

Mummies discovered in ancient tomb near Egypt's Luxor (Update)

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Members of an Egyptian archaeological team work on a wooden coffin discovered in a 3,500-year-old tomb in the Draa Abul Nagaa necropolis, near the southern Egyptian city of Luxor, on April 18, 2017

Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed several mummies, colourful wooden sarcophagi and more than 1,000 funerary statues in a 3,500-year-old tomb near the city of Luxor, hailing an "important discovery".

The 18th Dynasty tomb containing at least eight mummies was discovered in the Draa Abul Nagaa necropolis near the famed Valley of the Kings, the antiquities ministry said in a Tuesday statement.

It belonged to a nobleman named Userhat who worked as the city judge. It was opened to add more mummies during the 21st Dynasty, about 3,000 years ago, to protect them during a period when tomb-robbing was common, Mostafa Waziri, the head of the archaeological mission, said at the site.

"It was a surprise how much was being displayed inside," Antiquities Minister Khaled el-Enany told reporters outside the tomb.

"We found a large number of Ushabti (small carved figurines), more than 1,000 of them," Enany said.

"This is an important discovery."

Ushabti figurines were often placed with the deceased in ancient Egyptian tombs to help with responsibilities in the afterlife.

Antiquities officials had initially said six mummies along with partial remains were discovered near the southern city, but said they had later identified two more mummies.

"There are 10 coffins and eight mummies. The excavation is ongoing," Waziri said.



Members of an Egyptian archaeological team stand near artifacts, known as Ushabtis, discovered in a 3,500-year-old tomb in the Draa Abul Nagaa necropolis, near the southern city of Luxor, on April 18, 2017

Inside the tomb, archaeologists wearing white masks and latex gloves inspected the sarcophagi, which were covered with intricate drawings in red, blue, black, green, and yellow, and featured the carved faces of the dead.

Further discoveries possible

The coffins were mainly well-preserved, though some had deteriorated and broken over the years.

Archaeologists were also examining a mummy wrapped in linen which

was inside one of the coffins.

White, orange, green, and patterned pots were also found in the tombs.

The necropolis is located across the Nile from Luxor, on the west bank, where many of the famous ancient Egyptian pharaohs were buried, including Tutankhamun.

The age of the tomb was determined "through the drawings on the ceiling," said Waziri.

"It is a T-shaped tomb (which) consists of an open court leading into a rectangular hall, a corridor and an inner chamber," the ministry said in a statement.

A nine-metre shaft inside the tomb held the Ushabti figurines, as well as "wooden masks and a handle of a sarcophagus lid," the ministry said.



A member of an Egyptian archaeological team shows artifacts discovered in a 3,500-year-old tomb in the Draa Abul Nagaa necropolis, near the southern city of Luxor, on April 18, 2017

"The corridor of the tomb leads into an inner chamber where a cachette of sarcophagi is found," the ministry said.

Waziri said the mummies dated back to an age called "the era of the tomb robbers."

"It's evident that someone with a conscience, the priests or a high-profile government official... made an opening to the chambers, and they put the coffins there," he said.

Another room in the tomb was also discovered, though it has not yet been completely excavated, the ministry said.

Archaeologists were able to enter the tomb "after removing almost 450 metres of debris out of the open court," it added.

The tombs and ancient temples of Thebes, the capital of ancient Egypt during its later periods and now the city of Luxor, have been a major tourist attraction.

Tourism here has dropped in the turmoil that followed the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak.

Enany said he hoped these new discoveries would help attract tourists again.

Nevine el-Aref, the spokeswoman for the antiquities ministry, said "there is evidence and traces that new mummies could be discovered in the future" at the site.

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