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Were women powerful in Mayan culture?

In Orlando, Fla., Drs. Arlen and Diane Chase, both 31, are shown above in their home in Winter Springs, Fla. just northeast of Orlando. They are holding

Mayan artifacts they found in Belize, a tiny country in Central America. The husband and wife archeology team from the University of Central Florida

is unearthing startling finds that contradict views about the ancient Mayan civilization. (UPI)

Florida archeologists find:

Women might have ruled in storied Mayan society

ORLANDO, Fla. (UPI) — Archeologists digging in Belize believe they unearthed evidence that indicates women held prominent positions in society during the glory years of the Mayan civilization.

Arlen and Diana Chase, the husband-wife archeology team from the University of Central Florida, called their discoveries last summer "controversial and important."

The Chases, both 31, were home last week analyzing their finds from their third expedition to Belize and planning a fourth trip early next year.

The Mayan culture, a storied Indian society, was at its height from the years A.D. 300 to 900. The primary communities were scattered throughout Mexico, Guatemala and

Belize, a tiny nation that sits just south of Mexico.

The Chases made their most significant find of their last expedition when they dug into a large mound at the Santa Rita excavation site in northern Belize and discovered a tomb 16 centuries old.

The Chases said the tomb's prominence and its artifacts indicated the high status of its occupant — an elderly woman.

Along with the skeleton, the archeologists found such offerings as

blackware vessels, polychrome plates, a necklace and a jadeite ornament and earflares depicting an individual wearing an eagle headdress.