

## CAMPECHE ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

The Mexican federal state of Campeche, located in the western part of the Yucatan peninsula, possesses a rich archaeological heritage, as a testimony of the Maya civilization that flourished in the area for several millennia before the arrival of Spanish conquerors at the beginning of the 16th century, as well as of the early colonial times. The paper summarizes the archaeological research and restoration works carried out in Campeche during the last few decades.

**Key words:** Maya archaeology, Campeche, research history.

As it happens in other parts of the country, Mexico's southeastern region has a solid cultural background whose roots nourish the daily life of many citizens. The specific case of the Campeche State, on the western section of the Yucatan peninsula, is a clear example of how the past is still alive in several ways: new archaeological findings; rescue and salvage projects; integration of pre-Hispanic sites to tourist circuits; major cultural heritage conservation works; epigraphic, archaeological and historical research achievements, etc. (Benavides 1998).

Campeche's northern section preserves more Maya-speaking people with pre-Columbian traditions than the southern section. In the middle of the XXth century the southern low demography helped to promote the foundation of many communities integrated by migrants from almost every region of the country. However, the pre-Columbian vestiges are found everywhere within Campeche's 58,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Today's Campeche population is less than one million, with Campeche and Carmen cities as the undeniable economic centers that support half of the state's demography. As a consequence, Campeche's road system only has basic lines whose branches began to grow until recent years.

On the other hand, archaeologists' work has revealed only tiny fragments of some ancient cities and there is still much to register, to study and to divulge. Still without a formal archaeological site corpus, some relevant pieces of an enormous puzzle have begun to appear, and little by little are being recognized. Here we have to remember two

relevant achievements of recent times: Campeche city historical downtown and the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve<sup>1</sup>, where the ancient settlement of Calakmul is also located; both are now included in the world heritage list.

A hot and humid environment has been a *sine qua non* circumstance for the rise and development of the Maya culture in Campeche through several centuries. The working habitats have been different: dense and suffocating mangroves or a thousand shades of green and brown in the inland jungles. There are still some dangerous animals there but little remains of the fine woods that once thrived on large territories. Sometimes work has to be done in thick pastures that devoured the jungle and where you find thousands of tick squads. Nevertheless, putting aside discomfort and difficult days, the voyages to Campeche's past have been fruitful. Most of the archaeological projects have had enough resources to register and dig domestic units or to consolidate and restore monumental buildings, and also to study and publish their findings.

Materials and information obtained have not only helped to better know the features and sequences of the studied sites, but have also been useful in proposing wider and better explained interregional scenarios.

In a similar way, movable and non movable cultural heritage has been rescued, particularly relevant for its specific contexts. This means that during the last decade, the number of Maya artifacts and sites known in Campeche has increased particularly as a result of formal research, rather than of looting raids. Information derived from objects whose provenance, associations, chronology, chemical composition etc. are known contributes to explaining and understanding past societies that created them. Such activity has also generated new research and conservation questions, topics whose discussion and solution require, more frequently than before, the participation of interdisciplinary teams.

During the past years many researchers from different academic fields have devoted time and resources to better know the ancient history of many settlements of Campeche. Information has been obtained from many sources: surveys, rescue labors, fortuitous findings, maintenance and restoration efforts, excavations and analyses of diverse materials. In the following lines an attempt will be made at summarizing what we consider to be the most relevant issues. A list of several wide coverage projects will be followed by the information related with research projects developed at specific sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Its surface is 723,185 hectares, which is 47 % of the area of the municipality of the same name.

