

The small country of El Salvador occupies an important place of the ancient history of Central America. It was there where highly developed civilizations from Mesoamerica in the north-west were interacting with other cultures from Lower Central America in the south-east. Despite a century of research, this „Transition Zone” has not been well understood.

The archaeological site of San Isidro is located in the western portion of El Salvador, in the middle of a natural corridor between the Pacific coast, and the hinterland. Its unusually large size, and its strategic location, allow to speculate that it was one of the key political and commercial centers in the region. Despite all of that, the site has never been excavated. The survey, conducted in 2018 and 2019 by a team from the University of Warsaw (Poland), and from Universidad Francisco Gavidia (El Salvador), revealed that the visible remains of architecture cover at least five square kilometers. Fragments of pottery found on the surface of the earth date to a timespan between roughly 1000 BC and 500 CE, or the Middle and Late Preclassic (1000-400 BC and 400 BC - 250 AD) and much of the Early Classic periods (250 - 600 AD). However, the surface pottery does not demonstrate whether all of the visible remains of the site had functioned at the same time.

This project consists primarily of three seasons of archaeological excavations that will allow to see how ancient inhabitants of San Isidro created their buildings, and what objects they used in their everyday life. Did they use mostly local objects, or did they have access to more exotic goods? Were they more Mesoamerican, more Lower Central American, or a mixture of both cultural areas? Answers to this questions will be provided through meticulous analysis of found architecture and small objects. When feasible, they will be tested in laboratories using sophisticated chemical and physical analyses. Those analyses will reveal precise origin of raw materials from which the tools and vessels were made, and will provide absolute dates of particular stages of development of San Isidro.

The results of this project will contribute to both local, Salvadoran, and broad Mesoamerican archaeology. Most of El Salvador remains a „blank spot” on our archaeological maps of the world. Any new information that fills it is much needed. Moreover, the concept of Mesoamerica has been serving us well for decades despite never being well defined. Different scholars understand it in different ways. For some it was a somewhat hermetic, self-contained cultural area, and for others it was an open sphere, constantly maintaining an exchange network with the outside world. Research at San Isidro will no doubt shed some light at this issue as well.