# Archaeology Team Discovers Oldest Remains of Sea-faring Ships in the World

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A team of archaeologists from Boston University and the University of Naples l'Orientale recently uncovered the oldest remains of sea-faring ships in the world and cargo boxes containing goods from the lost-land of Punt – a fabled southern Red Sea trading center. The discoveries were made during a round of excavations inside two man-made caves previously found by the team at Wadi Gawasis on Egypt's Red Sea coast.

In remarkable condition, the unique artifacts of cedar planks and decking timber – some with the mortises and tenons, and copper fastenings still in place – demonstrate that the Ancient Egyptians were excellent ship builders and provide further evidence that they reached Punt by sea. The findings may also help researchers determine the location of Punt, a long-time source of debate among scholars.

In addition to the ship timber and cargo boxes, the archaeologists discovered five parallel rock-cut rooms that served as storage areas for ship equipment.

"One of the rooms contained coils of ship rope, all neatly tied and knotted – just as the sailors left them almost 4,000 years ago," said Kathryn Bard, associate professor of archaeology at BU and co-director of the excavations. "The view into this cave is truly astonishing."

A large stone anchor, shards of Egyptian storage jars, and a limestone tablet, or stela, of Pharaoh Amenemhat III inscribed with all five of his royal names were also found.

During the excavation last spring that unearthed the caves, the team found two cedar steering oars which the scientists speculate were used on 70-foot-long ships from a 15th-century naval expedition launched by Egypt's Queen Hatshepsut to Punt. Well-preserved and intact, the oars are the first complete parts from a sea-faring ship to have been found in Egypt. Near the oars were pieces of pottery dating from 1500 – 1400 B.C. and a stela with hieroglyphic inscriptions detailing the trade expeditions to Punt.

The team will return to the site in December to continue the five-year project which began in 2001.

Source: Boston University

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