

Egypt to search 3 sites for Cleopatra's tomb

April 15 2009, By REBECCA SANTANA , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Archaeologists will begin excavating sites in Egypt next week in an attempt to solve a mystery that has stymied historians for hundreds of years: Where is the final resting place of doomed lovers Cleopatra and Mark Antony?

Archaeologists looking for the tombs of the celebrated queen of [Egypt](#) and the Roman general, who committed suicide in 31 B.C., will begin excavating three sites at a temple where tombs may be located, Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities said in a statement Wednesday.

Cleopatra and Mark Antony, whose relationship was later immortalized by William Shakespeare and then in a movie with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, could have been buried in a deep shaft in a temple near the Mediterranean Sea, the council said.

Archaeologists last year unearthed the alabaster head of a Cleopatra statue, 22 coins bearing Cleopatra's image and a mask believed to belong to Mark Antony at the temple.

The three sites were identified last month during a radar survey of the temple of Taposiris Magna, the council's statement said. The temple is located near the northern coastal city of Alexandria and was built during the reign of King Ptolemy II (282-246 B.C.)

Teams from Egypt and the Dominican Republic have been excavating the temple for the last three years. They found a number of deep shafts inside the temple, three of which were possibly used for burials. The

lovers could be buried in a similar shaft, the statement said.

The lovers committed suicide after being defeated in the battle of Actium. Mark Antony is said to have killed himself with his sword, while Cleopatra is believed to have clutched a poisonous asp to her chest.

However, John Baines, an Egyptologist with Oxford University in England questioned why Augustus, who defeated Antony, would have chosen such a distinguished burial place.

"I don't really see why there should be a particular connection between that site and Antony and Cleopatra," Baines said.

Zahi Hawass, Egypt's top archaeologist, said the Cleopatra statue and coins - which show an attractive face - debunk a recent theory that the queen was "quite ugly."

"The finds from Taposiris reflect a charm ... and indicate that Cleopatra was in no way unattractive," said Hawass, according to the statement.

Academics at Britain's University of Newcastle concluded in 2007 that the queen was not especially attractive. Their conclusion was based on Cleopatra's depiction on a Roman coin that shows her as a sharp-nosed, thin-lipped woman with a protruding chin.

Excavators at the site near Alexandria have already discovered a large previously unknown cemetery outside the temple enclosure. They have also discovered 27 tombs - including a total of 10 mummies.

According to the statement, the style of the tombs indicates they were built during the Greco-Roman period. The presence of the cemetery also indicates that an important person - possibly royalty - could be buried inside the [temple](#).

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