

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State Party

Guatemala

State, Province or Region Municipality of El Asintal,

Department of Retalhuleu

Name of Property

National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj

Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

The archaeological site Tak'alik Ab'aj is located in the municipality of El Asintal, in the department of Retalhuleu. It is located 600 m above sea level on the hillslopes of the volcanic chain that runs through the South Coast between coordinates N:14°37'26" and 14°39'36" y W: 91°43'39" and 91°44'47".

Textual description of the boundary(ies) of the nominated property

Boundaries:

To the South:

Private property Santa Margarita, next to Interfinca path "Calle de Pan"

To the West:

Private property Santa Margarita, next to Interfinca path "Calle de Pan"

To the North:

Private property Santa Margarita

To the East:

Private property Santa Margarita, next to paved Road CA2 Occ.

The nominated property, National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj

(PANTA), with its entire extension of 15.38 ha is situated within the private property Santa Margarita.

The whole archaeological site has an extension of 650 ha, distributed among the private properties Santa Margarita, San Isidro Piedra Parada, Buenos Aires, San Elías and Montes Elíseos, which for decades have been an eminent zone of single crops (coffee, rubber, and sugar-cane). Private property Buenos Aires is declared as Private Natural Reserve; Buenos Aires and Montes Elíseos are affiliated to Rainforest Alliance and their products distinguished with the seal of Green Deal. Private Natural Reserves a management category of the National System of Protected Areas (SIGAP) of the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) and have their respective management plan with corresponding established agricultural activities amicable to the natural environment; this by its nature contribute to the protection and conservation of the archaeological site and the PANTA. The remaining properties are engaging in the process to be declared as Private Natural Reserves.

A4 or A3 size map(s) of the nominated property, showing boundaries and buffer zone (if present)

Maps attached.

Criteria under which property is nominated

- (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (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;
- (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

(text should clarify what is considered to be the Outstanding Universal Value embodied by the nominated property, approximately 1-2 page format)

Brief synthesis

The ancient city of Tak'alik Ab'aj has an extension of 15.38 ha, and it's located at the piedmont of the Pacific littoral of Guatemala. Its history of over 1700 years, from 800 BC to 900 AD is bound to the special geographic condition of its location, positioned in the strategic landscape on the hillslopes of the Sierra Madre volcanic chain running parallel to the Pacific Coast of southeastern Mesoamerica.

The continuity of its development over many centuries is a cultural mirror where important events of the history of Mesoamerica are reflected, as the dominance of the ancient Olmec civilization in Middle Preclassic times (800-350 BC), followed -after a significant period of transition (100-150 BC)- by the emergence of the Early Mayan culture during the Late Preclassic (100 BC-150 AD).

The commercial long-distance trade route and relations management capacity, played an important role for the economical and cultural development. The contact among different people and cultures eased the flow and appropriation of universal thought, which interestingly was shared, but creatively re-invented in a local version, building the local identity as well as sharing it with others, within a wider concept of cultural dominance.

It appears that this scenario was appropriate for the emergence of a chiefdom at the site and the region, and the precocious development of an urban, technological, and artistic program that acts as an "ambassador" for the unique and precocious South Pacific cultural development.

To this day, this city is a sacred place visited by the different indigenous groups who perpetuate their rituals according to their calendars established centuries ago.

Criterion (i): Tak'alik Ab'aj distinguishes itself from other pre-Columbian cities in Mesoamerica for its extraordinary quantity and diversity of Preclassic stone sculpture styles and sophisticated jadeite artifacts for early powerful rulers.

This continuum reflects the transition from Olmec towards Maya cultural expressions, providing a unique opportunity to observe the gradual change of thought behind the artisans' chisel, thus documenting that these phenomena was a gradual evolutionary process generated by the deliberated decision and plan of these early rulers to undertake these changes.

