



National Archaeological Park

TAK'ALIK AB'AJ

Nomination of the National Archaeological Park
Tak'alik Ab'aj as UNESCO World Heritage Site
Ministry of Culture and Sports / Republic of Guatemala



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Conceptualisation de la nouvelle image du logo

L'abstraction de l'iconographie est basée sur la hachette en forme de vautour du pendentif en jade (un symbole royal) trouvée dans l'enterrement du roi K'utz Chman, l'une des découvertes archéologiques les plus importantes de Mésoamérique.

Six cercles irréguliers représentent les figurines de l'Offrande "Les Poupées", icône de Tak'alik Ab'aj, également situées dans cette sépulture royale. La hachette à tête de vautour personnifie le roi, qui à ce titre constitue l'Axis Mundi, le centre du monde et le cinquième point central du cosmogramme. La représentation architecturale de l'Axis Mundi, situé dans le Groupe central, est basée sur le concept de cosmogramme, qui se traduit par l'utilisation des points cardinaux comme référence pour l'agencement des bâtiments.



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México

Insular and
Maritime
Territorial
Dispute
Pending
Resolution

GUATEMALA



Location of the National Archaeological
Park Tak'alik Ab'aj

Honduras

El Salvador

In the region of the piedmont between the west of the volcanic chain and the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, there was an ancient Pre-Hispanic city known as Tak'alik Ab'aj. Its name in K'iche' Mayan language means "Standing Stone" due to the many stone sculptures it has.

The strategic location of this city within a long distance trade route, as well as the ability to manage relationship, played an important role in its economic and cultural development. Its history covers a continuity of more than 1700 years (from 800 BC to 900 AD) which has allowed us to see important historical events in Mesoamerica reflected in Tak'alik Ab'aj. At the beginning, it was in close contact with Olmec civilization in the Middle Preclassic Period (800 - 350 BC), later it experienced a transition period (350 -100 BC), and finally it was part of the emergence of the early Mayan culture during the Late Preclassic (100 BC -150 AD). The changes were made freely by the rulers and their population through gradual process as indicated by the unbroken continuity of the ceramic tradition.

The nominated area corresponds to the National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj which constitutes the core area of the city and it is where the greatest archaeological research has been concentrated. The Park has unique characteristics such as the emergence of the first rulers of the region, as well as the unique early cultural development through urban, technological, astronomical and artistic design programs. The knowledge obtained through the study of the important archaeological finds and investigations within the Park, have made it possible to define the values to meet five of the six cultural criteria of the World Heritage Convention.







Scenic landscape of the Guatemalan piedmont, where the nominated property is located.

Criterion (i). Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.

The evolution of the sculpture and lapidary art programs are testimonies of the cultural transition, since they are carriers of the changing political discourse from the time of the hegemony of the Olmec culture to the early Maya.

Sculpture programs: The Park presents an extraordinary number and diversity of Preclassic stone sculpture styles, which stands out from other Pre-Columbian cities in Mesoamerica.

Lapidary Art: Royal burials of powerful early rulers have been found with sophisticated jadeite artifacts, including miniature mosaic ceremonial heads.

On the other hand, associated with lapidary art, a funerary offering considered unique has been found, consisting of six clay figurines representing young women, placed according to the cardinal points and the trajectory of the sun.

Cultural transition: The transition of cultural expressions from Olmec to Mayan provides the unique opportunity to observe the gradual change of thought and the deliberate decision of the first rulers to undertake those changes, which is considered exceptional in the history of Mesoamerica.



Monument of zoomorphic style



Funerary offering "Las Muñecas" (The Dolls)



Miniature mosaic ceremonial heads made of jadeite

Criterion (ii). Exhibit an important exchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental art, town-planning or landscape design.

The National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj is an exponent par excellence of the Preclassic cities on the Pacific coast of Mesoamerica. Represents the urban scenario of the first rulers, with characteristics of monumental ceremonial architecture, urban design and water management.

Ceremonial and monumental architecture:

It is characterized by presenting large, staggered clay platforms with rounded stone cladding; within the Park are the best preserved examples of this ancient construction technique. In addition, the use of clay and volcanic cobblestones for structural resistance or for cladding, it is considered a characteristic of its own architectural monumentality. Associated with these platforms is one of the oldest known Ball Court in Mesoamerica, as well as two of the richest burials in the Mayan era.

Urban design: The adaptability to the landscape and its use is one of the values of Tak'alik Ab'aj that

makes it representative for the region. The original landscape of natural terraces, characteristic of the region, was used to adapt a sophisticated urban design that is ruled by ancient cosmographic principles and astronomical orientation. In the National Archaeological Park Tak'alik' Ab'aj this particular design is observed, which is based on the drawing of the cosmogram. It represents the cross of the four cardinal points with a central point called "Mux" (in Mam Mayan Language means navel) that represents the center of the world (*Axis Mundi*)

Hydraulic engineering: Another characteristic of the nominated area is the management of rainwater by means of discharge canals from the ceremonial areas, and drinking water supply canals systems from springs. Both systems are still active. In addition to the practicality of these canals, the strong sacred connotation of water and its management with associated ritual activities has also been evidenced. Particularly highlights the symbolic meaning, when in the construction of the Classical Period, parts of ancient sculptures of the Preclassic have been integrated or reused.



