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AN ARCHEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE IN
SOUTHEASTERN MEXICO
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AN ARCHEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE IN SOUTHEASTERN MEXICO

By MATTHEW W. STIRLING

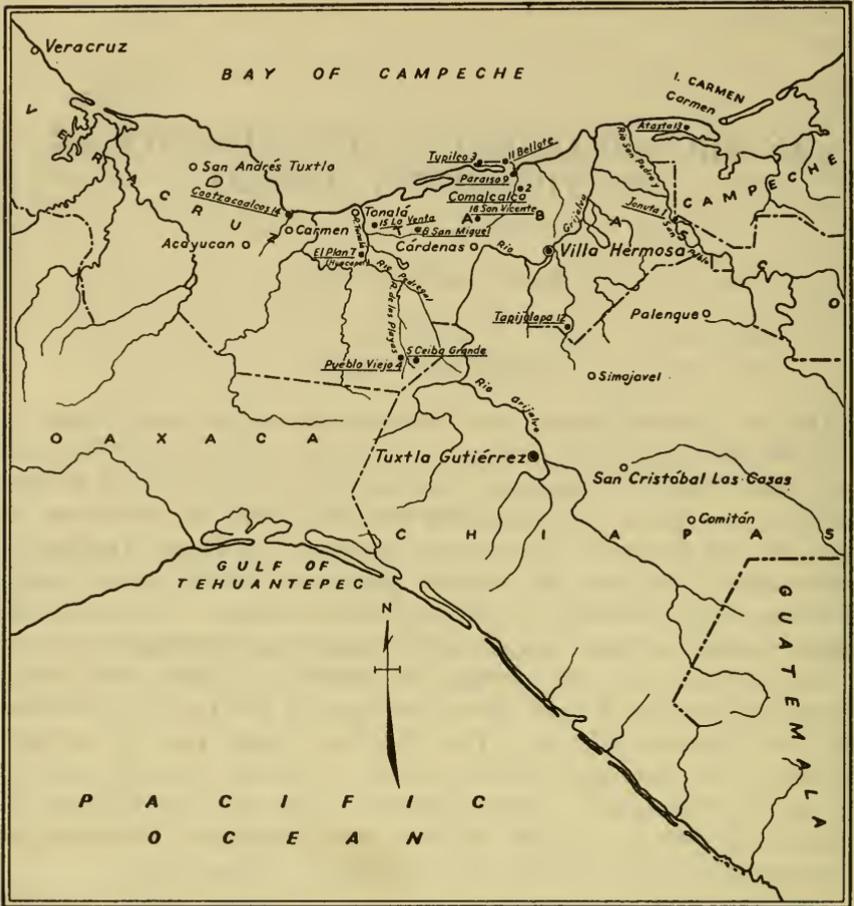
INTRODUCTION

One of the important but little-known archeological areas of Middle America is that portion of southern Mexico lying between the classic Olmec territory and that formerly occupied by the ancient Maya. In 1944 a reconnaissance was conducted in this region as part of the National Geographic Society-Smithsonian Institution archeological program, the primary purpose of which was to establish the eastern boundary of the early Olmec culture. The work was made possible by funds supplied by the National Geographic Society.

The territory covered during the months of March and April, extended from the Tonalá River eastward to the Laguna Terminos and the Candelario River. This includes a small part of southern Veracruz and northern Chiapas, most of Tabasco, and the western corner of Campeche. I was assisted on the trip by Richard H. Stewart, assistant chief of the National Geographic Photographic Laboratory, and by my wife Marion Stirling. (Map 15.)

In general in this region there are very few roads; rivers and trails supply the principal avenues of travel. Chartered small planes were utilized for several of the longer jumps, but for the most part travel was by launches, canoes, horseback, or on foot.

The coast facing the Bay of Campeche is low. A line of sand dunes fringes the water's edge and behind these dunes mangrove swamps extend many miles inland where the water is made brackish by the tides. Back of the sandy coast is a chain of large, shallow salt-water lagoons. Along most of the Tabasco coast, the mangroves give way to fresh-water swamps in the low flat interior. This low land extends almost to the Chiapas border where the mountains leading to the central plateau begin. The major portion of this territory is covered by a dense tropical rain forest, interspersed by lakes, swamps, and large rivers, which are joined by a network of connecting sloughs. The principal rivers are the Grijalva, and the



MAP 15.—Map of Tehuantepec and adjacent territory.

San Pedro y San Pablo which constitutes the lower course of the Usumacintla. In spite of what might seem an unfavorable environment, the area is fairly well populated. The 1940 census gives 12 inhabitants to the square kilometer, a figure which seems too high. The abundance of archeological remains would suggest that the population in aboriginal times was greater than at present.

A number of Maya sites are to be found in this region, the most important being Jonuta on the lower Usumacintla and Comalcalco on the Río Seco. The latter is of particular interest since it represents the westernmost-known Maya site.

Many of the prehistoric remains, however, are not yet identifiable as Maya, a fact which points up the importance of doing work in this key area. Here, theoretically, should be found the chronological

link between the established culture columns of the Maya region, on the one hand, and of the Veracruz coast, on the other. In addition, there appear to be relationships with the highlands of Chiapas. There is evidence also of Toltec influence, an item of considerable current interest. All in all, Tabasco and the adjacent territory constitute a critical region of primary archeological importance.

At Comalcalco there are a number of interesting anomalies. The architecture in many respects is typical of the Classic Maya. Rooms are narrow with extremely thick walls surmounted with steep corbeled vaults. Tombs contain figures modeled in stucco reminiscent of Palenque. The structures, however, are made of fired bricks instead of stone, and the substructures are earth mounds similar to those of Veracruz rather than stone-faced pyramids with rubble cores. At Jonuta also there are earth mounds instead of pyramids, but typical Maya stone sculpture exists, with Maya glyphs.

At Tupilco, near the coast of Tabasco, we found a site without architecture but with typical Maya figures modeled in clay. This site lies some 30 miles west of Comalcalco and is the westernmost Maya outpost yet known.

THE TONALA REGION

The Tonalá River, the boundary between the States of Veracruz and Tabasco, is formed by the junction of two streams, the Pedregal and the Río de las Playas, which originate in the rough mountains around the Cerro Mono Pelado. After flowing their separate ways through the mountains they join soon after entering the coastal plain. At the present time the region which they drain is entirely uninhabited except for the lower reaches.

While working at the site of La Venta in 1943, we heard stories of ruins known as Pueblo Viejo, located on the Río de las Playas. On many maps of Mexico this site appears in large type as though it was an existing city. Unable to find anyone who had been there, we became intrigued and resolved to make a trip up the river in an effort to locate it. Our unsuccessful attempt to do so at that time has been described elsewhere (Stirling, 1943; Weber, 1945). However, on this 1943 trip we obtained information that convinced us of the existence of the ruins of Pueblo Viejo, which we presumed was a colonial site. We were told also of a large pre-Columbian site in the vicinity known only to one man, Vicente Aguilar, a native pioneer living on the Río de las Playas, who was unavailable to us as guide on our first expedition.

On March 11, 1944, Stewart, Mrs. Stirling, and I left La Venta in a canoe with an outboard motor, in order to survey the upper reaches of the river. Having heard of a mound group near the oil camp of

Cuichapa, we made our first stop at Las Choapas and took the autovia car to the oil camp.

Here one of the engineers, Roberto Montez, led us to the site, which is about 3 miles west of Cuichapa. The group is quite impressive, consisting of a very large long mound approximately 500 feet long and 40 feet high. Just east of it is a steep conical mound about 50 feet high. South of this are several small round mounds. We found no sherds on the surface. Although the mounds had been cleared 2 years before our visit, they had again become covered with a dense second-growth jungle.

Leaving Las Choapas we continued up the river. At El Plan the first high banks appear along the river, and the mangrove swamps are left behind.

EL PLAN

At El Plan, formerly known as Huacapal, there are two mounds about 50 yards from the edge of the 50-foot-high riverbank. The largest of these is about 14 feet high and is dome shaped. In front of it, in the direction of the river, is a low irregular mound about 5 feet high. Some digging had been done on the east edge of the larger mound, but it had not been much damaged. The space lying between the mounds and the river was evidently an occupation site, since abundant sherds are revealed where digging has been done for construction purposes. These sherds are for the most part of plain buff ware with black interspace as the result of incomplete firing. They are undecorated except for simple grooves or incising near the rims. The principal shapes noted were shallow, flat-bottomed bowls with widely everted rims.

A few obsidian flakes and flint chips were scattered around. No figurine fragments were seen.

RÍO DE LAS PLAYAS

Beyond the mangroves, the country continued low, with here and there low hills and elevations. Occasional milpas along the river were planted primarily with corn but with some beans and bananas. When we entered the Río de Las Playas the riverbanks became much higher. Ascending the Playas for 1 hour we came to a low hill on the left, with a sandstone exposure at the river's edge. Just back of this on a higher elevation could be seen a group of mounds and leveled terraces silhouetted against the sky. An hour's journey beyond this point we saw another mound group on a high point back of the river on the right.

