

Egypt unveils trove of ancient coffins

● **Discovery made at Asasif, a necropolis on the west bank of the Nile River**

● **The sarcophagi date back to the 22nd Dynasty, founded around 3,000 years ago**

Luxor | Egypt

Egypt revealed yesterday a rare trove of 30 ancient wooden coffins that have been well-preserved over millennia in the archaeologically rich Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

The antiquities ministry officially unveiled the discovery made at Asasif, a necropolis on the west bank of the Nile River, at a press conference against the backdrop of the Hatshepsut Temple.

"This is the first discovery in Asasif by dedicated Egyptian hands, comprised of archaeologists, conservationists and workers," the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Mostafa al-Waziri, told reporters.

The 30 ornately decorated coffins of men, women and children were found only a metre (three feet) underground, stacked in two rows. They are believed to belong to family members of high priests.

Waziri explained that excavations of the site in the 19th century had revealed royal tombs,



Tourists observe sarcophagi displayed in front of Hatshepsut Temple in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in Luxor

but this latest discovery had yielded a collection of priests' burials.

The sarcophagi date back to the 22nd Dynasty, founded around 3,000 years ago in the 10th century BC.

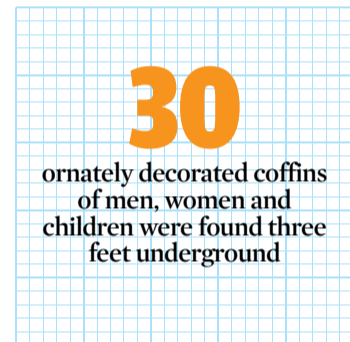
Despite their age, black, green, red and yellow paintings of snakes, birds, lotus flowers and hieroglyphics that cover the coffins are still clearly visible.

A sealed coffin belonging to a young ancient Egyptian child was incomplete and unpainted.

"We only did remedial first-aid on these well-preserved coffins. They are considered to be in great condition because there were hardly any settlements" around the site, local antiquities ministry restorer Saleh Abdel-Gelil said.

Tombs and tourism

Discoveries of ancient Egyptian relics had slowed after the 2011 Arab Spring revolution that toppled long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak and plunged the country in political turmoil, according to Antiquities Minister



30
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Khaled el-Enany.

Several high-level officials, including President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, have in recent weeks affirmed Egypt's stability following rare, small-scale protests in September that drew a heavy-handed response from security forces.

"Now in Egypt we have more security so we have more foreign nationals. We have more than 250 (archaeological) missions. More work equals more discoveries", he told AFP on the sidelines of the press conference.

At Marsam, a boutique hotel in Luxor, the flurry of archaeological discoveries in recent years has translated into good business and foot traffic.

"You can say two years ago we noticed a difference. There was less than half the people that we have today," said Birte Fuchs, a German who manages the Marsam with her husband and local partners. "Tourism is coming back".

This year, over 11 million visitors travelled to Egypt, following a sharp dip in numbers after the revolution.

Egypt has sought to promote its archaeological heritage and finds in a bid to revive its vital tourism sector, which has suffered due to political insecurity and terror attacks.

However, critics point to archaeological sites and museums suffering from negligence and poor management.

But Enany, the minister, remains upbeat.

"Some people, we don't have

to mention names, don't want us to have these discoveries... that impress the world," said Enany before throngs of tourists, referring to detractors.

"These discoveries are priceless for Egypt's reputation," he added.

Sporting his trademark cowboy hat, Egyptologist Zahi Hawass, who has consistently promoted his discoveries to a global audience, was also at Saturday's unveiling.

He took selfies with tourists who flocked to the coffins.



Egyptian officials and archaeologists surround a sarcophagus at the Valley of the Kings in Luxor



The coffins belong to men, women and children, said to be family members of priests from the time of ancient Egypt's 22nd Dynasty

Louvre gears up for Leonardo da Vinci retrospective

Paris

The Louvre in Paris is putting the finishing touches to an ambitious Leonardo da Vinci retrospective opening Thursday, which groups more than 160 of the artist's works and has already attracted close to 200,000 advance visitor bookings.

