

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JULY 2014

LIFE BEYOND EARTH • AFRICAN AGRICULTURE • OUT OF EDEN WALK • GROUPERS • CHINA CAVES

JULY 2014

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

LIFE BEYOND EARTH

AFRICAN AGRICULTURE GOES GLOBAL 46

THE WALK AROUND THE WORLD CONTINUES 78

THE GOLIATH GROUPER 102

EXPLORING CHINA'S CAVES 114



All figures are female, each slightly different from the others. The heights range from 11 to 16 inches.

The King's Maidens

Six ceramic figurines were a puzzle when they came to light in a royal Maya tomb at Takalik Abaj in Guatemala in 2012. Now archaeologist Christa Schieber de Lavarreda and her team believe they have worked out the complex symbolism. "They're like marionettes in a theater," she says. One role was to accompany the king to the underworld in about 500 B.C.

But they also played other parts. Four stood at the cardinal points, the corners of the Maya universe. Two others, positioned east and west, likely represented the daily cycle of the rising and setting sun. That symbol of constant rebirth may allude to the staple crop of corn sprouting anew every year—a nod to the king's own mythical role as the corn god. —A. R. Williams



ET CETERA

Large **ACID RAIN** storms may have followed the asteroid strike that killed the dinosaurs some 65 million years ago, says one study, one reason only some species survived. ■ Oceanographers have found an unknown **COLD-WATER CORAL** near southern Greenland, where water temperatures are close to freezing. ■ A **ZIRCON** rock discovered in Australia contains crystals believed to be 4.4 billion years old, the oldest material ever found on Earth.

PHOTO: KENNETH GARRETT, MADE WITH PERMISSION OF TAK'ALIK AB'AJ NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK/ GUATEMALAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS. NGM MAPS. GRAPHIC: ÁLVARO VALIÑO. SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS