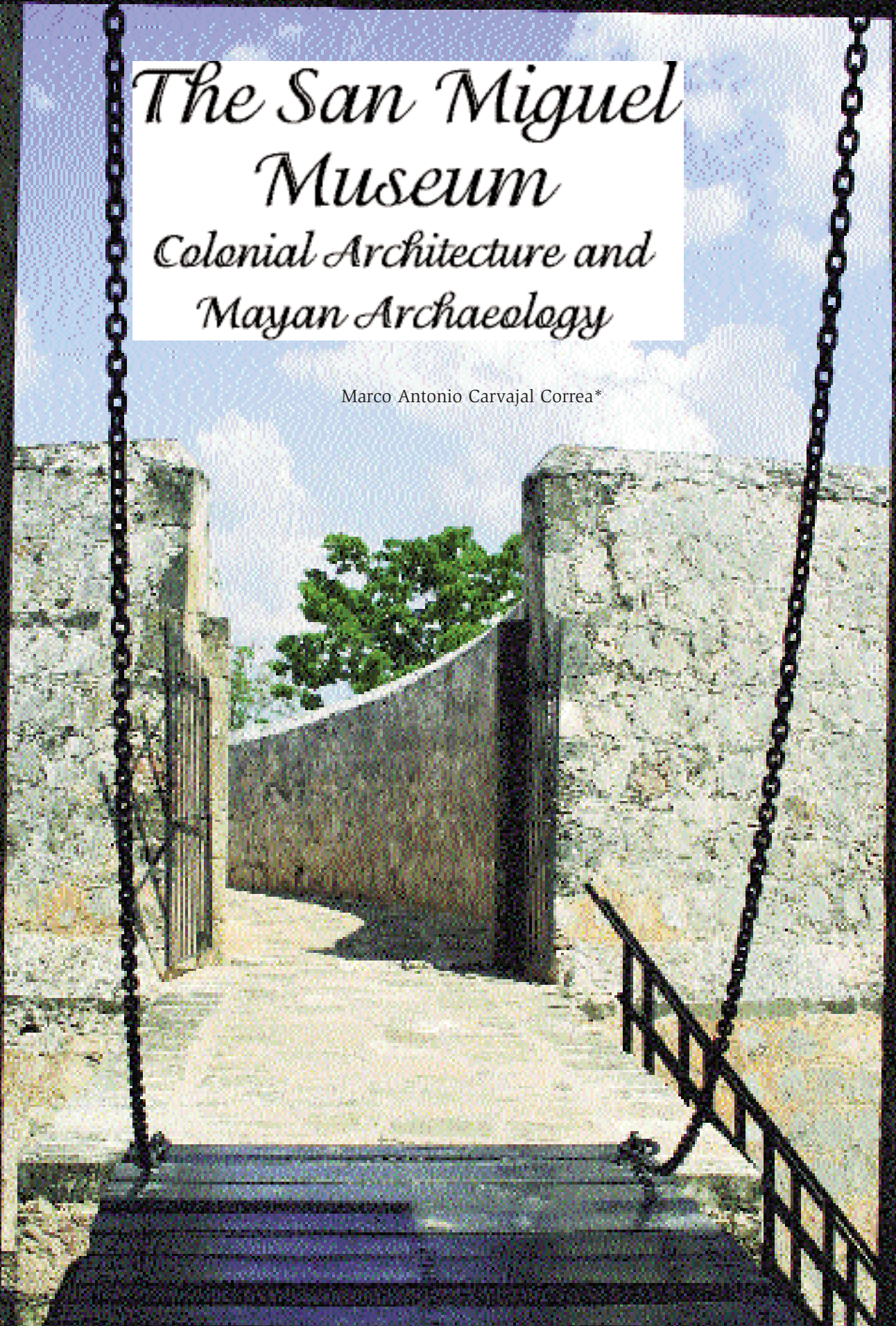
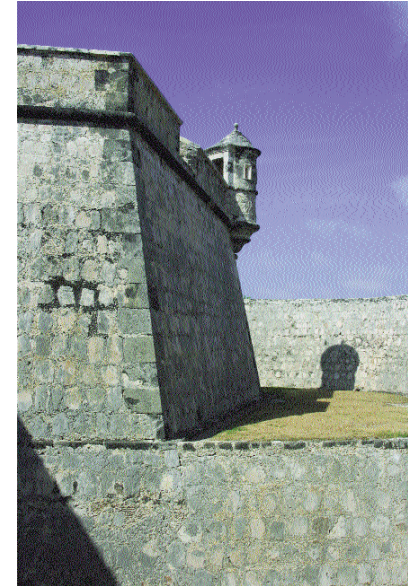


*The San Miguel
Museum
Colonial Architecture and
Mayan Archaeology*

Marco Antonio Carvajal Correa*





THE DEFENSE OF CAMPECHE

In the eighteenth century, France, Spain and Italy united against England in the Seven Years War (1761-1768). In 1762, England occupied Havana and Manila, two of Spain's important trading centers. To get these two enclaves back, Spain ceded Florida, making the Yucatán Peninsula of great strategic importance since whoever controlled Florida and Yucatán would dominate access to the Gulf of Mexico.

