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2000-year-old Roman Cemetery Found in Gaza

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A 2,000-year-old Roman cemetery has been found in the northern Gaza Strip, with the antiquities ministry calling it the most important local discovery of the past ten years.

Gaza is rich with ancient objects. The area has been an important trading spot for many civilizations, from the ancient Egyptians through the Roman empire.

Ruins discovered there include the remains of an attack by Alexander the Great as well as a Mongol invasion.

A grave is a place where a person is buried. Twenty Roman graves have been located so far and the research team expects to find about 80 in total within the 50-square-meter cemetery. Only two graves have been opened; one contained skeletal remains and some clay jars.

Jamal Abu Rida is director-general of Gaza's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Abu Rida suggested that researchers believe the graves likely belonged to "senior ranking people" in the Roman empire during the first century.

Unlike Muslim graves from later periods that face north to south, the Roman graves lie east to west, Abu Rida explained.

"We have made several discoveries in the past, this is the most important archaeological discovery in the past 10 years," said Abu Rida.

The area is closed off to journalists and the public while it is organized and made safe for visitors, the ministry said.

The cemetery, which is being supervised by a French team of experts, was found by a construction crew working on an Egyptian-funded housing project. When they came upon some of the cemetery's large, ancient bricks, they stopped work and called in the experts.

Gaza is run by the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which has fought four wars with Israel since 2008.

The conflict has hurt the local economy and officials usually ask international groups to help dig out and preserve archaeological findings, said Abu Rida.

I'm John Russell.

Nidal al-Mughrabi reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English.

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Words in This Story

cemetery – *n.* a place where dead people are buried

antiquities – *n.* objects from ancient times

archaeological – *adj.* of or relating to a science that deals with past human life and activities by studying the bones, tools, etc., of ancient people