

The Bastion of Our Lady of Solitude Museum of Mayan Architecture

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This museum, with its collection of important examples of Campeche state's Mayan archaeological heritage, is housed in what was one of the eight bastions built along the great defensive wall completely surrounding Campeche city in the eighteenth century: the Bastion of Our Lady of Solitude, patron saint of sailors. The building was situated very close to what was called the Sea Gate, facing onto the Gulf of Mexico, one of the city's four access points. Today, it preserves part of the old wall, the sentry walkway, the turrets and the sentry boxes. The internal patio leading to the museum is also the access point for a ramp that goes up to the roof where the sentry walkway used to be. From there it is possible to see far out to sea as well as into the city that this structure once protected.



Portico of the bastion's main floor. Seventeenth century.



Room 3. Column, stela and tops of vaults from the Chenes region. Late classical period (A.D. 600-900).



Room 3. Stela 19, K'uhul Ajaw, the sacred lord of Edzná who came to the throne in A.D. 686. Puuc Region.



Room 1. Columns from the Xcochá and Xcalumkín archaeological sites. In the background is a stela from Itzimté. Puuc Region. Late classical period.

Many great men of Campeche have concerned themselves with preserving what remains of the past of the Mayan region. One of the most outstanding of these was Román Piña Chan. Thanks to his numerous writings and those of other researchers, it was possible to collect a significant number of pre-Hispanic Mayan sculptures, now exhibited in the port city of Campeche.

This collection was begun in 1958 in the Bastion of Our Lady of Solitude, near the Sea Gate. Most of the pieces came from the former San José Church, now a cultural center, and the archaeological work being done at the time. To ensure that the collection could fit in the building, it was remodeled in 1975, and by the mid-1990s, it looked like it does today. Four exhibition rooms, an office for the National In-

stitute of Anthropology and History Regional Center and a lecture hall were added.

The bulk of the museum's collection is sculpture from the broad gamut of the Mayan culture, which lasted for a thousand years and covered a wide region, producing many different styles. Among others, it includes pieces of different styles: Jaina (from the eastern Jaina coast); Campeche (from Champotón, Chunkán, Edzná, Sihó and Tunkuyi); Puuc (from Acanmul, Cansacbé, Chunhuhub, Halal, Itzimté, Kankí, Kayal, Xcalumkín, Xcochá, Scombec and Xculoc); Chenes (from Chunbec or Kutzá, Dzehkabtún, Dzibilnocac and Dzibiltún); Río Bec (from Nohsayab), and Petén (from El Palmar).

Almost all the sculpture comes from northern Campeche, except the pieces from El Palmar. There are stelas, columns, door frames, lintels, door-jambs, carved stones and giant stucco masks, although some works are also made of ceramic, bone and other materials. According to these characteristics, the works can be classified as from the late classical period, between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D.

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Photos by Víctor Alejandro Zapata Zetina.
Photos courtesy of the INAH-Campeche Museum's Department.

Sculptures in the Puuc style, specifically from the western region, abound, their most noticeable characteristics being carved porch entryways, columns on the facades with anthropomorphic images, texts written in hieroglyphics and glyphs used as frames.

The reconstruction of the access to the Xcalumkín Initial Series Building is particularly outstanding. This is a site recognized as one of the most important of the western Puuc area. It can be identified by its triple access divided by two pillars. These two pillars, its abacuses and the lintels they support have a long inscription on them, while another inscription runs vertically inside the vault almost until it touches the floor near the central axis of the doorway. The doorjambs display richly dressed figures with feathered headdresses, capes over their shoulders, necklaces, pectorals, bracelets, ornaments made of precious metals, shields

and a kind of ritual lance. Thanks to the hieroglyphics, we know that the building was built in the year A.D. 744, when it was dedicated with incense-holders. Three or four sculptors who carved the reliefs have been identified.

Another noteworthy example is Stela 45 from El Palmar, from the first half of the fifth century A.D. (A.D. 415-435). It shares the visual tradition of the Petén style from the early classical period (fifth and sixth centuries A.D.) given that the main side displays the figure of a dignitary who is diagonally carrying a ceremonial, two-headed staff. The individual's face and headdress are very worn away, but because of his general posture, we know that he was looking to his right; his slightly separated feet and legs can also be seen. The sides of the stela still contain a brief inscription explaining that this figure shed blood to invoke the gods Jaguar paddler and Stingray paddler (better known, by specialists as *remeros*).

