



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF
NORTHWEST YUCATÁN, MEXICO**

**Final Report of the 2001 Season
Committee for Research and Exploration,
National Geographic Society
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**A project conducted under the auspices of the
National Geographic Society,
Centro INAH of Yucatán of the
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia,
and
New College of Florida**

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■ Introduction

Since May of 1999, the authors of this report have been directing a field reconnaissance of prehispanic and historic archaeological sites in northwestern Yucatán, Mexico. This research is part of a larger multi-year study of coastal-inland dynamics of the northern Yucatecan coastal plain.

This research, which represents a continuation of several other projects begun in the 1970s and 1980s, has several objectives. The long-term focus is to investigate changing relationships between the coast and the interior of the prehispanic and historic northern Maya Lowlands, and how these relationships were affected through time by regional processes of environmental change, shifting commercial patterns, and broader pan-Mayan and Mesoamerican political developments. Specifically, we hope to obtain evidence of economic and political ties between major inland centers and coastal communities. The project will provide new data on coastal adaptations and coastal-inland exchange at the micro-regional level in several different areas of the north coast of Yucatán, through a program of survey, surface collections, and mapping and test excavations at selected sites. The ultimate goal of this research is to explore the nature of prehispanic adaptations to coastal environments and their implications for the reconstruction of microregional economic systems. This research, in turn, will enhance our understanding of the development of ancient Maya economic and political organization.

The research has focused on Zones 1 and 2a, as shown in Figure 1. These zones had seen very limited prior archaeological exploration, and little was known about them. In the previous phase of research in 1999-2000, we had focused exclusively on Zone 1.¹ Due to the quantities of sites, and the general complexity of the archaeological record, we were unable to complete the reconnaissance of Zone 1 in 2000. Thus, in the Spring of 2001 we worked in both Zones 1 and 2a.

Ultimately, this project will add important data to the files of the *Atlas Arqueológico del Estado de Yucatán* (a state survey database), help preserve many sites threatened by coastal and inland development, and add to our growing understanding of prehispanic and historic settlement patterns on the coastal plains of the northern Maya lowlands, and develop research designs for future archaeological research in the region.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 1

At the conclusion of the previous field season, in May of 2000, we had compiled information on 55 prehispanic and 35 historic sites. This included locational and survey data, maps of the central portions of seven prehispanic sites, test excavations at six prehispanic sites, sketch maps of numerous additional sites, and surface collections from more than 25 sites. That work, and research conducted prior to our project in Zone 1 has been summarized in several reports.¹

During the current season we returned to several of the above sites to gather more information, conduct further mapping, and obtain additional surface materials. We also located and gathered data on ten

¹ Preliminary summaries of the Phase 1 research are available in reports to the Instituto Nacional Antropología e Historia (Robles Castellanos and Andrews et al., 2000), and the National Geographic Society (Andrews et al. 2000), a thesis (Westfall 2000), two preliminary publications (Góngora Salas, Andrews, and Robles Castellanos 2000, Andrews 2001), and two papers presented at the 2001 Annual Meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in New Orleans this Spring (Andrews and Robles Castellanos 2001, Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001b). These contain detailed discussions of the research objectives and methodology of the project, as well as the history and bibliography of prior research in the region. An interim report for the 2001 season was submitted to the Committee for Research and Exploration in May of 2001; this is an updated version of that report.

new prehispanic and four historic sites, bringing the totals to 65 and 39, respectively. In the course of this season we have mapped six additional site centers, including those of Chayil, Choko'kat, Chukté, Chukú, Sinantoh, and Subín. This brings the total number of sites mapped in Zone 1 to 13. In addition we have sketch maps of many other sites, and substantial new quantities of surface materials.

While we now have reasonably good coverage of this zone, we still have reports of six sites that we have not yet located, and we think it is important to make at least rudimentary maps of two of the most unusual historic sites, the abandoned 19th century communities of San Francisco and Kaxek, which will be further discussed below.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 2a

Zone 2a encompasses the coastal plain between the ports of Sisal and Chuburná Puerto, and the inland towns of Hunucmá and Ucú (Fig. 1). The first archaeological sites to be reported in Zone 2a were the prehispanic remains underlying the towns of Hunucmá and Ucú, recorded by the members of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Roys 1949, 1952, 1957; Shook y Proskouriakoff 1951; Thompson 1951). Subsequently, in 1968 Jack Eaton, conducting a survey for the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University, recorded eight sites along the coast, including Chuburná Puerto, Chuburná 1 and 2, El Petén, Sisal, Yapak, Xcopté Rancho, and Xcopté (Ball y Eaton 1972; Ball 1974, 1977, 1978; Eaton 1976, 1978). In 1971, the journalist Luis Ramírez Aznar located and reported Tzikul, a medium-sized site in the tzekel (savannah) south of Chuburná Puerto (Ramírez Aznar 1971). In the mid 1970s, members of the survey project known as the **Atlas Aqueológico del Estado de Yucatán**, located another coastal site (Yapak 2), and revisited all of the previously reported coastal sites. They also recorded nine additional new sites in the interior, bringing the total number of known sites in the region to 21 (Andrews 1976a, 1976b; Garza T. de González and Kurjack 1980). It is worth noting that all of these sites lay in the periphery of the zone, along the coast, or adjacent or near the highways that delineate the research area. In the first phase of our research in 1999-2000 we re-visited the archaeological sites of Hunucmá and Sisal, and located two new sites at San José and Xcomulhó.

During the current 2001 season we have located and recorded 49 new prehispanic sites (Table 3 and Fig. 4). These include numerous small hamlets or villages, and a few larger sites. The centers of five of these sites were mapped (Chun Bohóm, Kanisté 2, Pitaya, Sinab, and Tzikul), and we have sketch maps of many others. We would have liked to have mapped more sites, but we simply ran out of time. Our top priorities for next season are mapping the core of the large sites of Cometa and Ch'el, (the latter in Zone 3, and possibly the largest in the region), the remaining six sites with ballcourts, and the coastal site of Xcopté. Due to time limitations and the poor results of last year's test pit program, we did not test pit any Zone 2a sites. We do have surface collections for the vast majority of them, however, and plan to conduct some test excavations at several sites next season.

We have also compiled a list of all the known historic sites of the region, some 36 settlements to date, including those of the Colonial period, and of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Table 4, Fig. 5). These range from small ranches to large towns; we have visited and recorded the location of all but three of these sites, and have obtained substantial artifacts collections from them. Once again, we have encountered a much higher density of settlement than we expected, and this has slowed us down considerably. We still have large areas that remain unsurveyed, numerous leads to sites we have not visited, many sites that need further reconnaissance, and at least eight sites that should be mapped.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 3

In the course of the 2001 season, a request for a powerline survey between Mérida and Hunucmá directed our attention to the area south of the Mérida-Hunucmá highway. This survey, which was conducted by members of the project, yielded several previously unreported sites, and visits to a couple of sites reported in the 1970s (Robles and Medina 2001). The largest prehispanic settlement in the area is Chel, a Rank 3 site next to the historic hacienda of San Antonio Chel (CY-138; see Figs. 4 and 5).

■ Prehispanic Settlements (Tables 1 and 3, and Figures 2 and 4)

Work in Zone 1 was restricted to the above-mentioned surveying and mapping activities, and further reconnaissance at Tzemé. To date, more than 50 of our prehispanic sites from Zone 1 have yielded chronological data, and many have long occupations from the Middle Preclassic period (>300 BC) times through Terminal Classic times (ca. AD 1000-1100). Only a few appear to have been permanently occupied in later Postclassic and historic times.

Perhaps the most interesting site we mapped in Zone 1 was Chuh' Kú, a settlement 12 kms west of Tzemé. The center of this site had the only prehispanic standing building in our survey area (Fig. 6). This was a single-room vaulted structure, with opposing doorways, each of which opened onto a separate plaza. On the basis of the masonry style and ceramics recovered nearby, we believe the structure dates to the Terminal Classic. Two other structures in the plaza adjoining the west side of the building also had boot-shaped vault stones, a diagnostic feature of Terminal Classic architecture. That the standing structure – a temple? – was an important foci of community life is suggested by its central position, facing both plazas, and its name: it has long been known as “La Iglesia” by local folks.² This site also had a short internal road, or *sacbé*. It is possible that Chuh'Kú may have served as a way station between Tzemé and the coast.

In the month of June Corey Lawton, Edgar Medina, and Kathe Lawton conducted further reconnaissance and mapping at Tzemé. They located several new architectural groups, and mapped six of them. They also developed a better understanding of the evolution of the layout in the central part of the site. Four *sacbé*s, or internal roads, have been recorded at Tzemé, and we may have traces of others. At one of the newly mapped groups -- Group G -- the crew located the fragments of a complete stela, which was removed to Merida and restored. The stela, 138 cms high and 47 cms wide, depicted a standing figure with a headress, loincloth, and sandals (Fig. 7). Three glyphs in front of his face have been tentatively read as a period ending date, which might possibly correspond to 10.2.0.0.0 3 Ahau 3 Ceh, or August 11, 869 AD. At Group G the crew also found a carved panel, with a single *tun* (year) glyph, and two column fragments with badly eroded glyphs. Members of the local Canul family, who work for the project, and have farmed and kept cattle at Tzemé since time immemorial, identified Group G as the source of three carved columns in the Mérida Museum, known to be from Tzemé.³ Fragments of another stela were located in the walls of the 16th century chapel in Group A, at the center of the site. This stela depicted an individual standing on a glyph serving as a pedestal; this is an *ahau* glyph, which is the glyph for “lord.” Three stela have been located at Tzemé, the largest and most complex site in the northwest corner of the peninsula, an urban settlement covering an area of at least four square kilometers (Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001a).

