

Gaza construction workers find 31 Roman-era tombs

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A general view shows a newly discovered Roman cemetery containing ornately decorated graves, in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip.

Construction workers at a building site in northern Gaza have uncovered 31 Roman-era tombs dating from the first century AD, the Palestinian

territory's Islamist rulers Hamas said Monday.

The tombs were discovered near the town of Beit Lahia as work began on an Egyptian-funded residential area, part of the \$500 million reconstruction package Cairo pledged after the 11-day war in May between Israel and [armed groups](#) in the Gaza Strip.

Naji Sarhan, an official at Gaza's Ministry of Public Works, confirmed the find and said there is "evidence that there are other graves" at the site.

Construction work has been halted and technicians from Gaza's Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism have been sent to the site to catalogue gravestones and artefacts, officials said.

One technician, who requested anonymity, said the tombs were believed to be part of a cemetery linked to a nearby Roman site in Balakhiya.

The find was the latest in Gaza, where tourism to archaeological sites is limited due to an Israeli blockade imposed since Hamas took over the strip in 2007.

Israel and Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, tightly restrict the flow of people in and out of the impoverished strip, which is home to about 2.3 million Palestinians.

Last month, Hamas reopened the remains of a fifth-century Byzantine church following a years-long restoration effort backed by foreign donors.

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