

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT CIUDAD NUEVO TAZUMAL, EL SALVADOR

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The Chalchuapa Archaeological Zone is located approximately 120 km southeast of Kaminaljuyu, and some 120 km away from Copán. In a clear day, it is possible to observe, from the top of Structure B1-1 in the Tazumal Archaeological Park, the Agua volcano, situated southwest of Guatemala City. Chalchuapa rests about 700 m above sea level. Here and towards south, the Apaneca mountain range may be observed, with an altitude of 1700 m, while the north the Chingo with an altitude of 1775 m, is visible. At north of this area and from east to west, flows the Pampe or Chalchuapa River which forms the Paz river basin, together with other water currents that empty themselves in the Pacific Ocean.

The Chalchuapa Archaeological Zone is located mainly in the east part of the modern city of Chalchuapa, which comprises eight areas from north to south: El Trapiche, Casa Blanca, Pampe, Peñate, Las Victorias, Tazumal, Laguna Cuzcachapa and Laguna Seca. The lands of the lotification of Ciudad Nuevo Tazumal adjoin to the northeast with the Tazumal Archaeological Park, and to the south with the Cuzcachapa Lagoon (Figure 1). It extends over an area of 9.71 blocks. The surface reconnaissance produced the collection of abundant Late Classic and Postclassic sherds. The west part of the terrain constitutes the lower area, where one circular and two long platforms were found, among other features. That terrain climbs to the east some 5 m, at the east border of which two structures were discovered. Then, the terrain remains flat towards east, where oval and square platforms were found, as well as habitational structures, among others.

BACKGROUNDS OF THE AREA OF NUEVO TAZUMAL

The historic documents from Colonial times refer to the town of Chalchuapa. In the year of 1586, Friar Alonso Ponce traveled from Guatemala to Nicaragua, together with Antonio de Ciudad Real, and wrote that indigenous Pipil speaking people lived at Chalchuapa (Tsuruga 1995). Between 1768 and 1770, Cortés y Larraz noted that Chalchuapa was inhabited by 662 indigenous people who spoke the Pokoma language.



Figure 1. Location of Nuevo Tazumal.

From September 1941 to April, 1942, the U.S. archaeologist John M. Longyear conducted extended and thorough expeditions in El Salvador, nationwide, with the support of the U.S. Institute of Andean Studies. During his visit to Chalchuapa, Longyear made a reconnaissance in the areas of Casa Blanca, Las Victorias, Pampe, Tazumal and El Trapiche, whose locations were recorded in the map of the Chalchuapa area (Longyear 1944).

In the area of Tazumal, Longyear made reference to 13 mounds and left a sketch showing their locations. Seven of the 13 mounds are found within the grounds of the development known as Ciudad Nuevo Tazumal. Stanley H. Boggs left a short

description about the sector of Nuevo Tazumal, where he referred to the presence of seven large prehispanic structures together with other small ones (Boggs 1943). In addition, Boggs mentioned a clay statue found at the site, quite close to the northeast side of the Tazumal Archaeological Park and apparently representing a Xipe Totec (Boggs 1945).

In 1968 Robert J. Sharer initiated the Pennsylvania University Museum's Chalchuapa Archaeological Project, during which a surface reconnaissance was conducted in the area located northeast of Structure B1-1 in the Tazumal Archaeological Park, and south of the Cuzcapacha Lagoon. Most of the sherds collected during that reconnaissance date to the Classic period, and also, Postclassic and Preclassic sherds were found. In addition, other eight low mounds were documented in the same area (Sharer 1970).

EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH

The first stage took place between December, 2001, and February, 2002. Based on a request submitted by a developer company to the National Council for Culture and Art (CONCULTURA), the Archaeology Unit of that Council in November, 2001, carried out an inspection in the area denominated *Lotificación Ciudad Nuevo Tazumal* (Lotification Ciudad Nuevo Tazumal) situated northeast of the Tazumal Archaeological Park, having found seven mounds within the area. Then, the Archaeology Unit immediately decided to preserve, as a green zone, three of the seven mounds, taller than the others. In addition, archaeological investigations were conducted on other four mounds denominated Mounds 1, 3, 6 and 7.

