

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 483

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Pre-Hispanic city of Chitchén Itzá

Location : State of Yucatan

State Party : Mexico

Date : December 17, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II and III.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Located midway between Mérida and Cancun, Chitchén Itzá is the most northernmost of the major archaeological sites in Yucatan. Covering more than 300 hectares, it is also one of the largest and richest in monuments. Above all, it is one of the most significant in historical terms because it illustrates two major periods in pre-Hispanic civilizations in the Mesoamerican zone.

The town was established close to two natural cavities (cenotes or chenes), factors of attraction in the calcareous plateau of Yucatan because they facilitated tapping the underground water system. The first population centre was located in the southern area of the cenote of Xtoloc during the classical period. The dates for this settlement vary according to subsequent local accounts; the Chumayel manuscript gives 415-435, while others equally late sources say 455. The town which grew up around the sector known as Chichén Viejo already boasted important monuments of great interest : the "Building of the Nuns", the "Church", "Akab Dzib", "Chichan Chob", "Temple of the Panels" and the "Temple of the Stag". They were constructed between the 6th and the 10th centuries in the characteristic Mayan style then popular both in the northern and southern areas of the Puuc hills.

The second settlement of Chichén Itzá, and the most important for the historians, corresponded to the migration of Toltec warriors from the Mexican plateau towards the south during the 10th century. According to the most common version, the king of Tula, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, or Kukulcan as the Mayans translated the name, reportedly took the city between 967 and 987 after wandering for many years. What is known for certain is that the Toltec invaders subjugated the local population with a

ferocity which even five centuries later the chronicles of the "sacred books" of the Mayans spoke of. The Toltecs imposed the ritual of human sacrifice which until then was rarely, if at all, practiced in the region.

Following the conquest of Yucatan a new style blending the Mayan and Toltec traditions developed, symbolizing the phenomenon of acculturation. Chichén Itzá is a clear illustration of this fusion. Specific examples are, in the group of buildings to the south, the Caracol, a circular stellar observatory whose spiral staircase accounts for its name, and, to the north, the Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, or the Castillo. Surrounding the Castillo are terraces where the major monumental complexes were built : on the northwest are the Great Ball Court, Tzompantli or the Skull Wall, the temple known as the Jaguar Temple, and the House of Eagles; on the northeast are the Temple of the Warriors, the Group of the Thousand Columns, the "Market", the ball courts; on the southwest there is the Tomb of the High Priest.

This new architecture, known today as Maya-Yucatec, took from the old local structures the art of stereotomy used on walls and vaults while incorporating certain Toltec elements in the decorations. Besides all the battle scenes, which are depicted in luxurious detail, the most obvious of the influences from central Mexico are the likenesses of the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl, ubiquitously present on columns and substructures where enormous heads of reptiles create a vigorous decorative motif. Other examples of the Mexican influence are the famous statues of the rain god Chac-Mool, executed in a typical half-reclining pose.

The history of Chichén Itzá from the end of the 10th to the 15th centuries is complex. The monopolistic authority of military leaders seem to have been mitigated after the city joined the Mayapan League, which included Uxmal. After the 13th century no major monuments seem to have been constructed at Chichén Itza and the city rapidly declined after the fall of Mayapan. In 1556 Bishop Diego de Landa visited the nearly abandoned ruins and recorded the legends pertaining to the various monuments. The ruins were not excavated until 1841. From its very beginnings, INAH actively continued the excavation work, concentrating particularly on the monumental zone, i.e. the ceremonial and administrative centre of the Pre-Hispanic city. The outer districts, which comprise twelve distinct groups within a radius of two kilometers of Castillo, and the complex network of the "sacbes" (raised stone paved causeways) were catalogued, but no excavations have yet been organized to explore them.

ICOMOS recommends that Chichén Itzà be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II and III.

