Final Report, SEEDS Grant

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As a result of the 2009 award from the SEEDS-NSF fund, Ardren was able to strengthen a professional collaborative relationship with a colleague working in Mexico that resulted in a joint publication. I travelled to the University of Yucatan on two separate occasions to collaborate on the analysis of the osteological materials excavated as a part of my research project at the ancient Maya site of Xuenkal, in Yucatan, Mexico. During these visits I was informed about the results of the osteological analysis of my materials by Dr. Vera Tiesler of the University of Yucatan. Dr. Tiesler is an expert in human bioarchaeology and maintains a large laboratory on the campus of the University of Yucatan with comparative collections and analytical equipment. With her students, she performed the initial analysis of sex and age indicators, health and occupational markers, etc. for the 20 individuals from our excavated burials.

My role was to explain the specific archaeological contexts and thus the relationships between these 20 individuals and their associated artifactual evidence. Many of the bodies had been placed in the same burial crypts and associations between them as well as their shared artifacts revealed a great deal about the age and meaning of the burials. Through extended discussion, Dr. Tiesler and I came to conclusions about the significance of this material and on the second visit, we drafted two publication outlines. The initial publication of her osteological and taphonomical results is forthcoming, and a subsequent publication on the cultural and funerary practices evident in the sample is in preparation.

The SEEDS funding made this collaboration and the publication of our results possible. Although my fieldwork at Xuenkal is funded by NSF, it does not include travel for the purposes of analysis and publication. Without time in Dr. Tiesler’s lab, our interpretation of the materials would have been not only delayed, but significantly less well integrated and meaningful. The experience of working through this sample from Xuenkal on two separate occasions has provided the foundation for a professional relationship with a highly skilled and politically important colleague that will continue throughout my career.