Project	Coverage	Sites	Coordination	References
PROCEDE <sup>2</sup>	State	± 60 and corroboration of more	Elena Canché M. / INAH <sup>3</sup> Campeche	
Mexico's Mural Painting	State	Xuelén, Chelemí, Ichmac, etc.	Beatriz de la Fuente / IIE UNAM <sup>4</sup> 1990s	De la Fuente 2001; Staines 1993; 1998; 2001; Navarjjo 2001
Underwater Archaeology	State	shipwrecks, cenotes, water bodies	Pilar Luna E. / INAH Subacuáticos 2003...	Luna and Roffiel 2001; Trejo 2003
MANZANA <sup>5</sup>	State	Okolhuitz, Ramonal, Puerto Rico, Ichmac, Xchan, Sisilá, Balché...	Antonio Benavides C. / INAH Campeche	Benavides 1999a, 2001a, 2003, 2004, 2004a
Southeast Campeche	Regional (Southeast)	Altar de los Reyes, Los Alacranes, etc.	Ivan Šprajc / INAH/ZRC SAZU <sup>6</sup> 1996-2005	Šprajc <i>et al.</i> 1997; Šprajc and Suárez 1998; Šprajc 2003; 2002-04
Territory and Power	Regional (North)	Xuch, Halal, Xcombec, etc.	Lorraine Williams and Edmundo de la Rosa / UAC <sup>7</sup>	Williams-Beck 1998; 1999; Williams-Beck and López 1999
Xculoc	Regional (Northeast)	Xculoc, Xcochxax, Xpostanil, Chunhuhub	Pierre Becquelin and Dominique Michelet / CNRS <sup>8</sup>	Michelet 2002; Michelet <i>et al.</i> 2000
Manos Rojas-Balamkú	Regional (South)	El Zapote, El Tapir, Morelia, Kaynikté, etc.	Dominique Michelet / CNRS	Nondédéo 1999; 2003
Champotón	Regional (West)	Champotón, Moquel, etc.	William Folan / UAC	Folan <i>et al.</i> 2004; Forsyth 2004; Forsyth and Jordan 2003
Río Bec	Regional (South)	Río Bec, Kajtún, Tres Lunas, etc.	D. Michelet, M-C. Arnauld, P. Nondédéo	Michelet <i>et al.</i> 2005; Nondédéo 2004; Nondédéo and Lacadena 2004

<sup>2</sup> PROCEDE stands for Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales, a national program certifying peasants' land ownership.

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico).

<sup>4</sup> Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

<sup>5</sup> Mantenimiento a Zonas Arqueológicas no Abiertas al Público (a project giving maintenance to archaeological sites not open to the public).

<sup>6</sup> Scientific Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Slovenia).

<sup>7</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Campeche (Mexico).

<sup>8</sup> Centre National du Recherche Scientifique (France).

The overall meaning of the previous projects is the continuity of site registration and gradual increase of knowledge, despite the lack of a complete site catalogue or a preliminary database containing the information produced by different research projects. Considerable progress has been made in the north, west and southeast regions, but there are also large territories practically unknown, such as the Laguna de Términos surroundings, the region west of Calakmul and the central portion of the state. A conservative guess is that we have registered around 800 pre-Columbian settlements, a number that obviously will increase in the near future.

Let us now continue with a summary of research and conservation projects at specific sites.

### **Acanmul**

This site is located 25 kilometers northeast of Campeche city and around 20 kilometers away from the coast. The ancient settlement occupies a 2 km<sup>2</sup> surface and lived its splendor years between the 7th and 9th centuries A.D. Héber Ojeda M., with INAH Campeche, is in charge of the research project and has dedicated efforts to the excavation and restoration of four buildings. The principal structure is the Palace, with two levels of vaulted rooms and a complex Puuc architecture construction sequence. Excavations of a nearby building revealed a sweatbath, a rather uncommon structure at Puuc sites. Ojeda has not found hieroglyphics texts so far, which may be due to stone extraction in the 18th and 19th centuries, when two nearby haciendas of Yaxcab and Nachehá were built.

### **Altamira de Zináparo**

This research project is relatively recent and is directed by Vicente Suárez A. His principal goal is to register pre-Hispanic and colonial settlements in a region still poorly known. Among the principal sites to be studied are the so called "Mountain Missions", which were towns and churches founded by the Spaniards during the 16th and 17th centuries in order to control the native population (Sacalum, Ichbalche, Chunhaz and Tzuctok). One of the sites currently under study is Conhuás Viejo (the old town of Conhuás).

### **Balamkú**

Balamkú has been studied by two teams of researchers; a Mexican one headed by Ramón Carrasco and a French group directed by Dominique Michelet and Pierre Becquelin. The first team has centered efforts in the Central Group, and the other has paid attention to the South Group and surrounding domestic units. Some achievements are a general topographic map of the whole settlement, a ceramic sequence beginning in the Formative and ending in the Postclassic, and good examples of architectural development including the Petén and Río Bec variations (Arnauld *et al.* 1998; 1999).