² Chuh'Kú has several possible translations. Kú generally means temple. One possible translation of Chuh is sacrifice and/or fire, suggesting “Temple of the Sacrificial Fire.”

³ Descriptions and illustrations of these carved columns have been published by Karl Mayer (1981, 1988).

As noted above, we have more than tripled the total number of prehispanic settlements in the Zone 2a research area, with a total of 72 sites. As in the case of Zone 1, our sites range in size from small hamlets to medium-sized towns, but we do not have as many settlements with large civic-ceremonial cores. In fact, the region does not appear to have any Rank 2 communities (i.e., like Tzemé), and only two or three Rank 3 sites. The largest appears to be Cometa, but this site has been drastically damaged by stone robbers, and we have yet to map it.

Despite the paucity of large sites, the parts of Zone 2a that we have surveyed exhibit a very high density of settlement distribution. As in Zone 1, we have a long history of occupation from Middle Preclassic times (> 300 BC) to the present, but our density and temporal distributions differ. The settlement pattern during most periods appears to be more dispersed, and more rural during the Classic period. As in Zone 1 we also have a bi-modal pattern of prehispanic temporal occupation, with predominant occupations during the Middle Preclassic (31 sites) and Late/Terminal Classic periods (AD 700-1100; 38 sites). What is most unusual in Zone 2a is the heavy presence of Middle Preclassic Nabanché-Mamón Horizon (800-300 BC) ceramics in the surface collections of most of the sites. These early ceramics – among the earliest in Yucatán – reflect a mix of local and foreign influences, hinting at ties with the Guatemalan Petén, the Gulf Coast, and Chiapas.

Even more interesting are the sites and architectural features associated with these ceramics. Four sites in Zone 1, and 11 sites in Zone 2 have ballcourts. The surface collections from these sites – and particularly the ballcourts – are predominantly Middle Preclassic in date, with significantly smaller quantities of later materials from the Late Preclassic and Classic periods. The ballcourts all have general north-south orientations, have a structure closing off one or both ends of the courts, and are often accompanied by one or two small residential acropoli (raised masonry platforms with two or more mounds around a courtyard; see Fig. 8). These settlements represent some of the earliest evidence of human occupation in Yucatán. Such a concentration of Middle Preclassic sites and ballcourts has no parallel elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Our final report for the season will contain a further discussion of these finds. At present we are at a bit of a loss to explain the significance and implications of this settlement pattern, though a preliminary report on the subject was presented by Lawton and Medina last Spring at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in New Orleans (Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001b).

Another interesting site is Tzikul, a medium-sized Classic period community in the savannah next to the coastal estuary south of Chuburná Puerto. This site also has a ballcourt – the only coastal ballcourt known from the northern lowlands -- and a *temaxcal*, or steam bath. The only other known steam bath reported from a Maya coastal site is from Xcambó, on the central north coast (Sierra Sosa 1999).

As noted above, Zone 2a has only a light – but extensive – layer of Classic period occupation, and almost no evidence of Postclassic period remains (AD 1200-1542). When the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century they encountered most of the population concentrated in the villages of Hunucmá and Ucú, and at small fishing and salt-collecting coastal hamlets at Sisal and Chuburná Puerto. There may have been other Postclassic communities, but we have not located them to date.

■ Historic Settlements (Tables 2 and 4, and Figures 3 and 5)

Many of the historic sites in the region were built over earlier prehispanic settlements. The ancient pyramids and temples were dismantled and the stone reused in the construction of Spanish churches and civic and residential buildings. As Ralph Roys observed long ago (1949, 1952, 1957), the Colonial churches of Hunucmá and Ucú were built on top of ancient Maya pyramidal bases, and ancient Maya stonework is visible in many older buildings in the villages and haciendas of the region. The largest historic communities, which

are flourishing communities today, are the above-mentioned towns, and the ports of Sisal and Chuburná. Sisal had a prehispanic occupation, and became the first port of Yucatán in the 16th century; it has a Colonial period fort, and several important historic buildings.

Most of the other historic sites in the survey region are -- or were -- ranchos or haciendas dating to the 19th and/or early 20th centuries. Some of them have been abandoned for decades, in some cases, a century or more. We have been able to develop a preliminary chronological framework for the historic sites through the use of historic records, old maps, and informant interviews. Altogether, we have records of 72 historic communities in Zones 1 and 2, but the list will undoubtedly grow as we encounter the remains of more abandoned ranchos and villages in the more remote reaches of our survey area.

Most of the new historic rural sites encountered in Zone 2a in 2001 fall into two categories: 1) small *estancias*, or ranchos and haciendas of the the pre-Caste War period (pre-1847), which were dedicated primarily to cattle, corn, and beekeeping, and to a lesser extent, to the exploitation of forest products, such as lumber, *guano* (palmetto thatch, *Sabal* sp.), and dyewood (*Haemotoxylum campechianum*), and 2) the large henequen plantation haciendas of the post-Caste War period (post-1850). The latter include Hobonyá, San Antonio Chel, San Miguel Chac, Tacubaya, Ulilá, Hobonyá, and Yaxché de Peón.⁴ Most of these saw their greatest period of grandeur during Yucatan's Gilded Age, ca. 1880-1920. It is interesting to note that most of the Colonial period and early 19th century *estancias* and ranchos were small communal and private landholdings, which were consolidated into the large latifundia that characterized the late 19th century henequen plantation boom. Following the land reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, the latifundia reverted to communal (*ejido*) lands and small private ranchos. Interestingly, the small rural homesteads of today -- mostly cattle ranches -- still retain the names they had in pre-henequen times. In some cases, these localities and their names can be traced back to Colonial and even prehispanic times.

In 2001 we returned to the prehispanic and historic community of Kaxek, in the far western reaches of Zone 1. Further reconnaissance and surface materials revealed a long occupation from Middle Preclassic to Terminal Classic times, and from the Colonial period to the early 20th century. Informant data indicates that the settlers were originally involved in the extraction of dyewood and other forest products, and when the dyewood industry faded out of existence, they supplied the bark of the *chukúm* tree (*Pithecellobium albicans*) to leather tanners in Hunucmá and Mérida (the bark is rich in tannic acid). This is the only relatively intact native Maya Colonial community we have encountered, and we believe it would be worthwhile to continue research at the site.

This year we also located the abandoned African-American community of San Francisco de los Negros, behind the coast south of Sisal, which originated as a refuge for escaped slaves in the early 19th century (or possibly earlier). We haven't been able find much documentation on this settlement, but a preliminary survey yielded a rich collection of artifacts, including large quantities of imported ceramics (olive jars and European porcelain). We also plan to return to this site next season.

All told, our survey areas are rich in historic remains, and our fieldwork will provide a solid foundation for more in-depth research in the historical archaeology and history of the region.

⁴ Yaxché de Peón was one of the largest henequen plantations in Yucatán, and had a 25 km-long decauville rail line to the coastal portlet of Xtul, where henequen was shipped to Progreso. In 2001 we mapped the remains of Xtul, which was occupied in the 19th and early 20th century and wrote up a brief report on its history (Burgos Villanueva and Andrews 2001).

■ Summary of Results and Future Research

To date, we have gathered data on more than 200 prehispanic and historic sites, and visited most of these in the field. Thirty three of these had been previously reported, and we have relocated, plotted the location, and gathered additional data on 25 of these (eight are still pending, for a variety of reasons). Altogether we have recorded 95 new prehispanic sites, mapped the center of 18 of these, made sketch maps of many more, conducted test excavations at six sites, and obtained surface collections from over 60 sites. We have also recorded the location and gathered data on 75 sites with historic occupations. We have also set up a preliminary chronology of the region, by means of ceramic analysis, historic records, and informant interview data. The overall region has a long history of occupation, from Middle Preclassic times (> 300 BC) to the present. Our preliminary impression is that the region had a much heavier prehispanic population – especially during the Preclassic and Classic periods – than was previously thought; this is a very marginal area for agriculture, and it cannot support a large farming population. Thus, the inhabitants must have exploited a variety of forest and marine resources in addition to their limited farming activities. In historic times cattle and henequen have been the mainstays of the region's economy.

