**The 5 archaeological discoveries that are candidates for the victory of the 7th edition of the International Archaeological Discovery Award “Khaled al-Asaad” have been announced**

**The Award, promoted by the Mediterranean Exchange of Archaeological Tourism and by Archeo, will be assigned in Paestum on Friday, October 1st during the 23rd BMTA**

The **Mediterranean Exchange of Archaeological Tourism and Archeoo** decided to pay the due homage to **archaeological discoveries** with an annual Award assigned in collaboration with the international magazines that are media partners of the Exchange: **Antike Welt** (Germany), **Archäologie in Deutschland** (Germany**, Archéologia** (France), **as. Archäologie der Schweiz** (Switzerland), **Current Archaeology** (United Kingdom), **Dossiers d’Archéologie** (France).

The Director of the Exchange **Ugo Picarelli** and the Editor of Archeo **Andreas M. Steiner** shared this common path, aware that “today, civilizations and cultures of the past and their relations with the surrounding environment are more and more important to rediscover the identities, in a global society which is dispersing its values”. The Award, therefore, aims to spread the exchange of experiences, represented by international discoveries, also as best practices of intercultural dialogue and cooperation among the people.

The **International Archaeological Discovery Award “Khaled al-Asaad”** – at its 7th edition and named after the archaeologist of Palmyra, who paid with his life the defense of cultural heritage - **is the only global prize dedicated to the world of archaeology and particularly to its protagonists, the archaeologists**, who with sacrifice, dedication, competence and scientific research live their job, both as scholars of the past and as professionals working for their territory.

In 2015 the Award has been assigned to **Katerina Peristeri**, head of the excavations, for the discovery of the Tomb of Amphipolis (Greece); in 2016 to **INRAP** Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives (France), in the person of President **Dominique Garcia**, for the Celtic Tomb of Lavau; in 2017 to **Peter Pfälzner**, Director of the archaeological, for the Bronze Age city near the small Kurdish village of Bassetki; in 2018 to **Benjamin Clement**, the archaeologist leading the dig, for the “Little Pompeii” in Vienne (France); in 2019 to **Jonathan Adams**, Responsible of the Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project (MAP) for the discovery of the most ancient intact shipwreck of the world; in 2020 to **Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Director of the** Italian Archaeological Mission to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Art History of the University of Udine, **the discovery of “ten Assyrian rock reliefs depicting the gods of Ancient Mesopotamia.**

The Award, assigned **to the first classified archaeological discovery, will be selected among the 5 finalists** according to the indications provided by the Editors of each magazine and will be conferred on Friday, October 1st, during the 23rd BMTA, in Paestum from September 30th to October 3rd, 2021, along with the archaeological discovery winner of the 6th edition of prof. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, not yet presented because of the postponement of the 23rd edition, that didn’t take place in November 2020.

Moreover, a **“Special Award”** will be attributed to the archaeological discovery, among the five finalists, that will receive the greatest consensus from the general public through the Facebook page of the Exchange ([www.facebook.com/borsamediterraneaturismoarcheologico](http://www.facebook.com/borsamediterraneaturismoarcheologico)) in the period from July, 1st to September, 1st.

**The five archaeological discoveries of 2020 finalists of the 7th edition of the International Archaeological Discovery Award “Khaled al-Asaad” are:**

* **Egypt: at Saqqara, Unesco World Heritage site 30 km south of Cairo, the finding of hundreds of sarcophagi**
* **Germany: the truth on the Nebra Disk, the most analyzed find of the German archaeological history**
* **Indonesia: on the island of Suwalesi the most ancient rock paintings with a red ochre boar of 45.500 years ago**
* **Israel: in Jerusalem three rooms of 2.000 years ago were hidden under the Wailing Wall**
* **Italy: many discoveries in Pompeii, a Thermopolium, a ceremonial chariot, the Etruscan origins of the city**

**The finding of hundreds of sarcophagi at Saqqara, Unesco World Heritage site 30 km south of Cairo**

In November, a precious treasure of **50 wooden sarcophagi** was found in the necropolis by a team of archaeologists led by Zahi Hawass. The finding sheds new light on the history of Saqqara during the New Kingdom, the period of Egyptian history between the 16th century BC and the 11th century BC. The precious coffins were found in 52 burial pits, between 10 and 12 meters deep, which were part of the funerary temple dedicated to Queen Naert, wife of King Teti, the first pharaoh of the 6th dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Also in November, near the pyramid of Djoser (the first complete concrete structure existing in the world and the oldest step pyramid in all of Egypt), over 100 sarcophagi, dating back to two eras, Ptolemy and Late Period, and more than 40 2,500-year-old statue with golden masks and mummies, well preserved in 12 meters deep wells were discovered.

In October there were the discovery of **3 burial wells**, 10, 11 and 12 meters deep, containing more than 59 anthropomorphic and polychrome sarcophagi dating back to the 26th dynasty, arranged in different chambers, stacked one on top of the other and belonging to priests, high officials and prominent personalities of high society. In addition, the sands of the cemetery area have unearthed as many as 28 wooden statues of the god mostly venerated in the necropolis, Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, and a large number of amulets, *ushabti* and other objects, including the bronze statue with red agate, turquoise and lapis lazuli marquetries of the god Nefertum.

