

Crafting the Secrets of the Ancient Maya: Media Representations of Archaeological Exploration and the Cultural Politics of US Informal Empire in 1920s Yucatan



Bulletin
of the History of Archaeology

RESEARCH PAPER:
AMERICAS/MIDDLE
EAST/AFRICA

LISA MUNRO 

]u[ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

During the 1920s, a wave of U.S. scientists and journalists descended on Central America and the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico to unlock the riddles of the ancient Maya: their origins, their cultures, and their disappearance. These expeditions, widely publicized in US newspapers, taught the public about both the Maya and US past and present. In this article, I compare media representations of archaeological exploration in Yucatan published in *The New York Times*. I analyze Alma Reed's reports from her 1923 visit to Yucatan against Gregory Mason's dispatches from the later Mason-Spinden Expedition in 1926. Each journalist drew different conclusions about the nature and identity of the ancient Maya, yet sought to transform readers into vicarious stakeholders to maintain US dominance in Yucatan. They recreated cultural and scientific ties between Yucatan and the United States damaged by plummeting henequen prices and a series of radical socialist experiments designed to bring the ideals of the Mexican revolution to the region. I show how cultural representations of empire and assumptions about the indigenous bolstered informal US economic empire and strengthened both real and imaginary relationships between Yucatan and the United States.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Lisa Munro

Independent Scholar, US

lisa@lisamunro.net

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Munro, L. 2021. Crafting the Secrets of the Ancient Maya: Media Representations of Archaeological Exploration and the Cultural Politics of US Informal Empire in 1920s Yucatan. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 31(1): 3, pp. 1-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-652>

In April of 1923, US journalist and archaeology aficionado Alma Reed fell madly in love with Yucatan. Reporting on her adventures throughout the peninsula through a series of articles she penned for the *New York Times*, Reed invited readers on an idyllic virtual tour of several spectacular ancient Maya cities. Reed wrote extensively about her visits to Chichén Itzá; she thrilled readers with details about the silent, imposing pyramid known as *El Castillo*, which soared to over 100 feet in height. Reed marveled at the artistic achievements of the ancient Maya, writing in detail about intricate ancient murals that depicted ferocious battle scenes; the brightly colored murals, painted centuries ago by indigenous hands, had only faded slightly with the passage of time (Reed 1923). Reed also befriended the cadre of US archaeologists in Yucatan working to decipher the so-called Maya riddle, as well as local Yucatecan politicians who promoted those riddles to lure US scientists and tourists to the region. Reed's series of articles about her trip to Yucatan painted a romantic, mysterious picture for readers of a society that had simply vanished without explanation.

Three years later, in the spring of 1926, the *New York Times* launched another exciting new series of articles about the adventures of the Mason-Spinden Expedition, en route to the Yucatan peninsula to search for what they believed were the hidden remains of ancient Maya cities. The expedition, a joint cooperative venture between correspondent, explorer, and writer Gregory Mason and archaeologist Herbert J. Spinden of Harvard University's Peabody Museum with financial backing and publicity from the *Times*, combined journalism and science to create a popular scientific narrative that would pique readers' interests about the great ancient native culture of the Yucatan peninsula. The Mason-Spinden expedition's reports, published just a few years after Alma Reed's visit to Yucatan, gave readers a different view of Yucatan, one that emphasized cultural ties and shared histories between ancient Mesoamerica and the contemporary United States. That emphasis, in turn, shaped the Mason Spinden Expedition's cultural, racial, and historical assumptions about the history of supposedly 'lost' Maya cities in the Yucatan peninsula. The *Times* heightened the drama of the expedition by adding colorful details about the potential dangers the explorers might face. The explorers packed toys, trinkets, beads, ribbons, anti-venom, and a gramophone with which they explorers planned to deploy to win over any hostile native people (Mayan Explorers Face Jungle Peril 1926).

Together, the series of articles written first by Reed and then Mason taught readers about the wonders of ancient Maya civilizations and revealed their assumptions about the US present. Reed and Mason approached their ancient subjects in different ways yet shared many of the same assumptions and used their representations in the media to expand US informal empire and provide cultural support for US economic imperialism in Yucatan. In this article, I compare how Reed and Mason constructed the imagined cultural identities of the ancient Maya and presented those representations to the US public through their respective series of newspaper articles published in the *New York Times*. I consider how the cultural context of the 1920s United States, as well as fractured US—Mexico relationships in the wake of the Mexican revolution, reinforced US assumptions about ancient native people and shaped popular media depictions of the ancient Maya for US readers. I argue that US journalists constructed ambiguous identities for ancient indigenous peoples—both as familiar and foreign—as part of a larger cultural strategy to manage US—Yucatec relationships and circulated those representations to US public audiences through newspapers to transform US audiences into vicarious stakeholders invested in US imperial expansion after the Mexican revolution. Reed and Mason drew different conclusions about the ancient Maya, but both produced cultural representations of ancient indigenous identities that bolstered the US cultural claims to economic dominance in Yucatan.

This article shows how cultural currents in the United States and Yucatan shaped both romantic and scientific representations of archaeological practice through the media to generate public enthusiasm for US informal cultural empire in a little-known region. Post-colonial scholars (Said 1978, Pratt 1992, Aguirre 2005) have argued that imperial powers forge empires and legitimate colonial control of people and resources through the politics of cultural and media representation. Although the United States never established a formal colonial presence in Yucatan, the US monopoly over the henequen trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century established a de facto informal economic empire; economic empires, nonetheless, require cultural support. Media representations of shared culture and history between the United States and Yucatan provided vital cultural symbols and histories to prop up more evident US economic dominance.

The journalists who visited Yucatan and wrote about their experiences structured knowledge about ancient indigenous cultures for US audiences, and constructed what Salvatore calls representational machines (Salvatore 1998) to familiarize readers with the softer side of US imperialism. Unofficial cultural mediators, including teachers, scientists, tourists, or journalists, helped produce informal empires through media representations that circulated cultural practices to the public to legitimate imperial expansion (Salvatore 1998); cultural representation of empire legitimated other forms of imperial domination. Representations of empire reach audiences through visual and written media, such as newspapers, visual displays, and venues of exhibition, which bring knowledge of foreign cultures into the US collective consciousness. Media representations of archaeological tourism and expeditions, such as Alma Reed's informal explorations and the more formal scientific expedition of the Mason Spinden Expedition, welded science, technology, exploration, and culture into powerful representational machines. The *Times* series circulated those images and representations to the US public, using scientific knowledge about ancient native cultures to teach readers about the cultural politics of informal empire in Yucatan.

