

# Pioneers in Maya Archaeology: Friar Estanislao Carrillo: (1798–1846)

Submitted by Marta Barber\*

Amid the famous 19th Century explorers of the Yucatán peninsula – Waldeck, Maler, Charnay – there is a pioneer whose name and work are almost forgotten: Estanislao Carrillo. Serving as the priest at Ticul, he aided John Lloyd Stephen's explorations and perhaps inspired by the traveler's publications, compiled his own accounts describing several Maya ruins.

Carrillo wrote articles about Uxmal, Kabah, Sayil, Chichén Itzá and the walled ruins at Chacchob, that were published between 1845–1849 under the pseudonym "Un Curioso" (A Curious Man) in the journal *Registro Yucateco*. Among those articles is the one titled, "Una Ciudad Morada," published on March 12, 1845, in which he reports for the first time the site of Chacchob, near Teabo. Here he describes the protective wall surrounding the site, defines its settlement organization and offers a social interpretation of the ancient community. David Webster carried out a detailed study of the site.

Estanislao Carrillo was born in Teabo, Yucatán, May 7, 1798. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, Teabo had a sizable Maya population. By 1617, it was the location of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul, built and run by the Franciscans. It was here, at the age of 8, that Estanislao started to work helping the friars with the chores of the monastery and the "capilla de indios," the open chapel that became part

*The Adivino pyramid at Uxmal, 1860, from a photocopy of page 35 in the book Cités et ruines américaines, by Désiré Charnay.*



\*With thanks to Dr. Edward Kurjack, who suggested the subject, helped edit the story and supplied leads on where to look for information.

of all early Catholic churches and monasteries in Yucatán and Mexico. He must have played on the large Pre-Columbian architectural complex at the center of the town.

Carrillo entered the College of San Francisco in Mérida where he took the Franciscan vows at the age of 20. In 1821, when Mexico won its Independence from Spain and passed a law of secularization of all the clergy, Friar Carrillo decided to stay a Franciscan monk.

In 1839, he met John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood during their explorations in Yucatán. Of him Stephens writes, "... while in the midst of a violent [malaria] attack, a gentleman arrived whose visit I had expected. ... It was the cura Carrillo of Ticul. ... We had heard of him as a person who took more interest in the antiquities of the country than almost any other, and who possessed more knowledge



*This is the earliest image of Friar Estanislao Carrillo that is publicly available. It is from a photocopy of what is probably a Daguerreotype image taken by either Stephens, Catherwood or ornithologist, Dr. Cabot during their second visit to the Yucatán.*



*Here is a Daguerreotype image of John Lloyd Stephens from the frontispiece of his Incidents of Travel in Yucatán.*

on the subject." Stephen continues: "He was past forty, tall and thin, with an open, animated and intelligent countenance, manly, and at the same time mild, and belonged to the once powerful order of Franciscan friars, now reduced in this region to himself and a few companions. ... His friends urged him to secularize engaging to procure for him a better curacy, but he steadily refused. ... The quiet and seclusion of his village did not afford sufficient employment for his mind but, fortunately for science and for me, ... he had turned his attention to the antiquities of the country."

In Chapter XV of *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, a message reaches Stephens in Santa Elena Nohcacab reporting that Father Carrillo was dying. With Dr. Cabot, Stephens traveled to Ticul to see the sick priest. The diagnosis was cholera. An English doctor was treating Carrillo by laying fresh killed mutton on his stomach. Stephens' visit evidently cheered the priest and he began returning to health.

Carrillo pointed out various basic features of Maya life that later scholars expanded; he described the various water sources exploited by the Maya, noted fortifications and recorded some of the legends associated with the ruins.

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*The church in early Teabo was part of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul. This rural Franciscan monastery has a one story cloister typical of 17th century Yucatecan convents. Its cemetery is one of the largest in the area. The church, built in the second half of the 17th century (1650-1690) houses a handsome colonial retablo. An extensive series of murals were discovered by accident in the 1980s. Located in the spacious sacristy and recently restored with more enthusiasm than finesse, the principal murals depict luminaries of the Catholic church, focussing on the Four Evangelists and the Four Fathers. The portrait of St. Jerome with his lion is especially striking. They are among the nicest murals in Yucatán.*





# Friar Estanislao Carrillo

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Friar Carrillo was one of the first to study the use of *chultuns* (wells) in northwest Yucatán.

In his book, *Two Days in Nohpat*, he reports the existence of a *sacbé* that joins the sites of Uxmal, Kabah and Nohpat. He also makes a very good reference of the legend of the tiny dwarf of Uxmal. (We cover

Carrillo's version of the legend compared to Stephen's version in the April *Explorer*.)

Carrillo wrote about his investigations of several sites in the area in other publications. As a good observer, Carrillo, in one of his articles, praises a special class of cigars made by the Maya.

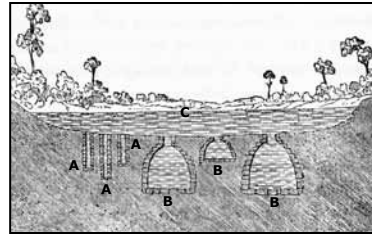
Friar Estanislao Carrillo is one of the lesser known names in Yucatec archaeology and, yet, "one of the most important," said Alfredo Barrera Rubio, at that time Director of the INAH office in Mérida, during a presentation in 2000. The friar, he continued, "was one of the few researchers of the Yucatán in the 19th Century."

In his translation of Stephens' work into Spanish, Justo Sierra O'Reilly notes that Carrillo died of a pulmonary infection in Ticul on May 21, 1846. Sierra reports

that Stephens had Carrillo made a member of the New York Historical Society and sent him a diploma of membership.

After the friar's death in 1846, the *Registro Yucateco* published "Loose Papers of Father Carrillo," which include articles such as "Ghosts," where he makes references to the *aluxes a balams* of Maya mythology.

One of his biographers tells that when visiting an interior village, he complained about the mistreatment and injustice practiced toward the Indigenous population. He told the visiting priest that such conditions could only bring revolt. Not long after his death, the War of Castes began, bringing devastation to the whole peninsula.



From Fig. 9, page 150, in Stephen's *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, we have Catherwood's drawing of Yucatecan water sources, A) wells, B) chultuns, C) aguadas. The restored corbelled arch of Kabah as it appears today. It was one terminus of the *sacbé* that connected the sites of Uxmal, Kabah and Nohpat.



There was a Franciscan mission in Ticul since 1555 and by 1591 it had attained the rank of *cabecera* or head mission. Construction on the church and convent began but was not finished until the 1640s. Carrillo's tomb is located outside the entrance of the church. Today in Ticul there are many colorful statues of gods and heroes in honor of the city's Maya past created by *Arte y Decoración*.



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