On December 10, 2001, the Archaeology Unit initiated the excavations in Mound 1, and later in Mounds 3, 6, and 7. On February 6, 2002, the Unit completed all the investigations in that area, which was subsequently liberated.

The second stage was carried out in July and September, 2003. In April 2003 the contractor company initiated the earth fill works of streets at the place and destroyed the north portion of Mound 2, where both the foundation of a prehispanic building and the floor of that architectural feature, which went undetected in the superficial observation, were exposed. A meeting was immediately arranged between the Archaeology Unit and the contractors, and both parties came to the agreement of carrying out the second stage of investigations and to more accurately establish the protected area in that piece of land. On July 24, 2003, the second stage of the investigations was initiated and concluded on September 23 of the same year.

During the investigations, 31 pits of 2 x 1 m were excavated as well as 26 trenches of varied dimensions, which led to detecting a patio surrounded by two long platforms (previously called Mound 2), two square platforms (Structure 5 and 8), a possible oval platform (Structure 1), two structures with a quadrangular floor plan (Structures 9 and 10), four habitational structures (Architectural Group 1a, 1b and 1e), four small habitational structures (Architectural Group 1c, 1d and 1f), and one long platform (Architectural Group 2). In addition, two Late Classic burials with offering came to light. One of the burials (Burial 1) consisted of seven vessels. The

other one –Burial 2- included two small greenstone beads and ceramic sherds, together with metate and obsidian fragments. As a result of the research works mentioned above, the CONCULTURA Direction General of Cultural Patrimony suspended the construction works, and the land now is in the process of being purchased by the Government of the Republic of El Salvador.

STRATIGRAPHY

The stratigraphy in the area of Nuevo Tazumal is very simple. From the present ground level it presents only two cultural strata. The first is a layer of black earth, with a thickness of 10 to 80 cm. The second is the layer of brown earth, with a thickness that varies between 20 and 100 cm. Both layers contain archaeological materials. The third is the layer of sandy yellowish brown earth, which is sterile and contains no cultural material. All of the architectural features found during the investigations are built on top of the upper level of the second layer (brown earth), or on the lower level of the first layer (black earth).

The mud-made floors documented in the three cuts of the streets designed by the constructors, are placed on top of the third layer. Besides, two burials that were excavated in prehispanic times were discovered, in the level on top of the surface of the third layer or slightly below.

ARCHITECTURE

During the two investigation stages in Nuevo Tazumal, a number of architectural features were documented, as follows: one circular platform (Structure 1), two long platforms (Structures 2a and 2b), one polygonal platform (Structure 3), two semi-oval platforms (Structures 4 and 7), four quadrangular platforms (Structures 5, 6, 8, and 9), eight foundations (Structure 10, Architectural Group 1 and Architectural Group 2; Figure 2). All of the architecture mentioned was built using stones and mud. Most of the stones used for construction are of volcanic origin and are abundant in the surroundings of the Chalchuapa Archaeological Area. Some constructions, such as Structures 1 and 6, show the use of volcanic stones carved like blocks. No mortar covering was detected on the stone-made walls. The details of each structure are explained below:

