

Archaeologists unearth 27 coffins at Egypt's Saqqara pyramid

September 21 2020, by Samy Magdy



This Sept. 2020 photo provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities shows one of more than two dozen ancient coffins unearthed near the famed Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, south of Cairo, Egypt. (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via AP)

Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed more than two dozen ancient coffins in a vast necropolis south of Cairo, an official said Monday.

The sarcophagi have remained unopened since they were buried more than 2,500 years ago near the famed Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, said Neveine el-Arif, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. She said 13 coffins were found earlier this month in a newly discovered, 11 meter-deep (36 feet) well, and that 14 more were found last week in another well.

Footage shared by the ministry showed colorful sarcophagi decorated with ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, as well as other artifacts the ministry said were found in the two wells.

The Saqqara plateau hosted at least 11 pyramids, including the Step Pyramid, along with hundreds of tombs of ancient officials, ranging from the 1st Dynasty (2920 B.C.-2770 B.C.) to the Coptic period (395-642).

Archaeologists were still working to determine the origins of the coffins, el-Arif said, adding that more details and "secrets" would likely be announced next month.

In recent years, Egypt has heavily promoted new archaeological finds to international media and diplomats in an effort to revive its key tourism sector by attracting more tourists to the country.



This Sept. 2020 photo provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities shows some of the antiquities that included more than two dozen ancient coffins and other artifacts, that were unearthed near the famed Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, south of Cairo, Egypt. The Tourism and Antiquities Ministry has said initial studies show that the newly found coffins had not been opened since they were buried more than 2,500 years ago. (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via AP)



This Sept. 2020 photo provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities shows Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, posing with one of more than two dozen ancient coffins unearthed near the famed Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, south of Cairo, Egypt. (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via AP)

El-Arif said further excavations were underway in the necropolis, and more coffins were expected to be found.

Last year, archaeologists found a cache at Saqqara that included hundreds of mummified animals, birds and crocodiles, as well as two mummified lion cubs.

The Saqqara plateau is part of the necropolis of Egypt's ancient city of Memphis, that also include Abu Sir, Dahshur and Abu Ruwaysh and the famed Giza Pyramids. The ruins of Memphis were designed a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1970s.

In October 2019, archaeologists unearthed 30 ancient wooden coffins with inscriptions and paintings in the southern city of Luxor.



This Sept. 2020 photo provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities shows Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, displaying an artifact found along with more than two dozen ancient coffins unearthed near the famed Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, south of Cairo, Egypt. (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via AP)

The Luxor coffins were moved to be showcased at the Grand Egyptian Museum, which Egypt is building near the Giza Pyramids.

Egypt's key tourism sector has suffered from the years of political turmoil and violence following the 2011 uprising that toppled autocrat Hosni Mubarak, and the sector was dealt a further blow this year by the global coronavirus pandemic.

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