

Guatemala: 2,500-Year-Old Olmec Monuments Discovered

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23/07/2018



The city of Tak'alik Ab'aj was originally inhabited by Olmecs (1,500 BC to 100 AD) and by Mayans during its expansion in the middle Pre-Classic period (800 to 300 BC).

Two carved Olmec monuments and a nearly 2,500-year-old column were found in the Tak'alik Ab'aj archaeological park in southwest Guatemala, officials with the local Ministry of Culture said Friday, according to AFP.

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"This finding strengthens the proposal put forward by the archaeologists of the site, who indicate that in Tak'alik Ab'aj there was a transition between the two cultures," the culture minister, José Luis Chea explained.

The city of Tak'alik Ab'aj was originally inhabited by Olmecs (1,500 BC to 100 AD) and by Mayans during its expansion in the middle Pre-Classic period (800 to 300 BC).

The Olmecs disappeared and the Mayans continued to develop their advanced culture, especially in northern Guatemala, southern Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize. The Mayan culture flourished in what is known to be the classical period (250-900 AD) until it declined in the post-classical period (900-1200 AD).

"The discovery consists of two carved stone fragments" of monuments "253a" and "253b" and column "86" which "correspond to the middle Preclassic period (800-350 BC) of the Olmec era," Chea told the reporters.

Archaeologist, Christa Schieber, said the researchers found the first monument which is in the form of an Olmec head that represents symbols of power and corresponds to an authority referred to as "Grandfather."

The monument is placed "on its head" and signifies "the meaning of the descent from the heavens of the ancestor," said Schieber, who is one of the experts leading the exploration in the municipality of El Asintal, 125 km southwest of the capital.

The second piece is "exquisitely" carved containing an emblem of ritual, with the column weighing nearly 5 tons, and together they show "The Descent of the Grandfather," the archaeologist further explained.

The culture minister added that the pieces found were part of other "monumental" structures which were mutilated "to mark the end of the middle Pre-Classic period, corresponding to the Olmec occupation and dedicated to the start of a new cycle, according to the Mayan era."

In October 2012, the Guatemalan archaeologists announced the discovery of the tomb of a powerful king in Tak'alik Ab'aj, which could have led to the transition from Olmec to Mayan culture between 700 and 400 years BC.

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