

Cave of the Temple of The Stalagmite (Templo de La Estalagmita) is part of underground archeological site of Playa del Carmen

*** The staffs of the Quintana Roo INAH Center and of the “Urban Cenotes of Playa del Carmen” project have carried out the relevant inspection and recovery of materials from the surface.

*** The relevant Identity Card of the place where a small Maya place of worship is located, was created in order that said place will be registered on the Public Registry of Monuments and Archeological Zones of the INAH.

The name proposed for the recently inspected underground site of the urban area of Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, is “Cave of Temple of The Stalagmite”, and with said name it will be inscribed into the Public Registry of Monuments and Archeological Zones of the INAH. The name of the cave is a consequence of the speleothems which are found in front and inside of the small Maya place of worship; this space is added to the more than 150 cavities located in this area which have some kind of archeological remains.

The archeologist Enrique Terrones González, in charge of inspection, and his colleague José Antonio Reyes Solís, both from the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) of this State had stated that on the eastern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula it is common to find altars inside of caves and cenotes, because those places were considered sacred by ancient Maya people since they believed that water, fertility and trade deities, such as Chaac and Ek Chuah resided in said places.

This “discovery” is put in perspective by specialists, who note that throughout the Playa del Carmen area, an extensive system of dry and semi-flooded caves includes approximately 150 caves that have archeological evidence of distinctive uses and practices. Those range from altars for worship to simple offerings which are comprised of ceramic, lithic and bone pieces, as well as engravings and paintings on their walls.



Since August 2019, experts of the Quintana Roo INAH Centre had worked together with colleagues of the “Urban Cenotes of Playa del Carmen” project. The latter is managed by biologist Roberto Francisco Rojo García, who is in charge of Sayab Planetarium of Playa del Carmen and also a member of Círculo Espeleológico del Mayab AC. The inspection of this site had begun at his request.

Mapping of the inside of the cave has just been carried out by the team. The Cave of the Temple of The Stalagmite is comprised of dry sectors and other sectors with shallow water in an area of approximately 800 m². From archeological materials recovered from the surface, it can be deduced that the place of worship was used around 1200 to 1550 A.D., time span that coincides with the period to which most of these places of underground worship were dated.

Enrique Terrones and José Antonio Reyes state that these kinds of structures inside cavities belong to the Late Post-Classic period, which is considered as an unstable era by several researchers as a result of diverse regional interactions. The development of large Maya cities and a thriving population, as well as the limited resources availability caused by prolonged droughts triggered social problems. Maya people entered into these places, which were considered as the “entrance to the underworld” to place offerings and ask the ancestors for advice and for the help of deities.

The researchers specified that a systematic walkthrough of dry part of the cave has now been carried out, and that they found some archeological materials on surface. Therefore, it is suggested that a detailed exploration that should include consolidation and restoration of the ritual altar, which is located 20 meters from entrance of the cave which ancient Mayas itself modified in order to facilitate access to the altar. Some visible land modifications and leveling were also carried out.

The small pre-Hispanic construction was built with limestone and coated with stucco, and there are remains of blue painting. Its architectural style is that of the Eastern Coast in the Late Post-Classic period. The façade has a narrow entrance oriented toward the west. On the top portion of the building there is a recessed lintel and above it a cornice; over the cornice there is a wall extending from the façade to the roof of the cave.

Deterioration of the back wall of the ritual space, as well as the ancient removal of stones and stucco from the lateral walls and floor indicate the site was pillaged long time ago.

Specialists of the Quintana Roo INAH Center mention that although the cave was named as the Temple of The Stalagmite, the speleothem may actually belong to a stalactite which was extracted from another cavity and inverted, assuming its natural form. Future explorations may allow clarification of this question.

At 5 meters from the ritual space was found a source rock outcropping, where a mortar was excavated. Additionally, ceramic fragments of the Late Post-Classic period, an obsidian blade and



two human molars were found indicating that materials inside of the cave were displaced by natural factors. The cultural materials are currently being cleaned and classified in order to obtain more information about ceramic forms and their placement in certain chronologies.

Among the measures need to ensure the preservation of the sacred space, there is the requirement made to Solidaridad Municipality requesting the placement of a restraining rail at the cave entrance until such time as a systematic exploration of all semi-flooded cave is continued and the consolidation and restoration of this Maya place of worship can be completed.