Most of our fieldwork was completed by the end of May. During the month of June Lawton and Medina continued the reconnaissance and mapping at Tzemé and mapped two additional sites with ballcourts. Robles and his assistants are continuing their analysis of the ceramics in the lab, and Medina is conducting further research on the ballcourts for his *Licenciatura* (B.A.) thesis at the University of Yucatán. Lawton is continuing to gather data for a dissertation on the prehispanic city of Tzemé, and David Anderson is exploring the possibility of a similar project at some other site in the survey region. Both are Ph.D. students at Tulane University. Our historic materials are being analysed by Rafael Burgos, a historical archaeologist at INAH, who plans to prepare a monograph on the historic sites in the region.

Given the wealth of information that we have encountered in the course of the 2001 survey, we have again reconsidered our research strategy and objectives, and have developed the following plan for a final season of fieldwork in the Spring of 2002.

In this final season we will extend the Zone 2a survey area to the east, to the Mérida-Progreso highway, an area we have designated Zone 2b. We will also conduct a preliminary survey of the area south of the Mérida-Hunucmá highway, which we have designated Zone 3. We have begun to notice a gradual transition in the ceramics and settlement patterns in the Zone 2a region which suggests that there are two separate cultural spheres in the overall area: a western sphere with a heavy scattering of Middle and Late Preclassic settlements, preclassic ballcourts, and a later Classic period under the control of a single center at Tzemé; and an eastern sphere, perhaps under the aegis of Komché during the Late Preclassic period, with no ballcourts, and with a Classic period political structure dominated by the communities of Caucel, Mérida, and Dzibilchaltún. A survey of Zone 2b should allow us to examine the frontier area between these two spheres, and possibly demarcate their boundaries. As noted above, it has come to our attention that Zone 3 has several prehispanic and historic sites that may have played a major role in the region, and which need to be included in our analysis and reconstruction of the settlement patterns and cultural dynamics of the larger region in the past. By surveying Zones 2b and 3, we will have covered the entire northwest corner for the peninsula, from Celestún to Mérida to Progreso. The data obtained from such a survey would allow us to present a reasonably full reconstruction of the cultural history of the region, and a preliminary analysis of its settlement patterns and political and economic organization and dynamics from the Middle Preclassic period to the present.

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■ Introduction

Since May of 1999, the authors of this report have been directing a field reconnaissance of prehispanic and historic archaeological sites in northwestern Yucatán, Mexico. This research is part of a larger multi-year study of coastal-inland dynamics of the northern Yucatecan coastal plain.

This research, which represents a continuation of several other projects begun in the 1970s and 1980s, has several objectives. The long-term focus is to investigate changing relationships between the coast and the interior of the prehispanic and historic northern Maya Lowlands, and how these relationships were affected through time by regional processes of environmental change, shifting commercial patterns, and broader pan-Mayan and Mesoamerican political developments. Specifically, we hope to obtain evidence of economic and political ties between major inland centers and coastal communities. The project will provide new data on coastal adaptations and coastal-inland exchange at the micro-regional level in several different areas of the north coast of Yucatán, through a program of survey, surface collections, and mapping and test excavations at selected sites. The ultimate goal of this research is to explore the nature of prehispanic adaptations to coastal environments and their implications for the reconstruction of microregional economic systems. This research, in turn, will enhance our understanding of the development of ancient Maya economic and political organization.

The research has focused on Zones 1 and 2a, as shown in Figure 1. These zones had seen very limited prior archaeological exploration, and little was known about them. In the previous phase of research in 1999-2000, we had focused exclusively on Zone 1.¹ Due to the quantities of sites, and the general complexity of the archaeological record, we were unable to complete the reconnaissance of Zone 1 in 2000. Thus, in the Spring of 2001 we worked in both Zones 1 and 2a.

Ultimately, this project will add important data to the files of the *Atlas Arqueológico del Estado de Yucatán* (a state survey database), help preserve many sites threatened by coastal and inland development, and add to our growing understanding of prehispanic and historic settlement patterns on the coastal plains of the northern Maya lowlands, and develop research designs for future archaeological research in the region.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 1

At the conclusion of the previous field season, in May of 2000, we had compiled information on 55 prehispanic and 35 historic sites. This included locational and survey data, maps of the central portions of seven prehispanic sites, test excavations at six prehispanic sites, sketch maps of numerous additional sites, and surface collections from more than 25 sites. That work, and research conducted prior to our project in Zone 1 has been summarized in several reports.¹

During the current season we returned to several of the above sites to gather more information, conduct further mapping, and obtain additional surface materials. We also located and gathered data on ten

¹ Preliminary summaries of the Phase I research are available in reports to the Instituto Nacional Antropología e Historia (Robles Castellanos and Andrews et al., 2000), and the National Geographic Society (Andrews et al. 2000), a thesis (Westfall 2000), two preliminary publications (Góngora Salas, Andrews, and Robles Castellanos 2000, Andrews 2001), and two papers presented at the 2001 Annual Meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in New Orleans this Spring (Andrews and Robles Castellanos 2001, Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001b). These contain detailed discussions of the research objectives and methodology of the project, as well as the history and bibliography of prior research in the region. An interim report for the 2001 season was submitted to the Committee for Research and Exploration in May of 2001; this is an updated version of that report.

new prehispanic and four historic sites, bringing the totals to 65 and 39, respectively. In the course of this season we have mapped six additional site centers, including those of Chayil, Choko'kat, Chukté, Chukú, Sinantoh, and Subín. This brings the total number of sites mapped in Zone 1 to 13. In addition we have sketch maps of many other sites, and substantial new quantities of surface materials.

While we now have reasonably good coverage of this zone, we still have reports of six sites that we have not yet located, and we think it is important to make at least rudimentary maps of two of the most unusual historic sites, the abandoned 19th century communities of San Francisco and Kaxek, which will be further discussed below.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 2a

Zone 2a encompasses the coastal plain between the ports of Sisal and Chuburná Puerto, and the inland towns of Hunucmá and Ucu (Fig. 1). The first archaeological sites to be reported in Zone 2a were the prehispanic remains underlying the towns of Hunucmá and Ucu, recorded by the members of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Roys 1949, 1952, 1957; Shook y Proskouriakoff 1951; Thompson 1951). Subsequently, in 1968 Jack Eaton, conducting a survey for the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University, recorded eight sites along the coast, including Chuburná Puerto, Chuburná 1 and 2, El Petén, Sisal, Yapak, Xcopté Rancho, and Xcopté (Ball y Eaton 1972; Ball 1974, 1977, 1978; Eaton 1976, 1978). In 1971, the journalist Luis Ramírez Aznar located and reported Tzikul, a medium-sized site in the tzekel (savannah) south of Chuburná Puerto (Ramírez Aznar 1971). In the mid 1970s, members of the survey project known as the **Atlas Aqueológico del Estado de Yucatán**, located another coastal site (Yapak 2), and revisited all of the previously reported coastal sites. They also recorded nine additional new sites in the interior, bringing the total number of known sites in the region to 21 (Andrews 1976a, 1976b; Garza T. de González and Kurjack 1980). It is worth noting that all of these sites lay in the periphery of the zone, along the coast, or adjacent or near the highways that delineate the research area. In the first phase of our research in 1999-2000 we re-visited the archaeological sites of Hunucmá and Sisal, and located two new sites at San José and Xcomulhó.

During the current 2001 season we have located and recorded 49 new prehispanic sites (Table 3 and Fig. 4). These include numerous small hamlets or villages, and a few larger sites. The centers of five of these sites were mapped (Chun Bohóm, Kanisté 2, Pitaya, Sinab, and Tzikul), and we have sketch maps of many others. We would have liked to have mapped more sites, but we simply ran out of time. Our top priorities for next season are mapping the core of the large sites of Cometa and Ch'el, (the latter in Zone 3, and possibly the largest in the region), the remaining six sites with ballcourts, and the coastal site of Xcopté. Due to time limitations and the poor results of last year's test pit program, we did not test pit any Zone 2a sites. We do have surface collections for the vast majority of them, however, and plan to conduct some test excavations at several sites next season.

We have also compiled a list of all the known historic sites of the region, some 36 settlements to date, including those of the Colonial period, and of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Table 4, Fig. 5). These range from small ranches to large towns; we have visited and recorded the location of all but three of these sites, and have obtained substantial artifacts collections from them. Once again, we have encountered a much higher density of settlement than we expected, and this has slowed us down considerably. We still have large areas that remain unsurveyed, numerous leads to sites we have not visited, many sites that need further reconnaissance, and at least eight sites that should be mapped.

■ 2001 Fieldwork: Zone 3

In the course of the 2001 season, a request for a powerline survey between Mérida and Hunucmá directed our attention to the area south of the Mérida-Hunucmá highway. This survey, which was conducted by members of the project, yielded several previously unreported sites, and visits to a couple of sites reported in the 1970s (Robles and Medina 2001). The largest prehispanic settlement in the area is Chel, a Rank 3 site next to the historic hacienda of San Antonio Chel (CY-138; see Figs. 4 and 5).