Architectural monumentality inside the Park

Criterion (iii). Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

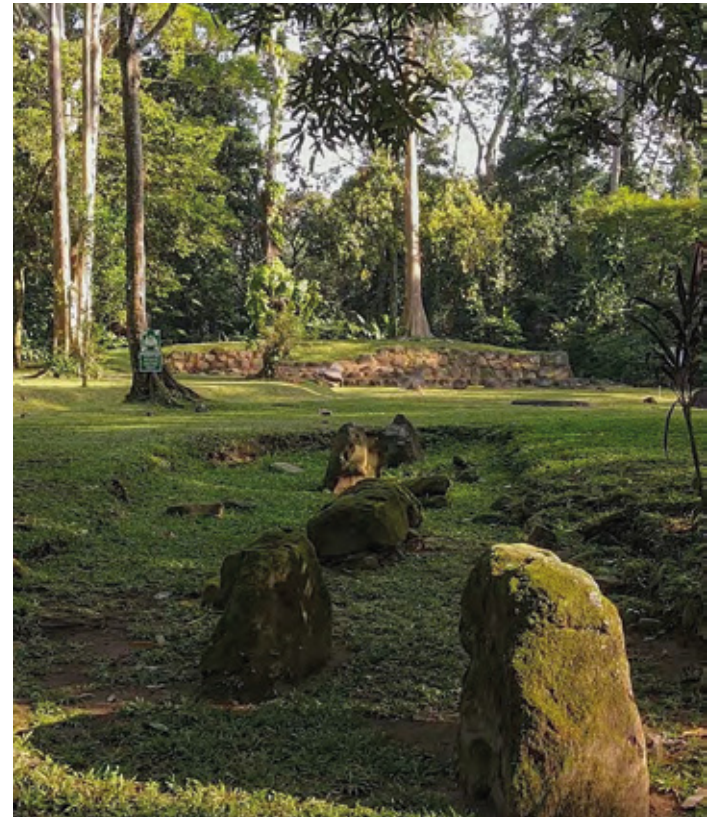
Within the nominated area there is an astronomical observatory where the history of science is exhibited in the public and ritual space. In addition to the development of astronomy, writing and the calculation of time (Long Count System).

Astronomy: Tak'alik Ab'aj is noted for the early astronomical scientific development. The Park has an amazing historical record of observations of the journey of the constellations and the daily course of the sun, symbolized in alignments of three rows of sculptures on top of a sacred platform. As well as the location of massive cyclical rituals on specific dates, according to these astronomical orientations.

Writing: Tak'alik Ab'aj represents one of the first ancient sites to show the intellectual achievements during the Preclassical period, such as the development of hieroglyphic writing depicted and sculpted in stone sculptures.

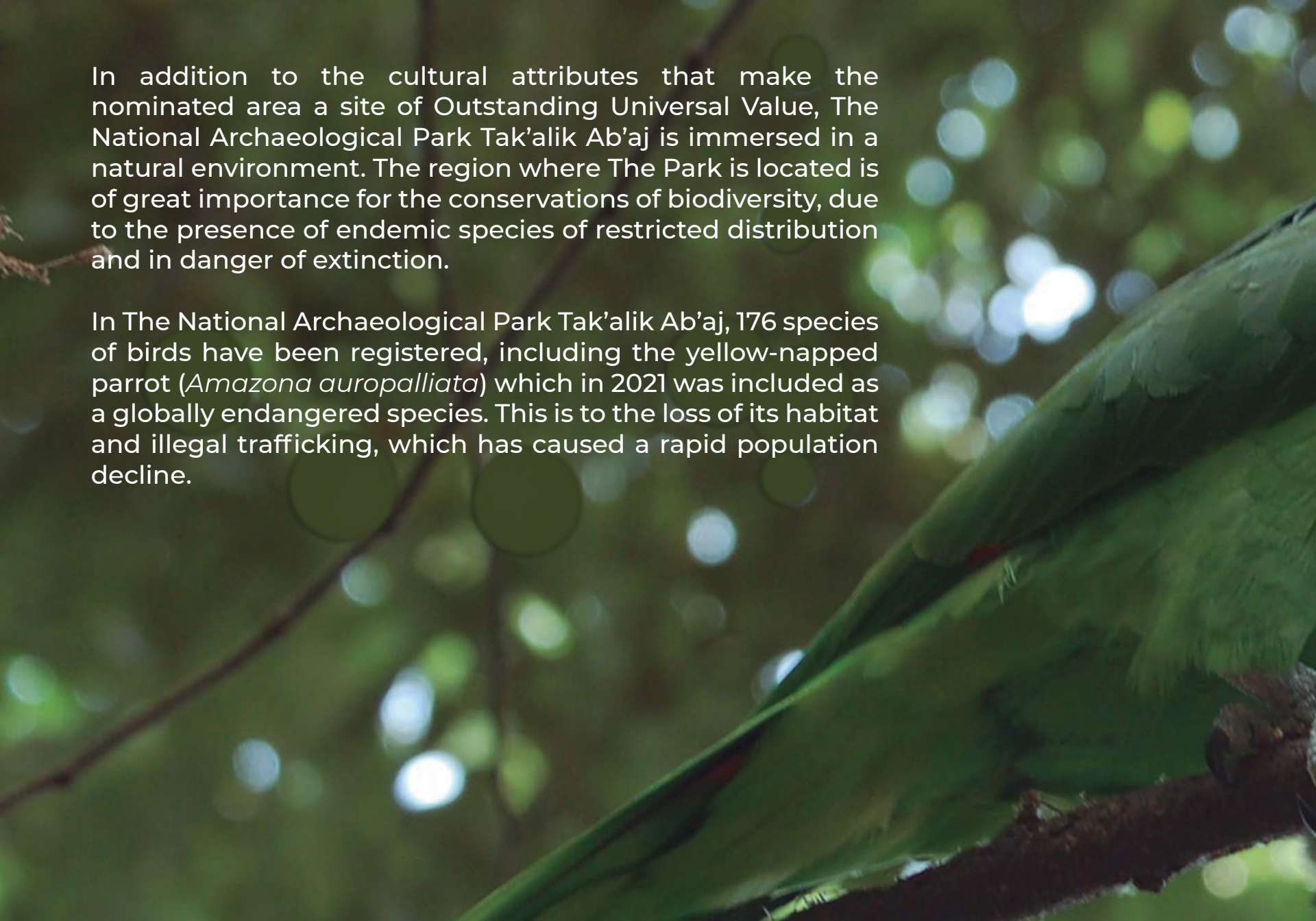
Time calculation: There are records of the commemoration of important dates, such as the