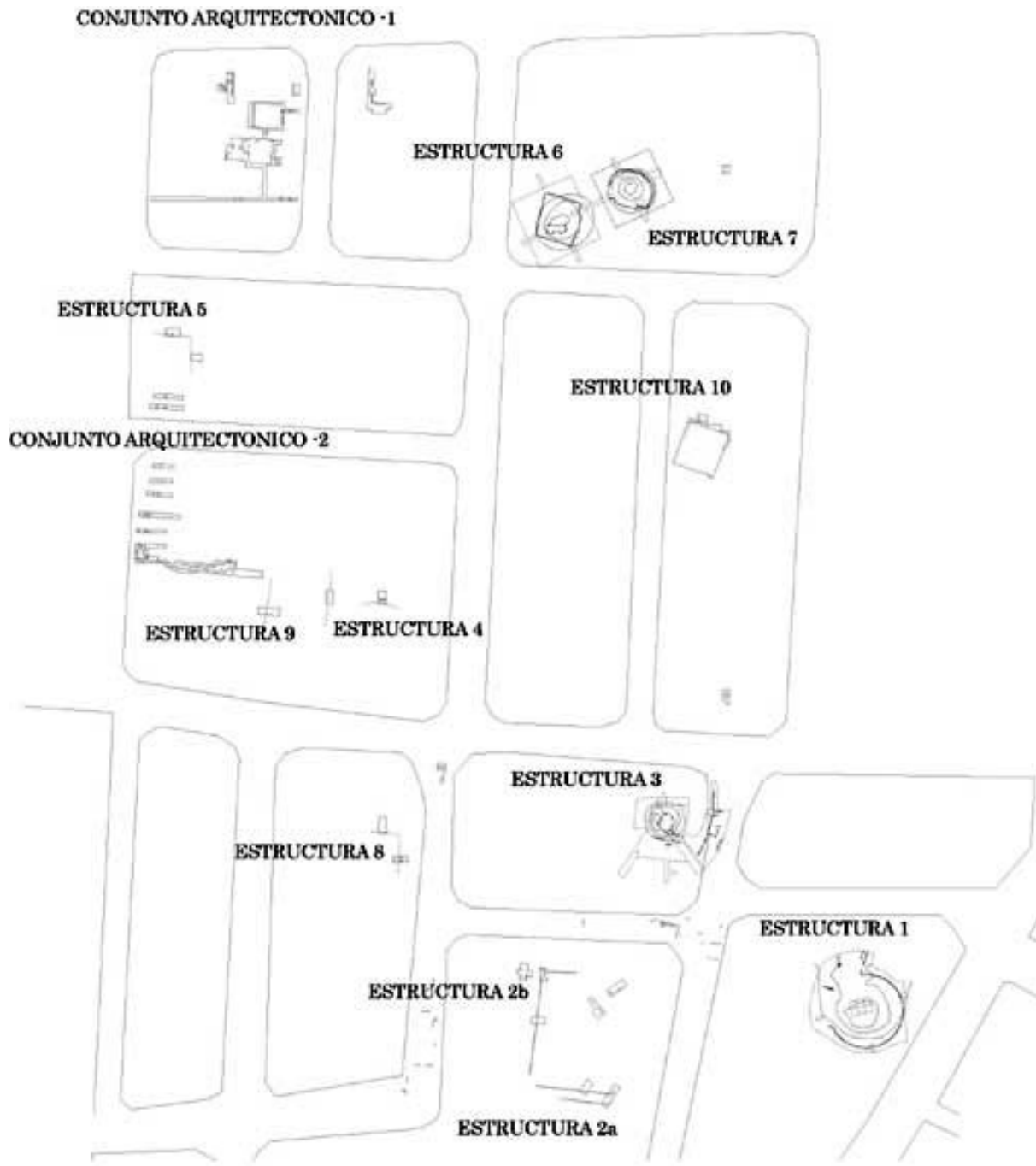


Figure 2. Plan of location of all structures found.

The architectural style of Structure 1 (Figure 3) features a circular floor plan. The diameter of its beginning is of 21 m and currently, it is 0.90 m tall. The upper part of the wall was deteriorated. Therefore, it was not possible to establish whether the wall of Structure 1 either formed or did not form tiers. Comparing the height of the wall preserved (0.60 m) and the present height of Structure 1 (0.90 m), it is possible to posit that Structure 1 was a circular platform with only one wall. Structure 1 has two accesses to its summit. There are located on the west side, and on the north side, respectively.