■ Prehispanic Settlements (Tables 1 and 3, and Figures 2 and 4)

Work in Zone 1 was restricted to the above-mentioned surveying and mapping activities, and further reconnaissance at Tzemé. To date, more than 50 of our prehispanic sites from Zone 1 have yielded chronological data, and many have long occupations from the Middle Preclassic period (>300 BC) times through Terminal Classic times (ca. AD 1000-1100). Only a few appear to have been permanently occupied in later Postclassic and historic times.

Perhaps the most interesting site we mapped in Zone 1 was Chuh' Kú, a settlement 12 kms west of Tzemé. The center of this site had the only prehispanic standing building in our survey area (Fig. 6). This was a single-room vaulted structure, with opposing doorways, each of which opened onto a separate plaza. On the basis of the masonry style and ceramics recovered nearby, we believe the structure dates to the Terminal Classic. Two other structures in the plaza adjoining the west side of the building also had boot-shaped vault stones, a diagnostic feature of Terminal Classic architecture. That the standing structure – a temple? – was an important foci of community life is suggested by its central position, facing both plazas, and its name: it has long been known as “La Iglesia” by local folks.² This site also had a short internal road, or *sacbé*. It is possible that Chuh'Kú may have served as a way station between Tzemé and the coast.

In the month of June Corey Lawton, Edgar Medina, and Kathe Lawton conducted further reconnaissance and mapping at Tzemé. They located several new architectural groups, and mapped six of them. They also developed a better understanding of the evolution of the layout in the central part of the site. Four *sacbé*s, or internal roads, have been recorded at Tzemé, and we may have traces of others. At one of the newly mapped groups -- Group G -- the crew located the fragments of a complete stela, which was removed to Merida and restored. The stela, 138 cms high and 47 cms wide, depicted a standing figure with a headress, loincloth, and sandals (Fig. 7). Three glyphs in front of his face have been tentatively read as a period ending date, which might possibly correspond to 10.2.0.0.0 3 Ahau 3 Ceh, or August 11, 869 AD. At Group G the crew also found a carved panel, with a single *tun* (year) glyph, and two column fragments with badly eroded glyphs. Members of the local Canul family, who work for the project, and have farmed and kept cattle at Tzemé since time immemorial, identified Group G as the source of three carved columns in the Mérida Museum, known to be from Tzemé.³ Fragments of another stela were located in the walls of the 16th century chapel in Group A, at the center of the site. This stela depicted an individual standing on a glyph serving as a pedestal; this is an *ahau* glyph, which is the glyph for “lord.” Three stela have been located at Tzemé, the largest and most complex site in the northwest corner of the peninsula, an urban settlement covering an area of at least four square kilometers (Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001a).

² Chuh'Kú has several possible translations. Kú generally means temple. One possible translation of Chuh is sacrifice and/or fire, suggesting “Temple of the Sacrificial Fire.”

³ Descriptions and illustrations of these carved columns have been published by Karl Mayer (1981, 1988).

As noted above, we have more than tripled the total number of prehispanic settlements in the Zone 2a research area, with a total of 72 sites. As in the case of Zone 1, our sites range in size from small hamlets to medium-sized towns, but we do not have as many settlements with large civic-ceremonial cores. In fact, the region does not appear to have any Rank 2 communities (i.e., like Tzemé), and only two or three Rank 3 sites. The largest appears to be Cometa, but this site has been drastically damaged by stone robbers, and we have yet to map it.

Despite the paucity of large sites, the parts of Zone 2a that we have surveyed exhibit a very high density of settlement distribution. As in Zone 1, we have a long history of occupation from Middle Preclassic times (> 300 BC) to the present, but our density and temporal distributions differ. The settlement pattern during most periods appears to be more dispersed, and more rural during the Classic period. As in Zone 1 we also have a bi-modal pattern of prehispanic temporal occupation, with predominant occupations during the Middle Preclassic (31 sites) and Late/Terminal Classic periods (AD 700-1100; 38 sites). What is most unusual in Zone 2a is the heavy presence of Middle Preclassic Nabanché-Mamón Horizon (800-300 BC) ceramics in the surface collections of most of the sites. These early ceramics – among the earliest in Yucatán – reflect a mix of local and foreign influences, hinting at ties with the Guatemalan Petén, the Gulf Coast, and Chiapas.

Even more interesting are the sites and architectural features associated with these ceramics. Four sites in Zone 1, and 11 sites in Zone 2 have ballcourts. The surface collections from these sites – and particularly the ballcourts – are predominantly Middle Preclassic in date, with significantly smaller quantities of later materials from the Late Preclassic and Classic periods. The ballcourts all have general north-south orientations, have a structure closing off one or both ends of the courts, and are often accompanied by one or two small residential acropoli (raised masonry platforms with two or more mounds around a courtyard; see Fig. 8). These settlements represent some of the earliest evidence of human occupation in Yucatán. Such a concentration of Middle Preclassic sites and ballcourts has no parallel elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Our final report for the season will contain a further discussion of these finds. At present we are at a bit of a loss to explain the significance and implications of this settlement pattern, though a preliminary report on the subject was presented by Lawton and Medina last Spring at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in New Orleans (Lawton and Medina Castillo 2001b).

Another interesting site is Tzikul, a medium-sized Classic period community in the savannah next to the coastal estuary south of Chuburná Puerto. This site also has a ballcourt – the only coastal ballcourt known from the northern lowlands -- and a *temaxcal*, or steam bath. The only other known steam bath reported from a Maya coastal site is from Xcambó, on the central north coast (Sierra Sosa 1999).

As noted above, Zone 2a has only a light – but extensive – layer of Classic period occupation, and almost no evidence of Postclassic period remains (AD 1200-1542). When the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century they encountered most of the population concentrated in the villages of Hunucmá and Ucú, and at small fishing and salt-collecting coastal hamlets at Sisal and Chuburná Puerto. There may have been other Postclassic communities, but we have not located them to date.

■ Historic Settlements (Tables 2 and 4, and Figures 3 and 5)

Many of the historic sites in the region were built over earlier prehispanic settlements. The ancient pyramids and temples were dismantled and the stone reused in the construction of Spanish churches and civic and residential buildings. As Ralph Roys observed long ago (1949, 1952, 1957), the Colonial churches of Hunucmá and Ucú were built on top of ancient Maya pyramidal bases, and ancient Maya stonework is visible in many older buildings in the villages and haciendas of the region. The largest historic communities, which

are flourishing communities today, are the above-mentioned towns, and the ports of Sisal and Chuburná. Sisal had a prehispanic occupation, and became the first port of Yucatán in the 16th century; it has a Colonial period fort, and several important historic buildings.

Most of the other historic sites in the survey region are -- or were -- ranchos or haciendas dating to the 19th and/or early 20th centuries. Some of them have been abandoned for decades, in some cases, a century or more. We have been able to develop a preliminary chronological framework for the historic sites through the use of historic records, old maps, and informant interviews. Altogether, we have records of 72 historic communities in Zones 1 and 2, but the list will undoubtedly grow as we encounter the remains of more abandoned ranchos and villages in the more remote reaches of our survey area.

Most of the new historic rural sites encountered in Zone 2a in 2001 fall into two categories: 1) small *estancias*, or ranchos and haciendas of the pre-Caste War period (pre-1847), which were dedicated primarily to cattle, corn, and beekeeping, and to a lesser extent, to the exploitation of forest products, such as lumber, *guano* (palmetto thatch, *Sabal* sp.), and dyewood (*Haemotoxylum campechianum*), and 2) the large henequen plantation haciendas of the post-Caste War period (post-1850). The latter include Hobonyá, San Antonio Chel, San Miguel Chac, Tacubaya, Ulilá, Hobonyá, and Yaxché de Peón.⁴ Most of these saw their greatest period of grandeur during Yucatan's Gilded Age, ca. 1880-1920. It is interesting to note that most of the Colonial period and early 19th century *estancias* and ranchos were small communal and private landholdings, which were consolidated into the large latifundia that characterized the late 19th century henequen plantation boom. Following the land reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, the latifundia reverted to communal (*ejido*) lands and small private ranchos. Interestingly, the small rural homesteads of today -- mostly cattle ranches -- still retain the names they had in pre-henequen times. In some cases, these localities and their names can be traced back to Colonial and even prehispanic times.

In 2001 we returned to the prehispanic and historic community of Kaxek, in the far western reaches of Zone 1. Further reconnaissance and surface materials revealed a long occupation from Middle Preclassic to Terminal Classic times, and from the Colonial period to the early 20th century. Informant data indicates that the settlers were originally involved in the extraction of dyewood and other forest products, and when the dyewood industry faded out of existence, they supplied the bark of the *chukúm* tree (*Pithecellobium albicans*) to leather tanners in Hunucmá and Mérida (the bark is rich in tannic acid). This is the only relatively intact native Maya Colonial community we have encountered, and we believe it would be worthwhile to continue research at the site.

This year we also located the abandoned African-American community of San Francisco de los Negros, behind the coast south of Sisal, which originated as a refuge for escaped slaves in the early 19th century (or possibly earlier). We haven't been able to find much documentation on this settlement, but a preliminary survey yielded a rich collection of artifacts, including large quantities of imported ceramics (olive jars and European porcelain). We also plan to return to this site next season.