Also from the early classical period is a giant stucco mask that may be from Halal. The deterioration of the relief prevents us from knowing



Room 3. Column with a depiction of K'awil, god of corn. Santa Rosa Xtampac archaeological site. Chenes Region. Late classical period.



Room 2. Representation of Kinich Ajaw, the Sun deity. Chunhuhub archaeological site. Puuc Region. Late classical period.

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the identity of the figure, but it does confirm the widespread, continuous use of this kind of visual work.

Another important piece is Stela 5 from Jaina. Until today, five stelas have been found there, but they have been overshadowed by the fame of the many fine terracotta figurines from the same site. The stelas are an average of 50 cm across and 150 cm tall. They often show two figures facing each other, usually one seated and the other standing. Above them may be a brief inscription. The oldest seems to date from A.D. 652, and the most recent, number 5, from the eighth century. Another stela, without a date glyph, is decorated with a kneeling prisoner in profile, with his hands tied behind his back.

The museum also boasts pieces worthy of mention from Edzná, Cansacbé and other sites, pieces that all follow the canons of Mayan sculpture from the late classical period. I think, however, that given space limitations, it is preferable to focus on other monuments.

One of them is Stela 1 from Chunkán, rather uncommon among Mayan art in general. It is a small relief, possibly carved in the tenth or eleventh centuries A.D., judging by the iconography. It depicts an individual wearing ear plugs, a pectoral, wrist ornaments, a skirt and a loincloth and sandals. In his hands, he is holding an object that is unrecognizable today. His face is turned sideways, while his body faces the



Room 2. Corner giant mask representing K'awiil, god of corn and protector of the Mayan nobility. Miramar archaeological site. Chenes Region. Late classical period.

front. The remains of a brief inscription can be seen in front of his face. This work is important because its formal treatment announces a new style that would be much more schematic and in which the figures' bodies would be smaller than six times the size of their heads, with broad shoulders and hips contrasting sharply with slender torsos and waists. It should be noted that these traits can lead to the rather unfounded opinion that these are reliefs from the early post-classical period (from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries A.D.), or are somehow "decadent." Rather, this is an example of how the human body was represented in the coastal area between Champotón and Campeche. The same can be said of the Tunkuyí column, despite the fact that the site is inland, near Bolonchén.

The museum's most recently acquired monuments are the Itzimté stelas (eleventh century A.D.), exam-

ples of the innovation of presenting figures standing atop an enormous calendar sign. Despite this trait, they continue to adhere to the northern tradition of dividing the space of the composition into two or three sections, as can be seen in several cities of Puuc. The top area portrays past historical events; the central part contemporary events; and the lower part calendar signs and sometimes the figures of captives. It should be added that on occasions, the central figure is doing what is called the "Xibalbá dance," which can be observed in Itzimté.

This is a brief, general description of the wealth of sculpture offered by the Museum of Mayan Sculpture, crafted in the almost one thousand cities, now archaeological sites, identified in the state of Campeche. They are from the great regional styles: Jaina-West Coast, Campeche, Puuc, Chenes, Río Bec, Petén and Lower Usumacinta.

Each of the works in the museum is a faithful reflection of a period and a culture rich in material and spiritual achievements, with solid links between the past that saw them emerge from chisel blows and the present that never stops admiring them. It is our present which seeks to reveal the secrets and messages of that past which we know to be unique, original and, simultaneously, shared and universal. That is what Román Piña Chan and a long list of researchers who preceded us thought: they marked the way forward and it is our duty to not diverge from it. **MM**

Museo de arquitectura maya

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of Our Lady of Solitude)
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ADMISSION AND SERVICES

The museum is open to the public Tuesday to Sunday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is 27 pesos and free for children under 13, students, teachers and seniors with ID. On Sunday, admission is free for everyone. A fee must be paid for using video cameras. The museum also offers the sale of publications, mini-guides and guided tours.