

Mayan housing types, looking at layouts, structure, and architecture



Alex Jetter, Sean Daugherty, Timothy Hare Ph.D

Many ruins surrounding an ancient Mayan city are at risk for destruction due to highway construction and other developmental projects. Most of these ruins are ancient Mayan family homes that have long since been destroyed by weathering or repurposing of the materials used in construction. There are many types of housing, and many aspects to the homes, which tend to be both elegant and complex.

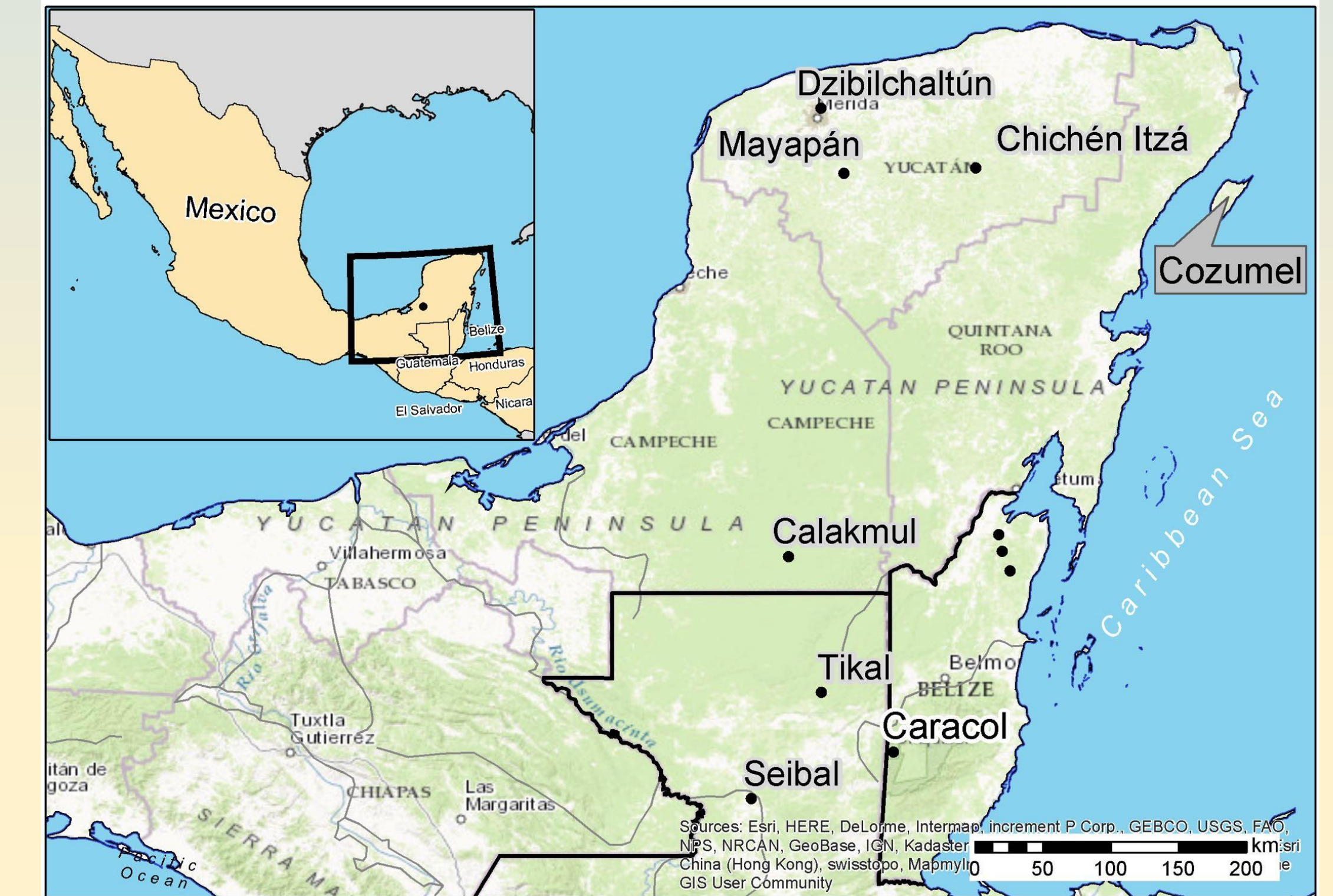
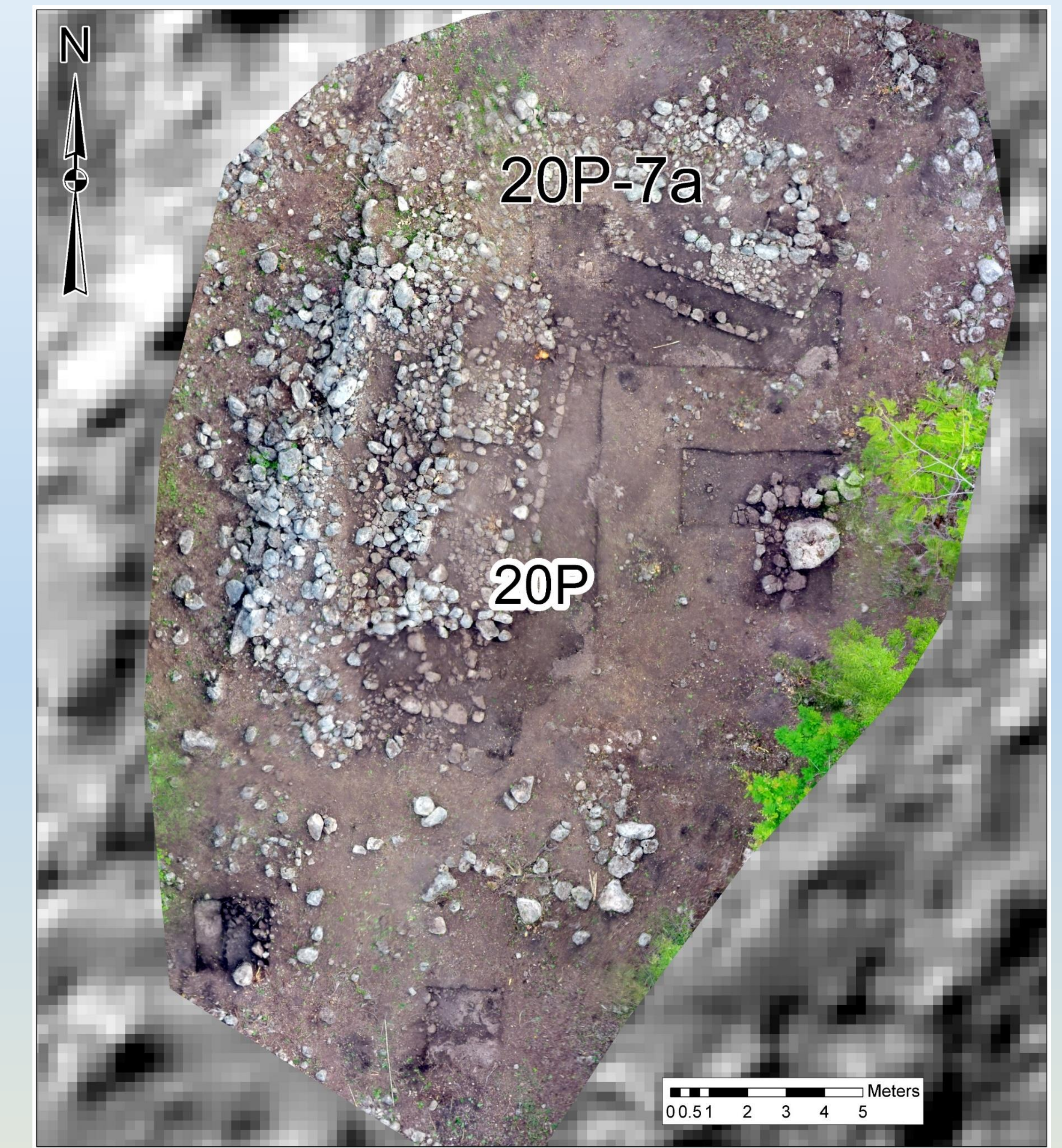
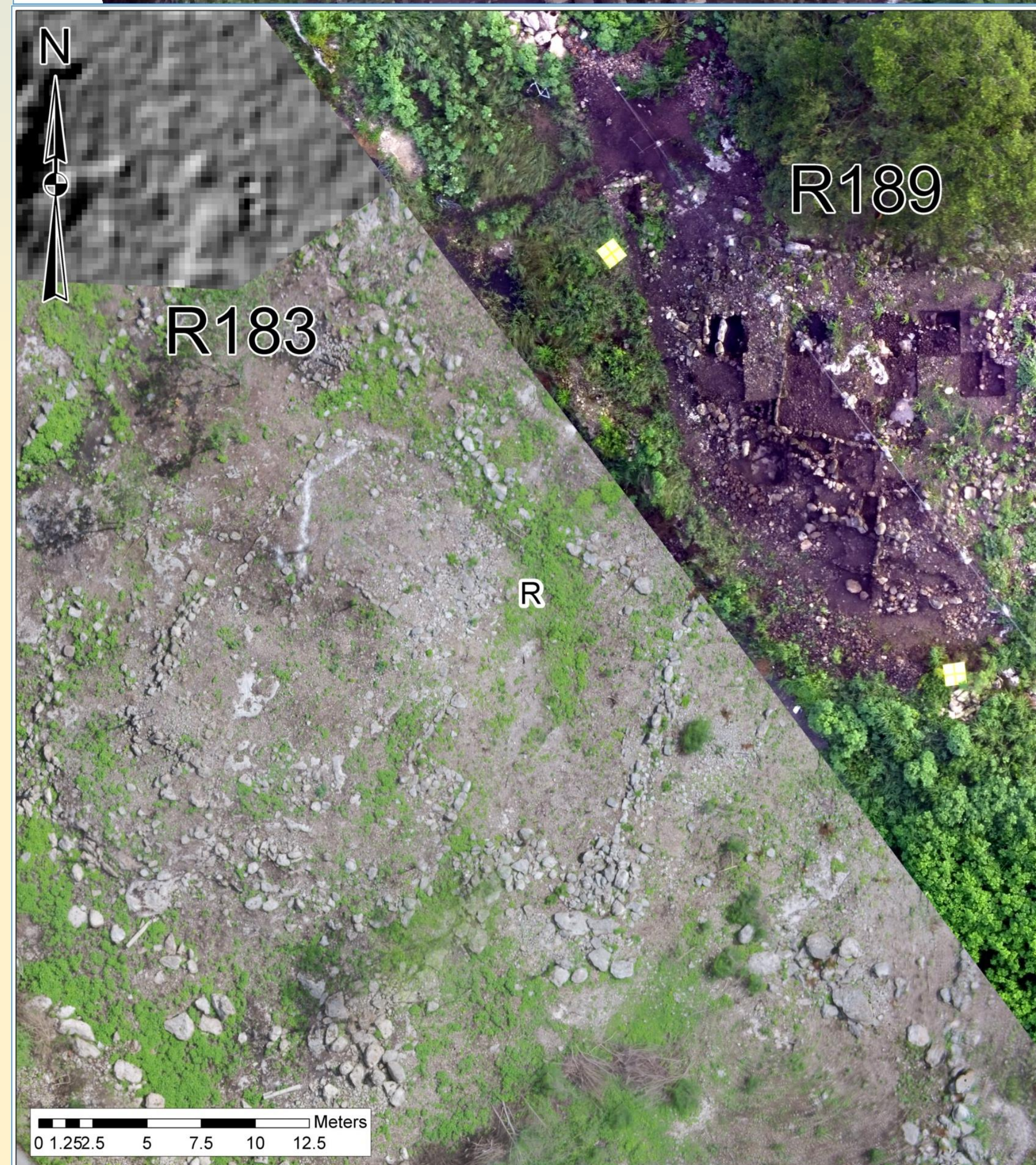
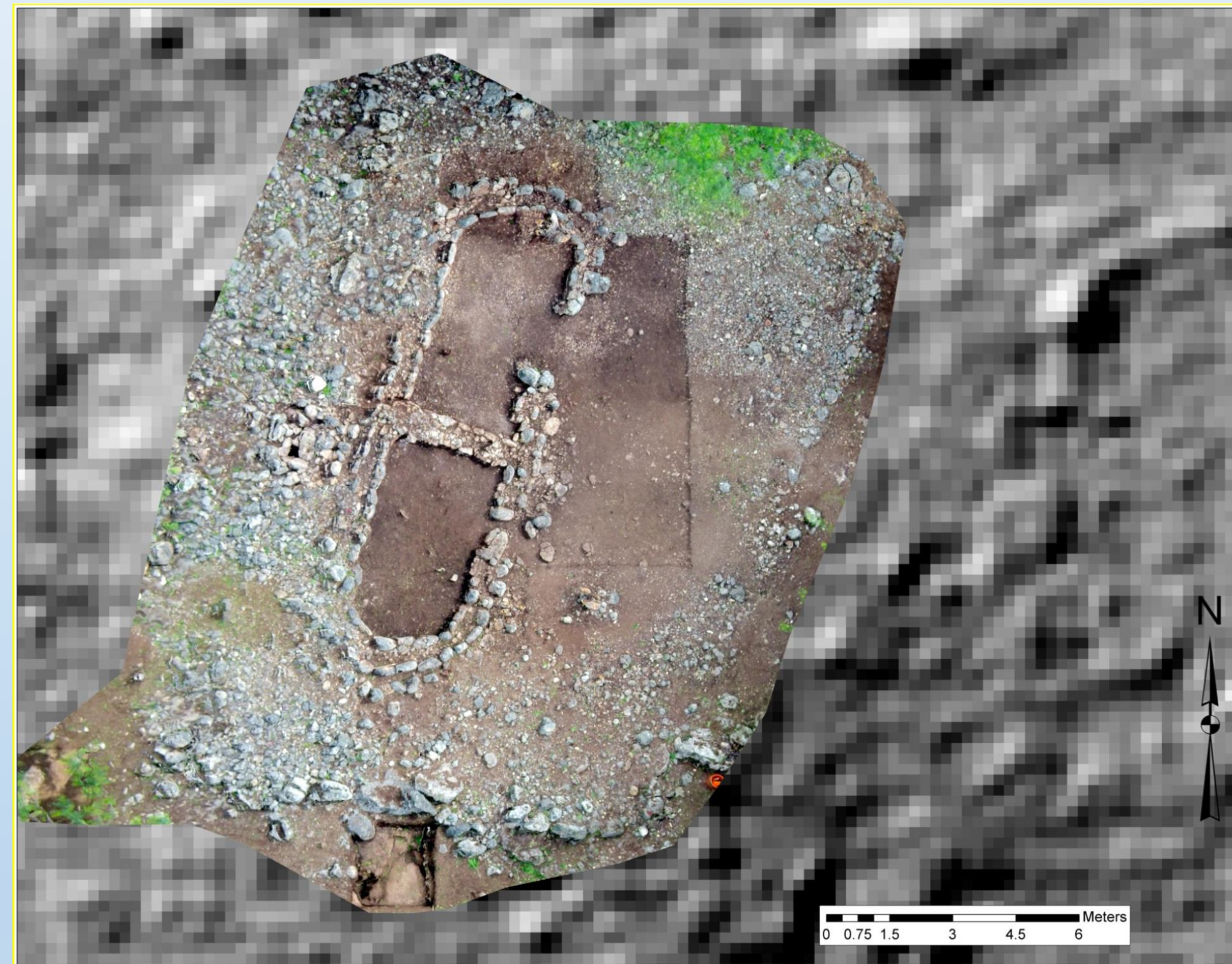
Mayan Housing