All told, our survey areas are rich in historic remains, and our fieldwork will provide a solid foundation for more in-depth research in the historical archaeology and history of the region.

⁴ Yaxché de Peón was one of the largest henequen plantations in Yucatán, and had a 25 km-long decauville rail line to the coastal portlet of Xtul, where henequen was shipped to Progreso. In 2001 we mapped the remains of Xtul, which was occupied in the 19th and early 20th century and wrote up a brief report on its history (Burgos Villanueva and Andrews 2001).

■ Summary of Results and Future Research

To date, we have gathered data on more than 200 prehispanic and historic sites, and visited most of these in the field. Thirty three of these had been previously reported, and we have relocated, plotted the location, and gathered additional data on 25 of these (eight are still pending, for a variety of reasons). Altogether we have recorded 95 new prehispanic sites, mapped the center of 18 of these, made sketch maps of many more, conducted test excavations at six sites, and obtained surface collections from over 60 sites. We have also recorded the location and gathered data on 75 sites with historic occupations. We have also set up a preliminary chronology of the region, by means of ceramic analysis, historic records, and informant interview data. The overall region has a long history of occupation, from Middle Preclassic times (> 300 BC) to the present. Our preliminary impression is that the region had a much heavier prehispanic population – especially during the Preclassic and Classic periods – than was previously thought; this is a very marginal area for agriculture, and it cannot support a large farming population. Thus, the inhabitants must have exploited a variety of forest and marine resources in addition to their limited farming activities. In historic times cattle and henequen have been the mainstays of the region's economy.

Most of our fieldwork was completed by the end of May. During the month of June Lawton and Medina continued the reconnaissance and mapping at Tzemé and mapped two additional sites with ballcourts. Robles and his assistants are continuing their analysis of the ceramics in the lab, and Medina is conducting further research on the ballcourts for his *Licenciatura* (B.A.) thesis at the University of Yucatán. Lawton is continuing to gather data for a dissertation on the prehispanic city of Tzemé, and David Anderson is exploring the possibility of a similar project at some other site in the survey region. Both are Ph.D. students at Tulane University. Our historic materials are being analysed by Rafael Burgos, a historical archaeologist at INAH, who plans to prepare a monograph on the historic sites in the region.

Given the wealth of information that we have encountered in the course of the 2001 survey, we have again reconsidered our research strategy and objectives, and have developed the following plan for a final season of fieldwork in the Spring of 2002.

In this final season we will extend the Zone 2a survey area to the east, to the Mérida-Progreso highway, an area we have designated Zone 2b. We will also conduct a preliminary survey of the area south of the Mérida-Hunucmá highway, which we have designated Zone 3. We have begun to notice a gradual transition in the ceramics and settlement patterns in the Zone 2a region which suggests that there are two separate cultural spheres in the overall area: a western sphere with a heavy scattering of Middle and Late Preclassic settlements, preclassic ballcourts, and a later Classic period under the control of a single center at Tzemé; and an eastern sphere, perhaps under the aegis of Komché during the Late Preclassic period, with no ballcourts, and with a Classic period political structure dominated by the communities of Caucel, Mérida, and Dzibilchaltún. A survey of Zone 2b should allow us to examine the frontier area between these two spheres, and possibly demarcate their boundaries. As noted above, it has come to our attention that Zone 3 has several prehispanic and historic sites that may have played a major role in the region, and which need to be included in our analysis and reconstruction of the settlement patterns and cultural dynamics of the larger region in the past. By surveying Zones 2b and 3, we will have covered the entire northwest corner for the peninsula, from Celestún to Mérida to Progreso. The data obtained from such a survey would allow us to present a reasonably full reconstruction of the cultural history of the region, and a preliminary analysis of its settlement patterns and political and economic organization and dynamics from the Middle Preclassic period to the present.

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Site	CY-	UTM Coords**	Atlas #	Verified
Sabak'abal	35	15Q YP 008 168		13-IV-00
San Antonio	54	16Q AU 883 243		5-V-00
San Joaquín*	25	16Q AU 952 297	16Q-d (4): 139	10-VI-99
Santa Rita*	7	16Q AU 982 239	16Q-d (7): 239	1-VI-99
Silbaas	43	15Q ZP 078 241		25-IV-00
Sinantoh	58	15Q ZP 060 134		10-V-00
SN [Ya'ab Pech Reg]	39	15Q ZP 014 223		19-IV-00
SN [Ya'ab Pech Reg]	45	15Q ZP 004 230		19-IV-00
SN [Camino Km 19]	57	15Q YP 966 149		8-V-00
SN [Camino Km 24]	73	15Q YP 954 195		2-II-01
SN [Camino a Kaxek]	75	15Q ZP 020 260		15-II-01
SN [Camino del Caño]	76	15Q ZP 064 307		15-II-01
Subín [Chu'kú]	36	15Q YP 990 111		30-III-00
Tetíz	27	16Q AU 950 207	16Q-d (7): 244	26-V-99
Tres Hermanos	28	15Q YP 890 084		5-VI-99
Ts'ok u Beel	11	15Q ZP 067 336		23-II-00
Tzemé	1	15Q ZP 098 155	15Q-f (9): 27	25-VI-99
Uayún [Uayún 2]	29	15Q ZP 085 222		9-VI-99
Xanilá	30	15Q ZP 079 159		17-III-00
Xcot	74	15Q YP 939 136		2-II-01
Ya'ab Pech	34	15Q ZP 023 222		17-IV-00

TOTAL SITES: 65

* No name reported in *Atlas*

** Datum: NAD 27

Table 3. Zone 2 -- Prehispanic Sites

AA

[Area of Sisal - Hunucmá - Ucú - Chuburná Puerto]

Site	CY-	UTM Coords**	Atlas #	Verified
Coast (10)				
Chuburná 1	122	16Q BU 050 519	16Q-d (4): 117	8-V-01
Chuburná 2		16Q BU 053 502	16Q-d (4): 164	
Chuburná Puerto	150	16Q BU 078 527	16Q-d (4): 165	
El Petén		16Q BU 969 491	16Q-d (4): 132	
El Petén 2	61	16Q BU 975 494		24-III-00
Rancho Xcopté		16Q BU 024 511	16Q-d (4): 131	
Sisal	16	15Q ZP 082 432	15Q-f (6): 1	27-V-99
Xcopté	87	16Q BU 003 507	16Q-d (4): 126	8-III-01
Yapak	60	16Q BU 987 499	16Q-d (4): 130	24-III-00
Yapak 2		16Q BU 995 502	16Q-d (4): 127	
Interior (62)				
Buenavista 1	95	16Q BU 065 326		27-III-01
Buenavista 2	96	16Q BU 051 336		27-III-01
Carrera Chen	110	16Q BU 068 353		9-IV-01
Chan Ch'em	125	16Q AU 983 358		8-V-01
Chel	138	16Q BU 058 251	16Q-d (4): 4	16-V-01
Chun Bohóm	81	16Q BU 013 363		22-II-01
Chunché Chen	109	16Q BU 078 371		9-IV-01
Chun Cruz 1	86	16Q BU 013 3042		6-III-01
Cometa*	62	16Q BU 141 343	16Q-d (4): 45	18-1-01
El Diablo	94	16Q BU 051 307		27-III-01
El Diablo 2	121	16Q BU 065 307		7-V-01
Halal 2	134	16Q AU 966 364		10-V-01
Hobonyá*	63	16Q BU 133 354	16Q-d (4): 162	18-1 & 26-II-01
Hunucmá 1	20	16Q BU 011 266	16Q-d (4): 148	26-V-99
Hunucmá 2		16Q BU 030 273	16Q-d (4): 142	
Kanisté 2	91	16Q BU 004 314		22-III-01
Ka Ka Hoy Keb	89	16Q BU 013 398		19-III-01
Nacacab	97	16Q BU 053 354		27-III-01
Na Om	127	16Q AU 983 381		8-V-01
Pam Bisayá	88	16Q BU 007 387		16-III-01
Paraná	102	16Q BU 018 335		4-IV-01
Pitaya	92	16Q BU 046 409		26-III-01
Pontó 1	136	16Q BU 092 340		11-V-01
Sabakalal	64	16Q BU 117 345		18-1-01
San Carlos Chac	104	16Q BU 067 286		5-IV-01
San José 1	6	16Q AU 976 302		10-VI-99
San Miguel Chac*		16Q BU 079 291	16Q-d (4): 129	
San Pedro	93	16Q BU 048 296	16Q-d (4): 140	27-III-01
Santa Elena	124	16Q AU 997 319		10-V-01
Sinab	98	16Q BU 018 319		30-III-01
SN (NE de Tacubaya)	82	16Q BU 045 375		1-III-01
SN (NE de Tacubaya)	83	16Q BU 052 374		1-III-01
SN (NE de Tacubaya)	84	16Q BU 068 359		1-III-01
SN (SE de Uliilá)	99	16Q BU 118 297		2-IV-01
SN (SE de Uliilá)	100	16Q BU 117 307		2-IV-01

