

Rare early Mayan portrait is found

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University of Calgary archaeologist Kathryn Reese-Taylor and an international team of researchers have discovered an early Mayan portrait of a woman.

The discovery was made earlier this year in Guatemala at the site of Naachtun, a Mayan city about 55 miles north of the more famous Mayan city of Tikal. The woman's face -- carved on a stone monument called a stela in an artistic style never before seen -- suggests women played significant roles in early Mayan politics, Reese-Taylor said.

"I've worked in the Maya area a long time and I've never seen anything like it," she said. "We have images of queens, who ruled both singly and with their husbands or sons, depicted on stelae later in Mayan history ... but this stela is completely unique in style and likely dates to the 4th century A.D."

Scientists are tantalized by the possibility she might be a mythical figure.

"If this is a patron deity, then it is extremely rare," Reese-Taylor said. "When hieroglyphic texts do mention women, it is usually in the context of being either someone's mother or someone's wife."

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