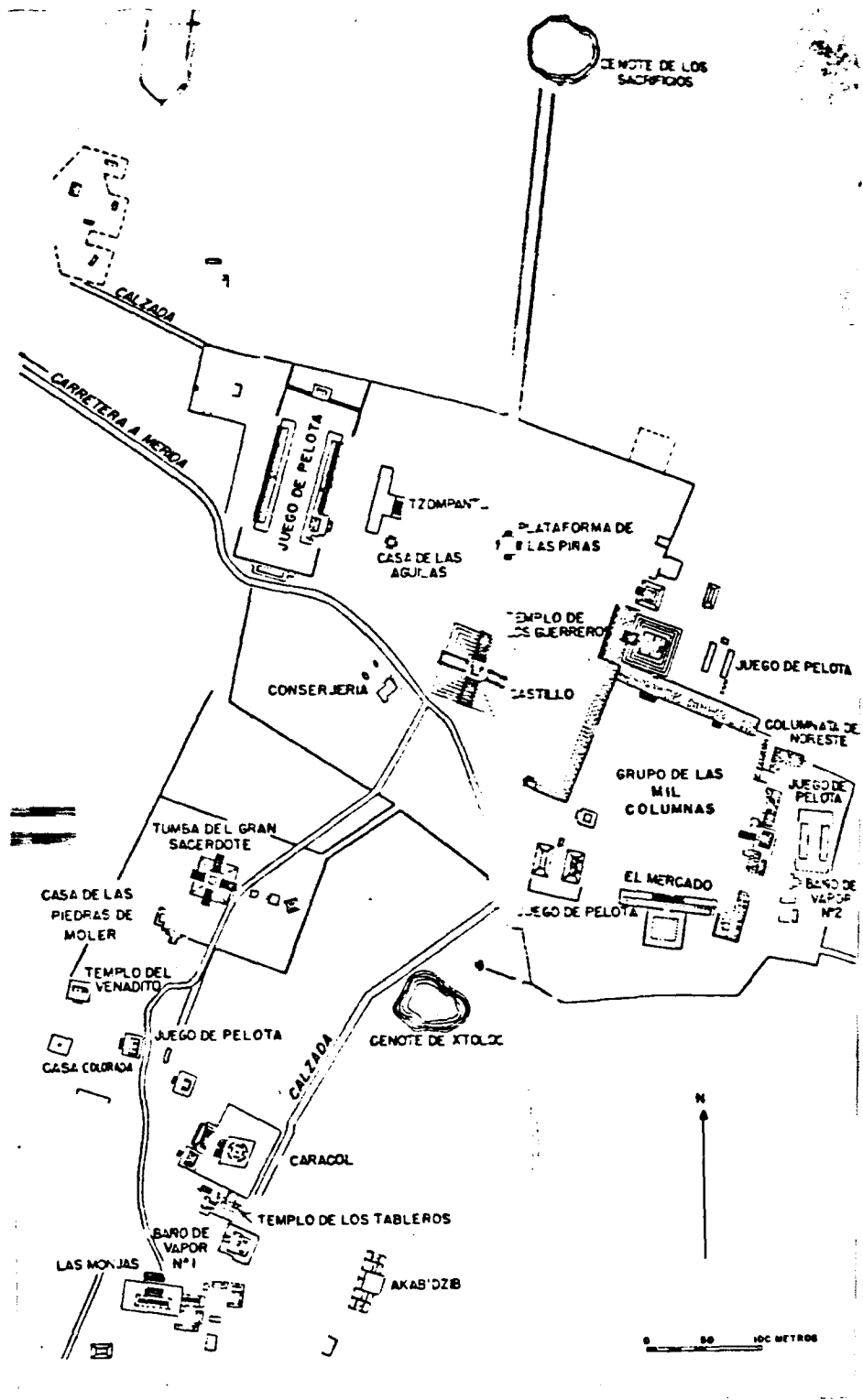
- Criterion I. The monuments of Chichén Itzà, particularly in the northern group, which includes the Great Ball Court, the Temple of Kukulcan and the Temple of the Warriors, are among the undisputed masterpieces of Mesoamerican architecture because of the beauty of their proportions, the refinement of their construction and the splendor of their sculpted decorations.

- Criterion II. The monuments of Chichén Itzà exerted an influence throughout the entire Yucatan cultural zone from the 10th to the 15th century.