Site	CY-	UTM Coords**	Atlas #	Verified
SN (N de S.M. Chac)	106	16Q BU 074 307		5-IV-01
SN (N de San Román)	115	16Q AU 987 341		17-IV-01
SN (N de San Román)	126	16Q AU 981 368		8-V-01
SN (N de San Román)	129	16Q AU 975 401		9-V-01
SN (N de San Román)	132	16Q AU 975 382		9-V-01
SN (N de San Román)	133	16Q AU 969 405		9-V-01
SN (N de San Román)	135	16Q AU 982 342		10-V-01
SN (Camino de Xtul)	117	16Q BU 094 408	16Q-d (4): 133	30-IV-01
SN (Camino de Xtul)	118	16Q BU 117 402	16Q-d (4): 134	30-IV-01
SN (San Pedro?)		16Q BU 052 295	16Q-d (4): 140	
SN (Entrada a Ullilá)		16Q BU 111 290	16Q-d (4): 141	
SN (N de Yaxché)	66	16Q BU 136 314		18-1-01
Tacubaya 1	114	16Q BU 012 342		12-IV-01
Tzelac	120	16Q AU 085 362		7-V-01
Tzelac Aguada	119	16Q AU 088 355		7-V-01
Tzikul	123	16Q BU 079 484	16Q-d (4): 145	8-V-01
Ucú	67	16Q BU 145 282	16Q-d (4): 17	16-V-01
Ullilá 1	107	16Q BU 094 325		5-IV-01
Unión	101	16Q BU 045 318		3-IV-01
Usil	130	16Q BU 058 449		9-V-01
Xcomul-Ho	5	16Q AU 971 312		10-VI-99
Xcucul	103	16Q BU 037 295		4-IV-01
Xcumac 1	105	16Q BU 031 304		4-IV-01
Xcunek	131	16Q AU 974 364		9-V-01
Xtikinché	111	16Q BU 065 372		9-IV-01
Yaxché de Peón 1*	116	16Q BU 128 292	16Q-d (4): 128	30-IV-01
Yopob	128	16Q AU 993 338		8-V-01

TOTAL SITES: 72

* No name reported on *Atlas*.

** Datum: WGS 84

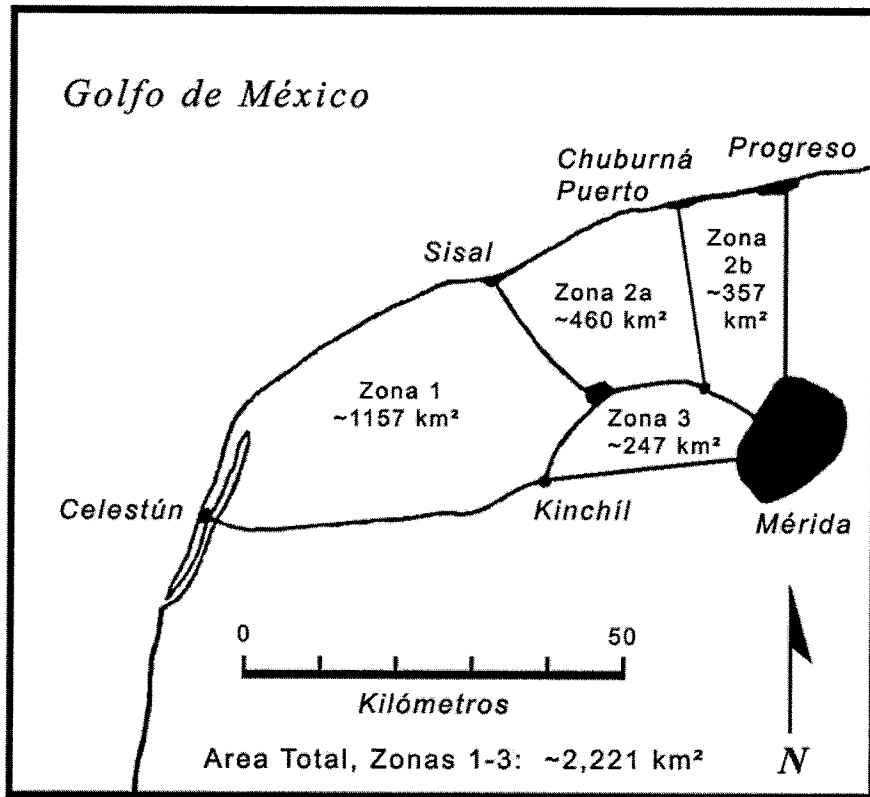


Figure 1. Map of northwestern Yucatán showing survey zones and surface areas. We surveyed zones 1 and 2a in 1999-2001, and will survey zones 2b and 3 in 2002.

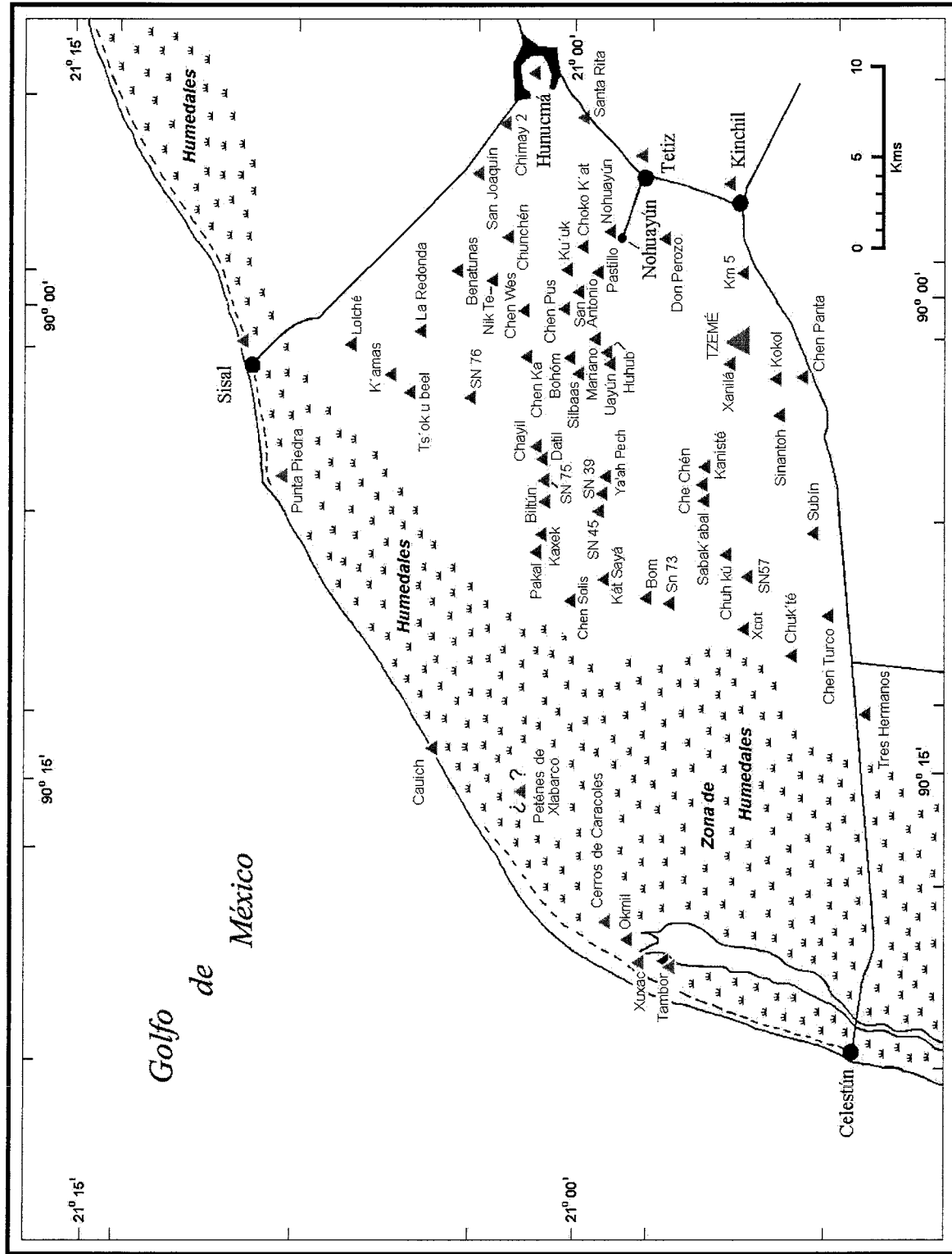


Figure 2. Map of Zone 1, showing prehispanic sites.

