

Voices of the Puuc angels: Rural life among the archaeological ruins in the Yucatan Peninsula

Interviewed: Thelma Martín and Rita Martín
Interviewer: Tomás Gallareta Cervera
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Tomás Gallareta Cervera [TGC]: Can you tell us your name, where are they from and what do you do?

Thelma Martín (Thelma): My name is Thelma, I'm from Oxcutzcab and I work in the kitchen area.

Rita Martín (Rita): My name is Rita, and I am also from Oxcutzcab, and I also work in the kitchen area as an assistant.

TGC: Before working here (MPARC) where did you work?

Rita: I worked in a store that is a shop and a mill at the same time. I was working for two years in a tortilla factory. I also worked in the store area of the one shop. Then I went to work in other places that sell bananas and tomatoes at the market. Then, I got married, after a while when my girl turned 4 years old I started working at MPARC in Kiuic. I kept working and helping them. I work in the kitchen area now, in ceramics, I wash ceramics, I ink ceramics, I help Betsy on her work.

Thelma: Before working, I was still working in a tortilleria, but my area of work was more than serving the tortillas, I also sold them in the market. There I had a position with a lady and that's where I worked, worked from 7am to 4pm. And afterwards I was informed that they (MPARC archaeologists) were looking for staff and I started working here.

TGC: How did you start working here? How did they get the job and why did they stay?

Thelma: At that time, my dad was working as a corporal with an archaeologist from Chacmultún. Back then was a person who did the cleaning and the food of the people who were occupying the house. Then my dad told me and I told him that if it is cleaning, I can go in and even though I do not know much about the food, if someone explains it to me, I can do it. Then the gentlemen agreed. During that time it was Carlos Pérez who was an archaeologist and Julieta Ramos and Ramón Carrillo were the ones we were going to attend. Then with them, I started to work. Later, through them, I met Don Tomás (Gallareta Negrón) and now I'm working with Don Tomás.

TGC: How long ago?

Thelma: It was 17 years ago already. From the beginning of the program.

Rita: I started working through Thelma. She told me that someone needed help with the pottery and she told me that if I wanted to help, I started with ceramics, washed ceramics and marked

ceramics. Then she needed help in the kitchen and she asked me if I could be with her. Then I went to help her in the kitchen and I'm still helping in the kitchen right now and when I'm not in the kitchen I work with pottery or in the cleaning area.

TGC: Have you ever seen up close or in general the archaeological remains such as ceramics and lithic before MPARC?

Rita: I had not seen it, I had only heard about it from my dad. He worked in several places, he worked in Palenque and Uxmal, he was working in the Chacmultún area, in several places he was working and he told us about the ceramics, so we knew or knew something about it, but I had not seen it. Since I started to work I started to see it and even then, I did not know that it should be taken care of, I only listened and I thought they said pottery but I thought that they meant the pottery itself (whole vessels) But when I went to work here I saw that it was not the entire pot, but pieces.

TGC: You Thelma had seen the same pottery somewhere else or until you got here you started to see?

Thelma: I saw it in the sense that we had in Cooperativa a piece of land and there was an area where we were going to look for water and there was a little hill. There I was struck by the fact that, with my brother, I saw that there was a lot of pottery thrown in the ground. We put it together and we took it and we did not know for sure what it is. When I go to work here, I learned, they explained to me what it was about and the names that the sherds have.

TGC: So when you were growing up, what ideas did you have about the archaeological material, the ruins, and these kinds of things? What did your father tell you that he worked and was he in contact with these things? Was it an everyday part of his life?

Thelma: At first no; because, the little things our dad told us was that he worked in a site and sometimes he would take out a plate, sometimes a plate, but he did not specify what the material was like, so we discovered it later on when we enter here to work.

TGC: And what do you think?

Rita: If it's similar. Because my dad came home from work and told us some things, right? But exactly what it was, no, we only imagined ourselves and through what has been the books we learned a little more. But more than not until we were here.

TGC: Now that you have worked for two decades in MPARC and see how there are different people who enter and take pottery and you have been involved in that research, has your perception of archeology changed when they were small compared to now?

Thelma: Well, yes, because previously, we did not know what was taken care of or what exactly it was. As a result of the time that we take here little by little as they are arriving the people are

explaining and talking about each piece. Why do you care, why do they come to investigate? With that as it gives you a more accurate idea of what archeology is.

Rita: I think the same. It's nice because the things we did not know before because right now we know. So sometimes for some reason, we can tell someone to be more careful in, for example, their land. There are people who have land and have pottery on their land and sometimes we tell them not to just throw it away or burn it because it is something that also serves us because it seems that no but it is always for us all that information.

TGC: **So you see the archaeological materials and archeology, in general, talking about local, state, national identity or as Mexicans like Oxcutzcab people, as Yucatecans, what is your relationship now with archeology? Another way of saying the question, now that you know, you have had more archaeological contact with the sites, do you think that now they are incorporated into your identity as people?**

Thelma: Well, if it's more integrated. With the knowledge of each thing and that we need to take care of it not as it was before when we were little. When we were little they did not specify anything for us. So now we have the knowledge that it is not something that you can and you can break it and play it just like that but you have to have respect because it is part of your customs or your ancestors.

TGC: **Do you think you find any difference in how different groups of people relate to the archaeological material, for example, thinking that the relationship between you, researchers, believe that the material is for everyone?**

Thelma: Well, it gives us the information (archaeological materials). I think they (the archaeological sites) can be used by everyone, it's just information that they're going to collect, they're not going to take the information, they're going to impart it to everyone. As long as they are not taking the pieces or the information is part of what is being seen or studied, I think it is something good for.

Rita: Well, I think the same. Because its part of ourselves, of what we have by inheritance and part of our culture that the ancestors had and it shows us many things that we did not know, for example, how they could have their sow, how they could have their own jewelry forms. And we did not know those little points, we did not know. I did not know many things in particular. Through my collaboration with Betsy in the ceramic analysis, I already know several things that I did not know before. The relationship between the ceramic vessels is not only a material, there are several other materials, there are many very nice materials and others that are not, but all are very beautiful, they are very well taken care of. Mostly we who are here do not take much care of the (archaeological) material. Even though they tell us that we should take care of them, we do not think of them as important because, for example, the people that find materials at their land are told to take care of them, but sometimes they say that it is not necessary, that it is basically already rubbish. They would say "for what is it going to serve you?", "it's no use to you anymore". And in reality it is not that it will not serve you, it serves you for the future of our children, they will understand through all these pieces so that we can be more, how can we say,

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know a little bit? But if we do not take care of that, tomorrow they will not know anything because what little there is is not being taken care of. Sometimes it makes your a little mad because when you explain it to the person sometimes he says "it's not because I do not take care of it, but if they buy it I can sell it". You can not sell it, it's something for you, it's not something you can sell. It's nice to keep things.

Rita: Well, the way to take care of it as I was commenting on is, then, to mention it to others, to comment it to young people. For example in my case, I have my boy already in high school. I tell him that if there is something they see that they need to inform about it because it is something that we need for everyone, it is not only for one, it is for everyone because everything we have in this place and in all places has great joy. That we can go to the museums and see it, we can have more information through social networks. For me, it is very beautiful and it is something that would be good for me not to miss. It is nice to keep it and through the other people, we are trying to tell them that we can really take care of the things that are ours.

Thelma: We hope so, we are giving them the information since they are kids. Before we did not have this information in elementary school. Now they are trying to make the kids more aware, then I hope that it can be better in the future.