

# Private Money and Public Work: Evaluating Funding Sources for US-Based Archaeological Research in Guatemala

Maura  
Ellenberger

Advised by Dr. Olivia Navarro-Farr  
Department of Archaeology  
ellenbergermaura02@gmail.com



THE COLLEGE OF  
**WOOSTER**

## Abstract

My goal is to examine funding sources associated with archaeological projects in Guatemala. Often, funding sources have political links, either explicitly stated or not. I consider the history of excavations of the Penn Tikal Project (1956-1970) and the *Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'* (PAW - 2003-present). Understanding the motivations and changes in federal and private support for archaeological projects permits more transparent evaluation of the ethics and potential biases of past and current research while supporting a cross-disciplinary method of examining archaeological practices.



Restoration of Temple I (1963), done by the Penn Tikal Project. Photo credit: FAMSI Tikal Digital Access Project.

## Timeline of Events

- 1949: Excavations at Tikal first proposed by the Penn Museum.
- 1954: Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz is ousted in a CIA-backed coup.
- 1955: Penn Museum signs an exclusive contract with the Guatemalan government to excavate at Tikal.
- 1957: Creation of Tikal National Park, the first in Guatemala.
- 1960: Guatemalan armed conflict begins.
- 1970: Penn Tikal Project officially ends.
- 1996: Peace agreements are signed between the Guatemalan government and guerilla forces.
- 2001: *Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'* is first proposed by David Freidel.
- 2003: First field season at Waka'.
- 2017: Freidel steps down as co-director and Olivia Navarro-Farr and Damien Marken assume co-directorship.

## Methodology

- Archival research on the Penn Tikal Project conducted at the Penn Museum's Archives.
- Interviews with members of the PAW team.
- Research on donors from both projects.



Structure M13-1 at El Perú-Waka'. Photo by author.

## Major Findings

### Penn Tikal Project:

- Mainly funded by North American private donors, wealthy families, and foundations.
  - Rockefeller Foundation, Tina Dimick, Scaife Mellon Foundation
- Contract with Guatemalan government included stipulations about restoration of the site.
  - Tourism has been a main consideration from the start.
- Guatemalan government provided logistical support: creation of roads and an airstrip at Tikal, weekly flights to and from site, and duty-free imports.

### Proyecto Arqueológico Waka':

- Funded by both private and governmental sources (e.g.,)
  - DOI via USAID, Glick Foundation, Hitz Foundation
- Restoration of the site is not a main focus of the project
  - Briefly funded by PACUNAM
- Objects from the site, such as the figurines from Waka's Burial 39, are featured prominently at MUNAE.

## Conclusions

- Both projects feed into nationalism in Guatemala, but in different ways.
  - Tikal: The physical site, its function as a national symbol, and benefits for tourism
  - Waka': Objects from the site (Burial 39 Figurines) are featured prominently at MUNAE. The location of the site within Laguna del Tigre National Park helps deter illegal activities.
- Both projects rely heavily on private funding as opposed to governmental funding.
  - Opportunities for US governmental funding have decreased over the years
- The political climate of both the US and Guatemala contributed to the funding of both projects.
  - Tikal: Begins immediately after CIA-backed coup. Documents from Penn Museum Archives show that spreading "our American way" was a consideration.
  - Waka': DOI funds were directly linked to preventing illegal activities in Laguna del Tigre National Park.
- Beyond acknowledging that funding is not neutral, projects should critically consider the political motivations of funding sources and how these impact work done.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who supported me. In particular, I thank Olivia Navarro-Farr for being an amazing advisor and shaping my research goals. I would also like to thank David Freidel for allowing me to interview him about PAW and the Penn Museum Archives for permitting access to the Penn Tikal Project documents.

## References Cited

