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Publication: Las Ruinas de Calakmul, Campeche, México: Un lugar central y su paisaje cultural

The Ruins of Calakmul, Campeche, México: A Central Locus and Its Cultural Landscape

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Translation of the Spanish by Alex Lomónaco



Research Year: 2000

Culture: Maya

Chronology: Preclassic, and Classic to Late Classic

Location: Campeche, México

Site: Ruins of Calakmul

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Calakmul is located in the southeastern portion of the state of Campeche, in the new ecological township of Calakmul, at 18° 06' 31" latitude N and 89° 48' 17" longitude W, 240.51 meters above sea level ([Figure 1](#)). The central core lies on an artificially leveled large dome of approximately 2.5 km², surrounded by streams, bajos and irrigation channels (Domínguez and Folan, 1996; Folan and May Hau, 1984). In general terms, being the constructions distributed along the bajo bank of the river known as "El Laberinto", it could be said that Calakmul looks like a lacustrine city (Folan, 1985a), an issue which is now under investigation (Gunn *et al.*, 2000). Early in the project, access to Calakmul was only possible through a timber breach that began at kilometer 95.5 of the Escárcega-Chetumal road, about two kilometers east from the Conhuás common lands. To reach Calakmul, we were forced to cross some 35 km of *bajos* of a road 65 km long, which was in very bad shape. At times, during the rainy season, the trip would take three or four days. After the beginning of the construction of a modern highway to Calakmul in 1984, the first 24 earth-filled kilometers that lead to the archaeological site made the trip much easier than it used to be. The road leading to the ruins was completed in 1993-1994. Today, even tourists are able to easily reach Calakmul.

Calakmul is a Maya site that dates from the Preclassic and Classic periods (600 B.C. to 900 A.D.), with indications of ceremonial visitors during the Postclassic. The site has been long considered a significant locus, but in spite of this, only one portion of the core had been surveyed, first by Calakmul's discoverer Dr. Cyrus L. Lundell (1933: Fig. 2), ([Figure 2](#)) back in 1931, who visited the place together with two chicleros from the Central Buenfil, and later by Architect John Bolles of the Carnegie Institution of Washington (in Ruppert and Denison, 1943). In addition to Bolles' map ([Figure 3](#)), Ruppert concentrated for quite a long time on the detailed study of the site's major architecture. Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley (1933) showed a particular interest in analyzing more than 80 stelae present in the place, a number that has now climbed to 119 (Pincemin, Marcus, Florey Folan, Folan, Domínguez Carrasco and Morales López, 1998).

In 1933, the archaeologist Enrique Juan Palacios (1937) from the *Dirección de Arqueología de México*, made a reconnaissance trip to Calakmul to verify the data provided by the Carnegie Institution. Gustavo Stromsvik excavated stratigraphic pits (see Smith, 1955), and conducted a study on the *metates* from Calakmul (Stromsvik, 1937), while Francis Morley took pictures and made a movie exhibiting a technique used to lift a fallen stela from Calakmul (Morley, 1932: field notes).

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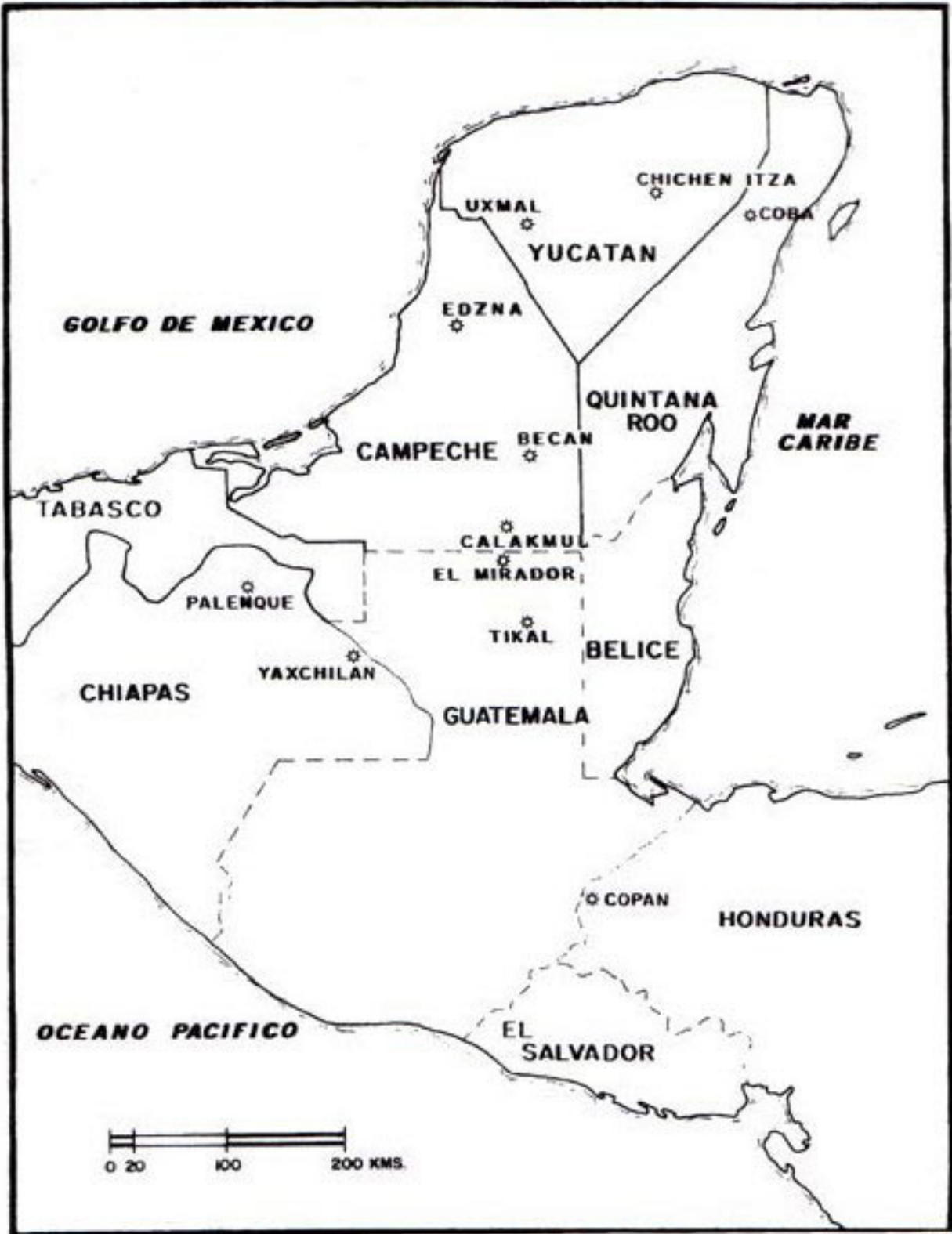