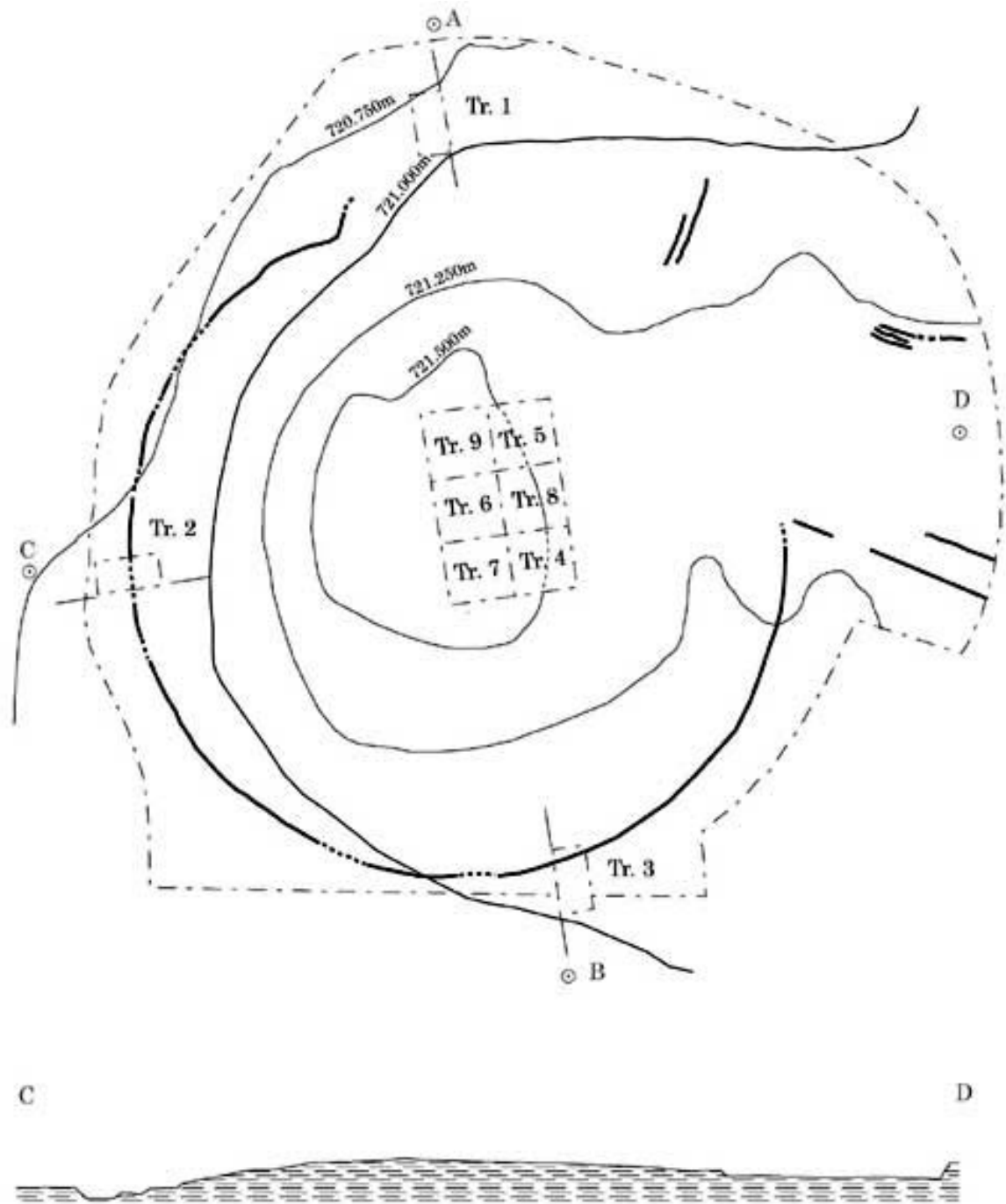


Figure 3. Ground plan and profile of Structure 1.

Structures 2a and 2b consist of long platforms built in the form of an “L”. Structure 2a has a talus that runs from north to south. Possibly, its length is of 24 m. The substructure also has the talus, with an orientation similar to that of Structure 2a. The upper portions of both inclines are now missing, as a consequence of deterioration. Structure 2b has a talus that runs from east to west, possibly 32.50 m long. The upper portion of the incline is lost. From the southeast corner of Structure 2b, there is another low platform projecting south.

Structure 3 (Figure 4), is the tallest one among the structures found in Nuevo Tazumal. Its present height is 2.30 m, and is divided into two parts. The lower part is a polygonal platform. Its beginning was found on the south side of that structure. Its upper portion is quadrangular in shape. The west side of the structure features a possible stairway, where a square sculpture with fret decorations was found. There is a looting trench at the top.