winter solstice (December 21). In addition, in the second part of the late Preclassical period (50 - 150 BC), there is evidence of the development of the Long Count System, which is the Mesoamerican vigesimal system created by the Mayan to measure time.





“Mux” (Navel) which means center of the world



In addition to the cultural attributes that make the nominated area a site of Outstanding Universal Value, The National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj is immersed in a natural environment. The region where The Park is located is of great importance for the conservations of biodiversity, due to the presence of endemic species of restricted distribution and in danger of extinction.

In The National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj, 176 species of birds have been registered, including the yellow-napped parrot (*Amazona auropalliata*) which in 2021 was included as a globally endangered species. This is to the loss of its habitat and illegal trafficking, which has caused a rapid population decline.



Yellow-naped parrot (*Amazona auropalliata*)

Criterion (iv). Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

The so-called “Open-air Museum” is considered an architectural and sculptural setting for political, ideological and historical discourse. The sculpture called “The Bearer of the Ancestor” is another example of the construction of historicity and the worship of ancestors through public display, which is considered a central element throughout the history of the nominated area.

Open-air Museum: This finding is another unique feature of the Park, it constitutes an exhibition of sculptures and monuments of different styles developed during almost a millennium and placed in front of the façades of the structures. Olmec-style monuments were removed from their original location, to form part of this historic façade or Open Air Museum, along with Mayan stelae and zoomorphic monuments. The act of reuse, reassembly, and combination of sculptures of different styles from previous eras for public display in architectural settings, indicates the intention to return to and evoke the past to create a historical discourse.

The Bearer of the Ancestor: It is a unique sculpture depicting an early Mayan ruler with his Olmec cultural ancestor on top, who in turn carries his ancestor on his back.





Sculpture "Bearer of the Ancestor"

Criterion (vi). Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic or literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).

There is a resilience of sacred rituals, since ceremonial life currently persists, as well as the survival of ancient sacred calendars and ancestral Mesoamerican cosmogonic symbols.

Current ceremonial life: The Park is recognized and identified by the current Mayan indigenous peoples as a sacred place of the ancestors. In the Park, the spiritual guides of various ethnic and linguistic groups from different regions of Guatemala can freely perform ceremonial rites, which perpetuate their deep-rooted ancestral spirituality.

Sacred calendars: These rituals are related to the persistence of the sacred Mayan calendar of 260 days (Cholq'ij) and the solar calendar of 365 days (Haab'), the ritual protocol and the indigenous cosmivision.

Ancient cosmogonic symbols: In the Park is one of the oldest monuments of the site that presents the cosmogram or cross K'an. Currently this cross symbol is drawn at the beginning of the ceremonial rituals to evoke the ancestors.





Mayan ceremonial rite



The National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj has unique characteristics that make it worthy of being part of the selective List of World Heritage Sites. The registration of the nominated property enriches a set of cultural assets that are little represented at the regional level and allows us to know the magnificence of the Mesoamerican cultures of the Preclassic Period. That is why the State of Guatemala ratifies its commitment to continue making all necessary conservation efforts to protect such an important historical and cultural legacy.

