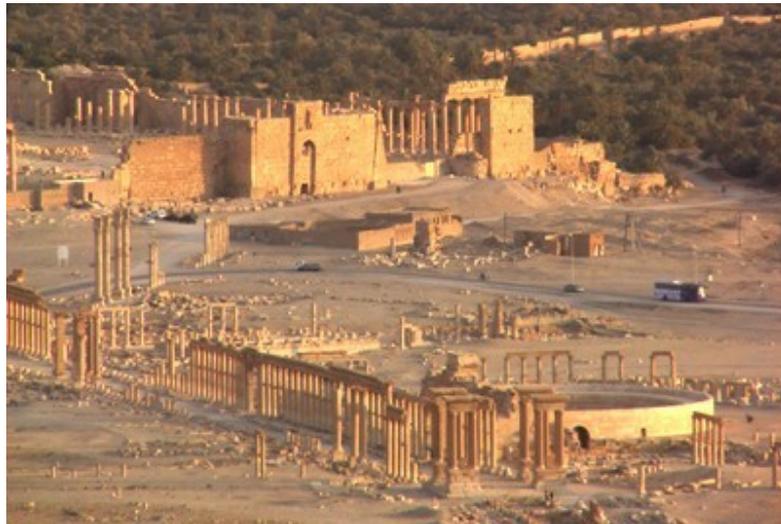




Italian Archeological Expedition Uncovers Ancient Burial Grounds South of Palmyra Oasis and Important Finds in Qatna

Nov 29, 2008



Rome, (SANA) – The Italian archeological expedition from the University of Udine uncovered a number of ancient burial grounds south of the Palmyra Oasis dating back to more than 4500 years.

Head of the expedition Prof. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi announced in a statement by the University the discovery of the burial grounds that date back to second half of the third millennium B.C., with the expedition uncovering 30 graves that constitute the first proof that humans inhabited that area during the Early Bronze Age.

Prof. Bonacossi added that other discoveries made by the 10th excavation expedition of the Italian expedition, which began in August and ended recently, include a travelers' rest area dating back to the Stone Age, in addition to camps that were probably used for hunting gazelles.

Other discoveries date back to the 3rd century A.D. and the Byzantine and Islamic periods, in addition to a Roman road connecting the Palmyra Oasis to western Syria and a number of pillars with the name of the Roman Emperor Aurelian.

The expedition also uncovered several finds in the Qatna area, including the remains of

a castle and a structure built over the collapsed walls of a royal palace built after the city's fall in 1340 B.C., in addition to valuable artifacts including a statue of the Syrian goddess Ishtar, ceramics, cylindrical seals and cuneiform writing.

Other discoveries at the royal palace area include the eastern palace dating back to the 2nd millennium B.C., showing signs of renovations and reconstruction that prove that the area was inhabited after its destruction in 1340 B.C., and several other findings that shed light on the Middle Bronze Age.

Prof. Bonacossi pointed out the extraordinary significance of these finds that point out to the interaction between the occupants of Mesopotamia and ancient Egyptians, in addition to the important information these finds provide on a mostly unknown period in history, pointing out that a document was discovered bearing the signature of Sumu-epukh, the king of the Yamhad empire, which was based in Aleppo.

The expedition includes international experts in archeology, renovation, and surveying, pointing out that the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has asked to feature some of the finds uncovered in Qatna in its "Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C." exhibition, which lasts until March 15 2009.

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