In the Central Group there is a substructure that preserved most of its original frieze from the first centuries A.D. Modeled in stucco and supported by stone tenons, it represents parts of the ancient Maya belief system. According to the most accepted ex-

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planation among specialists, the motifs illustrate a comparison of dynastic and solar cycles. The access to the throne is represented by a king sprouting from the jaws of a terrestrial monster (the Sun ascending from the Earth's mouth). The king's death is then the sunset, when he enters or falls into the mouth from where he came. The fantastic masks and jaguars speak of the force and richness of the Earth; the amphibian beings symbolize the transition between both worlds. This very interesting stucco allegory is today protected with an excellent covering that not only preserves the Maya vestiges but also restores the original form of the building.

## **Becán**

This ancient Maya city is located practically in the middle of the Yucatan peninsula, a strategic place that must have facilitated its connections with the east and west coasts, as well as with the north and south regions of the Maya world. Becán is particularly important for being surrounded by a ditch that gathered rain water and facilitated its use. The encircled space covering around 24 hectares is only accessible through seven entrances with short causeways saving the ditch. During war times such infrastructure could be complemented with palisades. The monumental buildings are displayed around plazas and patios, but there are also evidences of domestic units nearby and outside the ditch.

Recent archaeological work at this capital city of the Rio Bec architectural style region has been directed by Luz Evelia Campaña (2005), from INAH. She has continued exploration and restoration operations in Structures IX and X, and also excavations of several adjoining patios. In the southern section of one of those spaces there is a stucco representation of a human being coming out from the Underworld and flanked by heads of mythical creatures.

At Structure IX, the highest pyramid of Becán, the earliest vestiges have been dated to the end of the Formative, and since those times the Maya placed big stucco masks representing their gods at both sides of the principal stairway. The architectonic renovations of the Early Classic hid them, by placing a rich construction offering with 15 vessels that show two funerary traditions then in use: one from Calakmul, the other from Tikal, the powerful polities dominating in those times. The Late Classic additions of rooms on several levels at both sides of the stairway covered the previous architecture. Such a solution, in spite of differences, evokes the western side of a high structure at another regional capital: the façade of the Five Stories Building at Edzná is also dated to the Late and Terminal Classic period.

Furthermore, restoration works at Becán Structure I have demonstrated a series of architectonic transformations that began around A.D. 300 and ended seven centuries later. Structure I has vaulted rooms on two levels and is guarded by massive towers at each end.

After the disappearance of the centralized Classic government, during the 10th and 11th centuries, Becán continued inhabited by a society with lesser political strength. This is suggested by the reoccupation and modification of several rooms of Structure I

and the archaeological vestiges found there. That was also the epoch when the tower shafts (originally open) were filled in; several graffiti were engraved on the plaster of some rooms and some buildings were dismantled to create new ones with different architectural conceptions, like the one just southeast of Structure I.

## **Calakmul**

This ancient metropolis was one of the most powerful economic and political entities of the central Maya region. *Kaan*, or The Serpent's Kingdom, eclipsed its great enemy Tikal during the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. William Folan, from the Campeche Autonomous University, directed several field seasons at Calakmul between 1982 and 1994. Later, INAH's Ramón Carrasco began a new research program. During the past decade both researchers and their associates have published diverse texts derived from their respective investigations (Folan 1999; Folan *et al.* 1999; 2001; Boucher and Palomo 1998; Carrasco 1996; 1997; 2000; Carrasco *et al.* 1999; Carrasco and Colón 2005; Braswell *et al.* 2004; Domínguez *et al.* 2003).

The area surveyed covers 30 km<sup>2</sup>. Most of the settlement is enclosed by an extensive *bajo* (seasonally flooded swamp), as well as by *aguadas* (water ponds) and canals that formed a useful hydraulic system. A population estimate of 50,000 souls has been proposed for the summit epoch. Most of the 117 stelae known so far correspond to that period of splendor, recording dates from A.D. 435 to 909.

The climax of Calakmul corresponds to the reign of Yuknoom The Great (A.D. 636-686), who developed an ambitious program of palace constructions and renovations, clever economic and political negotiations with a number of the Petén cities, such as Dos Pilas, Naranjo, Cancuén and Piedras Negras. One part of the wealth accumulated by the Calakmul kings is reflected in dozens of polychrome vessels and in many jade masks found in funerary contexts. Calakmul governors also headed relevant war campaigns against Tikal. Many hieroglyphic inscriptions of the Petén region include Calakmul's emblem glyph, thence revealing its diplomatic relations, alliances, family ties, hierarchy, and other contacts not yet understood.

