

## Dig reveals significant Olmec find

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XOCHITEPEC, Mor. - A brewery and highways have devastated the site, but an archaeological dig here is unearthing treasures that, among other things, point to the influence of Olmec culture, considered the "mother" of Mesoamerican civilization, much farther afield than previously substantiated.

Archaeologists this week rescued a 120-kilo (264-pound) pre-Columbian sculpture about 2,500 years old that is presumed to represent an Olmec deity, it was announced Friday.

Mexican archaeologist Mauricio Castro, head of field work in the pre-Hispanic city of Zazacatla, some 90 kilometers (66 miles) south of Mexico City, told the media Friday that the piece follows other discoveries at the site in recent months that include 23 statues of priests, a head carved in stone, and a funeral offering together with 12 corpses, some of them cut in pieces.

The dimensions of the works representing priests are 46 by 58 centimeters (18 by 23 inches), and their features are akin to the Olmec dragon, the topmost deity in the Olmec pantheon.

Castro said the latest find was discovered in a niche of one of the six temples in the area, is in a sitting position, wears earflaps, and carries an anthropomorphic object in its arms, but cautioned that an exact identification of the personage represented cannot be determined until corresponding studies are made. The piece is painted with cinnabar, a poisonous red pigment.

Giselle Canto Aguilar, head of research at Zazacatla, said while on the site that this is one of the state's most important finds.

While the sculptures exhibit an unmistakable Olmec style, they themselves never inhabited the site. Their style was simply adopted here "to legitimize social segmentation in the creation of a nobility."

She said previously egalitarian societies had been the rule, but from the year 1,200 B.C. in Mesoamerica a segmentation was established that gave some groups the right to govern based on their alliances with the gods.

The Zazacatla site is located on the premises of the Modelo brewery, which covers 9,000 square meters, of which 3,000 square meters contain archaeological remains.

"The site is ruined ... we found housing developments, highways and the brewery, which have destroyed a great part of the remains," Canto Aguilar said.

She said that at present only about 30 percent of the archaeological area has been preserved, even though the site is protected by the National Institute of Anthropology, since housing developments have obliterated it.

The sculptures found are dated between 800 and 500 B.C., and will be exhibited at the Palacio de Cortés in Cuernavaca.