At Cerro Pilón the river emerges from the mountains, the rapids begin, and it is no longer possible to use a motor. Here the river

passes through a limestone gorge and the remainder of the trip is slow and difficult. The region being uninhabited, there is no land trail up the river. Just beyond the gorge, at the last house on the river, we picked up our guide, Vicente Aguilar. Near the house a good-sized stream, the Arroyo de Las Amates, enters the Playas on the left bank. Vicente told us that on a hunting trip he had seen a ruin farther up this stream. To reach it one goes 2 leagues up the Amates, where it is joined by the Arroyo Burro. Then one follows the Burro to the west until the Arroyo Esperanza enters it. Near the headwaters of the Esperanza is a good-sized site with stone-faced platforms, larger than Pueblo Viejo but smaller than Ceiba Grande, the two sites we examined on the Río de las Playas.

From Las Amates it is about 3 days' travel to the Arroyo Pueblo Viejo, on which are located the ruins of the site of the same name. On the third day we stopped just below a mountain, locally called the Cerro Tierra Colorado, in order to hunt game. At this place the left bank of the river is high and the land quite level for a considerable distance. Here along a small arroyo we saw a series of small mounds, the highest of which was about 10 feet. Some were circular in form and others were of an elongated oval shape. Most had sandstone slabs scattered on the surface. We saw one natural outcrop of this type of stone in the vicinity which gave us some doubt as to the artificial nature of the mounds. However their appearance and location lead me to believe that they are manmade. It would have cost us a day of travel to test them, so we did not excavate.

CEIBA GRANDE

About noon of the third day of our trip from the limestone gorge, we came to a small arroyo which enters from the left bank of the Playas opposite a high bank of blue shale topped with reddish soil. We gave it the name of Arroyo Vicente. The large prehistoric site, Vicente assured us, was located on this stream. After a 4-hour search, he found it. It is situated on the right bank of the arroyo on fairly level ground and was covered with a very high growth of virgin jungle.

A giant ceiba tree was growing on the exact center of the summit of the principal pyramid, so we named the site "Ceiba Grande."

Because of the heavy jungle cloak, the real nature and extent of the site was not apparent to us at first, but after 5 days of clearing and mapping, we found that it consisted of a principal pyramid, two adjacent courts, and a ball court (fig. 5).

The pyramid is approximately 50 feet high and is faced with sandstone slabs. A badly ruined wide stairway leads to the summit on the north side.

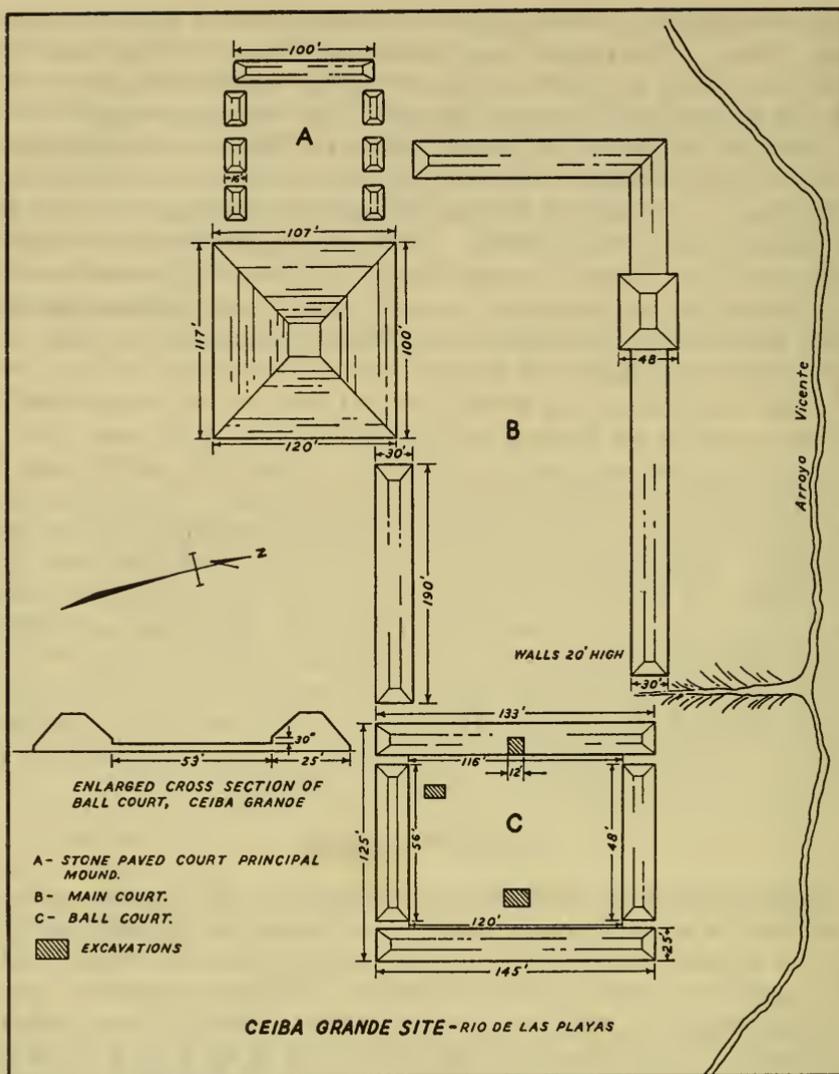


FIGURE 5.—Ceiba Grande site, Río de las Playas.

Just west of the pyramid is a rectangular court, paved with flat sandstone slabs. This is flanked on the west side by an elongated mound or embankment, and on the north and south sides by three small but fairly high mounds.

North of the pyramid is a large court about 400 feet long and 100 feet wide. This is flanked on the north and west sides by an L-shaped embankment. The long or north area of the L is enlarged, at the point opposite the pyramid, into a fair-sized mound. The

south side of the big court is flanked in part by the north wall of court "A," the principal pyramid, and by an embankment which extends eastward from the northeast corner of the pyramid for a distance of 190 feet. This embankment runs level for a distance of 140 feet and then slopes downward toward the ball court, which lies at a lower level. The east wall of the big court is formed by the west wall of the ball court.

The ball court itself, although it appears symmetrical to the eye, actually is not. The inside measurements of the north and south ends are, respectively, 48 feet and 56 feet, while the inside measurements of the east and west sides are 120 feet and 116 feet. Part of this apparent irregularity may be due to the fact that the inner paving has been buried in the talus washed down from the surrounding embankments.

The structures at the north and south ends of the ball court are somewhat shorter than the width of the floor, leaving a narrow passage at each corner. The entire surface of the walls is faced with flat slabs of sandstone, and the base of each wall has a vertical section which extends $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the floor. From this point the walls slope upward at an angle of 45° to the top of the wall, which is about 20 feet high. The floor has been fully leveled and consists of a well-fitted paving of sandstone slabs laid on a base of clean yellow sand. This sand is not a natural formation, but was apparently carried in (pl. 49, *b*).

The only excavations we made were in the ball court. We dug two small pits into the floor and ran a trench 12 feet wide into the central section of the west wall from the floor level, in order to gain a more accurate picture of the construction of the court. This trench yielded a fair sampling of sherds. There were no figurines, but we encountered a few prismatic obsidian flakes. The great majority of the sherds were of a coarse brick Red Ware, undecorated and sand tempered. A few sherds of this type were black, which may have been an accident of firing. There were also a few thin sherds of fine untempered paste. There were no sherds on the surface nor could we find any in the bed of the arroyo adjacent to the site.

In the dense forest south of the pyramid we saw some more mounds, but did not have time to survey them.

An interesting feature of Ceiba Grande is the fact that most if not all of the mounds and embankments are faced with stone slabs. This feature, along with the paved courts and ball court, clearly indicates that this site is something quite different from the mound groups of the adjacent coastal-plain region of southern Veracruz and Tabasco. Rather, it would seem to be an outpost of a culture originating in the Chiapas highlands. The ball courts which we found

in Chiapas in the region of the La Venta River were of the expanded-end type for the most part, but nevertheless I feel that there may be some relationship.

PUEBLO VIEJO

A short distance above the Arroyo Vicente, the Arroyo Pueblo Viejo enters the river from the left bank. Directly in front of the arroyo mouth, there is a large bar. A short distance above this is a second large bar. Just back of this, the site of Pueblo Viejo is located on high level ground on the right bank of the river. The site is near the river and lies between it and a small arroyo which enters the Playas just below. The site is about 400 yards square, and consists of approximately 30 rectangular platforms with masonry walls made of flat slabs of sandstone laid without cement. They are between 2 and 3 feet high, depending on the size of the platform. The largest we measured was 66 by 30 feet and the smallest 25 by 10. We selected one for excavation which was 30 by 18 feet, with walls 2 feet 10 inches high. At a distance of 7 feet 7 inches from the northwest corner there was a stone staircase 17 inches wide consisting of 3 steps, each with a rise of 7 inches. The long axis of the platform was oriented almost exactly north and south. This appeared to be the case with the other platforms as well. The space between the stone walls was filled with earth, level with the top. We dug a trench 5 feet wide extending from the middle of the north wall to the middle of the south wall and an intersecting trench connecting the centers of the east and west walls. (Pl. 48, a.)

