

Important New Discovery at Tak'alik Ab'aj

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“The king mentioned in the relief could be the founder of a Maya dynasty here at Tak'alik Ab'aj. At the same time, this could also represent the birth of Maya culture in general.”

Christa also said that she and Miguel plan to present a formal paper to report on the finding at this year's Guatemalan Archaeological Symposium to be held in Guatemala City in July. The following is the actual abstract for their report that they submitted to the event coordinators:

The Discovery of Altar 48 at Tak'alik Ab'aj

Since 2005, Proyecto Nacional Tak'alik Ab'aj has been conducting a specific excavation program aimed at recovering information about the context of the sculptures at Tak'alik Ab'aj. This report will feature the discovery and excavation of a pre-Classic carved stone altar, designated Altar 48, that we accomplished in March 2008.

An uncarved monumental stela had been positioned carefully above Altar 48 in order to protect it, which gives a hint about the magnitude of the meaning of this altar.

Altar 48 portrays on its surface the beautiful design of a crocodile with the quatrefoil symbol of the cave or portal on its back. Inside the quatrefoil, a personage depicted with headdress

After the trees and roots were removed and the toppled stela was hoisted up and moved out of the way, workers washed and cleaned the surface of the altar to reveal its intricate details for the first time.

and loincloth, is seated on his throne in Maya fashion. On the side edges of the altar, there appear two mythological themes that are positioned on either side each of a four-component glyph block that features very-early-style glyphs. These four glyphs appear to refer directly to this personage.

The crocodile with the quatrefoil symbol on its back resembles the representations of a turtle with its shell in the form of the same symbol. The figure of the Maize god emerging from the open shell of a turtle is frequently found in Maya iconography relating to the creation of the world.

The four glyphs open the possibility to relate this powerful mythological theme to a real personage, a ruler, in Late pre-Classic times, when the early Maya system was “institutionalized” and the universal symbols “mint.” This style was to influence all later epochs of Maya development. Altar 48 at Tak'alik Ab'aj might be one of the earliest mythological representations of Maya cosmivision used for political purposes.

Additional comments by John Major Jenkins

The imagery on Altar 48 recently discovered at Tak'alik Ab'aj is very similar to that of Stela 8 from the site of Izapa. In addition, Izapa Stelae 10, 11, 67, 22, and Throne 2 are all related to the



Archaeologist Miguel Orrego Corzo contemplates the significance of the carved imagery of Altar 48.

iconography on the new carving. Much more can be assembled here to make a case for the ubiquity of this symbolism.

The astronomical aspect of this symbolism was explored in David Stuart's *Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque* (2005), referencing the Classic Period “Starry Deer Crocodile” that originated in the crocodile carvings at Izapa (notably, Stela 25).

Tak'alik Ab'aj Altar 48 is part of an orchestra of iconographically similar carvings, all of which refer to the sun deity enthroned in the “mouth” or belly of the Milky Way. (A more detailed analysis is available online at: <http://Alignment2012.com/Takalik48.html>)

Congratulations to Christa Schieber de Lavarreda and Miguel Orrego Corzo of the Proyecto Nacional Tak'alik Ab'aj for making an important new discovery that helps us understand the relationship between Izapa and Tak'alik Ab'aj, between the ideological and cosmological insights formulated at Izapa and their later adoption by the Classic Period Maya.

A National Geographic video featuring the raising of the toppled stela with comments by Christa is available at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/04/080407-maya-video-ap.html>

Combined by the editor from various reports, including the *Prensa Libre*, submitted by Carlos Nolberto León Corado of Guatemala, personal communications from archaeologist Christa Schieber de Lavarreda and independent Maya researcher John Major Jenkins, plus an online report by Erik Boot available at: <http://mayanewsupdates.blogspot.com>



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