

Sidon excavations unearth 5,000-year-old antiquities

By Mohammed Zaatari
The Daily Star

SIDON, Lebanon: Excavations led by a delegation from the British Museum at the Frères' archaeological site in the old city of Sidon unearthed Wednesday antiquities from 5,000 years ago.

The most important findings of the excavations, which are funded by the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development and the National Cement Company and are now in their 13th year, include a sacred musical instrument from the Iron Age, the head of a Phoenician figurine, a ring from the Roman age, and a large storage room for wheat from 3,000 BC.

A 48-meter-long temple, where religious feasts were held, was also discovered along with a huge burial site with a number of burial jars, pieces of pottery, and the remains of animal bones.

According to the head of the British Museum delegation, Claude Doumit Serhal, the new findings fill in a missing link from Sidon's history.

The archaeological discoveries Wednesday "revealed that the Frères'

site is not an ordinary site or a scene of an everyday life ... but a historical and religious site that includes temples, burials and very large buildings that witnessed feasting and religious ceremonies," Serhal said.

One of the new discoveries is a bronze musical instrument dating back to the Phoenician age, 1,000 BC, depicting the face of the Egyptian goddess Hathor with cow horns, Serhal said.

The instrument, called a sistrum, was used in dances, religious rituals and ceremonies, particularly in the worship of Hathor, the goddess of music, love and giving, according to Serhal.

"This musical instrument is further proof of the continuity of feasting activities at the Frères' site over thousands of years," Serhal said, adding that a similar piece was discovered in Egypt and is displayed in the British Museum.

According to Serhal, it was the first time a musical instrument was discovered at the Frères' site, which helped the excavation team expand their understanding of feasts over the millennia.

"The picture becomes clearer over the days and years, and we can now show a clear and rare continuity of

Sidon and Lebanon's history from 3,000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C. to the Roman age," Serhal said.

After examining the city's stratified layers which date from the Phoenician to the Roman ages, the team now had an important group of antiquities.

More storage rooms for wheat and barley attached to temples were discovered, and this year's excavation revealed for the first time a large important storage room built from stones and not mud brick, Serhal said.

The storage room contained Emmer wheat, one of the oldest domesticated varieties, which was found in Syria as early as the Neolithic period. The wheat and 160kg of barley were completely burnt, a sign of the fire that destroyed the building around 2,500-2,400 B.C., Serhal said.

According to Serhal, 116 burial sites dating back to the first half of the second millennium B.C. have been excavated so far and particularly noteworthy this year was the discovery of a grave containing the remains of at least eight individuals.

The grave also contained a large quantity of pottery, a cylinder seal,



A small head of a Phoenician figurine was among the discoveries.

where feast rituals took place.

The excavation work inside the Middle Bronze Age Temple revealed the temple consisted of six rooms,

where feast rituals took place.

Serhal said he expected the discovery of more antiquities at the Frères' site with the continuation of excavation.

Photo by Mohammed Zaatari