As both an art and science, archaeology had first skyrocketed into US popular consciousness after the publication of John Lloyd Stephens's blockbuster travelogues, based on his travels first in Egypt (1836) and then on his explorations of Maya lands in Yucatan, Guatemala, and Chiapas (1840) (Stephens 1969). Interpretation of archaeological evidence of the ancient Maya region, both by experts and amateurs, became popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as both scientists and the public projected their US cultural assumptions and imperial desires onto what many believed to be an extinct and largely unknowable culture. Fritze locates the public mania for archaeology in the rise of mass culture and media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which brought the mystery of archaeology to broader public audiences than ever before; people then transformed that knowledge to suit their own purposes (Fritze 2011, p. 14). Scholars of the history of archaeology have also examined how and why the public misinterprets archaeological evidence and creates erroneous ideas about human history (Feder 1990, Fagan 2006, Fritze 2011, Card 2019). Card argues that the inherent nature of material culture from the past—perceptions of its ultimate unknowability—infuses archaeological practice with a sense of mystery and wonder (Card 2019, p. 2), fueling public interest in ancient civilizations. Most importantly, the mysterious unknown nature of the ancient Maya has allowed the US public to project present-day cultural concerns onto the supposedly blank slate of the ancient past.

During the 1920s, the entire Maya region, from the lowlands of the Yucatan peninsula to the highland region of Guatemala, cast a special spell over the first visitors to the region. Explorers, artists, writers, and travelers who visited ancient Maya cities for the first time wrote about the wonders they experienced for public audiences, sharing their adventures through newspaper articles and other media. Evans argues that the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century romance of the Maya in US public imaginations exploded not only from the thrill of fantastic archaeological discoveries, but also because of the invented historical narratives that linked Maya archaeology to a new generation of US Maya explorers and their attempts to claim the Maya past for their own uses (Evans 2004). Similarly, Gero and Root argue that representations of the archaeological past serve to legitimate and naturalize the present (Gero and Root 1990). Alma Reed and the team of Mason Spinden expedition represented different kinds of explorers; their respective reports for the *New York Times* reflected their distinct approaches to the question of the mystery of the ancient Maya. Nevertheless, both invented new identities for the ancient Maya, as either culturally familiar and foreign, and deployed those imagined identities in cultural support of US empire.

Journalists of the 1920s who reported on the ancient cultures of Yucatan framed their stories around invented mysteries, riddles, and secrets to heighten public interest. Although most archaeologists had reached the conclusion that the Maya had originated independently in the Americas (rather than Atlantis, Egypt, or Carthage, as many had previously believed), no one was quite sure what had happened to them. Only their magnificent stone temples and stelae remained; US archaeologists, primarily associated with the Carnegie Institute of Washington, arrived in Yucatan in droves to help decipher the mystery. A parade of now-famous archaeologists cut their teeth on the great ancient ruined cities of Yucatan, including Sylvanus Morley, Earl Morris, and Marshall Saville (Morley 1925, Charlott *et al.* 1931, Saville 1935).

Journalists often framed stories about archaeological expeditions as a search for a mysterious past, which helped justify the presence of US archaeologists in Yucatan, who brought with them specialized technical and scientific training that local Yucatecans seemed to lack. Hervik argues that early twentieth-century editions of *National Geographic* often used the romantic language of ‘mystery’ as a plot device to enhance the exotic and supposedly ‘lost’ nature of Maya people and culture (Hervik 1998). Those early *National Geographic* stories evoked invented tropes of cultural continuity that linked ancient and contemporary cultures in a seamless narrative; these narratives created fictitious ties between the ancient Maya and the US present. Hervik’s analysis explains Reed’s romantic depictions of the ‘pastness’ and enduring mystery of Yucatan, as well as the media representations from the Mason–Spinden expedition that emphasized connections between the ancient Maya and the United States of the 1920s. Both Reed and Mason mixed archaeological science, mystery, and adventure into a seamless narrative arc about ‘lost’ cities for readers, molding their reactions to US imperial expansion through archaeological practice.

Alma Reed and the Mason–Spinden expedition approached their subjects in different ways because of the way each author experienced Yucatan and interpreted archaeological evidence, yet they shared underlying assumptions and cultural preconceptions. Reed focused on the foreignness and exoticism of the ancient Maya and romanticized them. In contrast, Mason’s articles attempted to bridge cultural differences between the ancient Maya and modern US and present a seamless evolutionary narrative that suggested that the ancient temples of the Yucatan peninsula had developed into the skyscrapers of 1920s New York. Reed taught readers that only US science could unlock the secrets of a lost people. The Mason–Spinden expedition reports taught readers that Yucatan had always formed an important part of both ancient and present US history and culture, naturalizing a sense of transnational historical continuity. Mason created a shared sense of history and culture, collapsing the racial differences and geographic distances between white Americans and the ancient Maya and taught a generation of readers about the politics of US empire in Yucatan.

I base my argument on qualitative comparative analysis on two sets of newspaper articles published by the *New York Times*, the first written by Alma Reed in 1923 and the second by Gregory Mason about the Mason–Spinden expedition in 1926. I analyze how Alma Reed created romantic representations of Yucatan and the ancient Maya, seeing the ancient Maya as a civilized people but ultimately exoticizing them and emphasizing cultural differences. She highlighted the work of US archaeologists and their vital work to uncover the supposedly lost secrets of ancient people. Although her dispatches were aimed at US readers, she confined her reporting to Yucatan; she also reported on the results of state experiments with radical politics in the early 1920s. Mason, on the other hand, viewed the Maya as culturally familiar and underscored cultural continuities and similarities between the United States and Yucatan. I read Mason’s more scientific dispatches against the frayed US–Mexico relationship and how his emphasis on cultural continuity between the ancient Maya and the modern United States nonetheless justified new cultural relationships to support new political and economic arrangements of US dominance over Yucatan.

