Preface

This book examines from an archaeological perspective the social and economic changes that took place in Yucatán, Mexico beginning in the eighteenth century, as the region became increasingly articulated within global networks of exchange. In this work I am particularly interested in the formation and ultimate supremacy of the hacienda system in Yucatán and the effect that new forms of capitalist organized production had on constructions of indigenous Maya social organization. I use household archaeology and spatial analysis, conducted on the grounds of the former Hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi, to provide the data for analyzing the results of this change on the daily lives and existence of those individuals incorporated within the hacienda system.

The historical perspective and interpretations regarding the evolution of social and economic organization on the Yucatán Peninsula outlined in this book are the result of my own personal history and evolution as a scholar. As a way of better positioning the reader to understand the “how” and “why” of this work, it might be fruitful to briefly trace the “what,” “where,” and “when” that have influenced my perspective on the past and as a consequence have influenced the interpretations expressed in the following pages. As an undergraduate at Boston University, my first foray into archaeological fieldwork involved excavations at pre-Hispanic Maya sites in northern Belize under the direction of Patricia McAnany and Norman Hammond. This experience left an indelible mark on me, not only by initiating a lifelong interest in Mayan, Mesoamerican, and more generally Latin American culture, but also more importantly by inspiring me to pursue a career in archaeology. An interest in Mayan lithic studies led me to peruse graduate studies in the Anthropology Department at Texas A&M University under the guidance of Harry Shafer. However as often happens in graduate studies, a chance opportunity to do a summer of exploratory fieldwork ultimately led to a dissertation project and a shift in concentration. In my case the shift was from an interest in pre-Hispanic Mayan culture to historic period Mayan culture in northern Yucatán during the rise, hegemony, and decline of the hacienda system from the Colonial period through the Mexican Revolution.

In hindsight, my transition and attraction to doing historical archaeology seems a natural one; I had after all also earned a major in History as an undergraduate and had always been interested in how the historical record was used to understand past
human experiences. At the time however I simply reasoned that an identified field project that dealt with Maya culture, even if it was historical in period, was better than the uncertain potential for a pre-Hispanic project. It was also during this period that my advisor David Carlson introduced me to the world-systems perspective and that by chance I came across a book on the Annales School approach in historiography. These two perspectives would come to form the basic framework with which I would interpret the archaeological record of the households at Hacienda Tabi.

The features and components of the world-system perspective aid me in placing local household change within a global context, articulating the Mayan workers at Hacienda Tabi within the larger global economic, social, and political networks of that system. Central to this understanding is a discussion of the concept of production and how local relations of production, which at first blush seem antithetical to capitalism, are in fact key components in global commodity chains within a capitalist world-economy. This book outlines the initial articulation of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production and documents the nature of the changes associated with economic and social organization before and after the rise of the hacienda.

The Annales school concept of “total history” includes an examination of the interwoven periods of time including the long durée (i.e., geohistory, cultural histories, etc. that operate over millennia), conjunctures (i.e., social, economic, and political cycles that operate over centuries or generations), and événements (i.e., the events of everyday life represented by individual human actions) that represent the structures, processes, and events that distinguish the cultural and social history of a particular place or region. The Annales conception of time allows this work to place the archaeological record of Hacienda Tabi within the historically particular context of the rise and development of the hacienda system in Yucatán. In this book archaeological data provide insight into the daily existence of individuals, whose actions are then correlated to larger local, regional, and global historical trends operating at various wavelengths of time. Of particular importance in this work is the use of the Annales “problem history” approach in order to understand the critical social, political, economic, and environmental events that created the historical moment in which the hacienda system along with its attendant processes of change could rise to dominance on the peninsula.

The current volume represents 15 years of study and contemplation regarding the rise of the modern world-system and how particular sites like Hacienda Tabi can inform our understanding of the chains that have increasingly come to link nearly every man, woman, and child in the world today. The modern era is distinguished by the increasing articulation of people and places within a globalizing world, characterized by a capitalist world-economy that links the local and regional to the global within an integrated world-system. Essential to this system is a worldwide division of labor that organizes individuals and households into exploitative relationships within global commodity chains. Haciendas and plantations, as some of the earliest capitalist enterprises, illuminate the fundamental social changes associated with the historic spread and growth of capitalism and therefore have relevance to contemporary people who are still living and functioning under the realities of the modern world-system.

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