

Ramón Arellanos Melgarejo- a Modern-day Veracruz Smiling Face 1943-2002



Figure 1. Ramon (left) and Francisco “Paco” Beverido P., two leaders in Gulf Lowlands archaeology during the second half of the 20th century, stand next to a Colossal Head from San Lorenzo in the Museo de Antropología Xalapa (MAX). Photograph by Michael D. Coe

While Ramón Arellanos Melgarejo enjoyed a long and distinguished career in Mesoamerican archaeology; his friends and colleagues remember him not only for his scholarly research but also because he could never go more than a few minutes without bursting into a broad grin that made southern Veracruz Smiling Face figurines look grumpy in comparison. He was a true “Cara Sonriente”!

Ramon lived his entire life in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico’s real city of “Eternal Spring”. In his youth he was very much inclined to athletics, especially American football, the martial arts, hiking, mountaineering, and other outdoors activities. These passions, along with archaeology, his family, music, public service, and working with young people, filled his life. He remained actively involved in

scouting for decades, became a certified scuba diver and one of Mexico's first underwater archaeologists, and spent considerable time working with students of all ages, both inside and outside the classroom. He and Lourdes "Lulu" Beauregard de Arellanos, his wife and an archaeologist who remains active today, shared a rich and interesting life together.

After a brief stint as a public school teacher in the 1960s, Ramón pursued a career in archaeology that included much important field work and many honors. Veracruz state was his archaeological sand box, although in 1971 and 1972 I was fortunate to lure him and Lulu to my University of Missouri Project at Tula, the Toltec capital in Hidalgo.



Figure 2. Ramón supervising an excavation crew while uncovering a Toltec house at Tula. His careful excavation techniques and detailed field notes set a high standard for my North American students to emulate. Photograph by Richard A. Diehl, July 1972.



Figure 3. Ramón typing his field notes at Tula on the 1970s equivalent of laptop. The young lady advising him is Ardith Benfer. Photograph by Richard A. Diehl, August 1972.

Xalapa was an exciting place for an archaeologist to be during Ramón's professional years. The museum, the Instituto de Antropología Veracruzana, and the Universidad Veracruzana's anthropology department all came into existence early in his career and he played important roles in their growth and development. In addition, there was always more field work to be done than time or money to do them; salvage projects, serendipitous discoveries, and chasing looters were common occurrences. So common, in fact that I was always surprised that Ramon was able to plan and execute as many long term research projects as he did. These included investigations at Las Higueras, a Classic period center near the coast where he led the recovery of truly incredible painted murals on temples walls, a project that he wrote up for an award-winning thesis. Toward the end of his career, he led a decade-long project at Quiahuiztlan, the first Totonac center visited by Hernán Cortes and his men when they landed in Mexico that fateful day in AD 1519. He also directed a major portion of the Proyecto Gasoducto, a large salvage archaeology project connected with the construction of a gas pipeline that traversed the state from southeast to northwest. Other field work sites included El Zapotal, Quahtochco, and Villa de Espíritu Santo, a very early Spanish Colonial settlement near modern Coatzacoalcos.



Figure 4. Ramón recovered this mural fragment along with many others from a painted temple wall at Las Higueras. It depicts a ritual procession of elaborately dressed men and women. The reconstructed mural may be seen in the MAX in Xalapa. Photograph by Nadine Markova, published in Museo de Antropología de Xalapa, edited by Beatrice Trueblood.



Figure 5. Quiahuiztlan, the location of Ramón's last project, was a Late Postclassic period center perched on a plateau surrounded by steep hills. In addition to being the first

Mesoamerican community entered peacefully by Hernán Cortes, it is famous for its miniature temple-like tombs. Ramón excavated and restored many of the temples and other structures in the ancient city center. Photograph by Richard A. Diehl, July 1996.



Figure 4. Ramón points out Hernán Cortes' likely landing spot from Quiahuiztlan to Roberto Lunagómez, one of his former students, and the author. Photograph by Richard A. Diehl, July 1996.

An early interest in sport diving led Ramón to train as an underwater archaeologist in the 1970s. He later taught the second generation of Veracruz archaeologists in this important field of study for Veracruz, a state with many rivers, lakes, and a long coastline. He undertook two important underwater archaeological projects in Veracruz state. The first, at Ojo de Agua, near the city of Córdoba, uncovered a yoke and other objects that day can be seen in the Museum of Archaeology in that city. The second involved a fruitless search for Aztec gold in the shallow waters off Rio Medio-Punta Gordo on the coast north of

Veracruz City following on the spectacular finds of a local fisherman (see *The Fisherman's Treasure* elsewhere in this web page), where days of diving in difficult conditions led only the discovery a few Colonial period potsherds.

Perhaps it was Ramon's extremely active life that prevented him from issuing as many publications as he might have. He was a good writer who unfortunately left many projects unpublished at his untimely death. Nevertheless, he created an indelible imprint on everyone and everything he touched, both personally and professionally. And what a smile of pure pleasure!

Acknowledgements: Dr. Roberto Lunagómez supplied me with important information for this Profile