

Israel to launch expedition to find more Dead Sea Scrolls

November 14 2016, by Daniel Estrin



In this Thursday, July 26, 2001 file photo, Roi Porat, an Israeli student of archaeology, works near the remains of a cave found at the West Bank archeological site of Qumran, near the Dead Sea Thursday, July 26, 2001. An Israeli antiquities official says Israel is embarking on a major expedition to find more Dead Sea Scrolls and other artifacts. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis, File)

Israel is embarking on a major archaeological expedition to find yet undiscovered Dead Sea Scrolls, an Israeli antiquities official said

Monday.

Amir Ganor of the Israel Antiquities Authority said a government research team will spend the next three years surveying hundreds of caves in the Judean Desert near the Dead Sea, the arid region where the Dead Sea Scrolls, the world's oldest biblical manuscripts, were preserved for thousands of years and discovered in 1947.

The collection is considered the crown jewel of Israeli antiquities.

In a move that is bound to stir controversy, the researchers may also excavate Dead Sea-area caves in the West Bank, Ganor said. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast War, and the Palestinians want the territory to establish an independent state.

Ganor discussed details of the project with The Associated Press ahead of an official announcement.

The expedition will begin in December and will be funded by the Israeli prime minister's office, Ganor said. A spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The upcoming expedition will be the first large-scale archaeological survey of the area since Operation Scroll, an effort in 1993 to find any remaining Dead Sea Scrolls hidden in an area of the West Bank before Israel transferred partial control of the area to the Palestinian Authority.



In this Monday, Sept. 26, 2011 file photo, Dr. Adolfo Roitman presents a part of the Isaiah Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, inside the vault of the Shrine of the Book building at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. An Israeli antiquities official says Israel is embarking on a major expedition to find more Dead Sea Scrolls and other artifacts. (AP Photo/Sebastian Scheiner, File)

No scrolls were found in that undertaking.

According to Ganor, archaeologists also hope to find other antiquities dating back to as early as 5,000 years ago, as well as from the 1st-century Jewish-Roman war and the 2nd-century Bar Kochba revolt, when Jewish fighters battling the Roman army sought refuge in the desert.

Last summer, Israel carried out a three-week excavation of the so-called Cave of the Skulls in the Judean Desert, after catching a group of six

Palestinian men digging illegally at the site in 2014. The Palestinians were believed to be digging for more Dead Sea Scrolls.

In recent years, ancient manuscripts have trickled onto the local antiquities market, and looters are believed to have plundered them from Dead Sea-area caves, prompting the government initiative.

"We know there are more," Ganor said, speaking of undiscovered Dead Sea Scrolls. "Most of the places haven't been reached."

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