The *New York Times*, which styled itself as the paper of record, purported to provide readers with a factual narrative of local and world events. The stories by Reed and Mason departed from the sensationalist, yellow journalism of the turn-of-the-century newspapers designed to generate public excitement over blatantly misleading headlines and biased exposé reporting. Instead, the *New York Times* of the 1920s published more credible news stories to garner broad support for US activities in Yucatan. A brief history of the *Times* from 1921 shows that it saw as its responsibility to ‘tell promptly and accurately the happenings and occurrences that were not sensational but of real importance in the affairs of the people’ to its estimated half a million Sunday readers’ (Davis 1921, p. xix). Popular reports, dispatches, and articles about ancient native peoples gained authority and credibility from their reproduction in the *Times*. Although the available evidence does not allow me to evaluate precisely how audiences responded to the series of articles, they nonetheless provide insight into the racial, cultural, and scientific assumptions that guided interpretations of archaeological practice and shaped readers’ understanding of the wonders of the Mesoamerican past and US imperial present.

The unexpected boom in henequen production in Yucatan at the end of the nineteenth century had created warm economic ties between the elite henequen producers of the peninsula and the US International Harvester Company. The US International Harvester Company and the elite Yucatec henequen planters drew closer as the First World War increased demand for binder twine and other fiber-based products; historians have characterized this US business monopoly as ‘informal imperialism’ (Joseph 1987, pp. 45–46). Those relationships proved remarkably durable, even through the worst of the violence of the Mexican revolution of 1910. The initial decade of revolutionary violence (1910–1920) unfolding in the north and central parts of the country did not affect Yucatan immediately. However, by the 1920s, that relationship showed signs of strain because of plummeting market prices for henequen. In 1920, the US Commercial Attaché in Yucatan reported that “many years will be required to restore the plantations of sisal to their normal production’ (Sisal Production In Yucatan. 1920) because the post-war surplus had depressed prices.

The radicalism of the Mexican revolution eventually reached the peninsula, through first the moderate reforms General Salvador Alvarado implemented from 1915 to 1918 (Joseph 1987, pp. 125–31) and then through the socialist program of Yucatan governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto from 1922–1924. Local efforts to mobilize peasants in Yucatan to revolt against their bondage failed because of long standing economic and social conditions that indentured Maya people and others on henequen haciendas in perpetual conditions of debt peonage. Instead, revolution came from above through a series of radical social experiments designed to challenge the henequen planting class. Carrillo Puerto imposed political reforms intended to break established systems of debt peonage on the Yucatec henequen haciendas (Joseph 1987). Those experiments further strained the traditional informal economic empire and geopolitical relationships between the United States and Yucatan. US newspapers linked the fortunes of the henequen industry in Yucatan to growing fears of international radical politics after the election of socialist governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto in 1922 (Yucatan Socialism Bad for Henequen 1923).

Carrillo Puerto implemented ambitious reforms, including expropriating haciendas, establishing public schools and universities, and addressing issues of indigenous rights (Joseph 1987, pp. 185–227). Perhaps most importantly, he also restructured the henequen production system, placing much of it under direct control of state agencies and syndicates. In 1923, *The New York Times* sounded the alarm, blaming Carrillo Puerto for the further decline of the henequen trade between the United States and Yucatan; henequen exports had dropped to 20 percent of previous years. The *Times* accused Carrillo Puerto of complete state control of the industry, appointing family members to government posts and crushing the international henequen market and hacienda planters to give ‘corn patches’ to Indians (Yucatan Socialism Bad for Henequen 1923).

As the revolution in Mexico shifted away from violence and towards rebuilding national institutions in the 1920s, the United States relied more heavily on cultural representations of empire to define its relationship with Mexico. US journalists who reported on the reforms of the Carrillo Puerto government both acted as collaborators in the US expansion of informal empire by raising fears of the specter of socialism and radical politics in Yucatan. New local and regional political realities in Yucatan prompted journalists to create new kinds of representational machines to circulate images of US empire to the US public to restore the inequitable relationship between Yucatan and the United States.

LA PEREGRINA: ALMA REED EXPLORES YUCATAN IN 1923

During her trip to Yucatan in the spring of 1923, Alma Reed had fallen hopelessly in love with Yucatan, both personally and professionally. Alma Reed had first become interested in Mexico as a young journalist writing for the *San Francisco Call*. In 1921, she wrote a series of articles in which she defended the life of a young Mexican boy who had received a death sentence for a murder conviction. Her work helped to overturn capital punishment in California for juveniles under eighteen years of age. (Delpar 1992, pp. 35–36). In 1922, she reported with no small degree of sympathy on the case of labor activist and Communist Labor Party founding member Anita Whitney of Oakland, California, convicted of ‘criminal syndicalism’ for

advocating for violent overthrow of the government (Reed 1922). Reed's choice of subjects and the way she framed them suggest her affinity towards certain strains of radical politics and perhaps her personal calling as a social justice advocate for people she believed downtrodden or disenfranchised. During her trip to Yucatan, she had a chance to see the radical politics of the Mexican revolution, imposed through the socialist reforms of Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto, in action.

In addition to her love for the beauty, culture, and ancient history of the Yucatan peninsula, Reed also fell in love with Carrillo Puerto himself. Because of his close relationship with the US archaeological community in Yucatan, as well as his growing personal relationship with Reed, Carrillo Puerto often appeared in her dispatches for the *Times*; Reed described him as 'Yucatan's Socialist Governor, and direct descendant of Nachi Cocum, the last of the valorous defender of his fatherland against the "conquistadore"[sic] Montejo' (Reed 1923a). At times, Reed seemed enamored even more by the handsome young governor's radical politics than by her romantic perceptions of his indigeneity. She rarely missed an opportunity to tell readers about the triumphs of Carrillo Puerto's 'Socialistic Administration' and its efforts to open archaeological sites for US scientists (Reed 1923b). She was particularly thrilled about the March 1923 opening of the twenty-five miles of highway between Dzitas and Chichén Itzá, an important infrastructure project, but one sure to provide greater benefit to US archaeologists and foreign tourists than the local indigenous people of the peninsula.