Timed to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the famed artist's death, the show, simply



The Louvre holds the world's biggest collection of Da Vinci's paintings

called "Leonardo da Vinci", took a decade to put together and includes works on loan from Queen Elizabeth and Bill Gates.

"If you want to be amazed, you must come," said Vincent Delieuvin, chief curator at the Louvre's department of paintings, during a preview for staff at the Louvre.

"It's almost as if we were bringing Leonardo da Vinci's workshop back to life," he said.

The Louvre itself owns five

of the artist's paintings, more than anybody else, including the Mona Lisa which is seen by 30,000 people every day.

In addition to the Mona Lisa -- which will remain at her usual spot in the Louvre -- four paintings are to form the centre of the show: The Virgin of the Rocks, La Belle Ferronniere, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Anne.

The exhibition runs until February.

Hong Kong activist injured in knife attack

Hong Kong

A man handing out leaflets for a Hong Kong pro-democracy protest was attacked by a knife-wielding assailant who slashed his neck and abdomen on Saturday, days after a leading activist was left bloodied in another street attack.

The injured 19-year-old, wearing black clothes and a

black face mask, was knifed near one of the large "Lennon Walls" that have sprung up around the city during months of demonstrations, police said.

Local media images showed the man had been severely injured, with his inner organs visible where his abdomen had been cut in the afternoon incident in northeastern Tai Po district.

Elizabeth Taylor's personal treasures set for auction

● **Following Elizabeth Taylor's death in 2011 at age 79, a week-long auction in New York of her vast collection of luxury dresses, jewels and fine art saw total sales topping \$153 million**

New York

Internationally known for her lavish lifestyle and glam taste, silver screen siren Elizabeth Taylor also boasted a playful side, and now some of her personal effects that bared it are hitting the auction block.

Items including a gold vermeil link belt, a sumptuous silk caftan and a studded black leather Versace biker jacket belonging to the late Hollywood legend will travel across the Atlantic on the

famed Queen Mary 2 ocean liner, giving guests a first glimpse at Taylor's treasures.

Following the actress' death in 2011 at age 79, a week-long Christie's auction in New York of her vast collection of luxury dresses, jewels and fine art saw total sales topping \$156 million.

But this time the items anticipated to go for a wide range of price points show the side of a larger-than-life woman -- known for starring roles in classics like "Cleopatra" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" -- her closest friends and family knew.

"The icon on screen isn't the grandmother that I would hang out with around the house," said her grandson Quinn Tivey, a 33-year-old artist who is an ambassador for The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.

"I don't really know Elizabeth Taylor the celebrity," Tivey told AFP aboard the enormous ocean liner his grandmother frequented, on which he will make the

week-long journey with the preview of her items.

"To me she was just grandma."

Martin Nolan -- the executive director of Julien's Auctions, which is hosting the sale -- says some items like Taylor's scarves or costume jewelry carry pre-sale estimates of \$200 to \$400, meaning not only institutions and members of the upper crust will have a chance at taking something home.

"I think people will be surprised that they will be able to actually acquire and afford to have something from the amazing Elizabeth Taylor," he told AFP.

After their voyage across the Atlantic and to the Newbridge Silverware's Museum of Style Icons in Ireland, Taylor's effects will be taken to California, with bidding December 6-8 online and in person at a Beverly Hills exhibition.

The gold coin-chain belt from Cartier was a gift Taylor gave to her mother to match one of her own, which she engraved with the message: "To My 'Hippy' Mom All my love Elizabeth."

The house estimates the belt could go for between \$1,000 and \$2,000, while the aforementioned leather jacket -- which Taylor wore in 1992 on Johnny Carson's iconic talk show -- carries an estimated price tag of \$4,000 to \$6,000.

Tivey remembers growing up watching movies with his grandmother, her frequent advice on his love life -- and even swiping the jacket from Taylor's closet on occasion to give it a try.

He hopes that

whoever buys it will "actually wear it" and share her style with the public.

