



El Castillo

Located

Chichén Itzá, Yutan State Mexico

History

El Castillo, known as the Temple of Kukulcán (or also just as Kukulcán), is a Mesoamerican step-pyramid that dominates the center of the Chichen Itza archaeological site in the Mexican state of Yucatán. The pyramid building is more formally designated by archaeologists as Chichen Itza Structure 5B18.

Built by the pre-Columbian Maya civilization sometime between the 8th and 12th centuries AD, the pyramid served as a temple to the deity Kukulcán, the Yucatec Maya Feathered Serpent deity closely related to Quetzalcoatl, a deity known to the Aztecs and other central Mexican cultures of the Postclassic period. It has a substructure that likely was constructed several centuries earlier for the same purpose.

Discovery

El Castillo is a pyramid within a pyramid within a pyramid. If researchers can reach it, it could tell them important things about the early people who built it. The researchers made their discovery using tri-dimensional electric resistivity tomography — a term thankfully shortened to ERT-3D.

This technology was already fairly familiar, since it had been used the year previous to discover a cenote, a subterranean river often used for sacrifices, underneath El Castillo. Using 96 electrodes placed around the outside of the structure, scientists were able to create a digital map of the mysterious pyramid. They knew that the pyramid we see today was built over another pyramid, the remnants of which have been well documented, but they were surprised to find a third structure buried within the second.