- Commoner Mayan homes were not complex structures, usually being built out of wooden pole frames with thick clay walls, and thick thatch roofing that kept out the elements and kept in the heat.
- The building materials would have to be repaired or replaced often.
- Their homes would be built on top of small mounds that they would build up, allowing the use of the same solid foundation each time a home had to be replaced.
- The areas where the homes were built also contained many other features
- This included a storage space, a common garden, a kitchen, a family cemetery, a laundry area, and a restroom area.
- Each family's property was marked with a low stone wall to separate the land from the public areas
- Mayan Elite houses were much different than those of the commoners, both in construction and style.
- Elite houses were built for durability, made of stone, and high quality masonry was used to ensure that their houses would last through bad weather and enemy attack.
- Elite houses would rest on raised platforms as a way to differentiate them from the commoners.
- Both Elites and commoners lived in a nuclear family situation, with extended family members living in the same property as the rest of their kin.
- Elites were able to afford complex crypts for their deceased, so they didn't have to do as the commoners do and bury their deceased under their houses floors like the commoners.

Importance of Mayan Housing

The residential structures may have seemed easily constructed, but there were certain things that had special meanings.

- The direction that Mayan houses faced was important to the ancient Maya.
- Housing structures almost never faced west (religious structures did, implying that the West was a direction reserved for those buildings).
- Out of the housing groups, the majority (around 400) faced east. 175 faced north, about 75 faced south, and less than 20 faced west.
- There is still ongoing research that is slowly finding a more complex reason behind the orientation of housing structures.
- Out of the roughly 2000 houses in Mayapán, less than 100 faced west, supporting the idea that west was a religious direction.
- Masonry mainly consisted of what has been called "block-and-slab" masonry, where blocks and slabs were laid vertically or horizontally, and often mixed in the same wall.
- Many of the well cut stones were used as doorjambs or cornerstones, and were placed at the ends of walls.
- Since many of the houses were on raised platforms, stairways were an integral part of life in the Yucatan.
- Stairs came in many styles, some being inset to the platform, some out of the side, and some that looked much like modern stairs with railings on each side.
- Almost all houses had both interior and exterior decorations.



In conclusion, the ruins of ancient Mayan houses throughout the Yucatan Peninsula are evidence of the Mayan's advanced construction techniques and offer valuable insight into how the Mayans lived in their everyday lives, as well as evidence of cultural and periodical traditions and ceremonies.

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