Recent explorations in Calakmul's core have shed light on the Preclassic period at the site, but they have also helped to get a better view of the elite domestic units built near the heart of the city. Tunnel excavations in Structure II have revealed a long construction sequence, one of the most spectacular findings being a big stucco frieze symbolizing the Underworld entrance. In the central part of the scene (over the lintel) a dynamic high rank personage descends to the entrance and is flanked by enormous fantastic two-headed birds. The ends of the frieze have big square ornaments containing the symbols of "mirror" or sacredness; other mythic creatures with fleshless jaws hang from the square elements.

Behind the above mentioned entrance, the structure has an almost true arch, a very unusual feature in Maya architecture but also present at one elite tomb of the site and at Structure XII of La Muñeca, another Petén site 33 kilometers northeast of Calakmul. This information reported by Hasso Hohmann (2005) leads us to assume that the principle

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of the true arch was known by the ancient Maya. Probably they did not use it frequently due to the stability qualities of the corbelled vault: a true arch will fall down if it loses only one element; a Maya vault collapse tends to be partial.

The tunnel explorations into Structure II gave evidences of a patio measuring 70 meters on their sides, today covered by hundreds of tons of stone filling that support later constructions. Other tunnels in that patio disclosed a building whose stairway is flanked by two big stucco zoomorphic masks. They are more than 4 meters high and 3 meters wide. Some details are marked with red pigment, others with blue painting, and the snouts have *Ik* symbols representing “wind” or “vital breath”.

At Structure XX, forming part of the eastern side of the Great Acropolis, excavations showed a complex construction development. Ceramics included very interesting bichrome and polychrome types previously poorly represented in the ceramic collection of the site. A good example are many fragments of the so called “codex style” vessels.

The explorations at the North Acropolis, located north of Structure VII, produced several Early Classic painted murals. A low platform built as a narrow walkway preserves several sections of an aquatic scene that combines herons and cormorants with water lilies and *Kaban* (Earth) glyphs. The lower section displays turtles, fishes and water serpents alternating with more water lilies and the *Chik Naab* glyph, an element associated with Calakmul’s kings.

Another mural painting at Structure I of the Great Acropolis depicts two women and two men in a ritual ceremony. The central part is occupied by an elite lady placing or receiving a big pot placed on the head of a squatting woman. The men of high rank are at both sides of the scene, seated and drinking or eating from their respective vessels.

## **Cerro de los Muertos**

This site is located on the Candelaria river, 50 kilometers away from the town of Candelaria. Conservation and research field seasons are directed by Vicente Suárez A., from INAH Campeche, revealing an originally Petén architecture site that thrived under the influence of nearby (7 km) Itzamkanac (El Tigre), the principal economic and political regional capital (Suárez and Rocha 2001).

Cerro de los Muertos settlement occupies the highest part of a natural hill and has three building complexes, one of them with a ball game court. Explorations at the ancient site show a ceramic sequence that begins during the Late Formative but had its climax during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. A Postclassic occupation is also represented at the site but with less ceramic materials. Archaeological works at this second rank Maya settlement have slowed down looting activities and have awakened an awareness of the importance of pre-Columbian cultural legacy among the locals.

## **Champotón**

In 2001 the Campeche Autonomous University began a regional research program at this port located 60 km south of the city of Campeche. The project is coordinated by William Folan; among the first fruits of their labor is the evidence of monumental Petén

architecture. Later buildings are Puuc-style constructions, and the Postclassic period materials are complemented by the 16th century historical sources (Folan *et al.* 2004; Forsyth and Jordan 2003; Forsyth 2004).

Colonial times witnessed the demolition of pre-Hispanic buildings and the re-use of stones, which are still visible in several districts of modern Champotón; such are, for example, gross Puuc column tambours, and the monuments with hieroglyphic texts embedded in the exterior part of the oldest church of the city.

Several kilometers north of Champotón, another settlement explored by the project is Moquel, where a preliminary ceramic study has showed a dense Preclassic occupation.

