

Name of Site **CHAC MOOL**  
Place **PUNTA PÁJAROS**  
State **QUINTANA ROO**

#### LOCATION

The archaeological site is located in the area of an old "copra camp" called Santa Rosa within the private reserve of Punta Pájaros, which includes the reserve-like coastal strip between the bays of Ascensión and El Espíritu Santo, in the state of Quintana Roo. The island is of coralifero origin and is located an hour's boat ride from the village of Punta Allen.

The geographical coordinates are N 19°30'127 and W 87°25'897. The site is located three hundred meters from the Caribbean coast, well protected by the coral reef. The sand dunes between the sea and the site protect it from the coastal winds. The site borders the Santa Rosa lagoon to the west.



*Quintana Roo State*



*Details of the Punta Pájaros region*

## DESCRIPTION

Chac Mool reached its peak during the Early Postclassic period, continuing through the Late Postclassic. It was a regional center for coastal trade. The name Chac Mool comes from a sculpture that was found in the structure known as Building F. This type of figure is usually found in archaeological sites further west in the Mexican Republic. Its presence indicates the influence and commercial ties with cities such as Chichen Itza and others of central Mexico. Chac Mool was of great importance during both the Early Postclassic (A.D. 900-1200) and Late Postclassic periods (A.D. 1200- 1550). This Mayan port was significant for both the protection and supply of canoes in the maritime trade circuit and served as a transfer port, linking trade circuits originating in different areas. The trade canoes traveled around the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula and extended north along the Gulf of Mexico and south as far as the coast of Honduras.

## WHO DISCOVERED THE SITE?

Although the first contacts with the Spanish at this site were not documented in the chronicles, artifacts from the Colonial period, such as olive jugs, copper nails and Majolica ceramics with metallic enamel have been recovered from excavations. The first written references to the site were made by the British doctor, Thomas Gann, who made a journey along the coast. [RECOMIENDO PONER FECHAS] During his visit, Gann excavated the sculpture that gave the site its name. Between the years of 1940 and 1950, the "copra camp" was established in the vicinity of the site.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE

Sea Trade Port. Chac Mool's position as a commercial port required a number of people working in different positions in order to keep the port functioning. These included tradesmen, stevedores, port personnel, and canoe builders, in addition to the infrastructure necessary for successfully carrying out such activities, such as docks, warehouses, and open market areas. Many of these can be detected in the plan of the excavated area of the site, which does not include buildings made of perishable materials in which most of the inhabitants probably lived.

One of the most important features of the site, and one that has not been observed in other locations, is the discovery of 17 graves that contain not only the personage who was buried, but also the remains of a dog, possibly a ritual sacrifice, along with an obsidian or flint arrowhead. It is believed that the dog was sacrificed in a way that paralleled how its owner had died. In some Maya groups there is the belief that a person is accompanied by a dog on the path to the underworld; the dog serves as a guide to lead the person along the correct path. From the colonial chronicles, we also learn that in the years that began with the day of Kan, dogs were sacrificed in New Year ceremonies.

## ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of the site has been carefully restored by the different projects that have worked there. The architectural style is similar to that found in other sites in the region, such as Tulum, Xelha, Xcaret, San Gervasio, el Rey, and el Meco. However, its source was the flourishing city-state of Chichen Itza.

Although the site is a fraction of the size of Chichen Itza, one can observe the orientation to the cardinal points of the buildings around a central plaza. The Palace or Building 1, which contains columns and interior benches, served as the primary structure. The plaza in front of this structure may have functioned as a ceremonial plaza. A second group of masonry structures, among which the building containing the Chac Mool is found, are located at the northern end of this plaza, although they are oriented to another small plaza to the west.