Reed's series of articles, particularly her framing of US archaeological work at Chichén Itzá, recreated intimate ties between Yucatec politics and US archaeology at a moment when Carrillo Puerto's socialist reforms and shifts in henequen production threatened those relationships. In addition to her romantic descriptions of Carrillo Puerto and strong support of his politics, she also captured his rapidly souring relationship with the group of elite henequen producers throughout the peninsula. Those producers served as the cornerstone of US-Yucatec relationships, shaping both international political, economic, and archaeological relationships. Reed depicted the animosity of the henequen producers towards the governor and the unflattering terms by which they referred to him: 'the reactionary planters of sisal hemp execrate [Carrillo Puerto] as "the red dragon with the jade eyes"' (Reed 1923a). Despite turbulent local politics she sought to create new cultural and scientific international ties between the US and Yucatan, her clear sympathies for (and romantic feelings towards) Carrillo Puerto allowed her to bring Yucatan and the United States into closer conversation, both personally and professionally. More explicitly political than many of the archaeologists who explored Yucatan, Reed's reporting both advocated for a stronger US presence in Yucatan for the purpose of archaeological knowledge production but also promoted radical socialist reform as an important component of scientific advancement and Yucatec identity.

Although her eventual engagement to Carrillo Puerto obviously colored her reporting on his politics, her dispatches openly addressed the region's volatile political situation and exposed her sympathies for Yucatan's downtrodden peasants. Linking local politics and a new cadre of US archaeologists, tourists, and scientific institutions into a new community, she channeled US public excitement around archaeological discoveries into open support for Yucatec socialism and Carrillo Puerto's brand of revolution from above. After a dinner party hosted at Mérida's Peón Contreras Theater that brought together government officials from the Carrillo Puerto regime with the leaders of US scientific institutions, she praised Carrillo Puerto's socialist government, seeing his reforms as crucial to both social and economic progress in the region, as well as the advance of US science. Relating a speech Carrillo Puerto delivered in his native Yucatec Maya at the event, she noted that he 'touched with precision the hope of the scientific men from the United States' (Reed 1923a) as they sought to reconstruct the mysterious history of the Maya. Additionally, she reported that the Carnegie Institute, which sponsored several seasons of excavations at Chichén Itzá, had full confidence in Carrillo Puerto's socialist government.

Even as her writing created mutual cultural ties between US scientists and Carrillo Puerto's socialist administration, Reed's work also reinforced US cultural imperialism in Yucatan. On April 8, 1923, the *New York Times* published an explosive story with Reed's byline, based on an interview with former US Consul Edward H. Thompson, owner of both the famed archaeological site and hacienda of Chichén Itzá (Reed 1923c). Thompson told Reed that he had regularly dredged the waters of the famed 'cenote sagrado' of Chichén Itzá from 1904-1906. Thompson described harvesting precious ancient Maya artifacts of gold, jade, and copper. Furthermore,

Thompson had shipped the booty to Harvard's Peabody Museum (Reed 1923c). Reed's article framed the story of Thompson's recovery of sacred items as a victory for science; nevertheless, the removal of those objects from the cenote represented a tragedy for Mexico. Reed's article, combined with Thompson's confession and detailed inventory of the items in his autobiographical *The City of the Sacred Well* (Willard 1926), drove a wedge between not only Yucatan and the United States, but US archaeologists and the national government in Mexico City. Mexico charged Thompson with robbery of national property (Albright 2015, p. 2) in the fall of 1926. Reacting from a place of new revolutionary cultural nationalism, the Mexican government's efforts to charge Thompson with crimes challenged encroaching US imperialism and asserted Mexico's national sovereignty and claims to cultural patrimony.

Alma Reed returned to the United States in the summer of 1923 to prepare for her wedding to Carrillo Puerto. While she was making preparations, news arrived that Carrillo Puerto had been assassinated in January of 1924 by revolutionary *delahuertista* forces.

THE MASON-SPINDEN EXPEDITION AND THE SEARCH FOR THE 'FIRST AMERICANS'

In the aftermath of Felipe Carrillo Puerto's execution, the political situation in Yucatan had shifted, requiring new types of representational machines to cement the US informal empire in Yucatan. After the demise of Carrillo Puerto's socialist administration and the end of his reforms, the Yucatan once began to produce more henequen and geopolitical relationships with the United States improved (Sisal Monopoly Ends 1924). US archaeological work continued in Yucatan, creating an ongoing physical and cultural presence designed to reinforce impressions of US hegemony. US journalist Gregory Mason's 1926 dispatches from the Mason-Spinden Expedition challenged Reed's earlier depictions of Yucatan and the ancient Maya. Even devoid of the romantic language Reed employed, Mason's articles stand out for their heavy emphasis on cultural continuity and his attempts to cast the ancient Maya as culturally similar to US readers. Aside from brief confrontations with local caciques, Mason's articles were devoid of explicit political language, designed to emphasize cultural and scientific ties between the United States and Yucatan.

The Mason-Spinden expedition purported to 'solve the riddles' of the ancient Maya: their origins, cultures, and eventual disappearance (Mason 1926a). Readers followed the exploits of the expedition through exclusive newspaper reports written by Mason and published in the *New York Times*. The series of full-page articles, with detailed illustrations and maps in the Sunday editions from January to May of 1926, swept readers up in the vicarious excitement of the expedition. Mason's articles employed a friendly narrative style that taught readers about the supposed mysteries of the ancient Maya. At the same time, Mason also sought to familiarize readers with the strange ancient culture of Yucatan and make it less exotic, characterizing the ancient Maya as '[this] oldest American civilization' (Mason 1926a). Although Mason incorrectly identified the Maya as the oldest Mesoamerican civilization, Mason's language connected the ancient Mesoamerican past to the US present by using *American* to describe both. Mason's later articles ran under large headlines that characterized the Maya as the 'first Americans' (Mason 1926b, 1926c). Whether the 'first Americans' language was Mason's own invention or that of the *New York Times* editors remains unknown. What is certain, however, is that the language of the 'first Americans' placed the ancient Maya firmly within US cultural imaginations, linking the US present to the ancient Mesoamerican past.

Although the expedition claimed that its objectives were purely scientific, it nonetheless played an important cultural role in reestablishing a US presence in Yucatan. The first wave of violence of the Mexican revolution (1910–1920) had severely disrupted the broader neo-colonial relationship between the United States and Mexico. In Yucatan, the revolution led to a series of radical socialist experiments that further damaged the historic ties between local henequen planters and the US International Harvester Company. In response, the United States promoted scientific expeditions to re-establish its traditional power over the peninsula through informal empire (Salvatore 2016). US appropriation of Maya history for imperialist purposes invented a fictional genealogy and justified economic domination of the henequen industry; henequen, in turn, relied on elite Yucatec domination of indigenous people and others through brutal systems of debt peonage (Turner 1969). Forging a shared culture between the United

States and the Maya region legitimated growing US economic power, technological progress, and domination of non-white people both within and outside national borders.