## **Dzibilnocac**

This place name was created with Maya words in the 19th century to describe a “stone turtle inscribed with glyphs” that was found among the ruins. The ancient settlement is 20 kilometers northeast of Dzibalchén, in the Campeche northeastern region. Dzibilnocac is a big settlement, partially mapped and where only one building has been partially excavated: a Chenes style three-tower construction with mosaic veneer stone masks decorating the towers and several rooms distributed along an east-west axis. INAH’s Ramón Carrasco has directed explorations and conservation works.

After its pre-Columbian history this Maya city was covered by the jungle around the 15th century and then lived again in 1822, when it was baptized as Iturbide<sup>9</sup>. John Stephens and Frederick Catherwood were there in 1842. At the end of that century Teobert Maler also visited the ruins. In 1964 there was an official change of name for the community: Vicente Guerrero<sup>10</sup>, but tradition has been stronger than political impositions and most people continue calling it Iturbide.

## **Edzná**

This site had a long pre-Hispanic occupation beginning around 600 B.C. and ending by the middle of the 15th century. Edzná inhabitants developed different architectural styles through 20 centuries, today called Petén, Chenes, Puuc, Chontal and Postclassic.

During the last field seasons archaeological activities have focused basically on the eastern side of the Five Stories Building, an action revealing that the pyramid was built long before the Great Acropolis. Explorations have also documented curious convex slopes, dated to the Late Classic (A.D. 600-1000) and apparently combining the Puuc and Chontal architectural styles as a result of modifications of the Peten architecture (Benavides 1997; 2001; 2005; Suárez 2001).

Edzná Preclassic evidences have also been complemented with explorations at several buildings of the Old Sorcerer complex, located 800 meters northeast of the Great Acropolis. More than 30 stelae have been found at the site but some are eroded and

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<sup>9</sup> Honoring Agustín de Iturbide y Aramburu (1783-1824), self-declared Agustín I, emperor of Mexico.

<sup>10</sup> A participant in the Independence movement and Mexico’s second president (1783-1831).



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others have no legible dates. Some monuments were carved during the Early Classic (A.D. 250-600) and others have dates between A.D. 633 and 810.

Other excavated and restored buildings include Nohochná or “the Big House”, west of the principal plaza and 135 meters long. Each side has a wide (100 meters) stairway. On top there are only four long rooms with multiple entrances that could have been used to keep and display the ruler’s richness. Similar long constructions, adjacent to large plazas and also with many rooms, have been reported at Dzibilchaltún (Building 44), Comalcalco (The Palace), Altun Ha (Building A6) Aguateca (M7-26) and Piedras Negras (Central Acropolis) (Arnauld 2001).

Structure 512 has also been partially explored and constitutes almost a copy of some very common buildings found at Chichén Itzá (e.g. the Sculpted Panels Temple). It has a slope on the lower wall, an entrance formed by columns and similar moldings. We are not speaking of influences, but of a contemporaneous construction style that was used in several peninsula settlements and is only now being documented in western Yucatan. The ceramic and architectural materials give us a Terminal Classic dating (A.D. 900-1000).

During September 2002 hurricane Isidore strongly affected several buildings at Edzná. A collapsed section on the northern side of the Five Stories Building unveiled parts of a big stucco mask. Repair works there and at other points of the Maya city were directed by Antonio Benavides C., from INAH Campeche, during the next months.

## **El Chechén**

This site is located 15 kilometers as the parrot flies southeast of Candelaria, on the southern margin of the Candelaria river, and around 50 kilometers west of El Tigre; in the neighborhood there are other Maya settlements, such as Isla Montuy and Salto Grande.

Field seasons at El Chechen began in 2003, headed by Ciprián F. Ardeleán (2005), from the Zacatecas Autonomous University. The archaeological zone covers 160 hectares and is formed by two complexes one kilometer apart along a northwest-southeast axis. The researcher’s team has registered 110 structures, no one higher than 10 meters. Surface collections are scarce and eroded but include ceramic materials from the Formative to the Terminal Classic periods.

## **El Ruinal**

Placed in another poorly known southern Campeche region, this site began its ancient history during the Late Formative, with Petén structures, and had a modest development during the Early Classic and a Late Classic apogee. Early ceramic materials relate El Ruinal with similar northern Guatemala polychrome types, and the Late Classic sherds have close connections with the Tabasco coast.

An interesting lithic surface collection from El Ruinal seems to indicate the settlement had good quality chert extraction zones. Some artifacts include early forms, but also many well made axes, knives, blades, burins, arrow heads, etc. The project is directed by INAH Campeche archaeologist Elena Canché M.