A considerable amount of plain buff potsherds and a quantity of flint chips and rejects were recovered. The only European object found was a large square hand-forged iron spike. This lay at a depth of 1 foot near the middle of the platform.

At the north edge of the site are two deep excavations or holes. On the rim of one of these are the remains of part of a stone wall. They might have been wells, but it is difficult to see why wells would have been necessary with the river so close at hand. My first impression was that this site was of colonial origin and had been occupied by mestizos or Europeans. This thought was induced primarily by the fact that we expected it to be a colonial site since it was placed on the old maps. This seemed to be confirmed by the finding of the iron spike, the stone steps, and the rather exact orientation of the structures. On the other hand, the pottery was all of native type (a fact not necessarily conclusive), and the masonry was very similar to that of structures we later found in the vicinity of Ocozocoautla in Chiapas. My present belief is that Pueblo Viejo is a late-type aboriginal site.

SAN MIGUEL

Leaving Coatzacoalcos by small plane, we went to Cardenas by way of Comalcalco and Villahermosa. From Cardenas we hired mules and a guide and rode the 42 miles to San Miguel in 12 hours. The first part of the trail is through comparatively open country and remains so until after crossing the Arroyo Limón, where it enters the forest. At Limón there is a sizable group of small mounds, and about 5 miles beyond, near the trail, is another similar group. At both of these sites, sherds are visible on the surface. Just beyond Limón the trail passes over a pair of small parallel long mounds.

San Fernando is the ruin of a former hacienda which stood at this place. The trail crosses the ruins of a brick structure. At one point it passes between two standing brick columns. A few yards back of these, hidden in the thick brush, was an aboriginal stone figure which we later learned had been brought from the site at San Miguel by a man named Villár, many years ago when the hacienda was in operation.

The figure is of basalt, representing a seated individual. It is $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. The head is the high elongated Olmec type. The ears are rectanguloid, long and narrow. The eyes are almond shaped and slanting. The features are badly eroded and now almost indistinguishable. The base is flat. The knees and arms are broken.

The present village of San Miguel consists of a few scattered thatched huts and is located on an archeological site. It is near the headwaters of the Blasillo River, on the lower reaches of which is the site of La Venta. The archeological site of San Miguel consists of a number of good-sized mounds and a deep pond or borrow pit similar to those at Cerro de las Mesas and San Lorenzo. The most interesting monument which we saw at the site was lying in the trail between two mounds. One of these mounds many years ago had been flattened on top in order to build a church of thatch. At the time of our visit the church had been abandoned and was falling to pieces. The stone consists of the dome-shaped upper portion of a large basalt head, broken off at the level of the eyes. In its present condition it is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. Scattered over the rounded head are a half dozen or more round faces, including one directly on top. Each of these faces is surrounded by a circle from which radiate five stepped elements and a long triangular point at the base. Some of the smaller faces on the back appear to have been rubbed or worn off. The rear of the head is flattened as is the case with the Olmec Colossal heads. (Pl. 50.)

About 300 yards south of this stone, well hidden in the jungle, was another fragment of what had evidently been a large stone monument. One surface of this is smooth with a deep groove in it.

Carved on this smooth surface in low relief are three "flame"- or leaf-shaped elements somewhat like the carvings in low relief back of the head of the principal figure of altar 4 at La Venta. It is impossible now to tell the nature of the monument from which this rather massive fragment was broken.

We were informed by the men of the village that a few years ago in a nearby field part of a carved basalt figure was exposed. Being curious, they dug it up and found it to be the figure of a man somewhat larger than life size. Their curiosity satisfied, they reburied it. At the time of our visit the field was covered with a heavy growth of zacate, but the men claimed they could locate the figure later in the season when the grass was burned. One man had a small pottery hollow figurine head of a jaguar with round ears. It is made of a light buff ware which had once been covered with a white slip. (Pl. 71, *a*.)

While not a particularly large site, San Miguel is important because of its obvious Olmec affiliations. Upon our arrival there we learned that the hard 12-hour ride to reach it was not necessary. A launch leaves Las Choapas on the Tonalá River twice a week and goes to Arroyo Prieto not more than 5 miles from San Miguel. From there one can reach the site on foot or by horseback. It is also much closer by trail from La Venta than it is from Cardenas.

COMALCALCO AND VICINITY

From Cardenas to Comalcalco we traveled in a truck over an unimproved road. Most of this section is a rich agricultural district. The road was lined with large cacao plantations which were overgrown and neglected at the time we passed by them. Such productive lands could have supported a very large aboriginal population.

The present city of Comalcalco is located on an island in the Río Seco, and it has a population of approximately 3,000. One of our first acts upon arrival was to visit Prof. Rosendo Taracena at the Instituto Comalcalco, a school for which he was largely responsible. In the school was a considerable archeological collection that he had assembled from the region. Included in the material were many specimens recently obtained from the large shell mound at Ceiba, near Paraiso, from which was taken the shell used in building the newly completed road from Comalcalco to Paraiso. The place of honor in the collections is held by a basalt seated figure from La Venta. This was placed in a corner partly covered by a wooden frame designed to resemble the arched niches on the La Venta altars. This figure was one of five which a wealthy mahogany dealer by the name of Policarpo Valenzuela had removed from the site at La Venta more than 50 years ago and brought to his hacienda San Vicente, near Aldama in Tabasco. In Aldama the great Mexican Revolution

began, and San Vicente was the first of the haciendas of the big landowners to be destroyed. The five La Venta monuments lay among the ruins for many years until two of them were transported to Villahermosa where they were placed in the grounds of the school (pl. 53, *a*). In 1939 Professor Taracena removed a third one to his institute in Comalcalco (pl. 53, *b*). Later we made a trip to San Vicente to see and photograph the two remaining monuments. At the time of our visit, the road from Comalcalco to Aldama had pretty much gone to ruin, and it was with considerable difficulty that we reached Aldama by car. Aldama, the "Lexington" of Mexico, once a prosperous town now consists of a few scattered thatch huts and adobe houses around a large open plaza in which are a number of cement seats. Here was fought the first battle of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

The road from Aldama to San Vicente proved to be impassable for our car, so we made most of it on foot. Along the road, just outside Comalcalco, are two small mounds where a brick factory was being built.

Halfway between Comalcalco and Aldama, on the Arroyo Seco at the site of the old Pemex camp, is a fair-sized mound and some smaller ones.

The trail from Aldama to San Vicente passes over some small mounds about three-fourths of the way from Aldama. There are sherds on the surface.

The remains of the hacienda are known locally as the "Casa Vieja." The ruins of the once fine structure are now buried in jungle. The broken brick walls wrapped in strangler figs and covered with parasitic plants look as ancient as any Maya ruin, although it was only 1913 when the hacienda was destroyed completely. Lying in the rubble of the old patio, we found the two monuments. Under the circumstances they seemed to us to epitomize the impermanence of human achievement. Policarpo took them from the wilderness which the great center of La Venta had become, and brought them to what he considered the luxurious permanence of the great hacienda. Now La Venta is, as a result of the oil industry, once more at the doorstep of civilization and easily accessible, while San Vicente, in utter ruin, is buried in a wilderness as complete as that which formerly engulfed La Venta.

One of the stones, 45 inches high, represents a man sitting cross-legged, leaning forward slightly, the hands clasping the feet. A band across the forehead passes completely around the head. The facial features are considerably eroded, and part of the upper left arm has been battered off; otherwise the sculpture is in pretty good condition (pl. 73, *a*).

The other stone, 36 inches high, is especially interesting. It represents the Olmec anthropomorphic jaguar in part human, part animal posture. The figure is seated with the left front paw drawn under the body, the right paw lying alongside the body with the realistically carved foot lying pads up. The head is large and represented as looking upward. The elongated eyes have branching "Olmec" eyebrows and the mouth is the typical Olmec "tiger mouth." The forehead is somewhat concave and the head flat across the top, with the usual notch in the middle of the forehead. The tail is stylized and shown as branching on each side like the eyebrow conventionalization.

A fresh break showed that someone very recently had knocked off the base of the tail. The piece so removed must have been carried away, since we searched for it in vain. (Pl. 73, *b*.)

A figure quite similar in appearance was found at Arroyo Sonso, 25 kilometers southeast of Coatzacoalcos and 15 kilometers from the Tonalá River (Nomland, 1932).

These two monuments are relatively small as La Venta sculpture goes. The bases of both pieces are perfectly flat, that of the jaguar having an opening through it which passes through the lap.