Mason crafted popular stories for general readers that tapped into their cravings for exciting adventure stories about lost cities. He had gotten his start in journalism as a writer and editor for Outlook Magazine. Mason's experience in Yucatan began in 1914 when he was sent to Yucatan to report on the Mexican revolution in the peninsula; while on assignment, he became interested in the many ruined cities of the area after seeing the magnificent ruins of Uxmal. Mason's first adventures in Yucatan prompted him to organize and seek funding for his own expedition in 1926 with Herbert Spinden, as well as a series of later expeditions to British Honduras (Delpar 1992, p. 109). Mason's writing followed the well-established tradition of adventure travel writing about Yucatan, his work provided readers with a modern, twentieth-century twist on Stephens's popular archaeological adventure travel memoirs. Adventure travel journalism shaped Mason's career as a writer; he went on to write several books about Mexico and Central America that combined personal memoir with the thrill of archaeological discovery, including *Green Gold of Yucatan* (1926), *Silver Cities of Yucatan* (1927) and *South of Yesterday* (1940).

Herbert J. Spinden, in contrast, was a Harvard-trained archaeologist and director of the Peabody Museum, having studied under the direction of noted explorer, Maya archaeologist, and ethnographer Alfred Tozzer. Although not a journalist by training, Spinden shared exciting anecdotes about his expeditions to Yucatan and Central America with the *Times* as early as 1914. He described the soaring temples of Tikal in Guatemala and speculated about the site's sophisticated plazas and ingenious aqueducts (Tells of Ancient America 1914). His later newspaper stories used metaphors of empire to link the ancient past to the capitalist present. His story in the *Times* about his 1924 expedition to the wilds of Central America connected Spinden's archaeological work to a new era of economic imperialism and technological superiority: '[The United Fruit Company] is a demonstration of empire rebuilding' (Spinden 1924a). Drawing comparisons between the decline of the ancient Maya and the modern sanitation and health campaigns of United Fruit, Spinden suggested that the fruit company empire would triumph over the scourge of yellow fever, hookworm, and malaria. Spinden also received a byline on May 25, contributing an exciting article entitled, 'Adventuring in Archaeology' that narrated the dramatic story of a local ten-year-old Indian boy who easily led the expedition through hazards in the dense jungles of Honduras as if he were a US boy scout (Spinden 1924b).

Mason's first few dispatches recreated well-worn narratives of conquest, drawing parallels between the expedition and the famous Spanish conquistadors of the fifteenth century: Cordoba, Grijalva, and Cortez. Nevertheless, Mason also informed readers that the native people of the Yucatan peninsula had never been entirely dominated, retaining much of their pre-conquest independence: 'The Indians have never given up the struggle for independence... in the Yucatan peninsula' (Mason 1926a). Recast as an unconquered people, the members of the Mason-Spinden Expedition assumed the role of a new generation of conquistadors, linking the expedition to a longer history of imperial domination. When the explorers discovered the remains of Spanish settlements, Mason noted that 'the many evidences of the work of the Spanish conquerors prove them to have been a remarkable people' (Mason 1926d), drawing parallels between the expedition and the intrepid colonial Spanish conquistadors. The expedition also made a point of departing from Cortez's 'famous march' from the highlands of central Mexico to Guatemala, implying that the expedition was indeed the first to reach certain areas of the peninsula (Mason 1926e). Framing the expedition in terms of a new phase of conquest invited readers to imagine the expeditionaries, as well as themselves, in the role of the first explorers to find the remains of ancient temples and treasure.

The indigenous people the explorers encountered both collaborated with the explorers and resisted their intrusions. Local *chicleros* led the explorers to certain sites, but almost certainly avoided revealing the location of other sacred altars. Mason noted on March 24 that the expedition had located the ruins of a city known as Okop, a "rare case of ruins actually being found by explorers...who generally succeed by following native guides' (Mason 1926d). Nevertheless, Mason also suggested that native guides 'misled' the explorers at times, leading them to the ruins of colonial Spanish settlements, rather than ancient Maya ruins. Although their local guides collaborated with the explorers, their expertise and knowledge crucial to the success of the expedition, their reluctance to share the precise location of sacred sites of indigenous devotion suggested a limit to their willingness.

As Mason's reports about the expedition ended in May 1926, the final two *Times* articles reiterated the 'first Americans' language. The May 16 edition carried an extensive article about the expedition with a provocative headline that claimed that religious practices dominated the artistic expression of the 'vanished 'First Americans' (Mason 1926e). Through detailed explanations of archaeological evidence, Mason taught readers about the apex of ancient Maya civilization, noting especially the sophistication of Maya calendar systems and artistic achievement of the 'ancient Americans.' Nevertheless, he also made sure that readers knew that the Maya represented a 'true branch of the American Indian race,' emphasizing their indigeneity and aboriginal origins. (Mason 1926a). He made a special point to criticize the shoddy and racist interpretations of the 'amateur scientists' who 'resent that America had an aboriginal culture of its own' (Mason 1926a) Mason's final report, published in the May 30, 1926 edition, piqued readers' interest with evidence of cultural links between the ancient Maya, framed as '[an] ancient American race' and their living descendants of the Yucatan (Mason 1926d).

IMPOSING INFORMAL EMPIRE THROUGH INTERPRETATIONS OF MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY

Both journalists employed the narrative plot device of mystery, riddle, and secrets to explain the ancient Maya for US readers and heighten interest in Maya archaeology; through their use of those plot devices, they insisted that only US scientific knowledge and know-how could solve these mysteries and accorded the power to interpret the ancient Maya entirely to US archaeologists. These representations of heroic US scientists arriving to Yucatan to help an impoverished and ignorant people unravel the mysteries of the region's great ancient past reinscribed the power inequalities between the United States and Yucatan and surely furthered readers' impressions of the need for US scientific and cultural dominance over the native people of the peninsula. Reed, in particular, captured these sentiments when she quoted John C. Merriam of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, who emphasized the inferior nature of Mexican archaeological excavations: 'Ignorant excavations and neglect to properly classify the excavated material will only destroy the record for all time. Better by far to leave the cities beneath the soil for another hundred years and sow maize over them than to expose them to the vandalism of careless handling' (Reed 1923a). US scientists did not trust indigenous people to excavate, interpret, or understand their own ancient past without assistance.

