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Pre-Hispanic artifacts found in backyard

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When residents of the Torres de Mixcoac apartment complex in the southwestern part of Mexico City decided to put in new water pipes, they were surprised when the excavation turned up pre-Hispanic artifacts.

Francisco González Hermsillo, who happens to be a historian for the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), was walking his cocker spaniel Nina near the construction site when Nina made the discovery, uncovering a tiny mask the size of an olive.

The mask is likely a depiction of Xipe-Tótec, known as the lord of flaying, a god associated with vegetation.

This type of artifact, according to González Hermsillo, was often placed in the mouths of the dead to assure their passage to the underworld.

Following the tiny Xipe-Tótec, more discoveries were made, including ceramic and clay fragments of everyday tools such as obsidian knives, comales (flat-pans), and mortars and pestles.

The artifacts, which have been certified as authentic by INAH, were likely used by ancient Tepanacs who inhabited the area between 1400 and 1520, shortly before the Spanish conquerors arrived.

"We haven't found a complete vessel, but rather fragments of ceramic utensils that were for domestic use," González Hermsillo said.

The discovery has given the building's residents a feeling of pride, and they refer to the artifacts as their "treasures."

They are even talking about trying to build a small museum dedicated to the site.