COMALCALCO RUINS

The Maya ruins of Comalcalco lie on the right side of the Río Seco and less than an hour's walk from the town. Considering the relative accessibility of the site and its great importance, it is somewhat difficult to understand why it has been so neglected by archeologists. Charnay visited the ruins for 10 days in 1880, publishing several inadequate accounts, but quite properly calling attention to the importance of the site (Charnay, 1887). (Pls. 51, *a, b*; 52, *b*.)

In 1925 the Tulane University expedition under the direction of Frans Blom (1926-27) visited and mapped the site, excavating a tomb containing a procession of figures modeled in stucco. (Pl. 52, *a*.) Save for these two brief forays, archeologists have managed pretty successfully to detour away from the locality. The principal mound is a composite structure more or less rectangular in form with two large aprons projecting from the west corners. It is more than 100 feet high and probably measures almost 1,000 feet along the east-west axis. The remains of the buildings still standing are of large, flat well-fired bricks set in heavy mortar made from burned oyster shell. The walls are more than 3 feet thick. Although some of the rooms are still intact, the site has been pretty well denuded of all the paintings and stucco "adornos" which once embellished it.

The tomb excavated by Blom had become exposed to the weather and the stucco reliefs were deteriorating although still in fair shape.

All of the glyphs in the tomb were gone. It is possible that similar tombs occur under the corresponding apron on the northwest portion of the mound.

Many years ago the major part of the walls of the main building was torn down in order to obtain bricks to build houses near Comalcalco. Despite the wreckage of the structures which surmounted the site, there has been virtually no excavation in the mounds themselves, so in one sense the vandalism has been superficial. Because of its strategic location as the westernmost outpost of the ancient Maya civilization, Comalcalco offers a splendid opportunity for finding in juxtaposition, materials typical of the southern Veracruz cultures and those of the Maya proper. Although the buildings are architecturally pure Maya, the substructures resemble the large earth mounds of the southern Veracruz area much more than they do the stone-faced Maya pyramids. While fine stucco modeling reminiscent of that at Palenque was characteristic of Comalcalco, stone sculpture seems to be absent.

PARAÍSO

The trip from Comalcalco to Paraíso over the new shell-surfaced road required only 30 minutes by car. The road is itself an attenuated archeological site, being composed of a mixture of shell and potsherds from the great shell mound near Ceiba on the lower Río Seco.

Paraíso, a town with a population of about 1,800, has apparently not changed much from its appearance when visited by Charnay in 1880. While in town we viewed some private collections of materials that came from the shell mound during the road-building period.

The shell mound was located on the left bank of the Río Seco about a mile above Ceiba in the direction of Paraíso. The location where the mound was actually situated is known as Palma, but since Ceiba is the better known place, I am referring to it as the Ceiba Mound.

When we visited the site the bulk of the mound had been hauled away, but since the base still remained with numerous excavation pits exhibiting vertical faces 8 or 10 feet high, it was still very instructive. The body of the mound goes down well below the water table which is at the surface level of the river. At the time of our visit some shell was still being taken from the mound.

The base of the mound was about 300 yards long by 100 yards wide. Our informants told us that the highest part formerly reached a height of 15 meters. The body of the mound consisted mainly of oyster shell with occasional pockets of conch shell, sand, and stray miscellaneous shells. Floors, both of burned clay and cement, are fairly abundant in the remaining lower portion of the mound. In several instances cross sections show 3 or 4 floors superimposed (pl. 55, *a*). The layers of cement are about an inch thick and were usually the sides and tops of

rectangular platforms with shell cores. The corners of the platforms were rounded and the walls sloped toward the top so that each platform was actually in the form of a much truncated pyramid (pl. 55, *b*). A man who lived at the site all during the period of excavation said that there were usually human burials with offerings beneath these platforms, which ranged from 2 to 4 feet in height. According to his account, which accorded with what other informants told us, most of the better specimens came from the upper levels of the mound. The highest summit had immediately under the surface a large cement or stucco-covered platform, the sides of which were decorated with "alligators" modeled in stucco relief. This made a rather impressive appearance, and the workmen, hopeful of treasure, lost no time tearing it apart only to find that the interior consisted of a pure oyster-shell core. Among the finds which our informant remembered was a string of pure white, highly polished stone beads, little pinch pots filled with red paint, some legless stone metates, and a stone "idolo" about 2 feet high representing a seated man.

Here and there in the mound can still be seen deposits of white lime made by burning oyster shell. Potsherds were abundant with the base of the mound so well exposed and freshly excavated; half vessels, large rimsherds, and basal supports lay about in profusion, many in situ. This material was representative of the early period of the mound structure. Some of the sherds are of incised ware, occasionally with zoned designs set off by punctate areas. Painted ware is either monochrome, dark red (specular hematite), or polychrome consisting of orange and black on buff. A good many of the vessels had a cream slip on the exterior, but no further painting. All the painted designs we saw were geometric in character. There were parts of comales, without handles, and fragments of large ollas. There was another type of large shallow vessel with round bottom and a short incurving neck with wide everted rim. Some of these, judging from the sherds, must have been 18 inches in diameter. Figurines appear to be relatively rare, such as there are, being of the hollow variety. The finer ware consists of shallow tetrapod vessels, usually with fluted melonlike sides and flange base. Effigy or mammiform supports terminate in a flat cylindrical nubbin. Some sherds revealed that a shallow annular or ring base was sometimes used.

A common type was a round-bottomed jar with sloping shoulder and a high neck, the rounded portion below the shoulder being roughened by textile impressions or scalloping applied with the edge of a pecten shell. There was apparently no shell tempering.

The nature of the ceramics is best shown by the illustrations (pls. 56-61).

BELLOTE

From Ceiba we drove by car to the end of the road where we hired a canoe to visit the shell mounds on the Laguna Mecoacan. We passed miles of coconut groves along low mangrove flats in an area similar to that of the 10,000 island region of Florida (pl. 63, *b*).

We passed several small shell mounds with sections exposed by the waves. In a little more than 2 hours we reached Bellote, where the big mound group is situated on Andres Garcia Island. There was a thatched house at the foot of the mounds owned by R. Unolfo Cordoba, who guided us over the mounds which he had partly cleared for cultivation. (Pls. 63, *a*; 64, *b*.)

The Bellote group is quite impressive. There are four principal mounds placed in close proximity and several smaller scattered mounds, principally toward the north and east.

The sides of the mounds are steep and do not run together aimlessly in the usual manner of shell midden mounds.

The central mound is more than 40 feet high and is more or less flat on top where parts of a cement floor may still be seen. At a somewhat lower level on the east side is a flat-topped apron. Just south of this is a slightly lower, steep symmetrical conical mound. East of the central mound is a large, somewhat elongated mound about 25 or 30 feet high, while north of the central mound is another mound with two summits, probably less than 20 feet in height. North of this are three low, elongated mounds running parallel with their axis in an east-west direction.

Our guide told us that in clearing his milpa they found some glass beads of large size.

Potsherds were abundant on the surface, and on superficial examination seemed similar to the ware at Ceiba.

Although of shell, the Bellote mounds seem definitely to have been constructed, and are not simply refuse heaps.

When Charnay visited Bellote around 1880, he said there were still ruins of a temple on the summit of the principal mound, and pictured a stucco relief similar in style to those at Palenque.

When we visited the site, the only visible evidence of a structure was the remains of a cement floor.

ISLA

On our return trip from Bellote we stopped to photograph some natives burning lime in a fashion that might have been used by the aboriginal inhabitants, who also made lime from oyster shells.

A sort of crib of mangrove wood was constructed, forming a platform which was heaped high with oyster shells. This was fired, reducing the shells to lime (pl. 64, *a*).

At a place called Isla, not far from this point, we stopped to see a man by the name of Francisco Chablé. He and his son had just dug a small mound on his property, and we made photographs of the interesting material recovered.

The mound was of earth and about 5 feet high. In the body of the mound were three pottery vessels. One was a round-bodied spouted "teapot," the upper part painted dark red and highly polished, the lower part incised (pl. 65, *a-1*). The spout is unsupported, the base flat with a vestigial annular ring support. The other two vessels were incrustated with "caliche" and the painted decoration, if any, did not show. The ware of both of these was brick red in color. One was a round-bottomed, high-necked jar with the rim expanded into bowl form. It was 9 inches high (pl. 65, *a-3*). The other was a wide-mouth jar with simple incised ornamentation (pl. 65, *a-2*).

Below the base of the mound was a grave about 4 feet deep, with traces of the bones of a child. Accompanying these were a number of artifacts. There were two pottery vessels. One was a spouted effigy pot of incised buff-colored ware 11 inches high, the other a pot of exceptionally fine ware in the form of a coiled shell, 9 by 8 inches. The latter had short cylindrical tripod supports, and a short spout, and the interior was painted dark red and was highly polished. The outside was covered with a cream slip. On the side was a rectangular cartouche with an elaborately modeled design which probably represents a stylized serpent head (pl. 66, *a, b*).

