



The Daily Star/Mohammed Zaatari

The discoveries increase the understanding of the complicated stages of Sidon's history.

Excavations reveal the forgotten cultural treasures of Sidon's past

By Mohammad Zaatari
The Daily Star

SIDON: Excavations led by a delegation from the British Museum at the Frères' archaeological site in the old city of Sidon unearthed more important antiquities during their 14th year, it was revealed Tuesday.

Preparations also got under way for the construction of a museum to display the findings at the site. The construction is due to begin in September.

Discoveries at the site since excavations began in 1998 have revealed artifacts from the Early Bronze Age, which began around 3,000 B.C., through to the Iron Age, which covered around 1,200-539 B.C.

Among the latest discoveries was a particular type of Phoenician architecture, which the archaeologists said was not commonly found in Lebanon, consisting of stones cut for the construction of walls or floors.

Over 50 amphorae were also found, as well as a stunning Attic vase, depicting two riders going to war wearing

white tunics and holding spears.

Excavations also turned up further graves in addition to those found in previous years, dating to the second millennium, bringing the total number of graves found at the site to 122. Among the latest discoveries was a Mesopotamian-style cylinder seal, which was used to roll pictures onto surfaces, featuring the God of water and the Goddess Lama.

Archaeologists also found further evidence that shelters were constructed at the time of burial, and food such as lentils, chickpeas and beans were consumed. Among the findings this year were a platform used around 1,600 B.C. within a large temple built for burial ceremonies.

Also among the discoveries in Sidon was a coin depicting the legend of Europa, a Phoenician woman who was abducted by Zeus disguised as a white bull and taken to Crete, increasing speculation that Europa may have been a Sidonian.

The importance of the discoveries at the site prompted the director of the Middle Eastern branch of the British

Museum, Jonathan Tubb, to travel to Lebanon, where he resided in Sidon for several days to supervise the excavation works taking place.

Tubb said that the site is the only one in the Middle East that the British Museum is currently excavating.

"[These discoveries] increase understanding of the complicated stages of Sidon's history and make them clearer," Tubb said. "We are very interested in knowing the complete story of Sidon, its history and the history of its civilizations, which no one has achieved so far."

The head of the British Museum delegation in Lebanon, Claude Doumit Serhal, said the Frères' site "can now summarize the history of Sidon and of the civilizations that lived there for 6,000 years, and also removes the mystery of some stages that were missing from Sidon's history."

The excavation works, which are supported by the British Museum, the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development and Cimeterie National SAL, focused this year on the

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north of the site, where work will begin later this year for a museum to display the findings. Serhal said the museum would add significant value to the work done on the Sidon site.

"Of equal importance to the archaeological discoveries is having them available to the public because culture that cannot spread among people is not culture," Serhal said.

One pillar of the museum will be placed in one of the excavation rooms, dating to the third millennium B.C. Excavation work was therefore speeded up in this area.