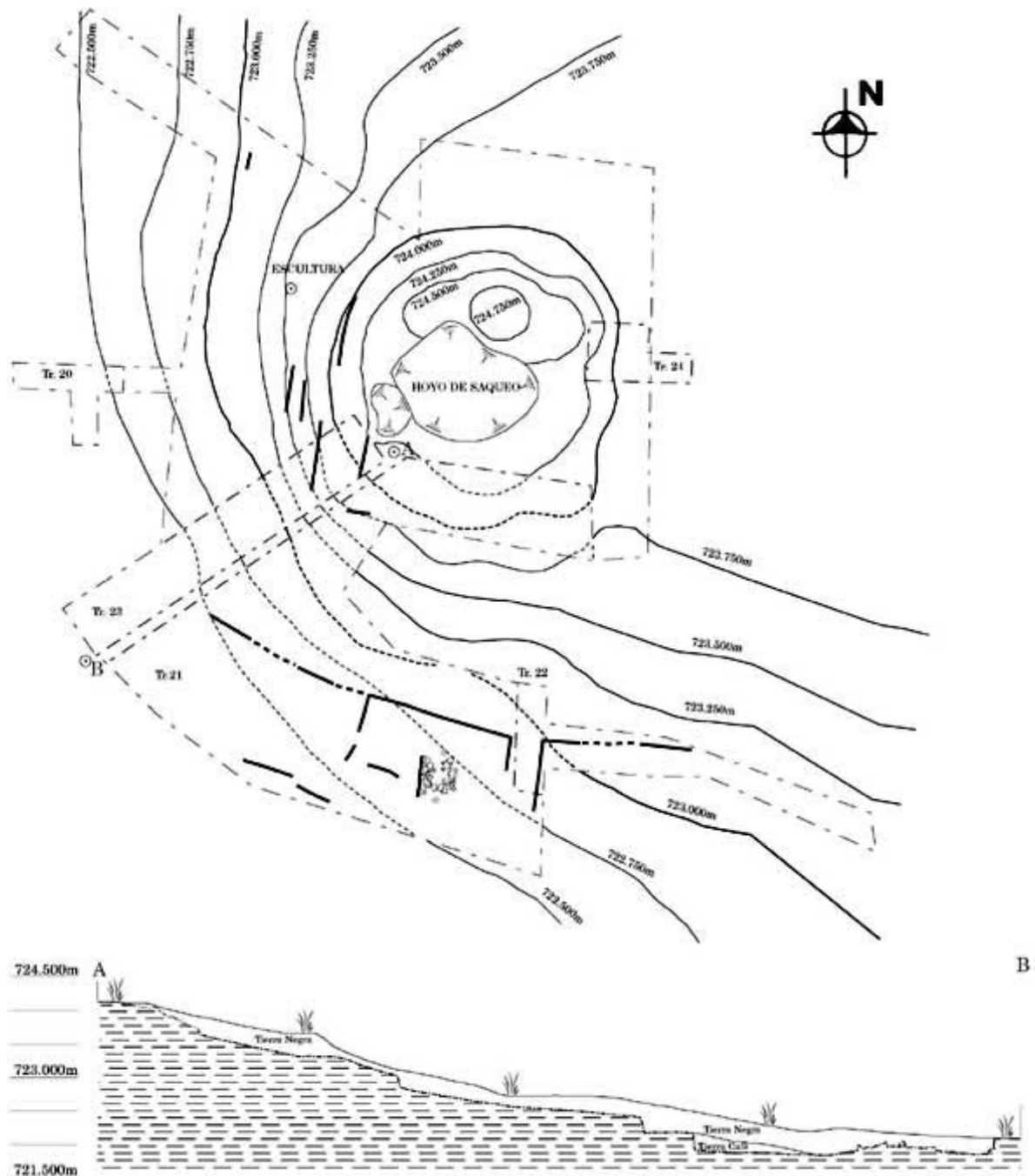


Figure 4. Ground plan and profile of Structure 3 and stone concentration.