Also with the burial was the profile of a human skull carved from shell, about 3 inches in diameter, and a pure white, well-preserved human head, beautifully carved and polished, made from a massive piece of some marine shell. It is 1½ inches in height. With it were 7 cylindrical shell beads and 15 bright green jade beads, and a pair of very small earspools of the same material. The shell head was in position as the central piece of the jade bead necklace. There was also a string of 12 polished and perforated shells (pl. 65, *b, c*).

TUPLICO

From Paraiso we drove to the finca of Alejandria Marques Gutierrez, widow of General Gutierrez whose father was killed in the battle of Aldama.

She had a very interesting collection made by her husband on what had formerly been his property, near Tupilco. The material consisted primarily of elaborate "adornos" in Maya style which had been broken from large cylindrical urns or incensarios. The best piece is a life-size head wearing a jaguar headdress. Part of the rim of the cylindrical urn to which it had been attached is still present. (Pls. 67, 68.)

The presence of a Maya site at Tupilco is of considerable interest, since this would make it the westernmost Maya outpost yet known.

The site consisted of small shell mounds with no other architectural features.

TAPIJULAPA

The picturesque town of Tapijulapa is situated at the base of the central mountains, at the junction of the Escalón and Oxolatán Rivers in the extreme southwestern part of Tabasco. There was formerly an archeological site here near the river, and specimens are occasionally found on a gravel bar in front of the town following floods. One such specimen (pl. 69, *b*) was a fine highly polished figurine made from a very hard reddish-brown hematite. It was 4 inches in height. The native who found it would not part with it because he said he was using it as a "santo" in his house.

We also saw a fine polished spindle whorl of blue stone and a number of quite small polished celts of blue or green stone, all found on this same bar.

We spent several days in Tapijulapa visiting a number of limestone caves and shelters in the general vicinity.

Near the airport, a stream of sulfur water flows from a limestone cavern on property formerly owned by Garrido, when governor of Tabasco. Near this stream is a good-sized, flat-topped mound on which was built a cement house that was never completed. We entered the cave for a considerable distance, but since it is a "wet" cave there was no sign of aboriginal occupation. Near this spot are the mineral springs where "Tapijulapa water" is bottled.

While at Tapijulapa we went by canoe up the Oxolatán River to the Cerro Cuesta Chica, where we visited four limestone caves and a number of rock shelters along the base of the limestone cliff where the caves occur. Two of the caves are of large size and contain beautiful stalagmitic formations, some of the curtain variety being very impressive.

In the caves, at the entrances, we found numerous potsherds of a red or buff ware. Some of these were of very good quality, red slipped and polished.

The rock shelters contain deep deposits which include quantities of snail shells brought up from the arroyo. There are also many flint chips and pieces of stone knocked from river boulders.

Excavations here would no doubt be most instructive and would yield considerable material.

In Tapijulapa we secured a fine slate ax with an Olmec design engraved on it and an alabaster bowl. The man from whom we obtained them said he had purchased them from an Indian who said he found

them in a cave at a place called Finca Chapayál near Santa Caterina, between Almendro and Simojoval, in Chiapas. (Pls. 70, *a*; 71, *b*.)

ATASTA

From Ciudad Carmen we went by launch across the Laguna de Terminos and then through a series of mangrove-lined passages to the village of Atasta, which is scattered for a considerable distance along the waterfront.

About a mile west of the town is a group of small mounds which probably mark the site of the ancient Atasta. About a year before our arrival, from one of these mounds was excavated a life-size stone figure of a standing man. A section consisting of the chest and shoulders is missing. The face is done in an unusual style and is represented as wearing a jaguar headdress and relatively small earspools. (Pl. 70, *b*.)

From this same mound, we were told, were taken several pottery vessels and a clay "tablet" elaborately engraved. These were taken away by some visiting "ingeniero."

When we visited the site, the corner of one mound had recently been dug into. This mound apparently covered a stucco-coated platform with a modeled frieze of prowling jaguars. On the rounded corner piece which had been removed was the figure of one of these jaguars about 3 feet in length (pl. 72, *a*).

The underside of the stucco coating was covered with bosses or protuberances so that the coating would adhere better to the clay core. These were probably produced by punching holes in the clay before the stucco was applied. (Pl. 72, *b*.)

This particular find is highly suggestive of Toltec influence, bringing to mind the prowling jaguar friezes at Tula and Chichen Itzá.

The schoolteacher in Atasta had a small archeological collection said to have come principally from this site. It contained one small complete bowl of brick red ware, fairly thin and quite hard. Another piece consisted of about three-fourths of a tetrapod, flange-base bowl, also of red ware. There were also a half dozen effigy legs from similar bowls, the effigies consisting of grotesque human faces and animal forms. Three copper bells were of the elongated oval variety. One, 2 inches in length, was cast to represent cord wrapping around the upper portion. The others, 1 inch in length, were plain.

The pottery, in form and design, appeared to resemble that from Ceiba, but the red-colored ware would seem to indicate that it was made from a different type of clay. We were not entirely convinced that this material came from the site described above.

A number of years after our reconnaissance Heinrich Berlin visited Atasta and has reported on it briefly (Berlin, 1952-54).

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EXPLANATION OF PLATES

PLATE 46

- a*, The Village of Tapijulapa is situated at the junction of the Escalón and Oxolatán Rivers at the base of the Central Mountains. At the present time the principal industry is the making of palm-fiber hats similar to the so-called panama hats.
- b*, A scene on the Río de las Playas, above the limestone gorge. From this point to its headwaters in the Cerro Mono Pelado region, the river is uninhabited.

PLATE 47

- Three stone heads from the vicinity of San Jose del Carmen on the Tonalá River.
- a*, Made of grayish basalt. *b, c*, Polished fine-grained stone.

PLATE 48

- a*, House foundation, Pueblo Viejo, Río de las Playas. The stones are sandstone slabs.
- b*, The west wall of the ball court, Ceiba Grande; partially cleared.

PLATE 49

- a*, Beginning the excavation of a cross-section trench in the west wall of the Ceiba Grande ball court, showing the capstones of the bench that lined the walls. The shovel is resting on the paved floor of the court.
- b*, Part of the floor of the ball court cleared, showing the pavement of sandstone slabs.

PLATE 50

- Two views of the upper portion of a Colossal Head, San Miguel, Tabasco. This fragment is now in the museum at Villahermosa.

PLATE 51

- a*, A view of one of the mounds and structural ruins at Comalcalco.
- b*, Detail showing the method of using large flat bricks with thick application of mortar. Some of the plastered surface still remains in place. Note the thickness of the walls.

PLATE 52

- a*, Stucco figures on the wall of the tomb discovered by Frans Blom, as they appeared in 1944.
- b*, Wall of one of the ruined structures at Comalcalco, showing arrangement of bricks and mortar and surface plaster covered with potsherds.

PLATE 53

- a*, Stone monument from La Venta, now in Villahermosa.
- b*, Stone monument from La Venta, now in the Instituto Taracena, Comalcalco.

PLATE 54

- a-d*, Figurines from central Tabasco, now in the colegio in Villahermosa.
e, Figurine head, buff on the exterior, black on the interior. Deep prefired grooves vertical on the back.
f, Cross of white onyx. The end of each arm has been drilled with a conical drill.
g, Vase with annular base, of terra-cotta red ware shaped like a lamp chimney.
e, *f*, and *g* were found 10 miles west of Frontera associated with almost a ton of quicksilver that had been buried in several large pottery urns.

PLATE 55

- a*, Section from near the base of the large shell mound at Ceiba (near Paraiso) showing two layers of stucco floors.
b, Cover of stucco-covered platform.

PLATE 56

- a*, *b*, Tetrapod vessel $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, from the shell mound at Ceiba. It has a buff slip with remains of red paint on the surface.
c, Part of a bowl of thick reddish sand-tempered ware with heavy incised decoration, $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. From the shell mound at Ceiba.

PLATE 57

Various specimens from the shell mound at Ceiba.

- a*, Light buff color, female figurine 6 inches high.
b, Buff color, 5 inches high.
c, Stylized head, buff ware 3 inches high.
d, Buff color, female figurine $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.
e, Potstand 6 inches wide, stucco coated and painted green and red.
f, Incised pot 5 inches in diameter.

PLATE 58

Specimens from the shell mound at Ceiba.

- a*, Spouted vessel with remnants of geometric design painted in red and black, 5 inches high.
b, Small vessel with design in red and black, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.
c, Tetrapod bowl with rattles in legs. Geometric design, red and black on orange, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide.

PLATE 59

Vessels from the shell mound at Ceiba.