## **El Tigre**

Dominating a strategic point of the Candelaria river fluvial traffic, the ancient Itzamkanac thrived during many centuries since the Late Formative. The original settlement has been dated to the Middle Formative, when the first monumental Petén structures were built, with a triadic pattern and big stucco masks at both sides of main stairways. Since those times mythic representations as the Sacred Mountain, the Vision Serpent and the Jester God were included in stucco allegories. During the Late Classic, El Tigre participated in the development of the Rfo Bec architecture, and witnessed building renovations in the Postclassic times. Archaeological research at the site is directed by UNAM's Ernesto Vargas Pacheco (2001; 2005; Vargas and Delgado 2003).

The work has so far been focused on Structure 1, where different stucco masks have been restored, and has contributed to understanding changes and chronology of the site. Structures 2 and 4 and the ball court have also been intervened.

El Tigre's highest construction is known as Structure 4, rising to 28 meters and with a base of 50 meters per side. It was built on top of a 10 meters high and 200 meters by side platform. Just like the contexts explored in Structure 1, this building has a long sequence with a clear Preclassic origin and abundance of Late and Terminal Classic ceramic materials.

## **Isla Piedras**

On the northern Campeche coast there is a tiny island covering 4½ hectares that was studied in 2004 by Armando Inurreta, of the Yucatan Autonomous University. Isla Piedras is located 15 kilometers north of Jaina. Activities during the field season included a detailed surface survey and the collection of materials. The last one produced fragments of flint artifacts, limestone and basalt grinding stones and also pieces of shell objects. Ceramic materials indicated a first occupation during the Preclassic horizon (4.4%), a strong activity along the Early Classic (40%) and less movement during the Late Classic (23%). The remaining percentage corresponds to foreign and unidentified shards (Inurreta and Pat 2005).

## **Jaina**

This little artificial island covering 42 hectares is located 40 kilometers north of Campeche city and has several monumental buildings under exploration. Six structures of the Zayosal complex have been partially excavated and restored, including a ball court. Vestiges of a Maya settlement are found all around the island and there is no definite evidence of a colonial occupation, but there are also ruins of a modest 19th-century hacienda.

Since the end of that century Jaina was heavily looted and the stone available on the surface was extracted. The material was transported to the city of Campeche and used for construction purposes, as well as for lime production. Later, along the first part of the 20th century, looting focused on figurines and vessels to satisfy the antiquities black

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market in the United States and Europe. This explains the presence of many Jaina artifacts in private collections and in different museums of the world.

A sad collateral result of this situation is that Jaina was conceived as a necropolis or a cemetery place, and that provenance has been assigned to many of these ceramic figurines. Now it has been proven that the ancient Maya did not have cemeteries; they buried dead people under their houses, domestic units or royal palaces. By the same token, the famous modeled and molded ceramic human representations were manufactured not only on the island but also at many sites distributed along a 700 kilometers long Classic-Postclassic trade circuit between central Veracruz and the northern Campeche coast. Recent field seasons at Jaina have been directed by Antonio Benavides C., from INAH Campeche (Benavides 2002; Benavides and Grube 2002; García Campillo 1998; Zaragoza and Martínez 2002; Barba 2003; Sauri *et al.* 2005)

## **Oxpemul**

This important site, whose modern name literally means “three mounds”, was discovered in 1934 by Karl Ruppert and John Denison, Carnegie Institution of Washington researchers, who also reported many other Maya settlements of southern Campeche and Quintana Roo. After the discovery Oxpemul continued to be covered by the jungle for 70 years more, and was only occasionally visited by some hunters and looters. Rediscovered in 2004, the site had been fortunate for being located in the area that has few or no relevant fine woods or chicle gum trees, and thus has not shared the destiny of intense and merciless looting with many others settlements of the region. Oxpemul preserves most of its monuments with hieroglyphic inscriptions, which contain references to several local rulers and others from Tikal, the dates between A.D. 731 and 830, and also its own emblem glyph.

Several specialists participated in the search and rediscovery of Oxpemul, especially Ivan Šprajc (Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) and Raymundo González Heredia (Campeche Autonomous University); they joined efforts with other Mayanists like William Folan, Nikolai Grube, Candace Pruett and Hubert Robichaux (Šprajc *et al.* 2005; Robichaux and Pruett 2005).