This made the port of Campeche part of British expansion plans in the Americas. In 1771, given the threat, the governor, Don Antonio Olivier, reported to King Carlos III of Spain about the need to start work on the city's defenses. The court's reply was slow in coming, but it finally authorized the construction of two forts, the San Miguel Fort on La Eminencia Hill, and the San José Fort on the Vigía Vieja Hill, plus four coastal batteries at the foot of the forts.

The English invasion that motivated building the forts never came about;



Ceramic incense burner. Edzná Archaeological Site.

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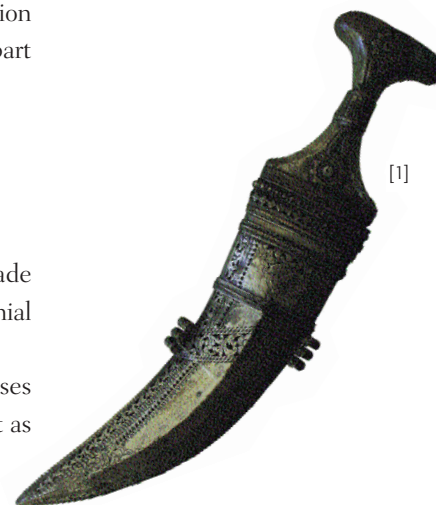
they were not attacked a single time in the eighteenth century. But the situation changed after Mexico's independence. Over almost 50 years, the San Miguel Fort, part of the city's defenses, was brought under siege six times.

MILITARY ARCHITECTURE

Construction began on San Miguel Fort in 1779, with the finishing touches made in 1801. Its lines and design are extraordinary, and it is representative of the colonial period's best military engineering.

Broadly speaking, it is a rectangular building without flanks with its main defenses on the upper story, characteristics that in strict military architectural terms define it as a redoubt. If we stand in front of the façade facing the land, what we see is the ascending embankment known as a glacis. In the central part is a winding access path built to prevent easy penetration by projectiles and frontal attacks by the enemy.

In the top part of the building are the *merlones*, or solid narrow walls between the crenels on the battlements, and the parapets to protect marksmen, alternating with portholes that allowed the gunners to orient the angle of elevation of the cannons. The building's north and south faces are finished by tower sentry-boxes that protected sharpshooters as they fired upon the enemy from above.



[1]



[2]

[1] Wooden-handled, metal-plated dagger. On loan from the Campeche INAH Center Collection.

[2] Detail depicting a reptile and a human head, representing a warrior's *wayay*. Becán Archaeological Site.

[3] *The Lady of Jaina*, considered a masterpiece of Mayan Sculpture. Jaina Archaeological Site.

[4] Room 1, displaying the chronology and geographic location of the Mayan culture.



[3]



[4]

Advancing toward the redoubt on the winding road, we come to the moat that surrounds the main body of the building. A drawbridge crosses it, leading to the gate and guardhouse, with its vaulted walkway or tunnel, and from there, to the barracks square or parade ground, built on the cistern for storing rain water. Around the square are the doors to the commandant and the troops' quarters, the chapel, the kitchen, mess hall, arsenal and storeroom.

On the upper plaza, we find the *barbeta* or low wall that would allow the artillery to fire openly on any ships attacking the city. Today, the museum has an interesting collection of 20 cannon from that period, some used in the field, others for fortifications and others on ships.

THE MUSEUM OF MAYAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The fort continued under army jurisdiction until 1951, when it was abandoned. Its roofs fell in and its interior filled up with weeds.

Years later it was restored by the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the state government and inaugurated as the Museum of Weapons and the Navy, August 7, 1963. In 1975, the collection was changed and the building was turned into the today's Museum of Mayan Archaeology of the City of Campeche.



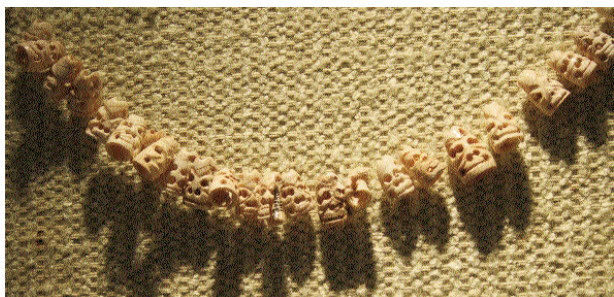
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REINAUGURATED IN 2000

The state's plans for tourism, among other things, prompted the Campeche INAH Center, together with state authorities and other federal bodies, to carry out one of the region's most ambitious projects in 2000. Their aim was to turn the museum's museography into one of the country's most modern, updating its scientific content and enriching its collection with some of the discoveries from the most recent archaeological digs in the four stylistic regions of Campeche state: North Petén, Puuc, Río Bec and Chenes.