A trench was excavated on the east side of Structure 4, where a talus was found, as well as a slightly inclined hallway. The talus is 70 cm high. According to the

superficial observation, the upper portion of the talus would continue towards both sides, at north and south, forming a curve. Therefore, the ground plan of Structure 4 is oval in shape.

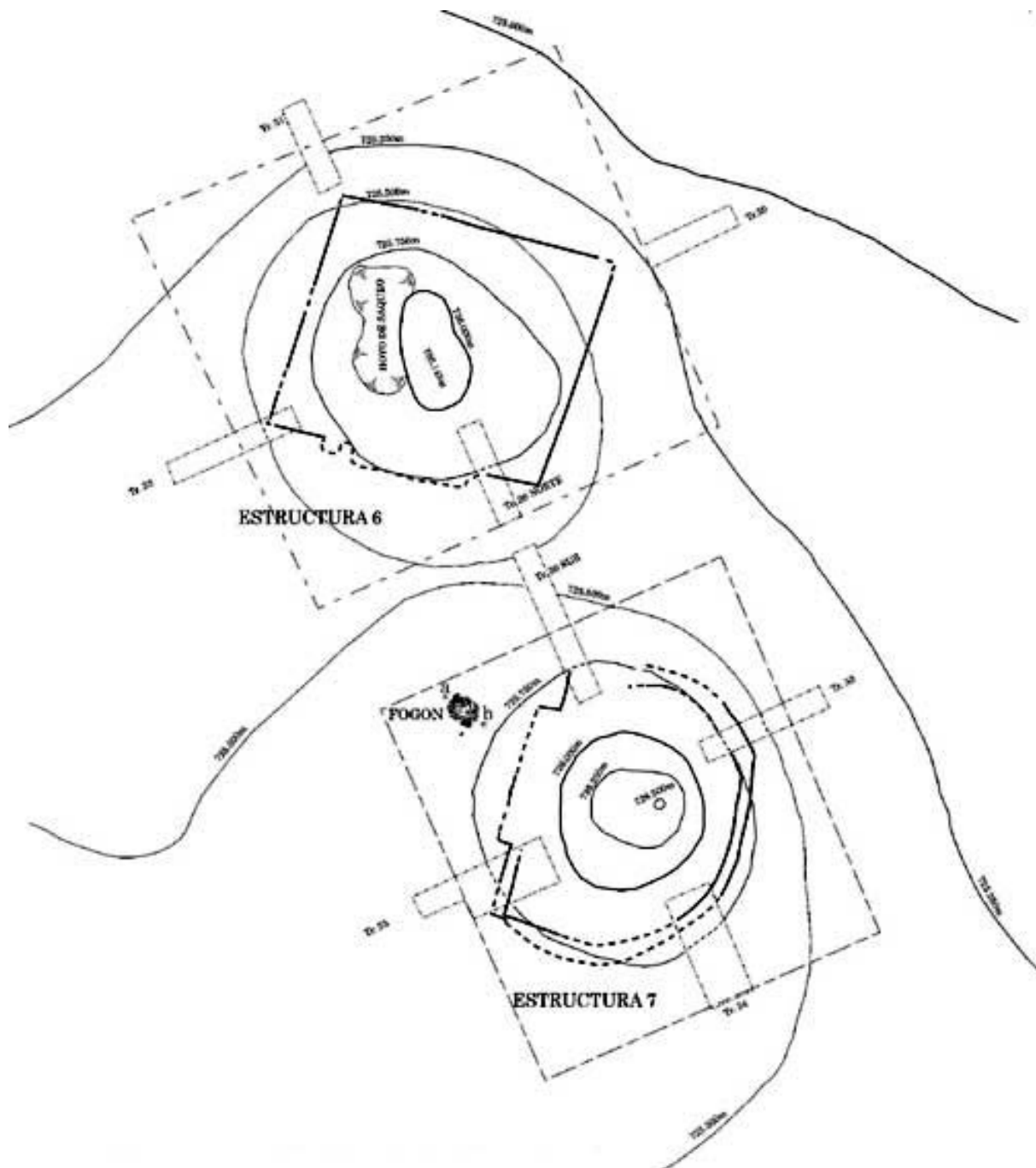


Figure 5. Ground plan and profile of Structures 6 and 7.

