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1,200 year-old slab from Mayan ruins site in southern Mexico

(2003-10-15 10:47) (Agencies)

Archeologists on Tuesday presented a 1,200 year-old stone slab with carvings making reference to human sacrifice that was unearthed from inside a temple at the ancient Mayan city of Palenque in southernmost Chiapas state.

Like Palenque itself, the two meter (6-feet) long and 60 centimeter (24 inches) wide slab dates back to the Classic period, from 250 to 900 A.D., Arnoldo Gonzalez, head of a team of Mexican scientists who discovered the slab, said at a presentation at the Regional Museum in the Chiapas capital of Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Gonzalez said scientists searching in and around Palenque's Temple XXI discovered a fragment of the slab in August 2001 and that a team of archeologists spent a year recovering other pieces and restoring the slab to 90 percent of its original dimensions.

Study of the tablet revealed that it was carved during the reign of Palenque ruler Ahkal Mo' Nahb' and makes reference to an event that occurred on July 22 in the year 736.

It is one of the oldest artifacts dealing with human sacrifice ever discovered at Palenque, Gonzalez said.

Carvings on its face depict five people identifiable by a collection of hieroglyphics over their heads. One of those shown is Mayan king Pakal II, who died and was buried in another Palenque Temple, the Temple of Inscriptions, more than 50 years before the date referenced on the stone.

Gonzalez said Pakal II is present in the scene to serve as a living witness to what was occurring from beyond the grave.

The stone depicts Paka II offering a weapon issued for self-sacrifice to his grandchild who has his back turned and is speaking with a supernatural rodent figure that's wearing a coat made of jaguar skin.

While no one is killed on the tablet, Gonzalez said it represents one of the earliest known references to human sacrifice.

Carvings elsewhere on the tablet explain that king Ch'away U Kokan ruled Palenque in the year 252 and was the first to put images honoring the gods of earth and agriculture in temples being erected on the site that's present-day Palenque.

Gonzalez said past archaeological work at Palenque has determined that the ancient inhabitants of Palenque first began performing human sacrifices to honor their gods during the reign of Ch'away U Kokan.

The tablet presented Tuesday is further significant because it links Paka II and Ch'away U Kokan, he said.

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Palenque, whose original name Na Chan Kan means ``City of Snakes'' is nestled among Chiapas dense Lacandon Jungle.



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