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Ancient cemetery found in Syria

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DAMASCUS, Syria, Dec. 18 (UPI) -- Archaeologists have dug up a large ancient cemetery in the middle of the Syrian desert, providing a glimpse into life and death in the 19th century B.C.

The necropolis discovered near the Syrian oasis of Palmyra about 125 miles northeast of Damascus, has at least 30 large burial mounds, ANSA reported Wednesday.

"This is the first evidence that an area of semi-desert outside the oasis was occupied during the early Bronze Age," said team leader Daniele Morandi Bonacossi of Italy's Udine University, who believes the burial site dates from the second half of the third millennium B.C.

"Future excavations of the burial mounds will undoubtedly reveal information of crucial importance."

The team of Italian and German experts, which concluded its 10th annual excavation in central Syria in late November, found the elaborate cemetery along a stretch of an old Roman road marked with stones bearing Latin inscriptions with the name of the Emperor Aurelius, who put down a rebellion led by the Palmyran queen Zenobia in 272 A.D. The discovery includes a Roman staging post that was perfectly preserved by a heavy layer of sand.

The group's digs began 1999, revealing a sprawling complex dubbed the Royal Palace. This year's work uncovered an even larger building being called the Eastern Palace.

"This discovery is not just exceptional for the imposing nature of the building itself, comprising at least 25 individual rooms around a large courtyard, but also for the period in which it was built," Morandi Bonacossi said.

"Until now, there had been no indications that buildings of that size existed in Qatna yet this one appears to have been in use for around 500 years," he said.

Qatna was once a powerful trading city.

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