Regarding Structure 5, only the beginnings were found on the south and east sides, and according to their orientation, the structure would feature a quadrangular floor plan. Structure 6 (Figure 5) is a low and also quadrangular structure, 12.40 m wide and 10.20 m long. On the southwest side there is a possible stairway. Close to the northeast corner and on the wall of that structure, there was an embedded sculpture

made of volcanic stone with the design of two concentric circles. In addition, another sculpture made of volcanic stone was discovered, with the representation of a human face, just off the beginning of the north wall.

Structure 7 (Figure 5) has a rather strange ground plan. The shape of the east side is oval and that of the west side is square and projected westwards. Just off the west side of said structure there was a stone hearth with measures of 0.80 m x 1.10 m. Right in its center there were traces of burning, around which the stones were placed (Figure 6). Southwest of the hearth an obsidian chip was found. On the east side of Structure 7 there are large aligned stones forming tiers. In front of the tiers there was a burnt, mud-made floor. It would seem that Structures 6 and 7 were built around a plaza.

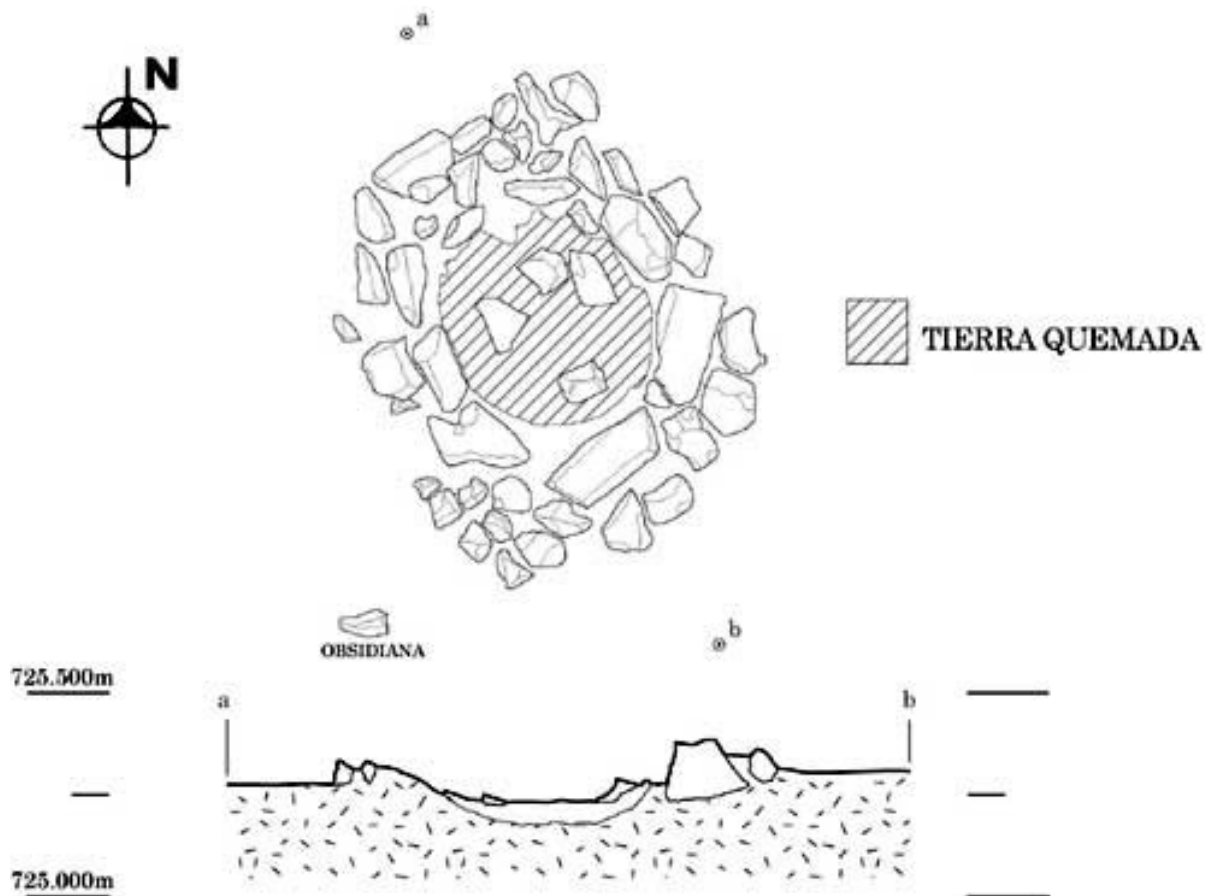


Figure 6. Ground plan and profile of the hearth in Structure 7.

In Structure 8 only the beginnings of the south and east sides were detected. According to their orientation, the structure was probably square. At the front of the south wall, the trench was abased, with the purpose of observing the stratigraphy. Within the third layer (sandy, yellowish brown earth), a burial was found (and denominated Burial 1), with an offering of seven polychromed vessels dating to the Late Classic period. Excavations at Structure 9 have only exposed the beginnings of the north and south sides. According to their orientation, the structure was probably quadrangular in shape. Structure 10 is a foundation featuring a "C"-shaped ground

plan, with a length of 9.20 m. At the north side it was possible to observe one portion projected to the east, while at its center there was a natural stone. The foundation was 30 cm thick in the north part.

Architectural Group 1 (CA-1) consists of at least five foundations. CA-1a is quadrangular in shape; it extends 10 m from east to west, and 12 m from north to south. The foundation is 90 cm thick. On the north side only an expansion of the foundation was observed, with nearly 80 additional cm. In the southeast and northwest corners there were areas where no stones were found, so that they may have been the corresponding entrances. CA-1b has a shape composed by two squares. The south part measures 10.40 m from east to west and 9.70 m from north to south. The north part is 6.80 m long from east to west, and 