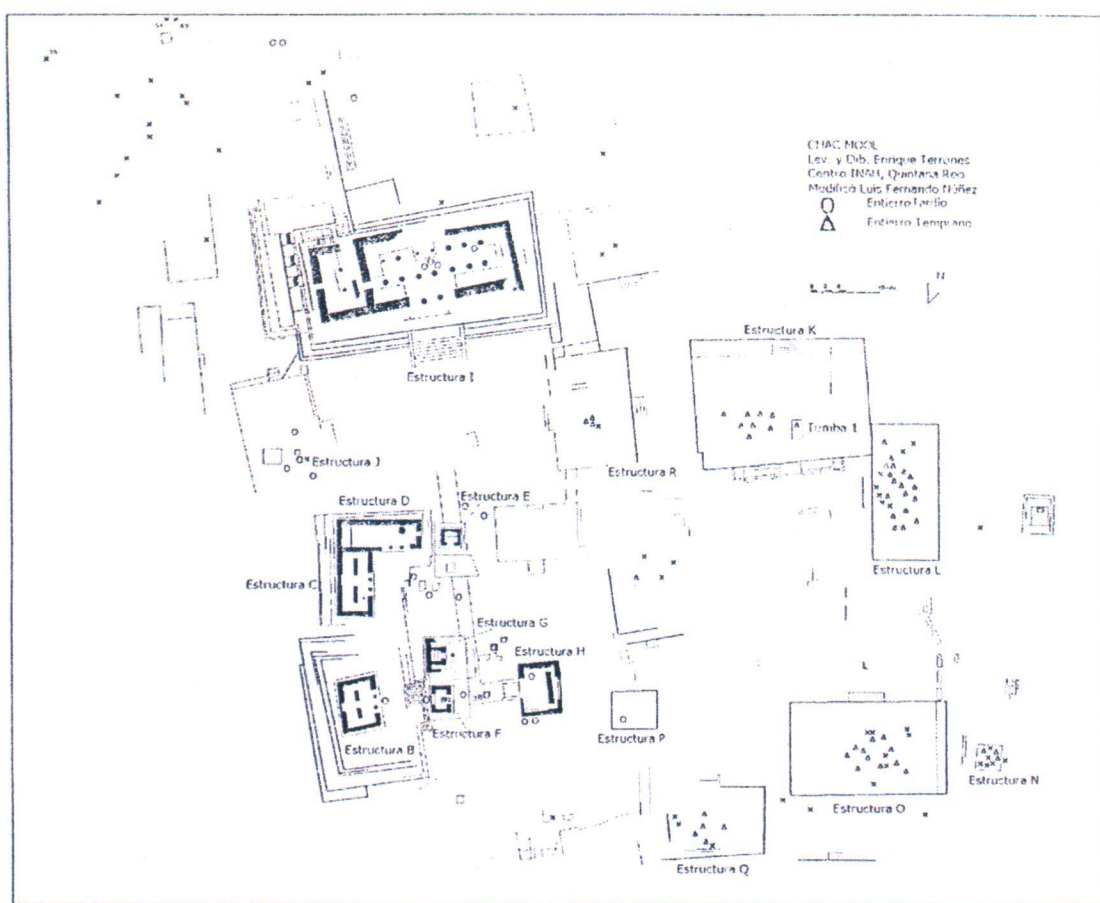
As you look at the ground, you can see the traces of square and rectangular



foundations of buildings that were made of perishable material on slightly elevated platforms faced with cut stones. These were the bases for large palm shelters. Archaeologists found evidence of domestic use of these buildings and many simple tombs were found below their floors.

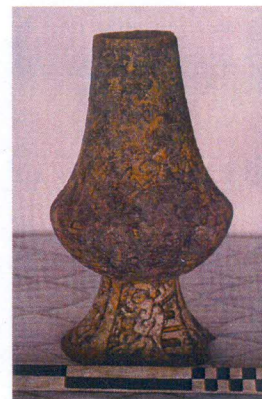
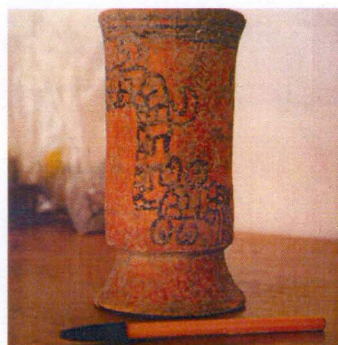
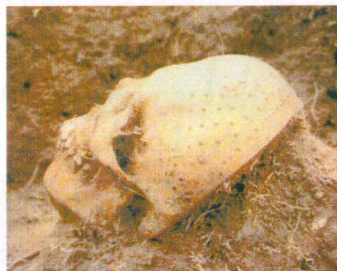
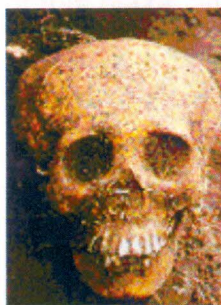
## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Given the number of structures, the 128 tombs that have been found, and the site's position as a transfer port in the regional trade circuit, Chac Mool must



