



AS IT IS

## Mexican Farmers Find Large Statue of Mystery Woman

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Farmers were digging among fruit trees on a farm on Mexico's coast when they found a big surprise: a stone statue almost two meters tall.

The female statue may represent an influential woman rather than a goddess, or some mix of the two, experts said earlier this month.

The National **Institute** of Anthropology and History said this was the first such statue in the Huasteca area of Mexico.

The statue had a complex hairpiece and showed evidence that the female subject may have held a high **status**. The piece may date to around 1450 to 1521, the institute said. The place where it was found is near El Tajin, a pre-Hispanic city from the early 9th to 13th centuries. But the statue shows some influences of the Aztecs.

The farmers found the piece on New Year's Day and quickly reported it to officials. The area where it was found had not been known to be an **archeological site**. And the statue may have been moved from another, unknown site.

The person represented by the open-mouthed, wide-eyed statue remains a mystery.

Institute archaeologist María Eugenia Maldonado Vite wrote that "this could be a ruler," based on her stance and clothing. She may not have been a goddess.

But Maldonado said the statue could be a mix of the Teem goddesses and women of high political or social status in Huasteca. Those goddesses were part of a **fertility cult**, she said.

Susan Gillespie is an **anthropology** professor at the University of Florida.

She said Aztec documents from colonial times made note of women “rulers” who passed their power on to successors. “Women were highly valued in the pre-Hispanic” times and lost their status only after the Spanish **conquest**, Gillespie added.

However, she noted that “if there is only one such find, it’s hard to say” how important it is or even if it is correctly identified. Archaeology works best with repeated findings, she explained.

In 1994 at the Mayan ruin site of Palenque, archaeologists found the **tomb** of a woman called The Red Queen. That name came from the red color that covered her tomb, which dates to between 600 and 700 A.D. But it has never been clearly established that the woman was a ruler of Palenque.

I’m Alice Bryant.

*The Associated Press reported this story. Alice Bryant adapted it for Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**institute** – n. an organization created for a particular purpose (such as research or education)

**status** – n. the position or rank of someone or something when compared to others in a society, organization, group, etc

**archaeological site** – n. is a place in which evidence of a past society can be found

**fertility cult** – n. a religious system of some agricultural societies in which seasonal rites are performed with the aim of ensuring good harvests and the future well-being of the community

**anthropology** – n. the study of human origins, societies and cultures

**conquest** – n. the act of taking control of a country, city, etc., through the use of force

**tomb** – n. a building or chamber above or below the ground in which a dead body is kept

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