

HERRICK, FEINSTEIN LLP

For Immediate Release

Contact: **Howard Spiegler 212-592-1444**
Lawrence Kaye 212-592-1410

Guatemala Announces Recovery of Thousand Year Old Stone Figure

The Republic of Guatemala announced today that an intricately carved section of a Mayan limestone monument more than a thousand years old, which had been pillaged from an archaeological site in northwestern Guatemala more than 25 years ago, has been recovered and will be returned to Guatemala shortly. The white stone artifact, depicting a masked bejeweled human figure with various adornments, was displayed today at the Guatemalan Consulate in New York by Consul General Fabiola Fuentes Orellana.



**The 1000-year-old
Mayan stela**

The stone relic once formed part of a monument or “stela” built by the Mayans at the El Peru archaeological site in the Peten region of Guatemala, explained Dr. Ian Graham, an archaeologist at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, who has conducted extensive archaeological research in Mayan antiquities, and who found the El Peru site in 1971. Upon entering the site, Dr. Graham discovered that it had been widely pillaged, with several stone monuments sawed into pieces and their carved surfaces removed. He observed that one particular monument, however, had only one section cut out and removed, and he took photographs and measurements of it for his studies.

Last autumn — 27 years later — Dr. Graham discovered that an artifact being offered for sale by a private American collector appeared to be the missing section of the El Peru monument. He reviewed his records, and confirmed that the listed piece fit perfectly into the surrounding images of the monument he had photographed in 1971.

Dr. Graham immediately notified the Guatemalan Consulate in New York. Guatemala’s attorneys, Howard N. Spiegler and Lawrence M. Kaye of the New York firm of Herrick, Feinstein, who specialize, among other things, in representing governments and individuals seeking to recover artwork, then contacted the United States Customs Service, and assisted with its investigation. The piece was withdrawn from sale and, after further discussions with Guatemala’s attorneys, the collector, who wishes to remain anonymous, agreed to return it to Guatemala.

Consul General Fuentes expressed her warm appreciation to all those who assisted in recovering the stela section, which she described as a significant part of Guatemala’s cultural heritage that will be displayed shortly at the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Guatemala City. Mr. Spiegler added that “the recovery of this priceless treasure is an outstanding example of Guatemala’s efforts to combat the international traffic in looted antiquities that victimizes so many countries.”

Consul General Fuentes particularly thanked Dr. Graham for his vigilance, and praised the collector’s cooperation. She urged all those who learn about antiquities stolen from Guatemala to follow this example and see to it that all such objects are returned. She emphasized that Guatemala will continue its tireless efforts to ensure that all antiquities illegally removed from Guatemala are found and “brought home.”

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