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Archaeologists hope to learn much from Phoenician-era cemetery in Tyre

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

TYRE: A Phoenician-era cemetery has been unearthed in the coastal town of Tyre, officials said Wednesday, adding that the find could provide key information about the seafaring civilization. "This discovery represents for now the most important source of information to better understand the history of the Phoenicians in this region," said Ali Badawi, an archaeologist and head of antiquities in Tyre, which was a major Phoenician seaport from about 2000 BC through to Roman times.

He told AFP that the cemetery, found nearly intact at the eastern edge of the town, dates to between the ninth and seventh centuries BC.

"The importance of this cemetery is that it is located in one of the main Phoenician towns," said Maria Aubet, a professor of archaeology and head of a team from the University of Barcelona which uncovered the find.

Badawi said more than 60 pieces of hermetically sealed earthenware, 50 centimeters deep, were found scattered across a 300-square-meter area at the site. Inside the jars were charred bones.

"It was traditional in Phoenician times to burn the cadavers and the bones of the dead," Aubet said.

Researchers hope the bones will help shed some light on the diet and the social status of those buried at the site.

The archaeological dig began four years ago but was interrupted in 2006 by the July-August war with Israel. - **AFP**

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