- a*, Tetrapod vessel with rattles. Has buff slip with remains of red and black painted design; 5 inches high, 8 inches wide.
b, Cylindrical vessel with slightly outflaring rim. Reddish ware, with zoned incised and punctate design.
c, Flange-base cylindrical vessel with incised design. Black surface, sand tempered, $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches high.
d, Small jar of thin yellow ware 4 inches high.
e, *f*, *h*, *i*, Dull red ware, rather thick, sand tempered; *e* is 9 inches high; *f* and *h* are each 7 inches high. These four vessels all have round bottoms which have been roughened by stamping them with the crinkled edges of pecten shells. The rims of all have been broken off. When complete they probably resembled in form, the vessel shown in plate 65, *a-3*.
g, Small pinch pot painted red and filled with red ocher—specular hematite, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.

PLATE 60

Hollow figurine of polished yellowish buff ware, 7 inches high, holding an animal under the left hand. From Ceiba shell mound.

PLATE 61

Pottery stamps from the shell mound at Ceiba. *a*, 6 inches long; *b*, 7 inches long; *c*, 5 inches long; *d*, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long; *e*, 4 inches long; *f*, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches \times 1 inch; *g*, 3 inches \times 3 inches; *h*, $2\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The 3 flat seals have stem handles on the back.

PLATE 62

Stone artifacts from the Ceiba shell mound.

- a*, Greenish stone, 5 inches high, perforated laterally at the top.
- b*, Gray igneous rock $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.
- c*, Yellow sandstone, 6 inches high.
- d*, Celt of polished fine-grained black stone.
- e*, Celt of green jade.
- f*, Celt of hard dark-brown stone.

PLATE 63

- a*, View of one of the large shell mounds at Bellote, as seen from the summit of an adjacent mound.
- b*, A sailboat in one of the mangrove-lined channels near Bellote.

PLATE 64

- a*, Method of burning lime from oyster shells near Isla. The crib is made of mangrove logs. This may well be similar to the method used in making lime from oyster shell as practiced by the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the region.
- b*, View of one of the smaller shell mounds at Bellote, as seen from the water.

PLATE 65

Associated objects from a tomb at Isla, near Paraiso.

- a-1*, Spouted vessel, polished red slip on upper part, lower portion unslipped and decorated by incising, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.
- a-2*, Small bowl of brick red ware, incised and slipped. Rounded bottom, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter.
- a-3*, Tall jar with rim expanded to bowl shape, round bottom, roughened by textile imprint. The entire surface of the vessel covered by calcareous coating, 9 inches high.
- b*, 12 shell beads perforated for stringing.
- c*, Shell gorget, probably representing a monkey head, 3 inches wide. Beautifully carved and polished head of massive shell, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. 7 beads of *Spondylus* shell; 15 jade beads, the majority of bright-green jade. Pair of small green jade earspools.

PLATE 66

Associated objects from a tomb at Isla.

- a*, Spouted vessel with polished red slip on interior and cream slip on outside, modeled cartouche on side, probably representing a serpent head. Tripod base, 9 inches wide, 7 inches high.
- b*, Effigy jar of light buff ware, burned black on the bottom. Figure formed by modeling and incising, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.

PLATE 67

Maya type figures from Tupilco, Tabasco.

- a*, Good quality, brick red ware, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.
- b*, Head formerly attached to large cylindrical urn. Brick red ware. Jaguar headdress, 12 inches high.
- c*, Animal head, 3 inches long.
- d*, Animal head, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches high.
- e*, Animal head, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long.
- f*, Head, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, Coarse Brown ware.
- g*, Alligator snout, Brick Red ware 8 inches long.

PLATE 68

Adornos from large urns, Tupilco, Tabasco. These elaborate adornos are made of thick Brick Red ware and formed ornaments attached to large cylindrical vessels. The head, shown in two views, is 8 inches high from chin to top of forehead.

PLATE 69

- a*, Carved celt of polished grayish green stone, 12 inches long. Found in a small mound near Escarsega Camp on the Candelario River. From a private collection in Carmen.
- b*, Figurine of polished reddish brown hematite found in the river bank at Tapijulapa, 4 inches high.

PLATE 70

- a*, Engraved black slate celt with Olmec design, found in a cave at Finca Chapayál near Santa Catarina, in the vicinity of Simojoval, Chiapas, $12\frac{1}{4}$ inches long.
- b*, Stone statue from a small mound at Atasta, Campeche.

PLATE 71

- a*, Pottery Jaguar head from the Olmec site at San Miguel, Tabasco. It is buff in color with a white slip.
- b*, Alabaster bowl $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, tripod supports. Said to have been found with the engraved celt shown in plate 70, *a*.
- c*, Upper portion of a large figurine head, with small Olmec face on the headband. From the site of La Venta, Tabasco. Private collection in Coatzacoalcos.
- d*, Flat metate from the shell mound at Ceiba, $22\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 12 inches wide.

PLATE 72

- a*, Portion of a prowling Jaguar modeled in stucco from stucco-covered platform in a mound at Atasta, Campeche.
- b*, Stucco fragments from the same platform, showing bosses on the underside, evidently for better attachment to the clay core of the platform. Holes were probably punched in the clay before the stucco was applied.

PLATE 73

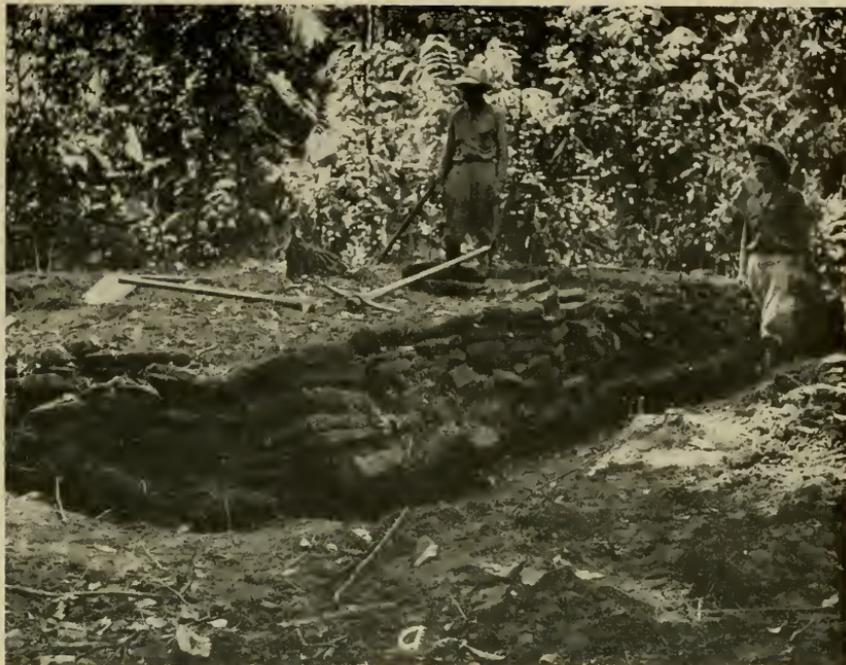
Two basalt monuments from La Venta, now in the ruins of Hacienda San Vicente, Tabasco: *a*, 45 inches high; *b*, 36 inches high.



a, The village of Tapijulapa, Tabasco. *b*, The Río de las Playas, Veracruz.
(For explanation, see p. 237.)

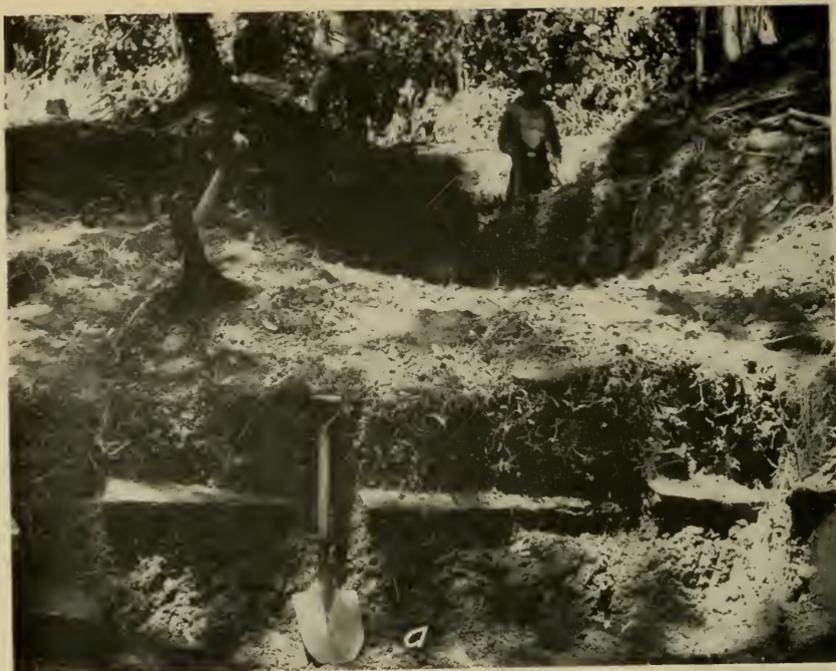


Stone heads from the vicinity of San Jose del Carmen.
(For explanation, see p. 237.)



a, House foundation, Pueblo Viejo. *b*, Ball Court, Ceiba Grande.