*Chac Mool Site Plan*

have had a number of public officials, probably members of the nobility, who were in charge of the ritual, civil, and security responsibilities of the port. The site's location on the coast probably created the necessity of the presence of a military garrison that was strong enough to protect not only the residents of the town but also crew and passengers of the canoes that stopped there for trade.



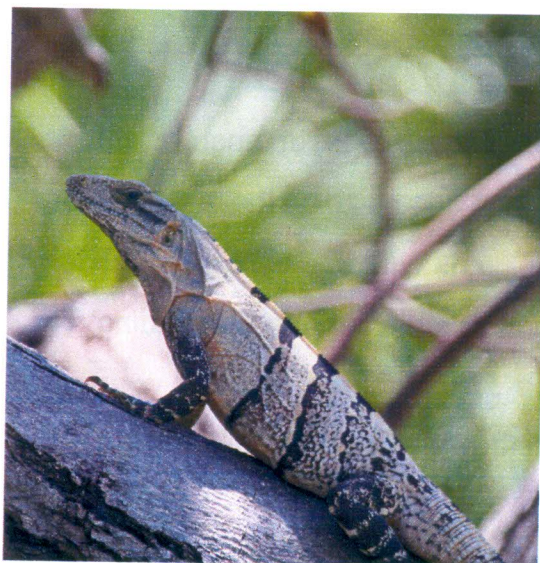
Exploration for the mapping of the site has not been completed so its total size and population are as yet unknown.

## CLIMATE AND VEGETATION

The climate is warm and humid, with abundant rains in summer. The vegetation is like that of a lowland rainforest, consisting primarily of mangrove swamps with a variety of trees; chicle, breadnut, small palms, gumbolimbo or mulato, cacao, as well as reeds and other plants.

## FAUNA

There is abundant animal life. Mammals include deer, tepezcuintles, foxes, ocelots and jaguars. There are reptiles such as iguanas, lizards, boas, fer de lances, coral snakes, crocodiles, and various species of turtles. Birds include heron, hawks and falcons, chachalacas, woodpeckers, flycatchers, in addition to many other birds.



## BUILDING I

The rectangular structure known as the Palace, originally referred to as Building I, is the largest structure at the site, measuring 36 x 20 x 5 meters. At one time it may have had a flat masonry roof or one made of palm thatch. It has characteristics of a residential-administrative building. The structure has two entrances on the south side and a smaller one on the north side, as well as three interior benches. Cist-style graves were found in the area where the structure joins a neighboring structure on its east side.