3.80 long from north to south. At the center of the north part there were traces of burning, that is, of a possible hearth. The foundation is 80 cm thick. In both the southeast corner and the north side there were areas where no stones were present, just like in CA-1a. CA-1c and 1d represent narrow foundations. CA-1e has a thick foundation alike CA-1a and 1b. Architectural Group 2 represents aligned stones. However, its characteristics are still to be established.

CONCLUSION

As a consequence of the archaeological investigations conducted in the area of Nuevo Tazumal, two cultural areas were confirmed there. The lower layer is the brown earth and the upper one is the black earth. Under the lower layer (with the brown earth) the mud floors were documented. The two burials found during the investigations were excavated at the level of the floors mentioned above. Based on the offerings in Burial 1, consisting of polychromed vessels that date to the Late Classic period, the occupation at the level of said floors appears to date to the same period. Following that occupation, different architectural pieces were built using stones and mud on the upper level of the second layer (that with the brown earth), or the lower level of the first layer (that with the black earth). In considering the period to which such features from Nuevo Tazumal would correspond, the case of Building 2 in the Casa Blanca area will be of help to provide a dating. This building was built with earth and covered with mortar. The refill yielded fragments of polychromed ceramics. In other words, Building 2 dates to the Late Classic period.

When the new highway at the south of the Casa Blanca Archaeological Park was about to be built, an archaeological salvage was carried out in the south portion of Building 2. During this salvage operation, a large amount of stones and mud that were covering Building 2 came to light. In addition, three Tohil Plumbate vessels were found like an offering in the south side of Building 2. Nevertheless, the location of these three vessels was outside the line where the south wall of Building 2 began. This means that the Plumbate offerings were associated with the stone and mud structure that covered Building 2, while the Tohil Plumbate ceramic is a Postclassic diagnostic. For this reason, it may be said that the architecture made of stones and mud in the area of Nuevo Tazumal correspond to the Postclassic period.

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Figure 1 Location of Nuevo Tazumal

Figure 2 Plan with location of all the structures found

Figure 3 Ground plan and profile of Structure 1

Figure 4 Ground plan and profile of Structure 3 and stone concentration

Figure 5 Ground plan and profile of Structures 6 and 7

Figure 6 Ground plan and profile of hearth, Structure 7.