

Unique gold earring found in intriguing collection of ancient jewelry in Israel

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This is the gold earring found at Tel Megiddo. Credit: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

Researchers from Tel Aviv University have recently discovered a collection of gold and silver jewelry, dated from around 1100 B.C., hidden in a vessel at the archaeological site of Tel Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel. One piece — a gold earring decorated with molded ibexes, or wild goats — is "without parallel," they believe.

According to Prof. [Israel](#) Finkelstein of TAU's Department of Archaeology and Near Eastern Cultures, the vessel was found in 2010,

but remained uncleaned while awaiting a molecular analysis of its content. When they were finally able to wash out the dirt, pieces of jewelry, including a ring, earrings, and beads, flooded from the vessel. Prof. Finkelstein is the co-director of the excavation of Tel Megiddo along with Professor Emeritus David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University and Associate Director Prof. Eric Cline of George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

The researchers believe that the [collection](#), which was discovered in the remains of a private home in the northern part of Megiddo, belongs to a time period called "Iron I," and that at least some of the pieces could have originated in nearby Egypt. Some of the materials and designs featured in the jewelry, including beads made from carnelian stone, are consistent with Egyptian designs from the same period, notes Ph.D. candidate Eran Arie, who supervises the area where the hoard was found.

A treasure trove with mysterious origins

When the researchers removed the ceramic jug from the excavation site, they had no idea there was jewelry hidden within. The jewelry was well preserved and wrapped in textiles, but the circumstances surrounding it are mysterious. According to Prof. Finkelstein, it is likely that the jug was not the jewelry's normal storage place. "It's clear that people tried to hide the collection, and for some reason they were unable to come back to pick it up." The owners could have perished or been forced to flee, he says. Prof. Ussishkin believes that it was the jewelry collection of the Canaanite woman who lived in the house.

The assortment of jewelry is also out of the ordinary, notes Arie. Though the collection includes a number of lunette (moon-shaped) earrings of common Canaanite origin, researchers found an abundance of gold items in the collection and a number of beads made from carnelian, which was

frequently used in the making of Egyptian jewellery in the same period. This points to a strong Egyptian connection, whether in influence or origin. Such a connection would not be surprising, according to Prof. Cline, who stated that interactions between Egypt and Megiddo are known to have taken place during both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

The most notable piece, the researchers agree, is a gold earring with a pattern of molded wild goats. "For unique items, we work to find parallels to help place the items in their correct cultural and chronological settings, but in this case we still haven't found anything," say the researchers.

Adding dimension to a multi-layer dig

It's another fascinating find from a unique archaeological site. Tel Megiddo was an important Canaanite city-state until the early 10th century B.C.E. and a pivotal center of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.E. It is a multi-layered site with various time periods clearly differentiated, and in this time period there are 10 to 11 strata well-dated through radiocarbon analysis. "Such a sequence of radiocarbon dates doesn't exist anywhere else in the region," says Prof. Finkelstein.

The layer in which the jewelry was found has already been dated to the 11th century B.C., just after the end of Egyptian rule in the 12th century B.C., Arie says. Either the jewelry was left behind in the Egyptian withdrawal or the people who owned the jewelry were influenced by Egyptian culture.

The researchers hope that analysis of both the textiles in which the jewelry was wrapped and the [jewelry](#) itself will tell them more about the origins of the collection. If the gold is pure rather than a mixture of gold and silver, for example, the metal most likely will have come from Egypt

itself, a region that was poor in silver resources but rich in gold.

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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