PACH has insisted with ECA on the necessity of having a garbage collection system. In 2004, the personnel of the Project joined school authorities to create a conscience among the students about garbage management and how the residues should be deposited in containers placed at important places in the village.

Health and Well-being

People from Chocolá live day after day in a state of crisis, not only due to their struggle for the most elemental survival, but also as a consequence of this absence of health and hygiene. Like we said, many of these problems may be solved with a project for handling solid residues, because many recurrent diseases are the consequence of contaminated food and water. The Project is trying to raise funds to conduct feasibility studies to define a way to consolidate programs for the management of solid residues and the management of drinkable water. In turn, such studies will help to obtain the necessary resources to complete the required improvements. In 2004, with the mediation of Dr. Juan Antonio Valdés and Lic. Oscar Gutiérrez, members of the PACH team and members of the school of medicine of the University of San Carlos provided free medical care for one week,

while Diana Belches, an archaeology student and professional odontologist, took care for several weeks of the needs of many members of the community. We are aware that these are but small efforts compared with the dramatic needs of the people of Chocolá, but the Project is still in the pursuit of structural improvements considering the possibilities at hand, as the major portion of the funds available are to be applied to the investigation. However, hygiene and health are a part of our primary concerns.

Education

Like we said, the argumentation around the benefits that scientific research could bring to the local inhabitants is not an easy task. Their history and our necessities, our history and their necessities seem incompatible. But education is a part of the process that seeks to integrate the cultural and biological diversity for a sustainable growth of the world archaeological patrimony that Chocolá represents. Through a collaboration program based on volunteers, the Project is creating scholarships to send children and young persons to schools and to the University of San Carlos at Mazatenango. Besides, it continues with its educational program on archaeology and cultural patrimony in schools and community assemblies.

Urban planning

The town of Chocolá is growing, but in an unplanned and risky manner, which in addition to harming the quality of life at Chocolá, is damaging and destroying the archaeological relics of its subsoil. With no resources for a planned development, with no financial flow, with no time for education, and with no resources for migrating to other countries, the people of Chocolá have no other choice but to struggle for their survival with a bankrupted patrimony, such as the poorly paid coffee crops and their small individual plots. Even in a situation like this, there is an apparent populational growth and an accelerated urban development that generate the destruction of significant archaeological features. The rich biological resources of Chocolá together with its archaeology may represent an important source of income for the village, provided the course is strategically changed in regard to urban planning and development patterns. The Project is promoting schemes through which the rich archaeological resources of the 774 individual plots may be protected, and an economical viability established for the owners. Like we said, PACH is working with IDAEH to declare the archaeological site of Chocolá a part of the Cultural Patrimony of the Nation, being particularly careful with the incomes of the plot owners, which should not be affected. The possibility of an exchange of plots in those places with monumental remains of prehispanic architecture is being considered by the mayor, *señor* Diego Macario Coc. Beyond this possibility, the Project is trying to find private investors to undertake projects of development and touristic infrastructure at Chocolá. Such efforts, for the time being, are preliminary, but we hope to make them come true, and thus help to save a heritage that is significant for the people of Chocolá, for Guatemala, and the world.