Figure 1. Map of the Yucatán Peninsula showing the localization of Calakmul and other major centers in the Maya area.

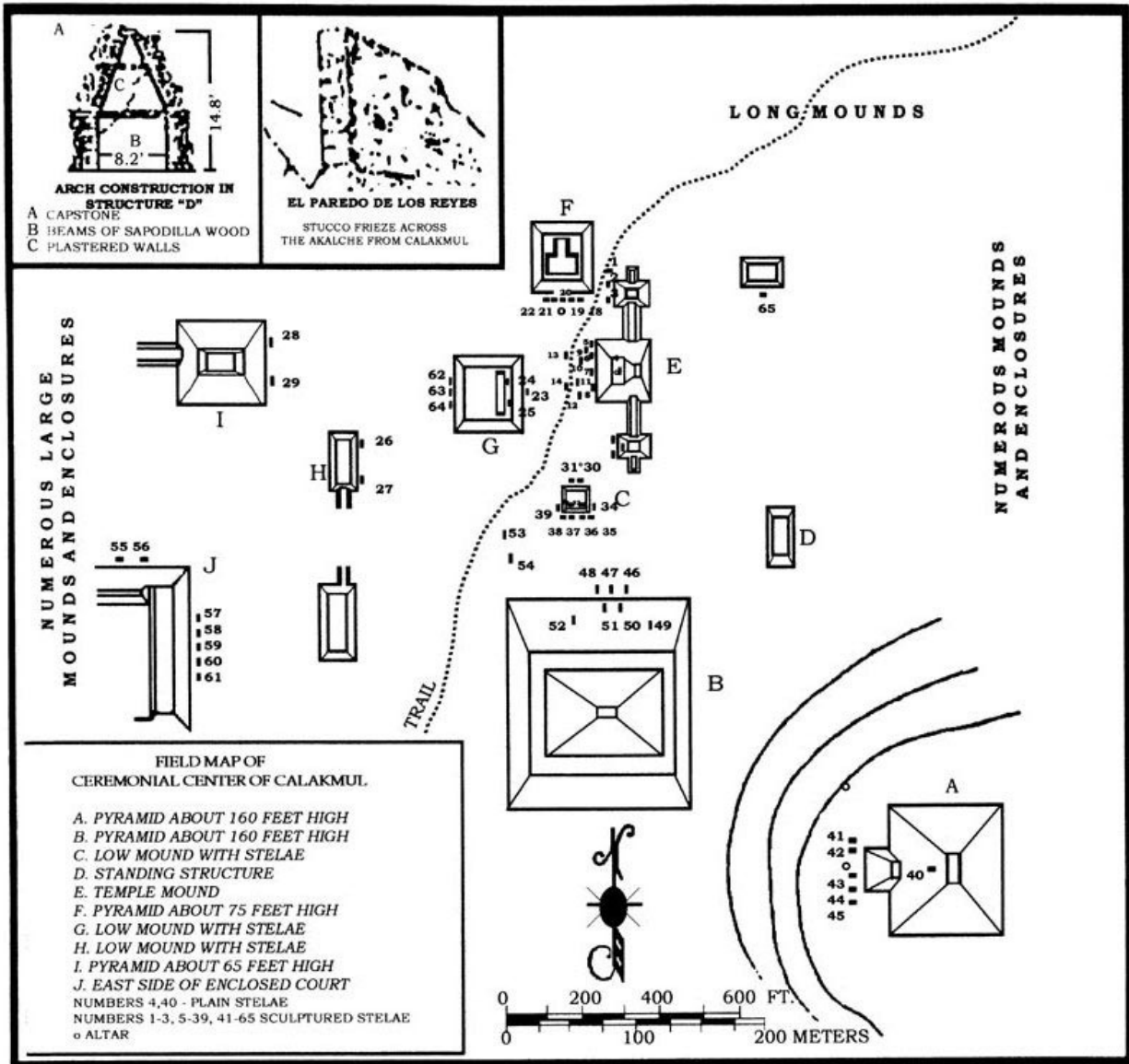


