

Intact Burial from the Reign of Ramesses II

3,300-year-old burial cave uncovered in Israel

In a once-in-a-lifetime discovery, a burial cave from around the period of Ramesses II was discovered entirely intact in central Israel. The grave appears to have been completely untouched since it was sealed roughly 3,300 years ago. Containing dozens of pristinely preserved finds, it offers a rare look into the land of Canaan at a time when the Egyptian empire spread along the Levantine coastline and allowed for extensive international trade.



Burial cave in Israel from the time of Ramesses II. *Courtesy Emil Aladjem, IAA.*

Egyptian - Era Grave in Canaan

The extraordinary grave was discovered, by accident, during development work at Palmahim Beach National Park, when construction equipment broke through a section of the roof. The square burial chamber had been carved into the bedrock near the beach, using a pillar to stabilize the roof. Within the chamber, archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) discovered several dozen intact ceramic and bronze artifacts, laid out in the cave as they had been in the burial ceremony to follow the deceased into the afterlife. As the grave was untouched, it can provide a more complete picture of Late Bronze Age funerary customs.



Archaeologist examining some of the various grave goods. *Courtesy Emil Aladjem, IAA.*

Discovery of a burial cave of this sort and age is remarkable, but finding one completely untouched is extremely rare. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime discovery! It is extremely rare to come across an ‘Indiana Jones film set,’” said Eli Yannai of the IAA.

According to archaeologists, the burial place appears to have been used by a family or other close-knit group over a long period, as the grave held several individuals, some of whom were moved after decomposition to make room for new denizens. Among the finds are numerous pottery vessels imported from along the Mediterranean coastline and Cyprus, as well as bronze arrowheads. These would have likely been in a quiver, which has long since disintegrated.

Local Grave, International Goods

The various goods uncovered within the grave come from several different regions. Some of the storage vessels were manufactured along the coast of Syria and Lebanon while smaller vessels, used to store and trade smaller quantities of expensive commodities, were imported from Tyre and Sidon. Yet other pottery vessels came from



Collection of amphorae in the burial cave. *Courtesy Emil Aladjem, IAA.*

The variety of finds speaks to the extensive trade networks that existed during [Egyptian control in the Late Bronze Age](#) (c. 1550–1200 B.C.E.). “In this period, in the long reign of the Nineteenth Egyptian Dynasty Pharaoh Ramesses II, the Egyptian empire controlled Canaan, and the Egyptian administration provided secure conditions for extensive international trade,” said Yannai. “These economic and social processes are reflected in the burial cave, which contains pottery vessels imported from Cyprus and from Ugarit on the northern Syrian coast, as well as from nearby coastal towns, clearly showing that the population of Yavneh-Yam (Palmahim Beach), played an integral part in the lively trading activity that took place along the coast.”

It is unknown who the individuals interred in the grave are. While they were likely locals of the area, the quality and diverse origins of their grave goods suggest they were well off. The presence of the arrowheads might also indicate that one of the individuals was a warrior. Another possibility, according to a report in [Haaretz](#), is that they were pirates who used a makeshift port, nearby, to avoid the port service fees of larger cities like Yaffo and Ashkelon.

According to Eli Eskosido, Director of the IAA, “The news of the discovery of the cave spread like wildfire in the academic world, and we have already received requests from many scholars to take part in the planned archaeological excavation.”

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