Reed focused her articles on local events in Yucatan rather than engaging in cultural comparisons between the United States and ancient Mesoamerica. Unlike Mason's later dispatches, she confined herself to reporting on Yucatan without suggesting any imagined cultural connections between the United States and Yucatan. Instead, her reports from her trip to Yucatan demonstrated a preoccupation with the cultural local Yucatecan context and events and the actual scientific and personal relationships between US archaeologists, journalists, and Yucatec politicians. She constructed a foreign, unfamiliar identity for the ancient Maya as incomprehensible to the modern US reader. Reed quoted Marshall Saville of the Museum of the American Indian, whose research at Uxmal and Chichén Itzá had only recently confirmed his belief that Maya civilization 'was not inherited, but that it independently developed the features of North African and Asiatic civilizations from a state of Neolithic culture' (Reed 1923a). Rather than comparing the ancient Maya to the culture of the contemporary United States as Mason later would, Reed's articles suggested an uncivilized and undeveloped culture that US readers would almost certainly consider it culturally and racially inferior.

Mason's articles, in contrast, positioned the ancient Maya as familiar to the modern US reader. His article series promoted a narrative of shared continuities between ancient Maya culture and the contemporary United States. His descriptions of the ancient Maya drew similarities between men like himself—civilized men of art, science, letters, architecture, religion and technology—and the ancient Maya, suggesting that ancient Mayan civilizations had influenced modern US culture. The headline of Mason's May 23 article ('Ancient Mayas Were Traders and Builders') characterized the ancient Maya as "traders and builders" and claimed that the expedition had collected fresh evidence showing 'the early American race to have been 'Ingenuous, Enterprising, and Prosperous' (Mason 1926f). Mason noted the ubiquitous presence of ancient stone walls throughout Yucatan, supposing that they served the same purpose as the stone fences of New England, leading him to conclude that the ancient Maya were 'an agricultural and commercial

people like ourselves' (Mason 1926f). The *Times*' readership could identify these elements in their own culture, linking the contemporary United States to the ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica. Mason's articles collapsed the racial and cultural differences between the ancient Maya and the United States, creating a new historical narrative that legitimated white settler-colonialism in the United States and imperialism in Yucatan.

Reed reproduced for US readers the racial and cultural discourse of *indigenismo* that informed national policies and attitudes towards indigenous people in Mexico in the 1920s. Reed's April 15, 1923 article for the *Times* proposed 'archaeological first aid' to culturally assimilate Mexico's indigenous people into a new national mestizo and revolutionary identity. Reed quoted Mexican anthropologist and archaeologist Manuel Gamio at length about Mexico's so-called 'Indian problem.' Although sources cannot reveal how US audiences received these articles, it seems likely that the racial overtones and the message about the challenges of cultural assimilation were not lost on US readers during the height of white nativist policies towards immigrants and Jim Crow policies of racial segregation enforced through violence. It seems possible that the debates over 'archaeological first aid' and cultural assimilation might have even heightened anxieties about the dangers of cultural and racial miscegenation and served to justify the politics of racial segregation and terror in the United States. On the other hand, Reed seemed to revel in her romantic perceptions of Carillo Puerto's indigeneity, delighting in his use of the ancient Maya tongue: 'the Governor spoke in the language of his ancient race...the only Indian language in the New World to dominate that of the conqueror' (Reed 1923a).

Mason, curiously, rarely mentioned the racial phenotypes of the ancient Maya, a surprising omission given the racially charged national zeitgeist of the United States in the 1920s and the widespread popularity of scientific racism and national fascination with eugenics. When he did refer to race, he framed the ancient Maya as a 'mysterious race' or the 'great race' (Mason 1926b) but without reference to any physical features or speculation about indigenous phenotypes. Perhaps because he couldn't describe the ancient Maya in racial terms without veering into unscientific speculation, Mason's discursive creation of shared culture appeared to negate the racial assumptions of the period and evolutionary studies of culture, but his articles nonetheless placed cultures, rather than races, into a predefined hierarchy with the obvious but unspoken assumption about the ultimate superiority of the culture of the contemporary United States. For example, Mason's May 9 dispatch, for example, framed the Maya as the cradle of the 'culture of the 'First Americans' and identified this culture as having originated in Mexico. Mason argued that the ancient Aztec culture, the cornerstone of Mexican national identity and culture, was distinctly inferior and overemphasized in the pre-Columbian history of Mexico (Mason 1926b).

Both Mason and Reed addressed the one point sure to thrill readers: the gruesome practice of ancient human sacrifice. Nevertheless, they drew different conclusions about the purpose of those sacrifices and what they suggested about the nature of the ancient Maya. Reed had learned about human sacrifice in Yucatan during her interview with Thompson about his illicit dredging activities in the Chichén Itzá cenote. Her article appeared as a full-page article in the April 8, 1923 Sunday version of the *Times* under the salacious headline: 'The Well of the Maya's Human Sacrifice' (Reed 1923c). Reed reported that Thompson considered the human bones of sacrificial victims at the bottom of the cenote as vital pieces of evidence to understand the ancient Maya, noting that 'many eminent scientists either doubted or flatly denied' that the Maya engaged in human sacrifice.

In contrast, Thompson claimed that he had believed the accuracy of the chronicles of the early Spanish conquest period, such those of Diego de Landa, who recorded such rites. Sensing an association between nature and religion, Thompson concluded that the sacred cenote had served as an important religious site. Reed imagined the lives of the maidens, 'virgins of flawless loveliness,' marked for sacrifice by their physical perfection and spiritual training as willing martyrs for communal good. She described to readers in lurid detail the ancient community procession to the edge of the sacred cenote, the blessing by the priest, and those terrifying final moments before the priests 'hurled the human sacrifices into the yawning water pit, the maidens having been mercifully drugged with the sacred ambrosia, *balche*' (Reed 1923c). Reed interpreted the Maya penchant for human sacrifice as evidence of their savagery, positioning them as an alien people foreign to the sensibilities of the more civilized modern United States. Reed's article series interpreted the remains of ancient native people as proof of their otherness,

barbarity, and irrational nature, noting that, “It is difficult to reconcile the certainties of human sacrifice at the Sacred Cenote and at many of the magnificent edifices of Chichén Itzá with its evidences of advanced culture’ (Reed 1923).