(For explanation, see p. 237.)



a, Part of the Ball Court, Ceiba Grande. *b*, Paved floor, Ball Court, Ceiba Grande.
(For explanation, see p. 237.)

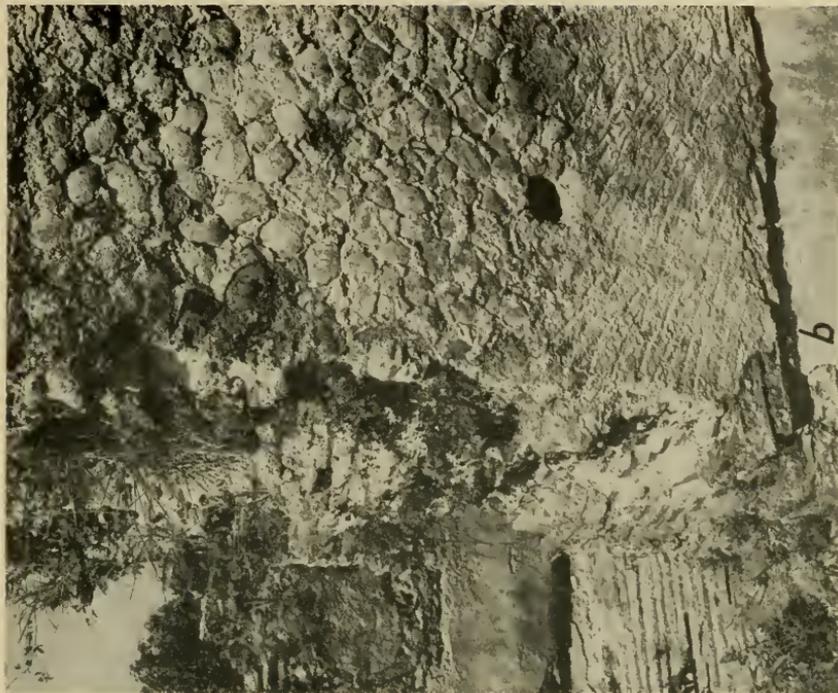


Portion of stone head, San Miguel, Tabasco.
(For explanation, see p. 237.)



a, The ruins of Comalcalco. *b*, Masonry at Comalcalco.

(For explanation, see p. 237.)



a, Stucco figures, tomb, Comalcalco. *b*, Potsherd encrusted masonry, Comalcalco.
(For explanation, see p. 237.)



a, Monument from La Venta, Villahermosa, Villahermosa, La Venta. Comalcalco.
b, Monument from La Venta, Comalcalco.
For explanation, see p. 237.



Artifacts from the vicinity of Villahermosa and Frontera, Tabasco.

(For explanation, see p. 238.)



Stucco construction in the shell mound of Ceiba, Tabasco.
(For explanation, see p. 238.)



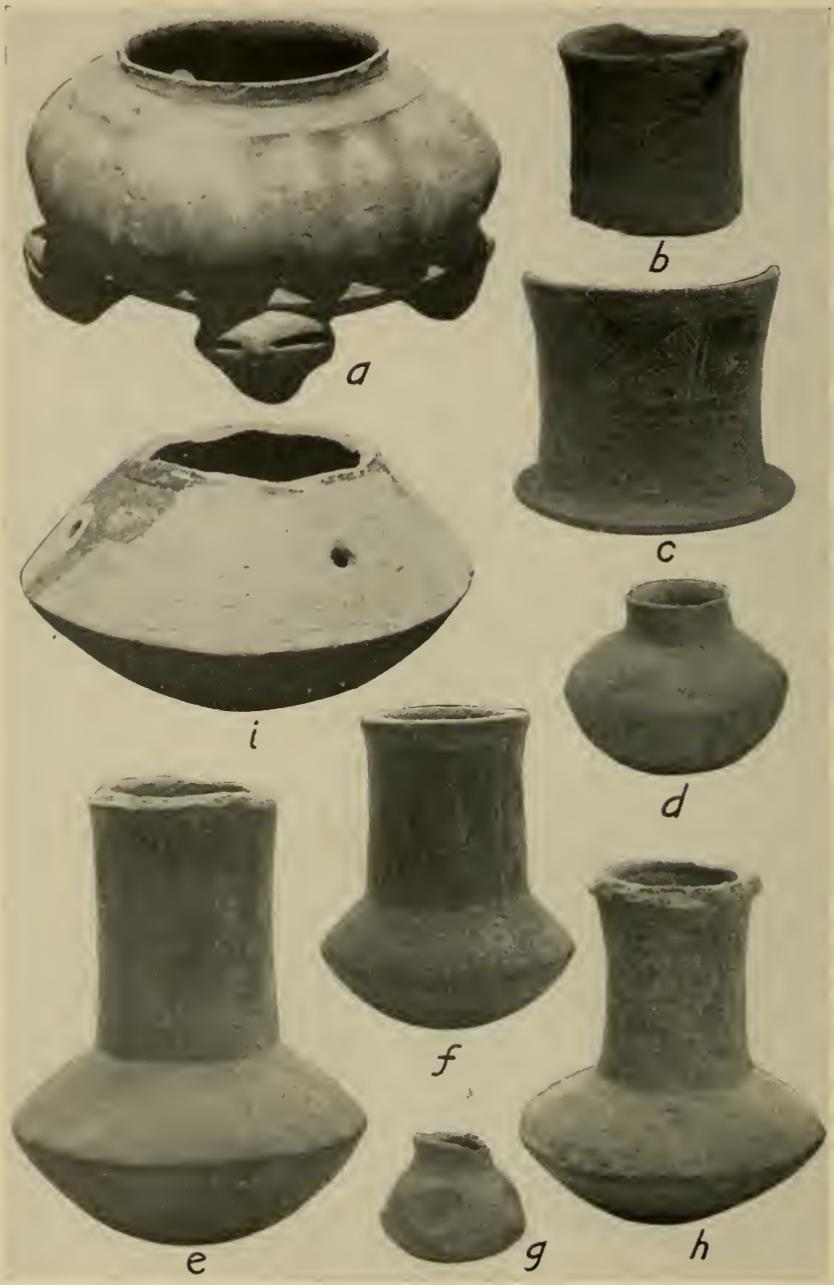
Pottery from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 238)



Figurines and pottery from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 238.)



Pottery from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 238.)



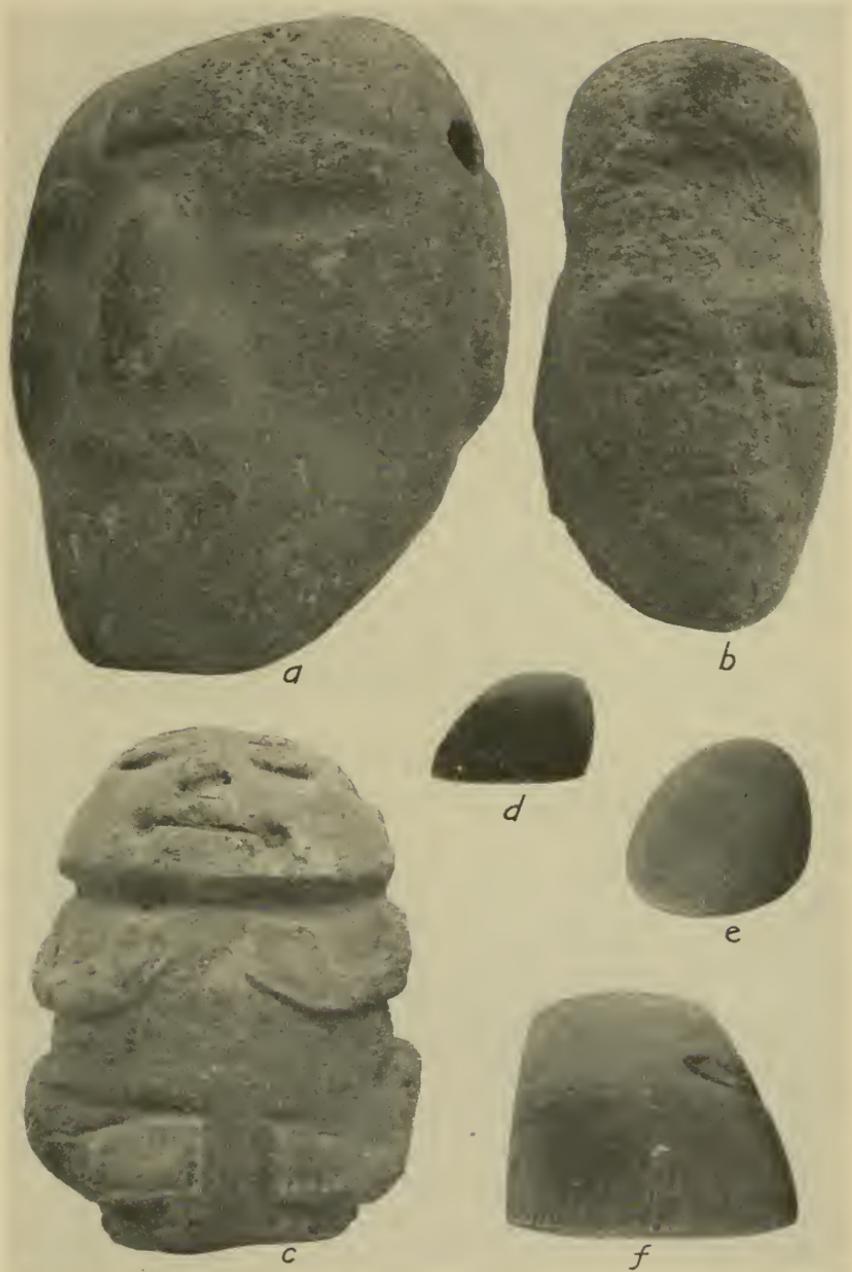
Pottery from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 238.)