The museum displays more than 450 pieces of pre-Hispanic Mayan art, produced using materials like jade, stucco, ceramics, bone, shells and limestone. Its collection also includes human remains from tombs found in digs in the same regions.

The museum's 10 exhibition rooms cover 600 square meters. Each room has graphic and thematic materials and explanations of each piece to ensure that visitors —mainly students— always have a clear, simple, brief expla-



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[5] Room 3. Three doorjambes from the Xcalumkin Archaeological Site.

[6] Becán Archaeological Site.

[7] String of beads made of sea shells in the form of fantastic masks. Calakmul Archaeological Site.

[8] Mask of the Divine Lord Yich' ak K' ak, or Jaguar Claw. Calakmul Archaeological Site.



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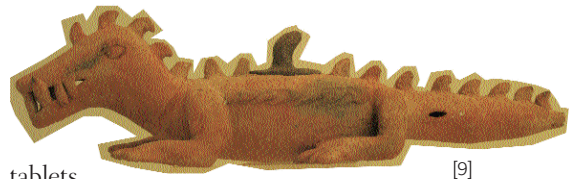
nation of what they are looking at. For anyone who wants more details, each room has tablets

with additional information; three rooms also have interactive digital screens.

The museum's scientific discourse includes the horizon of Mayan culture in Campeche; trade; architecture in Campeche; the house on the water (Jaina Island); the divine Lord Jaguar Claw; the order of the universe; the content of Mayan writing; war among the Mayas; the cycle of life; and recent exploration of the Becán and Balamkú archaeological sites.

THE COLLECTION

The museum has one of Mexico's most impressive collections of Mayan culture, with extraordinarily beautiful, masterfully crafted pieces in a diversity of techniques.



[9]

[9] Incense burner. Jaina Archaeological Site.

[10] Room 6, dedicated to the gods and cosmogony of the Mayan peoples.

[11] Tomb of the Divine Lord Jaguar Claw. Calakmul Archaeological Site.

[12] Anthropomorphic incense burner. Calakmul Archaeological Site. [Following page.]

JADE

No other material was as symbolically important for the Mayans as jade. For this reason, it was used in funeral preparations to portray the faces of dead sovereigns whose spirit was compared to corn. The corn's green leaves were a metaphorical representation of the regeneration of life. The museum has five of the most important jade masks in existence, found in royal tombs at the Calakmul archaeological dig.

CERAMICS

The ceramics collection also includes exceptional pieces. The quality of the Mayan pieces can be attributed to the fact that they began production from the very beginning of their agricultural settlements, with ceramic production evolving parallel to their most complex organizations and largest cities. First, it satisfied the basic need for recipients, but with the passage of time, the preparation of the clay and pigmenting and firing techniques became more sophisticated, resulting in veritable masterpieces of Mayan art.



[11]

STONE SCULPTURE

During the classical period (A.D. 200-900), the lowland Mayans erected enormous stone stelae in their main cities to register the succession of their dynasties, their military victories and the important enemies captured by their rulers. The museum contains smaller works crafted with great mastery, like altars, figures of gods and symbolic objects.

HUMAN REMAINS

[12]

Most of the pieces on exhibit are from the offerings buried with great rulers. The rulers' remains were subjected to preservation techniques like wrapping them in cloth made from plants and covering them with layers of resins, lime and cinnabar (iron oxide) until they looked like cocoons. One of the museum's most interesting attractions is the exhibit of the tombs of the Divine Lord Jaguar Claw and his attendants.

Clearly, the San Miguel Archaeological Museum boasts a wide variety of pieces and museographical resources that brings the Mayan world directly to us. This experience has sparked the desire for adventure and knowledge in several generations of researchers and a public interested in the topic, both of whom have followed the ups and downs of archaeology without losing their ability to be surprised. For young people, a museum visit is an invitation to join the search for the Mayas. **MM**



FURTHER READING

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Ortiz Lanz, José Enrique, *Piedras ante el mar* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Campeche/Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996).

Museo Arqueológico de Campeche, Fuerte de San Miguel

(Museum of Mayan Archaeology, San Miguel Fort)

Avenida Escénica s/n Campeche, Campeche Phone: 01 (981) 821-0973

Admission and Services The museum is open to the public Tuesday to Sunday from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Admission is 27 pesos. Children under 13, students, teachers and senior citizens with ID enjoy free admission, and entry is free for all on Sunday. A fee is charged for video-taping.

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