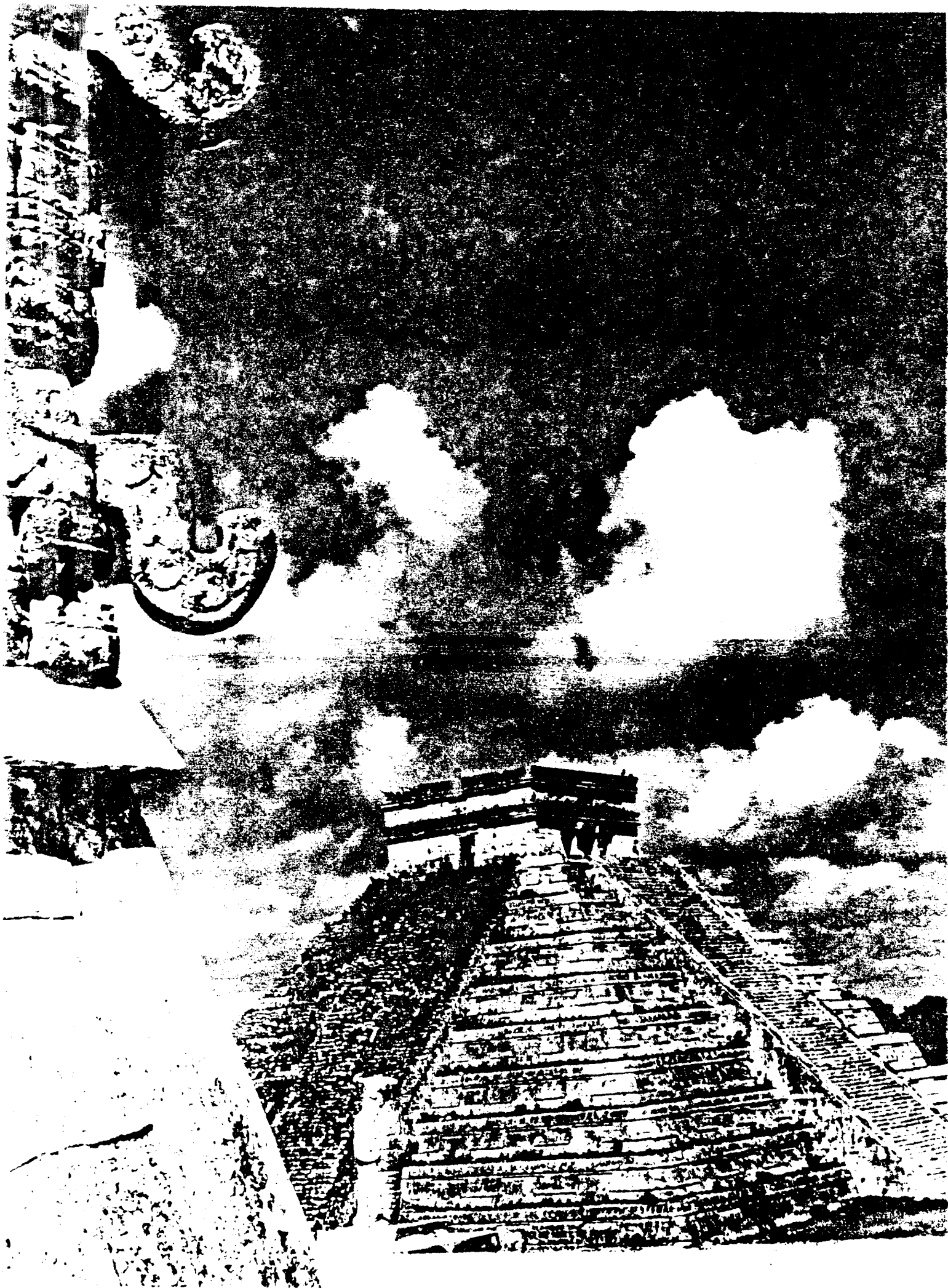
- Criterion III. Chichén Itzà is the most important archaeological vestige of the Maya-Toltec civilization in Yucatan (10th-15th centuries).

Moreover, ICOMOS recommends that the Mexican government protect the immediate surroundings of the archaeological zone of Chichén Itzà which are endangered by tourist infrastructures.

ICOMOS, July 1988



Centre of the archaeological zone



The "Castillo"