Criterion (ii): The ancient architects used and slightly modified the original terraced landscape descending from the volcanic piedmont to the coastal plains, in order to adapt a particular sophisticated urban design based on ancestral cosmogonic precepts as the cosmogram (four cardinal corner sides with the axis mundi center point), combined with astronomic orientations. Tak'alik Ab'aj is an exponent par excellence of this architectonic layout, which with the integration of a conspicuous sculptural program, created the ritual scenario for the public performance of the Preclassic incipient chiefdom.

Criterion (iii): During Middle and Late Preclassic the ancient astronomers at Tak'alik Ab'aj were performing important observations of the voyage of the constellations in the nocturnal sky and the daily course of the sun, leaving an amazing testimony of their record, as historic register symbolized in sculpture alignments.

Criterion (iv): What calls most powerful the attention in Tak'alik Ab'aj is the display of sculptures of different styles placed in front of the facades or top of the buildings. The Central Group of Tak'alik Ab'aj displays a composition of multiple sculptural styles of the monuments developed over a span of almost a millennium. The Olmec style monuments were extracted from its original placement to form part of this historic façade or “open air museum” in the Late Preclassic. The act of re-use and re-assemblage and combination of sculptures of different styles and previous epochs from the end of Late Preclassic and later on for public display in the architectonic scenarios, indicate the intention to resume and evoke the past and create a historic discourse, particularly in the advent of times of crisis.

Criterion (vi): Tak'alik Ab'aj in the imaginary of the indigenous people has been recognized and identified as sacred place of the ancestors and specific spots yielding special energy, which are designated as locations for ritual performance.

Integrity

Due to the particular history of the ancient city Tak'alik Ab'aj, which was abandoned around 900 AD and hence was covered by dense vegetation, the physical integrity was ensured for the centuries to come. Until modern times the shifting trends in agriculture, from banana to coffee plantations and currently combined with rubber, have not caused a significant impact, as these crops do not reach the archaeological levels in the ground. As well, the eruption in 1902 of Sta. María volcano, which bore the volcano Santiaguito, added an additional protective layer on the ground under which the ancient ruins were hidden.

The wealth of evidences and information of two and a half decades all year round work provides the unique opportunity to be able to correlate the archaeological stratigraphy with architecture, sculpture, ceramic, lapidary art, lithic tools, astronomy, urban design, landscape modifications and water management infrastructure, and cross check the data, as well to accomplish intense and profound study of each, which has produced a singular solid base for the most assertive archaeological interpretation and restoration.

Authenticity

Due to the described special pristine conditions of the site and wealth of examples of each of the multiple diverse cultural remains, their characterizing particular attributes as well testify a high degree of intactness in form and design (as the buildings and sculpture), no alteration in materials and substance, use and function, and traditions, techniques and management systems (as the building and sculpting traditions, lapidary and lithic production techniques, and water supply and evacuation engineering), unless the modifications are product of the proper historic development, as for example the change through time in style (Olmec to Maya), form, location (re-location) and use (re-use) (sculptures in architectural settings).

Requirements for protection and management

The cited donation of land to the Guatemalan State and mentioned legal framework, particularly the Declaration as National Heritage, and mainly the existence of the administrative and operative facility provided by the institution of the National Archaeological Park Tak'alik Ab'aj, dependence of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, under the administration of the Head Office of Cultural and Natural Heritage/Institute of Anthropology and History (IDAEH), with its annually assigned budget, and well organized operative units during 33 years has been the guarantee for its thoughtful research, careful designed conservation policies and integral maintenance program, as well as visitors service.

The current Management Plan 2021-2025 is adapted to the condition of candidacy for nomination and the elaboration of instruments to optimize operative quality, stability and capacity to protect and conserve the cultural heritage bearing the universal exceptional values constituting the proposed criteria i, ii, iii, iv, vi, and to strengthen the sense of belonging and identity of the local populations, particularly children with a socializing program.

Name and contact information of official local institution/agency

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