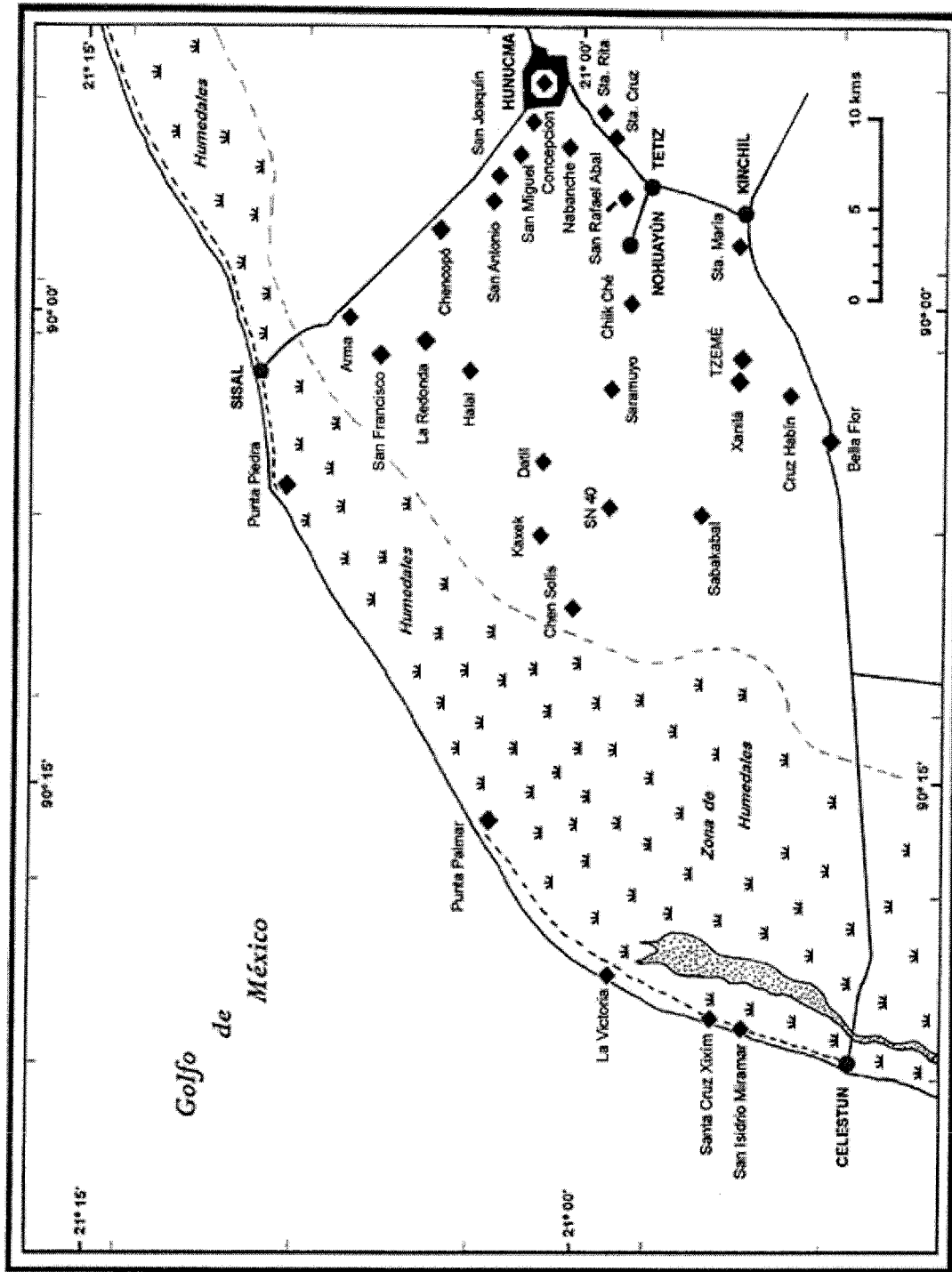


Figure 3. Map of Zone 1, showing historic sites.

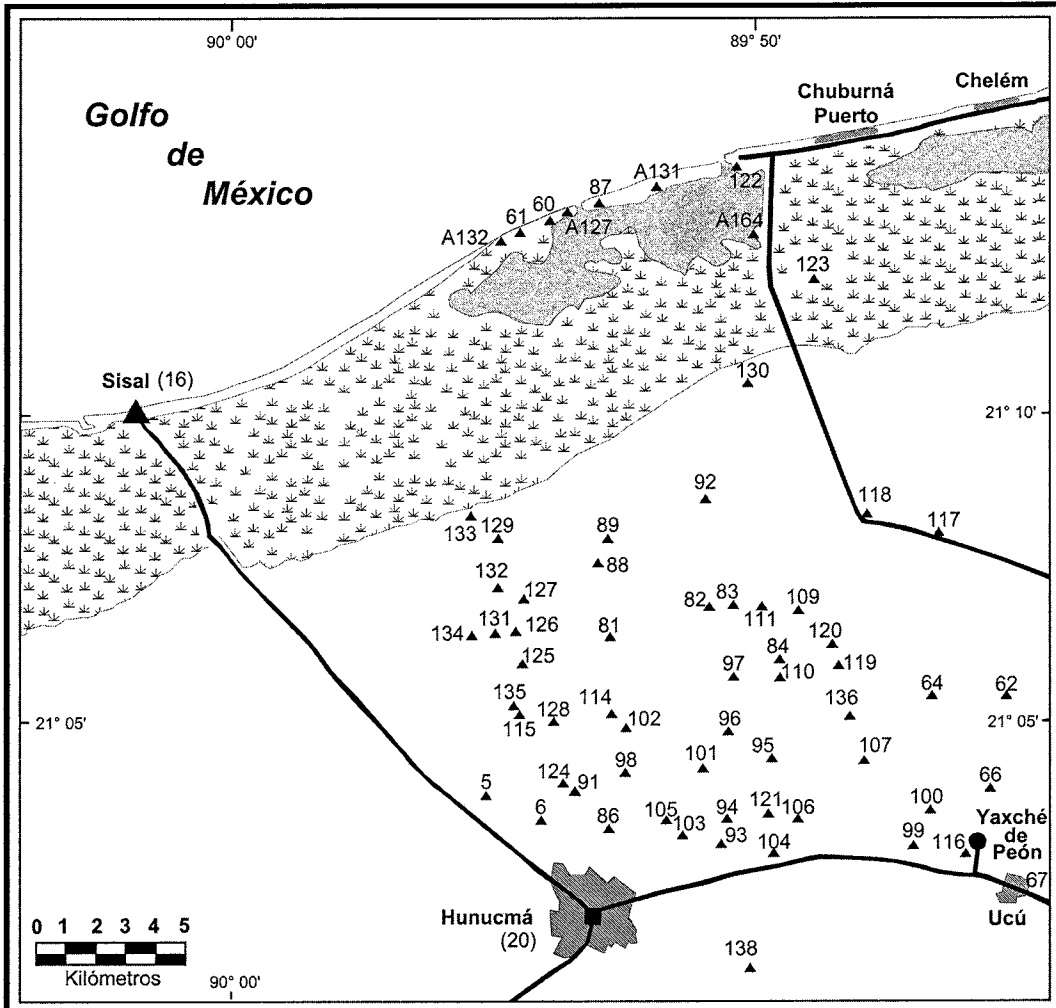


Figure 4. Map of Zone 2a, showing prehispanic sites.