Figure 2. Cyrus L. Lundell's map of Calakmul (1993).

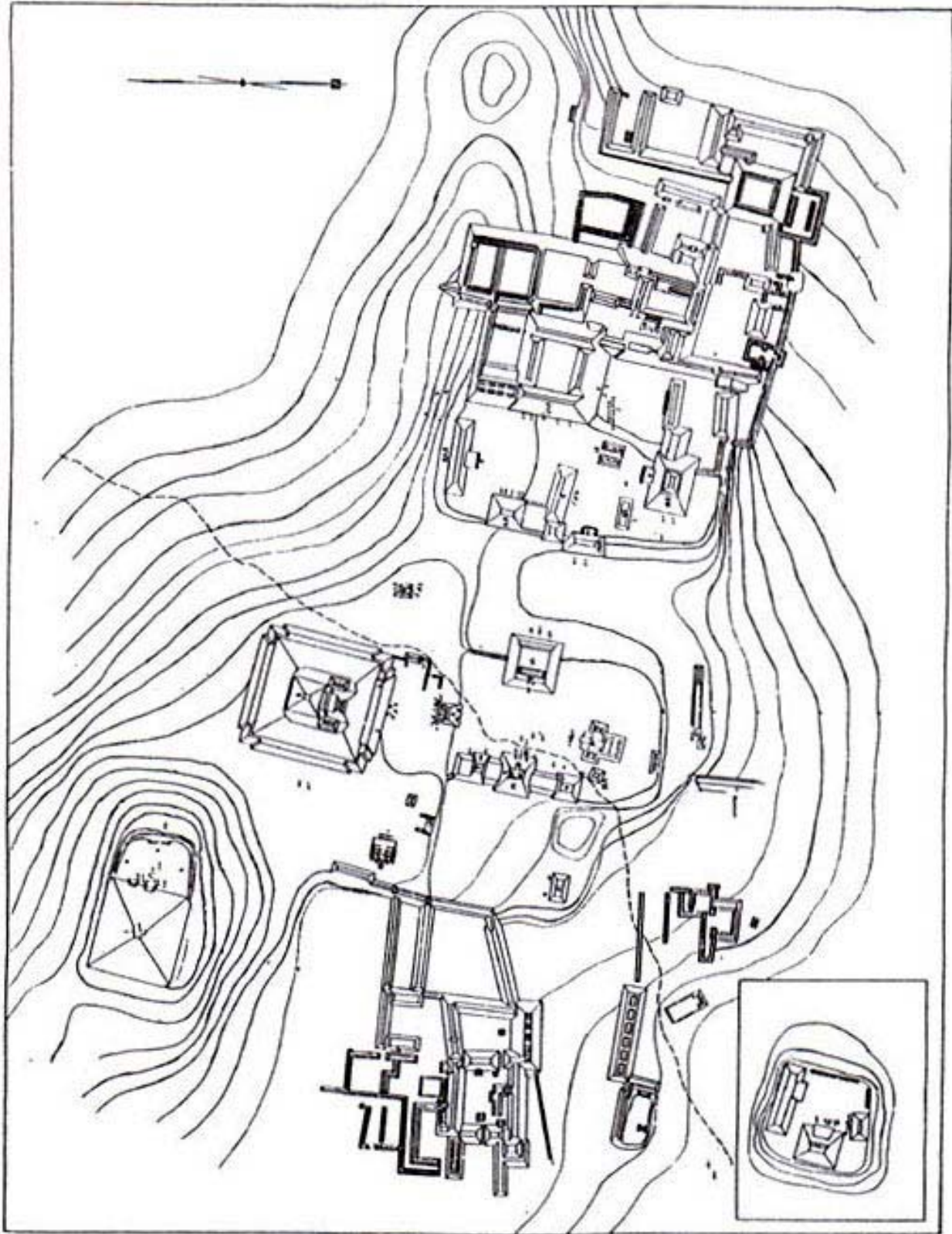


Figure 3. John Bolle's map of Calakmul (Ruppert and Denison, 1943).