

# Syria digs up 'rare' Roman mosaic in former rebel stronghold

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People look at a large mosaic that dates back to Roman era in the town of Rastan, Syria, Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2022. Syrian officials said it is the most important archaeological discovery since the conflict began 11 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Omar Sanadiki

Syria uncovered a large intact mosaic that dates back to the Roman era,

describing it Wednesday as the most important archaeological discovery since the country's conflict began 11 years ago.

Journalists were shown the [mosaic](#) in the central town of Rastan near Homs, Syria's third largest city.

The mosaic, at 120 square meters (around 1300 square feet), was found in an old building that Syria's General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums had been excavating. Lebanese and Syrian businessmen from the neighboring country's Nabu Museum bought the property that dates back to the 4th century and donated it to the Syrian state. Each panel was filled with square-shaped, small colorful stones measuring about half an inch on each side.

Dr. Humam Saad, the associate director of excavation and [archaeological research](#) at the directorate, said among the scenes the mosaic shows is a rare portrayal of Ancient Amazon warriors in Roman mythology.

"What is in front of us is a discovery that is rare on a global scale," Saad told The Associated Press, adding that the images are "rich in details," and includes scenes from the Trojan War between the Greeks and Trojans.

In Ancient Greek and Roman mythology, demigod hero Hercules slayed Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, in one of his 12 labors.



People look at a large mosaic that dates back to Roman era in the town of Rastan, Syria, Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2022. Syrian officials said it is the most important archaeological discovery since the conflict began 11 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Omar Sanadiki

The mosaic also portrays Neptune, Ancient Roman god of the sea, and 40 of his mistresses.

"We can't identify the type of the building, whether it's a public bathhouse or something else, because we have not finished excavating yet," Saad told the AP.

Sulaf Fawakherji, a famous actress in Syria and a member of the Nabu Museum's board of trustees said she hopes they could purchase other

buildings in Rastan, which she says is filled with heritage sites and artifacts waiting to be discovered.

"There are other buildings, and it's clear that the mosaic extends far wider," Fawkherji told the AP. "Rastan historically is an important city, and it could possibly be very important heritage city for tourism."

Despite Rastan's historical significance in the country, Saad says there have not been significant excavation efforts in the town prior to the country's [armed conflict](#).



A detail of a large mosaic that dates back to Roman era is seen in the town of Rastan, Syria, Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2022. Syrian officials said it is the most important archaeological discovery since the conflict began 11 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Omar Sanadiki

"Unfortunately, there were armed groups that tried to sell the mosaic at one point in 2017 and listed it on [social media platforms](#)," he said.

Syrian heritage sites have been looted and destroyed over the past decade of ongoing violent conflict.

Among the most notable incidents was the Islamic State group taking Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that boasts 2,000-year-old towering Roman-era colonnades and priceless artifacts, and partially destroying a Roman theater. Meanwhile, Syria's cash-strapped government has slowly been rebuilding Aleppo's centuries-old bazaar after reclaiming it from armed opposition forces in 2016.

Rastan was once a major opposition stronghold and was a point of intense clashes, before the Syrian government reclaimed the city in 2018.

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