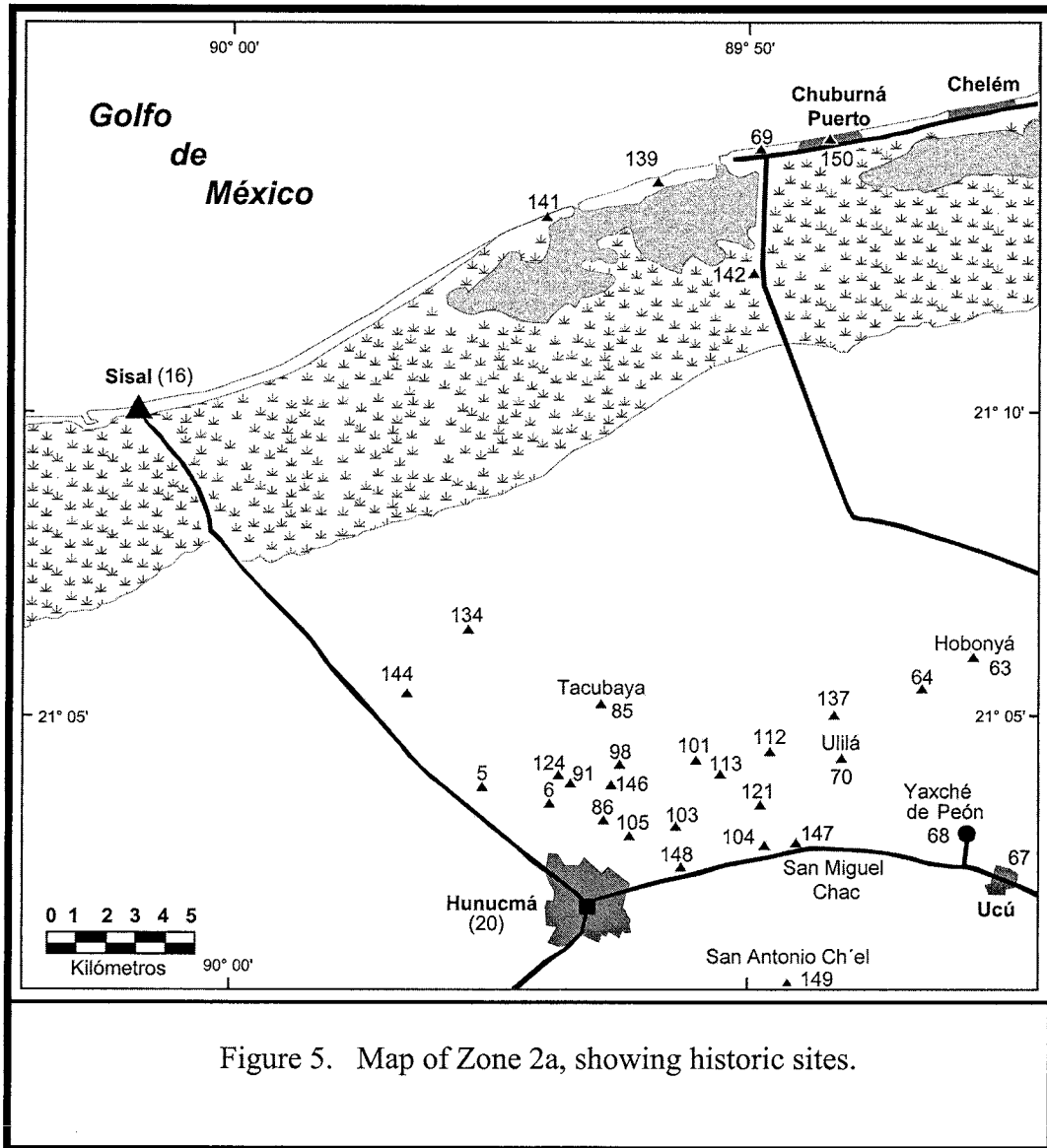


Figure 5. Map of Zone 2a, showing historic sites.

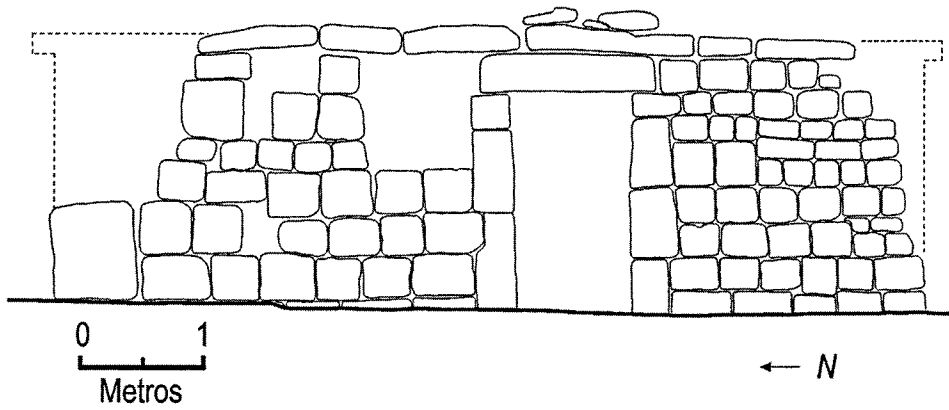
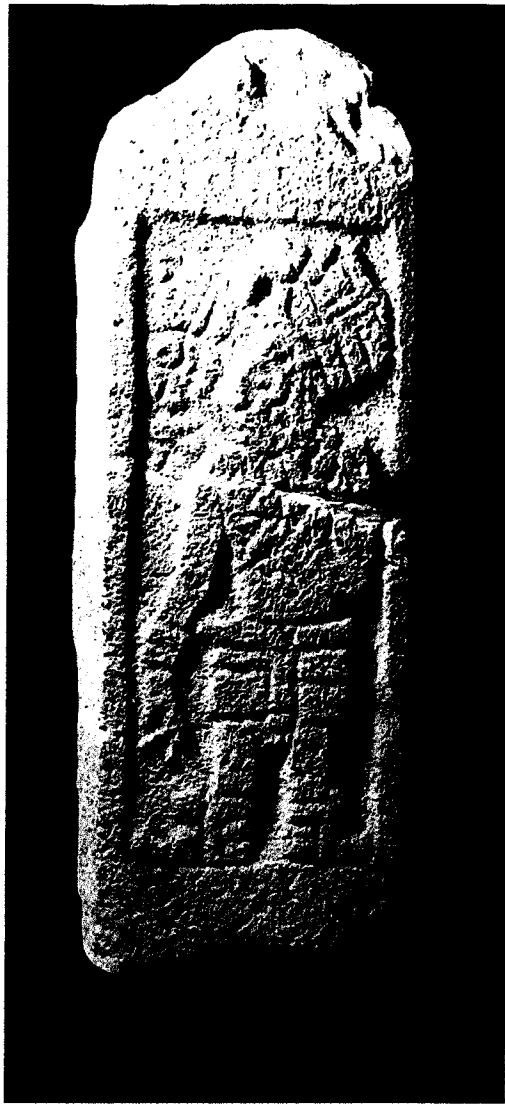


Figure 6. Photo and frontal (west) elevation of Str. A-1, Chuh' Kú, Yucatán (CY-52). Drawing by David S. Anderson.



Stela 2, Group G, Tzemé, Yucatán



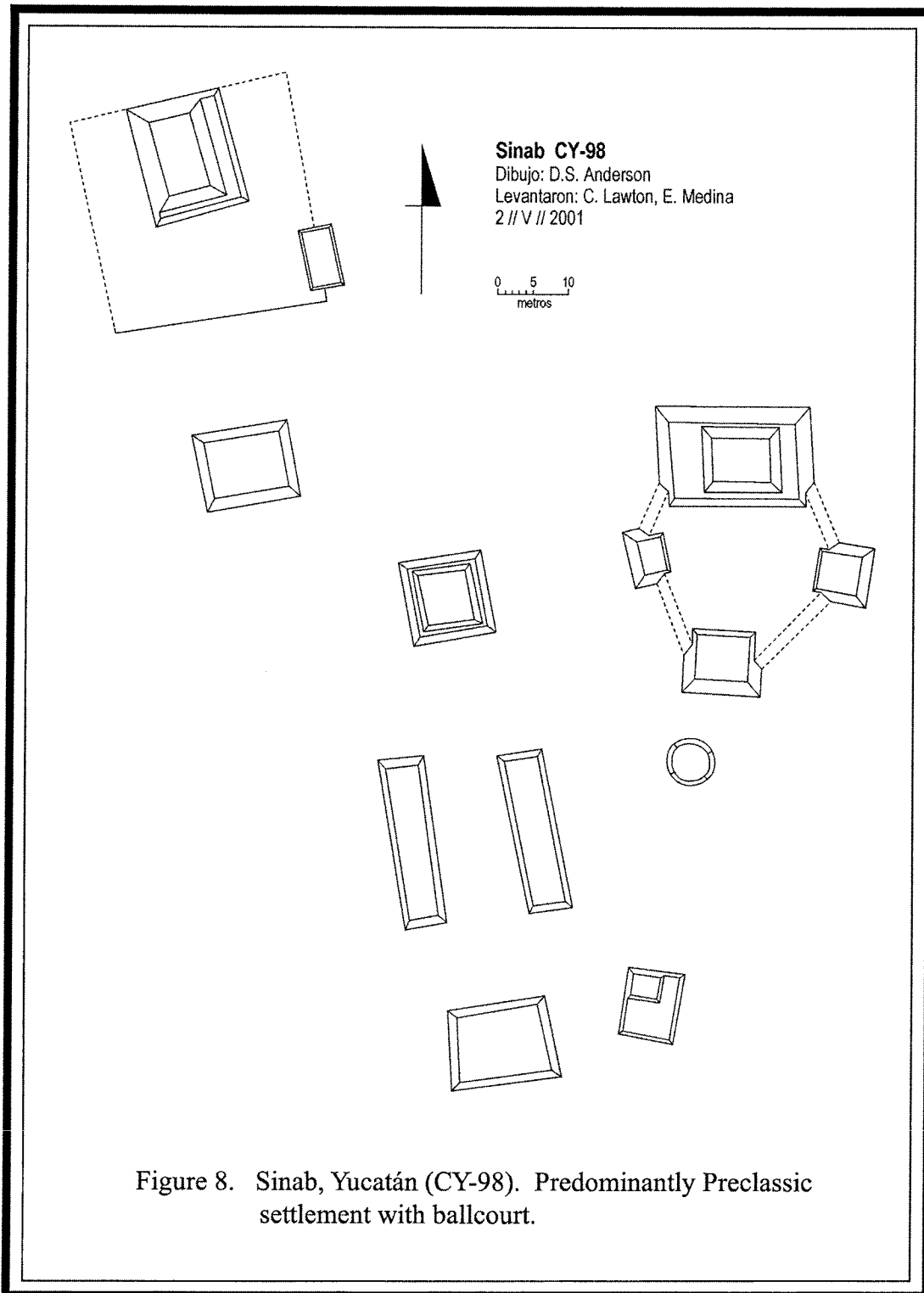


Figure 8. Sinab, Yucatán (CY-98). Predominantly Preclassic settlement with ballcourt.