## **Río Bec**

This is the name of an ancient region of southern Campeche, cited in 1904 by the Austrian Teobert Maler but diffused by the Frenchman Maurice de Perigny since 1906. The term today designates an architectonic style and a large archaeological site. Since their discovery the Río Bec buildings called attention because of their entrances resembling monster mouths, and their high towers with impracticable stairways and crowned by false temples. Very different from the Petén architecture, the Río Bec structures are also characterized by finely cut and almost perfectly assembled veneer stones.

Due to remoteness and inaccessibility most of the year (bad and frequently flooded trails), the region remained for a long time almost without archaeological research. This situation has been changed in the last years, thanks to the French archaeological team

formed by Dominique Michelet, Pierre Becquelin, Charlotte Arnauld, Eric Taladoire and Philippe Nondédéo, among others (Michelet and Becquelin 2001; Michelet *et al.* 2004; 2005; Nondédéo 2004; Arnauld and Lacadena 2004). We now have fresh information on more architectural groups with lateral towers, several stelae and more hieroglyphic texts. The earliest stela is dated to A.D. 475 and a bench in a structure of Group B records the date A.D. 805. Ceramic materials indicate human presence during the Late Formative and the ceasing of activities at the end of the Late Classic period (ca. A.D. 850).

The main feature of the Río Bec settlement is dispersion. Many groups of monumental buildings suggest that the zone was occupied by several elite families competing among them. Stelae and representations of personages are scarce.

A survey practiced around the known Río Bec groups and covering 100 km<sup>2</sup> registered 71 similar architectonic groups, each one with fewer than ten structures and separated by distances varying from 100 to 1000 meters (an average of 384 meters). They include domestic units of different quality, terraces and leveled sections that attest to the use of environment, not only for residential but also for agricultural purposes.

One of the interesting finds is Kajtun, a Petén-style settlement with concentrated monumental architecture, a main plaza, several patios and 7 stelae. The site is located 3 kilometers northeast of Río Bec's Group B; it has 63 structures, ceramic materials as early as the Late Formative, legible dates (A.D. 731 and 795), and its own emblem glyph (*Bolonil*).

All this information seems to indicate the coexistence of Maya societies with different political organizations; a Petén-oriented one with a traditional, vertical structure, and a Río Bec society, with less power concentration.

## **Santa Rosa Xtampak**

The September 2002 damages caused by the Isidore hurricane to several buildings of the site were solved with a maintenance program supervised by INAH's Renée Zapata P. (2005). Interventions included the Palace, the Red House, the Serpent Mouth House, one building of the Cuartel complex and some others of the Southeast Quadrangle.

Consolidation works required partial excavation, especially at the Palace, a three level building with more than 40 vaulted rooms. The eastern principal stairway was restored evidencing a previous stair. Several other sections, including the third level zoomorphic mask, were also intervened. A total of 23 stairways (including two interior ones) have been registered at the Palace.

The northern side of the Serpent Mouth House was also restored, revealing an architectonic representation of a mythic white bone centipede. The previously known southern façade of the building also depicts a fantastic animal, very similar to the one represented on top of the Palace.

Eight stelae and three capstones from Santa Rosa Xtampak give us dates ranging from A.D. 646 to 948, but ceramic evidences begin around 200 B.C. A better map of the site including more complexes and platforms has been recently prepared by Abel Morales and William Folan, of the Campeche Autonomous University.

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## Tabasqueño

This Maya city treasures an excellent example of a complete zoomorphic Chenes façade. The two-level construction was severely damaged by hurricanes; however, during a restoration program headed by INAH's Ramón Carrasco, the structure was excavated and then returned almost to its original appearance. Stucco masks were also discovered at both ends of the lower section of the stairway.

Explorations were extended to one of the mounds associated to the tower of a square ground plan, almost 5 meters high and located a short distance southwest of the main building. Belonging to the Chenes region in northeastern Campeche, Tabasqueño is situated 34 kilometers south of Hopelchén, along the road going to Dzibalchén.