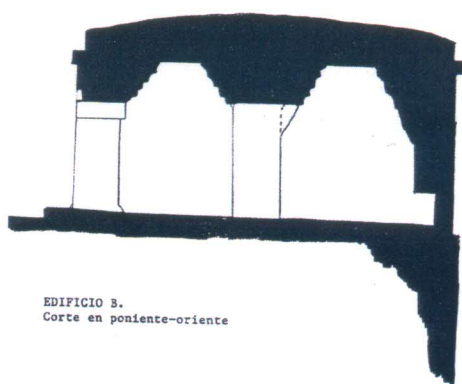


## BUILDING B

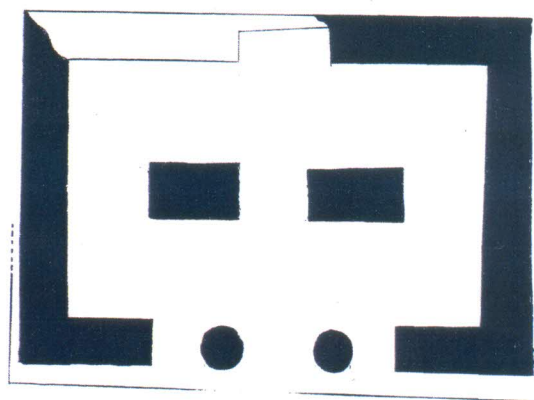
This structure is rectangular and measures 7.5 x 6 m. It consists of two rooms and is accessed on the west side by three doorways separated by two circular columns with square capitals. The central access is wider and is believed to have been a ceremonial building. Three doorways connect the two rooms; the one in the center being the widest and two others at the opposite ends of the central wall being smaller.

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The stucco finish on the exterior of the walls was made without specialized tools. In some areas, traces of handprints can be seen, indicating that the final polishing was done by hand. In the soffit in the interior of the vault, the stucco finish is only found on the interstices between the stones in the masonry.



EDIFICIO B.  
Corte en poniente-oriente

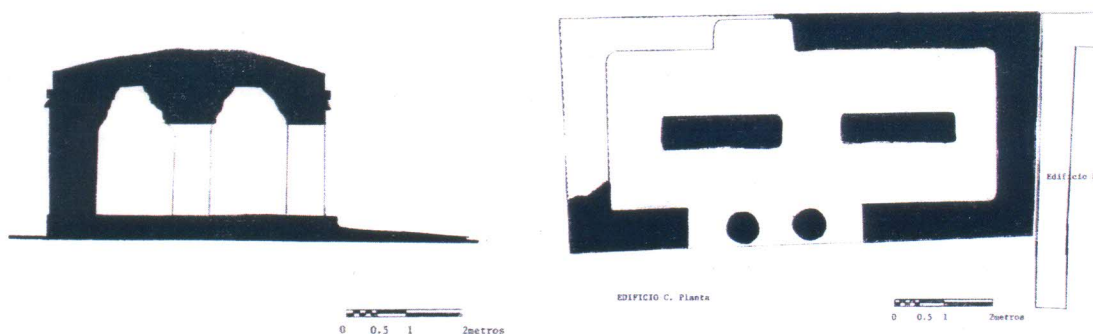


EDIFICIO B. Planta



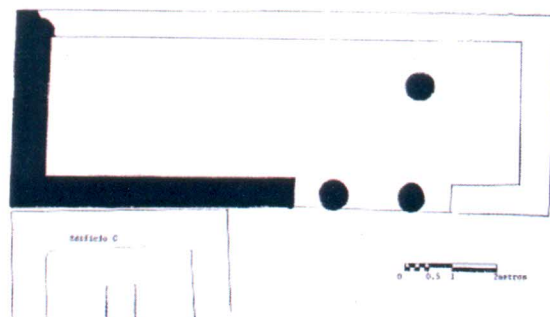
## BUILDING C

This structure is located to the south of Building B, aligned very similarly to it and has been identified as a ceremonial structure. It has a rectangular shape (8.5 x 5m.) and its interior design is similar to Building B. The façade is also similar but there are three connections in its cornice that resemble the Puuc architectural style. The columns that divide the three doorways have almost disappeared; only the bottom cylinder remains.



## BUILDING D

Investigators have identified this building as a rectangular residential-administrative type building (12.3 x 5 m.). Although it is not well preserved, there is evidence of round columns that indicate two entrances: the main entrance toward the north and a secondary entrance toward the west. It is evident that Building D was constructed after Building C since the northeastern wall is abuts the already existing wall of Building C. A round interior column found in the western part of the structure was possibly placed there for structural reasons.



## BUILDING E

This is a small building that has been identified as a ceremonial structure with a trapezoidal plan (2.5 x 2 m.). It is believed to be from the same period as Building C. It is in a poor state of preservation and most of it has been dismantled. Only the south and west walls remain along with the base of the vault.