Mason interpreted the question of human sacrifice differently, casting the ancient Maya as a far more peaceful and civilized people than Reed’s article had suggested. The ancient Aztec of central Mexico had long been known to have practiced ritual human sacrifice, a pre-Columbian practice witnessed by many of the famous chroniclers and *conquistadores* of the Spanish conquest period: Sahagún, Motolinía, and Hernán Cortés. Mason admitted that the Maya had also practiced human sacrifice but argued that it was not a central feature of Maya religion: ‘It is true that the horrible rite of human sacrifice obtained some hold among them, but...nothing compared to its prevalence among the Aztecs of highland Mexico’ (Mason 1926f). Despite ample historical and archaeological evidence of human sacrifice and ritual bloodletting recorded throughout the Maya region (for example, in the lintels of Yaxchilán in Chiapas, recorded in Bernal Díaz de Castillo’s sixteenth-century conquest chronicle *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, and in the bones of the sacrificial victims that Thompson dredged from the sacred cenote at Chichén Itzá), Mason claimed that Maya ‘sculptures, paintings, and pictured books are[were] the work of a religious and peacefully inclined people’ (Mason 1926f). The figure of the soldier, Mason told readers, was nearly absent in Maya iconography, though images of priests appeared frequently; Mason interpreted this as evidence of a peaceable and religious society rather than a warlike one. In Mason’s version of Maya history, no war god in the Maya pantheon compared to the bloodthirsty Huitzilopochtli of the Aztecs of central Mexico. Instead, Mason insisted that the ancient Maya had been originally a peaceful people, only driven to war in response to the violence of the Spanish conquest (Mason 1926f). Setting up these contrasts between the warlike Aztec and the supposedly peaceable Maya provided US readers with an easy association between the Maya and themselves, one in which ancient cultural characteristics had influenced the civilized and peaceable people of the United States. Conversely, Mason’s articles tacitly connected central Mexico’s gory ancient history to its perceived backwardness as a modern nation, most evident in the bloody revolution still winding down in the 1920s.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, my analysis of media representations of Maya archaeology in the 1920s shows how journalists crafted cultural representations of empire in Yucatan for US audiences to transform them into vicarious stakeholders in cultural and political relationships between the United States and Yucatan. Using the language of invented historical narratives, some romantic and some scientific, US journalists taught their readers about the nature of the ancient Maya and the politics of US-Mexican relationships in Yucatan. Reed and Mason drew different conclusions about the nature of the ancient Maya yet remained invested in the maintenance of US informal cultural empire in Yucatan. Reed viewed ancient native people through a romantic, though essentialist lens as a prehistoric people trapped in the past, driven by irrationality and barbarism. She emphasized their artistic and architectural achievements, but presented them to readers as fundamentally alien people, particularly in her writing on the practice of human sacrifice. Mason presented a different view of the Maya, one that constructed an imagined bridge from ancient Mesoamerica to the contemporary United States. Nevertheless, both readings justified greater US involvement in Yucatan and re-establishing damaged cultural and economic ties, compounded by new strains of radical politics circulating through the peninsula. If in Reed’s view, the ancient Maya were unlike the US scientists who arrived to study them, their fundamental dissimilarity justified a greater US presence to dominate their unknowability and to make their ancient culture legible and knowable for US audiences. When Mason portrayed the ancient Maya in terms familiar to readers, he suggested that ancient Maya formed a natural part of US history and its processes of informal empire.

Media representations of US archaeological practice in Yucatan also served to assuage US anxieties about fears of radical politics that had fractured traditional US-Yucatec economic relationships based on henequen production. Alma Reed clearly sympathized with Carrillo Puerto’s socialism, but also portrayed his socialism as an instrument for the advancement of US archaeology. The Mason-Spinden Expedition assured readers that US explorers had re-

established the traditional US role of interpretation of the indigenous past and continued to engage in narratives of conquest designed to subjugate radical politics to scientific inquiry. Linking the great ancient Maya past to the greatness of the United States in the 1920s established an invented cultural citizenship and unbroken, authentic history between the United States and Yucatan that soothed international relationships disrupted by the Mexican revolution and Carrillo Puerto's radical socialism. Archaeological expeditions, of which the Mason Spinden Expedition was one of many, created a constant US presence in the peninsula, reminding local people and politicians who, exactly, held the power to interpret and understand the indigenous past.

Reed and Mason, as journalists who mediated translated events on the ground in Yucatan for the US reading public, shows how journalists of both the past and present employ enormous interpretive power. Though neither was a trained archaeologist, they both shaped US perceptions of the ancient Mesoamerican past for readers and then linked those perceptions to an expanding informal US cultural empire. By building representational machines based around Alma Reed's 1923 reports, in marked contrast to Mason's 1926 article series, shows how changing political exigencies demanded different types of representational machines, but still justified US economic, cultural, and scientific dominance in Yucatan. Reed's dispatches linked US archaeological practice to imperialism and suggested that only US science could rescue the ancient Maya from their historical silence and present-day backwardness. By 1926, repairing US and Yucatec relationships to boost henequen production created a narrative of unquestioned imperial domination. Although the Mason-Spinden Expedition of 1926 did not find any archaeological evidence that revolutionized understandings of the ancient Maya, its presence and dispatches assured the US public that all was well in Yucatan.

This article shows how journalists interpreted scientific and archaeological evidence and shared that evidence with the public. Journalists and news media play an outsized role in the communication of scientific evidence to the public, but cultural contexts shape their interpretations and choices of messaging. Reed and Mason reproduced deep cultural currents of US imperialism, which shaped how they interpreted archaeological evidence. Where Reed saw foreignness and exoticism, Mason saw familiarity and continuity. Each sought to invent cultural identities for ancient native people for their readers, bringing the ancient Maya into US cultural consciousness and cultivating ongoing public support for US archaeological work.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Lisa Munro  orcid.org/0000-0003-2040-6801
Independent Scholar, US

REFERENCES

- Aguirre, R.** 2005. *Informal empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Albright, E.** 2015. *The man who owned a wonder of the world: The gringo history of Mexico's Chichén Itzá*. Bohlin Carr, Inc.
- Card, JJ.** 2019. *Spooky Archaeology: Myth and the science of the past*. 1 edition. University of New Mexico Press.
- Charlot, J, Morris, E and Morris, AA.** 1931. The Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itzá. *Carnegie Institution of Washington*, 1: 231–346.
- Davis, EH.** 1921. *History of the New York Times, 1851–1921*. New York: The New York Times.
- Delpar, H.** 1992. *The enormous vogue of things Mexican: Cultural relations between the United States and Mexico*. Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press.
- Evans, RT.** 2004. *Romancing the Maya: Mexican antiquity in the American imagination, 1820–1915*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Fagan, GG.** 2006. *Archaeological fantasies: how pseudoarchaeology misrepresents the past and misleads the public*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Feder, KL.** 1990. *Frauds, myths, and mysteries: Science and pseudoscience in archaeology*. Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield Pub. Co.