## Uaymil

This small island lies 30 kilometers north of Jaina. Rafael Cobos Palma and Alejandro Inurreta, from the Yucatan Autonomous University, prepared the first topographic map of the place. According to the newly available data, Uaymil only occupies an eighth part (7½ hectares) of Jaina's surface, but it also has monumental constructions, at least 15 structures. Some of them had entrances formed by several columns, and finely dressed stones seem to indicate that Uaymil also had Puuc architecture. It has also been confirmed that the island once had monuments with hieroglyphic inscriptions. Preliminary ceramic analysis revealed plenty of activity from A.D. 800 to 1000 (Benavides 2003a; Inurreta 2004; Ancona and Jiménez 2005)

## Colonial Archaeology

At the beginning of this contribution it was said that Campeche city downtown is now inscribed in the world heritage list. Many persons and factors are behind that achievement, but here I want to recognize some of the people whose little and big efforts have helped to promote different salvage and research programs for buildings and contexts belonging to the period from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Among others, I have to mention Ricardo Encalada, Eyden Navarro, Héber Ojeda, Vicente Suárez and Vera Tiesler (Suárez and Ojeda 1996).

Some good examples of colonial spaces recently explored are the San Francisco ward little plaza, the temple of the same patron, the renovation of the old penitentiary, the Polvorín (gunpowder storehouse) complex, several trenches open in different sections of the city, the exploration of some ancient urban quarries, the restoration of House No. 6 and the excavation of the primitive parish and its associated cemetery. The colonial bridge of Hampolol, on the royal road (*camino real*) going north to Mérida, has also been restored. Also in progress is the recording and graphic documentation of several colonial churches in the interior of the state (e.g. at Bolonchén, Bolonchencahuich, Cahuich, Chicbul, Pich, Pomuch, Sahcabchén, Tepakán and Tixmucuy). Different teams of specialists have participated: archaeologists, architects, historians, physical anthropologists and restorers, among others. It's clear that Campeche's colonial heritage is plentiful and rich, but that would deserve many more pages.

## **SOME FINAL COMMENTS**

Strictly related with the aforementioned topics is the pre-Columbian architectural heritage conservation issue. Research activities accomplished in the buildings have practically always been accompanied by the corresponding consolidation and restoration labors. As a result, today Campeche has more pre-Hispanic spaces cleaned, explored and open to the public than before. The list includes: Balamkú, Becán, Calakmul, Chicanná, Chunchuhub, Dzibilnocac, Edzná, El Tigre, Hormiguero, Kankí, Santa Rosa Xtampak, Tabasqueño, Tohcok, Xcalumkín and Xpuhil.

Archaeological projects have generated employment for many field workers, especially peasants, but also for many masons, drivers and professionals of different levels. In consequence, many communities have complemented their economy and now have a better understanding of the relevance of Maya pre-Columbian heritage. Hence the preservation of many ancient structures has been reinforced. Here we refer to the sites not open to the public. Some examples are Acanmul, Balché, Cacabxnuuc, Chelemí, Ichmac, Jaina, Sisilá, Xcavil de Yaxché, Xchan, Xuelén and Yaxché-Xlabpak in the Puuc or northern region. The settlements in southern Campeche, like Cerro de los Muertos, El Ruinal, Nadzcaan, Okolhuitz, Puerto Rico, Ramonal and Río Bec, still have a difficult access, but many of their buildings have been consolidated or restored, and these works also produced valuable information (*cf.* Benavides 1999; 2000; 2000a; 2001a; 2003; 2004; 2004a; Staines 1993; 1998; Suárez and Rocha 2001).

More visitors to the archaeological sites have granted benefits to many tourist contractors and promoters, particularly those related with transportation, food, and lodging. All those businessmen could well contribute financial resources or collaborate in different ways to proceed with the maintenance and research of archaeological cities. A gross part of the federal and state investment in cultural heritage yields good profits to those giving service to visitors.

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## **POVZETEK**

Arheologija v Campecheju na prelomu stoletja

Bogata arheološka dediščina v mehiški zvezni državi Campeche, ki leži na zahodnem delu polotoka Yucatána, priča o civilizaciji Majev, ki je na tem območju živela več tisočletij pred prihodom španskih zavojevalcev na začetku 16. stoletja, pa tudi o zgodnjem kolonialnem obdobju. Članek povzema arheološke raziskave in restavratorska dela, opravljena v Campecheju v zadnjih nekaj desetletjih.

**Ključne besede:** arheologija Majev, kolonialna zgodovina, Campeche, zgodovina raziskav.