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DOI-ITAP

GUATEMALA

NEWS BULLETIN

Ancient Maya Altar Discovered in Guatemala Reveals Conquest Strategies, Reminiscent of ‘Game of Thrones’

Archaeologists discovered a 1,500-year-old carved Maya altar at the La Corona archaeological site, located within the Maya Biosphere Reserve in northern Guatemala. This monument presents new evidence of how a powerful kingdom, the Kaanul dynasty, forged strategic alliances that encircled and eventually toppled the powerful city-state of Tikal, opening the way for Kaanul dominion over much of the lowland Maya region.

Archaeologist Dr. Tomás Barrientos, of Guatemala’s Universidad del Valle and co-director of the La Corona project added,

"For several centuries... the Kaanul kings dominated much of the Maya Lowlands. This altar contains information about their early strategies of expansion, and confirms the important role that La Corona played in the geopolitical strategy of the Kaanul kings, resulting in the conquest of its main rival, the city of Tikal, in AD 562."



Archaeologist Dr. Marcello Canuto, Director of the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University and Co-Director of the La Corona Project, sits beside the ancient Maya altar that he and his colleagues discovered in the jungles of northern Guatemala. (Image credit: National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Guatemala City / La Corona Regional Archaeological Project.)

Discovered in June 2017 inside a small temple in the La Corona archaeological site, the altar was carefully and painstakingly separated from the tree roots, which wrapped around it. Once ready, in 2018, it was moved to Guatemala City and put on display.

"This altar shows us a part of Guatemala's history and in this case, around 1,500 years ago, I would call this the historical Mayan version of ‘Game of Thrones,’” Dr. Barrientos added, comparing the maneuvering by the Kaanul kingdom to that in the ‘Game of Thrones,’ where the noble families compete over control of the seven kingdoms.

Vice-Minister Gladys Palala, of Guatemala’s Ministry of Culture and Sports, stated,

"These discoveries by archaeologists provide us with greater information that helps us own this extraordinary culture."

This significant finding was unveiled on September 12, 2018 at the National Museum of Archeology and Ethnology in Guatemala City, where the altar is currently on display

A long-term effort with USG support

Since 2011, the U.S. Department of the Interior's International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) has supported research at and protection of the La Corona Archaeological site as part of a broader strategy to strengthen governance in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, the largest protected area in Guatemala.

The La Corona site is located in a particularly vulnerable area within the Maya Biosphere Reserve, sitting in between the better-protected and intact forests to the east and the more impacted and highly threatened lands to the west. Protecting the La Corona site not only conserves Guatemala's archaeological heritage for continued study and future economic/tourism opportunities, but also helps to deter the spread of the growing criminal activities from the western to the eastern areas of the Reserve.



The unveiling to the public of this significant artifact was held at the National Museum of Archeology and Ethnology in Guatemala City, where the altar is currently on display. From left to right:

- *Cynthia Perera, DOI-ITAP's Deputy Chief;*
- *Tomás Barrientos, Director of the Center for Archaeological and Anthropological Research, at Guatemala's University del Valle, and Co-Director of the La Corona Project;*
- *Gladys Palala, Vice Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage, within Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and Sports;*
- *Roberto Moreno, General Director of Guatemala's University del Valle;*
- *Marianne Hernández CEO of Fundación Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya (PACUNAM); and*
- *Daniel Aquino, Director of the National Museum of Archeology and Ethnology.*

MEDIA COVERAGE

Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and Sports (Spanish)

Video: <https://www.facebook.com/CulturayDeportesGT/videos/689002111479079/>

University of the Valley of Guatemala (Spanish)

Nota de prensa y fotos: <https://www.facebook.com/111173898960825/posts/1863949683683229/>

University of Tulane (English)

<https://www.newswise.com/articles/tulane-archaeologist-leads-team-to-major-maya-find-> (scroll down the screen)

University of Texas (English)

<https://art.utexas.edu/news/university-texas-austin-professor-david-stuart-part-team-uncovers-major-maya-find>

Guatemala Media (Spanish)

<https://www.soy502.com/articulo/arqueologos-revelan-nuevo-altar-descubierto-corona-peten-24039>

<https://agn.com.gt/presentan-altar-descubierto-en-proyecto-arqueologico-la-corona-en-guatemala/>

<https://m.prensalibre.com/vida/escenario/altar-5-el-reciente-hallazgo-arqueologico-en-peten-que-explica-mas-sobre-la-civilizacion-maya>

<https://dca.gob.gt/noticias-guatemala-diario-centro-america/altar-5-la-joya-mas-antigua-de-la-corona/> (scroll down the screen)

<https://www.publineas.gt/gt/noticias/2018/09/12/descubrimiento-pieza-arqueologica-altar-5-de-la-corona-peten.html> (text and videos)

News Agencies and Foreign Media

English

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/correction-guatemala-mayan-altar-story/2018/09/18/d28aca8e-bb53-11e8-adb8-01125416c102_story.html?utm_term=.897564dbf670

<https://www.livescience.com/63652-maya-altar-discovered.html>

<http://www.sci-news.com/archaeology/maya-altar-guatemala-06418.html>

<https://apnews.com/f2f48b29a5c045e89af223003478bffb>

Spanish

https://www.nationalgeographic.com.es/historia/actualidad/imponente-altar-maya-que-revela-como-fue-expansion-inicial-reino-kaanul_13195

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKnpOxS9GiU>

<https://www.efe.com/efe/america/cultura/descubren-un-altar-en-guatemala-que-explica-la-expansion-de-dinastia-kaanul/20000009-3747856>

<https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2018/09/13/descubren-en-guatemala-un-altar-que-revela-el-juego-de-tronos-maya/>

Video: <https://noticieros.televisa.com/videos/descubren-altar-maya-en-guatemala/>

Video: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6tk7ee>

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