- Fritze, RH.** 2011. *Invented knowledge: False history, fake science and pseudo-religions*. 2nd ed. London: Reaktion Books.
- Gero, J and Root, D.** 1990. Public presentations and private concerns: Archaeology in the pages of National Geographic. In: *The politics of the past*, 201–3. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Hervik, P.** 1998. The Mysterious Maya of National Geographic. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 4(1): 166–197. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlca.1998.4.1.166>
- Joseph, GM.** 1987. *Revolution From without: Yucatan, Mexico, and the United States, 1880–1924*. Durham: Duke University Press Books.
- Mason, G.** 1926a. Science Seeks Key to Maya Riddle: The Mason-Spinden Expedition Will Search Temple Ruins in Yucatan Jungles for the Secret of the Intelligent and Powerful Race of City Builders That Flourished There Before the Christian Era. *New York Times*, 17 Jan, p. XX1.
- Mason, G.** 1926b. RUINS OF THE MAYAS YIELD NEW HISTORY: Scientists of Mason-Spinden Expedition Hold That the Culture of the 'First Americans' Was Not Derived From Other Lands but Originated in Mexico — Yucatan Adds Chapter to Mayan Story. *New York Times*, 9 May, p. XX3.
- Mason, G.** 1926c. MAYA CULTURE IS TRACED TO RELIGIOUS SOURCE: Members of Mason-Spinden Expedition to Yucatan Are Convinced by Their Archaeological Discoveries That Religion Dominated the High Artistic Expression of the Vanished 'First Americans'. *New York Times*, 16 May, p. XX4.
- Mason, G.** 1926d. RUINS OF MAYA CITY FOUND IN THE JUNGLE: The Mason-Spinden Expedition Travels 225 Miles Through the Wilds of Yucatan. OLD BUILDINGS EXPLORED Okop Gives Evidence of Being Built by Race of Industrialists, Religious but Not Artistic. OTHER RUINS ARE REPORTED Explorers Hear Indians Use an Old Temple for Mixture of Ancient and Catholic Rites. *New York Times*, 24 Mar, p. 25.
- Mason, G.** 1926e. MAYAS FLOURISHED ALONG THE COAST: Mason-Spinden Expedition Finds the Interior Almost Devoid of Ruins. COULD TRADE BY CANOE While the Dense Jungle Made Travel Difficult — Explorers to Go to Chichen-Itze. *New York Times*, 25 Mar, p. 4.
- Mayan Explorers Face Jungle Peril: Mason-Spinden Expedition to Sail on Saturday From New Orleans to study ancient city. Treacherous Reef, Deadly Snakes and Disease Among Dangers Amid Yucatan Ruins., 1926. *New York Times*, 5 Jan, p. 5.
- Morley, SG.** 1925. Chichen Itza: An Ancient American Mecca. *National Geographic*, 47(1): 63–95.
- Pratt, ML.** 1992. *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Reed, A.** 1922. WOMAN TESTS FREE SPEECH: Case Against Anita Whitney for 'Syndicalism' Up to Supreme Court Talked on Negro Question. Postponement Refused. WOMAN TESTS FREE SPEECH Her Demeanor During Trial. *New York Times*, p. 93.
- Reed, A.** 1923a. The Waiting Ghosts of the Maya: Waiting Ghosts of the Maya. *New York Times*, 18 May, p. SM3.
- Reed, A.** 1923b. On the Track of the Maya's Secret. *New York Times*, 1 Apr, p. SM14.
- Reed, A.** 1923c. The Well of the Maya's Human Sacrifice. *New York Times*, 8 Apr, p. SM9.
- Said, EW.** 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Salvatore, RD.** 1998. The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire. In: *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US—Latin American Relations*, 69–104. Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822396352-003>
- Salvatore, RD.** 2016. *Disciplinary Conquest: U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900–1945*. Durham; London: Duke University Press Books. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374503>
- Saville, MH.** 1935. The Ancient Maya Causeways of Yucatan. *Antiquity*, 9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00009984>
- SISAL MONOPOLY ENDS.: Yucatan Socialists' Enterprise Is Superseded by Society of Growers., 1924. *New York Times*, p. 8.
- Sisal Production In Yucatan.** 1920. *New York Times*, p. 35.
- Spinden, HJ.** 1924a. LOWLY BANANA REBUILDS AN EMPIRE: Central America, Once Seat of Maya Civilization, Is Coming Back Under Modern Enterprise. *New York Times*, 18 May.
- Spinden, HJ.** 1924b. ADVENTURING IN ARCHAEOLOGY: Or Boy-Scout-Led Up River and Through Jungle in Central America. *New York Times*, p. SM9.
- Stephens, JL.** 1969. *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, Volume I*. New York: Dover Publications.
- TELLS OF ANCIENT AMERICA.: Dr. Spinden, Back from Yucatan, Describes Ruins of Great Cities., 1914. *New York Times*, p. C5.
- Turner, JK.** 1969. *Barbarous Mexico*. [New ed.]. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Willard, TA.** 1926. *The city of the sacred well: being a narrative of the discoveries and excavations of Edward Herbert Thompson in the ancient city of the Chichen Itza with some civilization as revealed by their art and architecture, here set down and illustrated from photographs*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
- YUCATAN SOCIALISM BAD FOR HENEQUEN: Principal Industry of the State Is Languishing and Many Farms Are Abandoned. ALL IN GOVERNOR'S HANDS Senor Carillo, Through His 142 Relations and Numerous 'Ligas,' Controls Politics and Business., 1923. *New York Times*, p. 10.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Munro, L. 2021. Crafting the Secrets of the Ancient Maya: Media Representations of Archaeological Exploration and the Cultural Politics of US Informal Empire in 1920s Yucatan. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 31(1): 3, pp. 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-652>

Submitted: 01 October 2020

Accepted: 06 April 2021

Published: 10 May 2021

COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Bulletin of the History of Archaeology is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.