

In Mexico, colonial ruins shattered by truck, rains

June 25 2021



Construction of a private building project is seen on the outskirts of Teotihuacan, just north of Mexico City, Wednesday, May 26, 2021. The Mexican government said Tuesday that the project is destroying part of the outskirts of the pre-Hispanic ruin site and has repeatedly issued stop-work orders since March but the building crews have ignored them. Credit: AP Photo/Fernando Llano

It hasn't been a good week for Mexico's colonial-era architecture.

The government said Thursday that a truck driver with an over-sized load had bashed through part of an archway of a centuries-old colonial aqueduct south of Mexico City. And last Friday, heavy rains caused part of the facade of a centuries-old church to collapse in the Yucatan peninsula.

All of that comes three weeks after Mexico had to send in the National Guard and police to finally stop months of private construction work that probably trashed pre-Hispanic archaeological sites in Teotihuacan.

The incident late Wednesday happened when a flat-bed truck carrying what appeared to be several giant sections of concrete storm drain tried to fit under the arches of a colonial-era aqueduct in the town of Yautepec, south of Mexico City.

The arches of San Carlos, as the stretch of aqueduct are known, stretch across a section of a heavily-used road, and traffic is supposed to slow down, check the clearance and go under them.

That didn't happen Wednesday, and the drain pipe sections hit one part of the archway, sending part the massive stone and brick structure tumbling to the ground. The aqueduct was built during the colonial era to bring water to sugar mills that flourished there during the 1600s and 1700s.

On Friday, the National Institute of Anthropology and History reported that part of the facade of a colonial stone church on the Yucatan peninsula had partly collapsed after four days of heavy rain.

The chapel of the Baby Jesus in the Maya town of Tihosuco, west of the coastal resort of Tulum, had been partially roofless for years; it was damaged during fighting in the last Maya insurrection, known as the War of the Castes, between 1847 and 1901.

Built starting in the 1500s, the church wasn't finished in its present form until 1839. Tihosuco was an important Mayan town, and was the scene of fighting between Mayas angered by excessive taxation and exploitation, and government troops that brutally put down the rebellion.

Like most modern societies, Mexico has a hard time co-existing with its wealth of historical architecture.

On May 31, Mexico sent in 250 National Guard troops and 60 police officers to seize land next to the pre-Hispanic ruins of Teotihuacán where authorities have said bulldozers were destroying outlying parts of the archeological site.

Mexican archaeological officials had been trying since March to halt the private construction project, but work continued on what local media says were plans to build some sort of amusement park.

The Culture Department estimated at least 25 ancient structures on the site were threatened, and said it has filed a criminal complaint against those responsible.

Apparently, owners of farm plots are trying to turn the land into a recreation area. The area is just outside and across a road from the site's famous boulevard and pyramid complex.

The U.N. international council on monuments and sites said bulldozers threatened to raze as many as 15 acres (7 hectares) at the site, which is a protected area. The council also said looting of artifacts had been

detected.

Teotihuacan is best known for its twin Temples of the Sun and Moon, but it was actually a large city that housed over 100,000 inhabitants and covered around 8 square miles (20 sq. kilometers).

The still mysterious city was one of the largest in the world at its apex between 100 B.C. and A.D. 750. But it was abandoned before the rise of the Aztecs in the 14th century.

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