## BUILDING F

This structure is located at the base of Building B. It is an unusual structure, consisting of a single, open room containing a Chac Mool sculpture in its interior. Unlike the stone Chac Mool sculptures found at Chichen Itza that face the ceremonial area of a building or toward the plaza, this one is made of stucco and looks towards the interior of the building wall to the north. One theory pro-

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posed by the researchers is that this sculpture was brought from another site and placed in this building. Another possibility is that the residents of the town did not have stone of the right quality to sculpt the figure so they made it with stucco, which ended up getting damaged in the open air so they built the structure to protect it. Traces of the original color are still visible on the surface of the Chac Mool.



## TUPAK

This structure is located amid the lagoons on the western side of the Punta Pájaros Reserve and was first visited by the explorer Michel Peissel in 1958. Its architecture is typical of the Eastern style from the Late Postclassic period (A.D. 1200 to 1550). The façade of this rectangular building faces west. The entrance is tripartite with two columns with capitals dividing the doorways. The decoration of the frieze is made up of 16 rectangular panels with a geometric design. In front, there are two sculptures of serpent heads on either side of the door. The remains of hand prints in red paint are also visible.

On the roof there is a small chamber with four entrances. A small ceramic turtle was found inside containing jade beads and one shell bead.



*Entrance from the Lagoon to Tupak.*

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*Chapel on the the roof to Tupak.*



*Geometric decoration on the frieze.*



*Red handprints.*




*Snakes coming out of the walls.*

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavations carried out by the explorer Thomas Gann in 1919 and the archaeologists Ricardo Bueno in 1991, Enrique Terrones in 1996, 1997, and 2000, and Luis Fernando Nuñez Enríquez in 2003 served as the basis for writing these notes.

The information collected by the archaeologists comes from the excavation of the buildings, platforms, graves, and plazas. One of the problems that the archaeologists had was that the graves contained few artifacts, such as ceramics, that can be used to identify the burial date. At Chac Mool, a number of human graves in which the person was accompanied by a dog were found. Altogether, thirty-seven dogs were found. Of these, they were able to identify some common types, known as itzcuintlis, others with snub noses -- called malix and typical to the region -- and xoloitzcuintles or bald dogs. In addition, the discovery of snails, shells, and bone remains of birds and of a deformed raccoon was reported.

What we can deduce from the archaeological evidence is that the site called Chac Mool was of great strategic importance because of its location in the middle of the coastal trade route between Central America, Yucatan (both coastal and interior), and the Usumacinta.



## PUNTA PÁJAROS

The site had its greatest activity during two of the periods used to describe Mesoamerican cultures, the Early Postclassic (A.D. 900 - 1200) and the Late Postclassic (A.D. 1200 - 1550).

From the first period, regional ceramic material originating from sites in the political circle of Chichen Itza as well as ceramics from the Usumacinta region in Chiapas and Tabasco, and from the coast of Veracruz were found. The graves are richer in offerings. It is possible that the Chac Mool figure dates from this period, due to the site's connections to Chichen Itza and central Mexico.

The second period does not show evidence of contact with Chichen Itza and corresponds with the decline and disappearance of that important site. The graves in the later period are situated in a different area and there are differences in the associated ceramics.

Based on the analysis of the skeletal material, there were equal numbers of men and women in the town. During the later period, the majority of the people tended to be younger. There did not seem to be many differences in the diet of the residents and most of the skeletal material demonstrated some degree of nutritional deficiency, primarily that of iron. This was not seen as frequently in the more elaborate graves, in which tartar deposits in the teeth were observed, indicating a diet richer in proteins.

The distribution by age groups for the Postclassic graves of Chac Mool has the characteristic of a more homogeneous population, with a greater number of young adults that denotes an increase in fertility, but the survival of adults older than 50 years is rare.

Traces of injuries seen in the skeletal material of some of the graves indicated that these people may have participated in combat as part of protecting the port and the canoes that came to trade there.

Chac Mool is an interesting site and one of the few in which one can observe the impact of migration. After the fall of Chichen Itza, the population moved toward new centers. Some of the people may have arrived at Chac Mool, which was at that time a transit port linking the Maya's sea trade network around the Yucatan Peninsula.