Pottery figurine from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 239.)

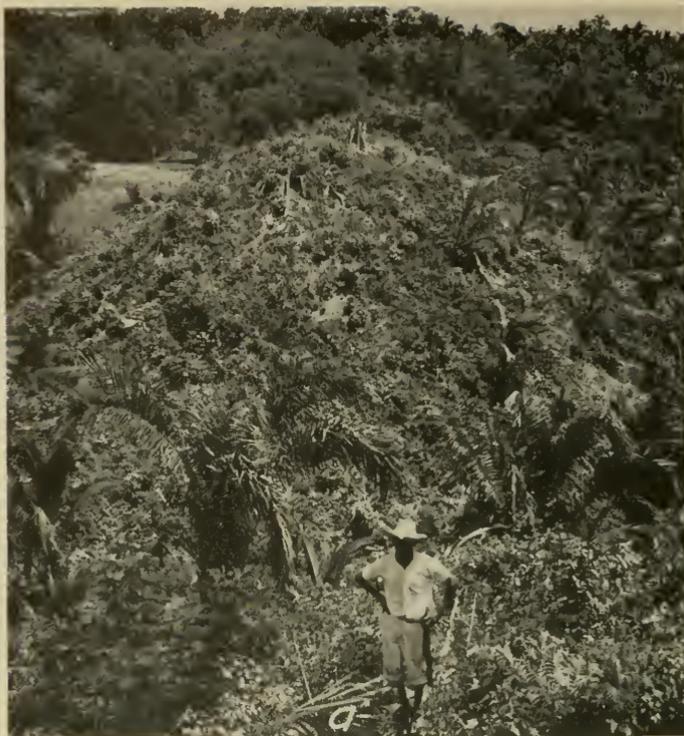


Cylindrical and flat stamps from shell mound at Ceiba.
(For explanation, see p. 239.)



Stone artifacts from shell mound at Ceiba.

(For explanation, see p. 239.)



a, Shell mound at Bellote. *b*, Salt-water channel near Bellote.
(For explanation see p. 239.)



a, Making lime from oyster shell. Isla. *b*, One of the Bellote shell mounds.
(For explanation, see p. 239.)



Associated artifacts of pottery, shell, and jade from a tomb at Isla.
(For explanation, see p. 239.)



Associated pottery vessels from a tomb at Isla.
(For explanation, see p. 239.)



Pottery figures of Maya type from Tupilco.
(For explanation, see p. 240.)



Adornos from large urns. Tupilco.
(For explanation, see p. 240.)



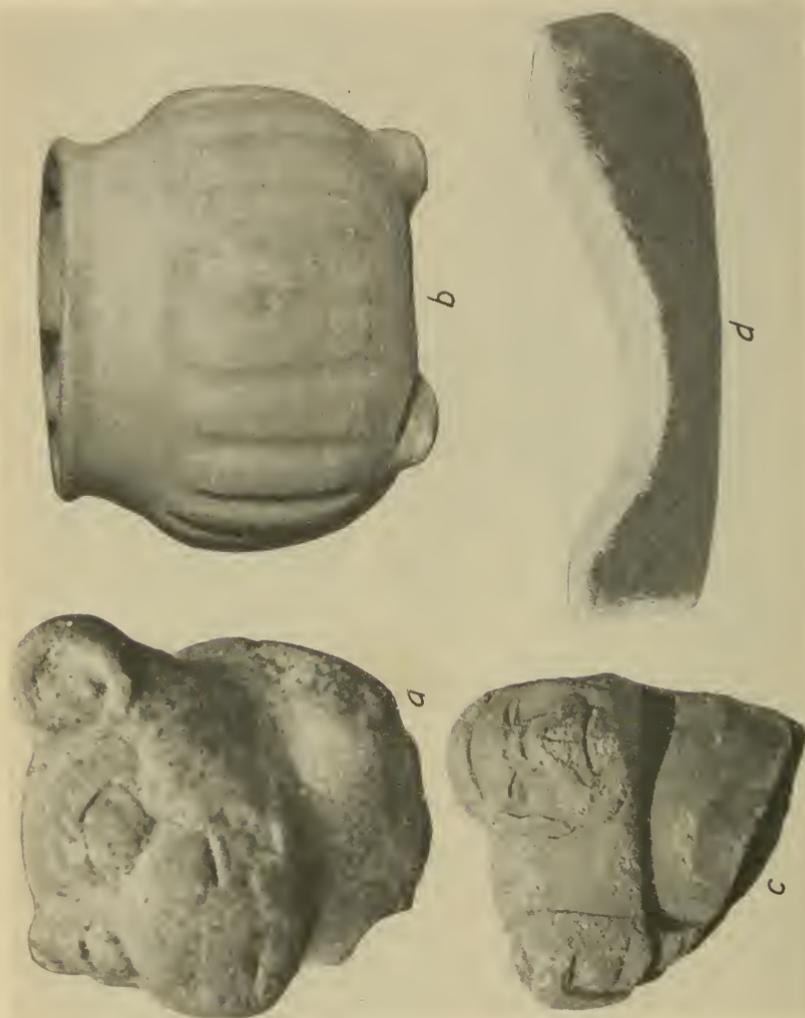
a, Stone celt from Rio Candelario. *b*, Hematite figure from Tapijulapa.

(For explanation, see p. 240.)



a, Engraved celt from vicinity of Simojoval, Chiapas. *b*, Stone statue from Atasta, Campeche.

(For explanation, see p. 240)



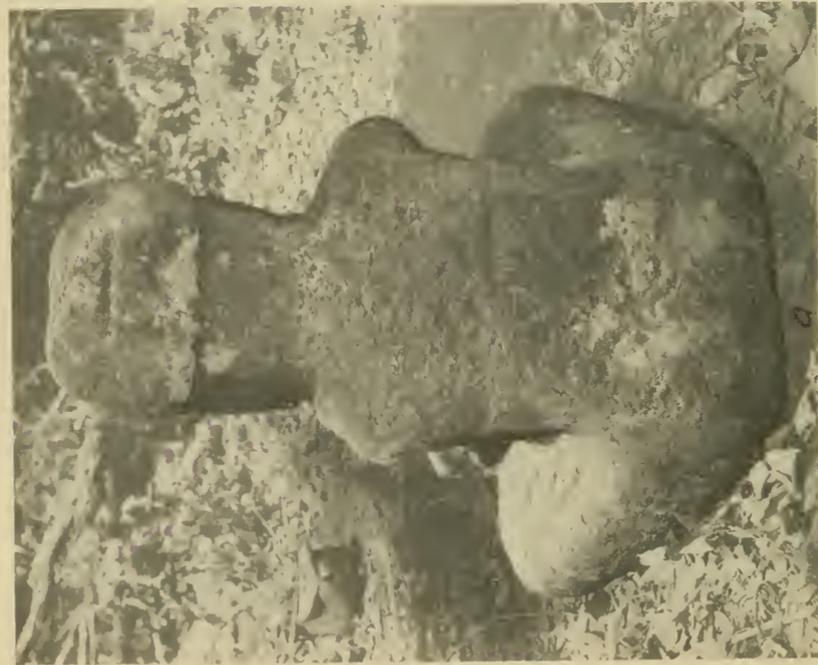
a, Pottery jaguar head from San Miguel. *b*, Alabaster vessel from cave near Simojovel Chiapas. *c*, Portion of pottery figure from La Venta. *d*, Grinding stone from shell mound, Ceiba.

(For explanation, see p. 240.)



a, Prowling jaguar in stucco from Atasta. *b*, Stucco fragments from Atasta.

For explanation, see p. 240.)



Basalt monuments from La Venta now at San Vicente, Tabasco.
(For explanation, see p. 240.)