In September, **27 intact sarcophagi** buried for more than 2,500 years and never opened, with excellently preserved wooden coffins, painted in bright colors, were found with other smaller artifacts, inside a well at the sacred site.

All these extraordinary ancient treasures, found at different times from the Egyptian archaeological mission headed by Mustafa Waziri, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, will be transferred to GEM Grand Egyptian Museum to be exhibited after the necessary restorations.

**The truth on the Nebra Disk, discovered in Central Germany, the most analyzed find ever**

The Nebra Disk is a metal plate with gold applications dating back to the Bronze Age, which clearly depicts astronomical phenomena and symbols of strong religious imprint, considered the oldest representation of the sky and one of the most important archaeological findings of the 20th century. The find is a bronze disc with a diameter of 32 cm and a weight of 2 kg on which the possible figures of the Sun, the crescent moon and a set of 32 small disks that could represent the stars are shown, in gold foil. Of these 32 gold disks, 29 are clearly visible, while the other ones detached, however, leaving an evident trace on the surface of the bronze disk.

Discovered in 1999 by some tomb looters inside a stone cavity on Mount Mittelberg, near Nebra, at an altitude of 252 meters, in the Ziegelroda forest, 180 km southwest of Berlin, it is now in the regional museum of Prehistory of Halle, Saxony-Anhalt. The disk was mainly examined by archaeologist Harald Meller (Halle Institute for Archeology and Conservation of Historical Monuments), astronomer Wolfhard Schlosser (University of Bochum) and by chemists specialized in archaeology Ernst Pernicka (archaeometallurgy), Heinrich Wunderlich (construction technique and method) and by Miranda J. Aldhouse Green (University of Wales), archaeologist and scholar of Bronze Age religions.

In a publication of scientific journal "Archaeologia Austriaca" Meller himself, together with twelve of his collaborators, proposed a synthesis of all the most recent investigations in favor of the attribution of the disk to 1600 BC, or the Bronze Age, with unequivocal evidences on the exactness of the place of discovery which, beyond the declarations of the two (certainly not very reliable) discoverers, are now difficult to object to thanks to the use of scientific data: the increased concentration, in the ground, of gold and copper particles, explained by the prolonged stay of the find in the ground, and the correspondence between the soil at the place of discovery and traces of it found on one of the axes and on the disk itself.

The dating of the find uses the results of radiocarbon analysis carried out on organic remains (traces of birch bark) taken from the handle of one of the swords that were found together with the disk.

The counter-tests face, on a large scale, the "accusation" made against the record of not being, chronologically and territorially, contextual to the other components of the discovery. The central topic thus becomes the chemical composition of metals (for which there is still no scientific dating method) and their place of origin. From the comparison with a database, which brings together 50,000 prehistoric metalliferous mines in Europe (and based on the geochemical examination of the concentration of lead isotopes), the origin of the copper used in the disk from deposits in the Eastern Alps, in present-day Austria (Mitterberg mine, near Salzburg) emerged, while the gold of the decorations comes, most likely, from the Carnon River, in the Cornwall region (Southwestern England).

**In Indonesia, on the island of Suwalesi the most ancient rock paintings with a red ochre boar of 45.500 years ago**

**Dated to 45,500 years ago, the Celebes Wart Boar rock painting, found in the Leang Tedongnge limestone cave may be the oldest known cave painting in the world. For comparison, the rock paintings of Lascaux, France, are dated to around 17,500 years ago; the oldest ones of the Altamira caves, in Spain, 36,000 years ago.**

**The cave is located in a valley enclosed by steep limestone cliffs, and it is accessible only by a narrow passage in the cave and only in the dry season, as the valley floor is inundated during the wet season. "The secluded Bugis community, which lives in this hidden valley, claims it has never been visited before by Westerners," Adam Brumm of the Australian Research Center for Human Evolution at Griffith University, co-leader of the research team conducted with Arkenas, Indonesia's leading archaeological research center, Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional, explained. The red ochre painting shows a wild boar with a short crest of erect hair and a pair of horn-like facial warts in front of the eyes, a characteristic of adult male Sulawesi boars, which are endemic to the island.**

**"Humans have hunted Sulawesi boars for tens of thousands of years," said Indonesian archaeologist Basran Burhan. "These pigs were the most commonly depicted animal in Ice Age rock art on the island, which suggests that they have long been valued both as food and as a hub of creative thought and artistic expression."**

**The rock art created in the limestone caves can be dated using the analysis of the uranium series of calcium carbonate deposits, the "cave popcorns", which naturally form on the surface of the cave wall used for painting. In Leang Tedongnge, a small "popcorn" had formed on the rear foot of one of the pig figures after it was painted; once dated, it provided a minimum age for the painting; considering that this deposit was dated to 45,500 years ago, the scene had therefore been painted some time earlier.**

**Numerous examples of primitive rock art have been dated previously, including representations of animals and narrative scenes that are exceptional both for the quality of their execution and its rarity, at least 43,900 years old.**

**In Jerusalem three rooms of 2.000 years ago were hidden under the Wailing Wall**

It is an underground complex that includes three rooms containing everyday objects. That portion of the wall, near the Second Temple (or Herod's Temple), had been destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 BC.

In fact, once there were two sacred temples in Jerusalem, main places of worship built on the Temple Mount, but they were both destroyed first by the Babylonians and then, indeed, by the Romans. The rooms were hidden behind a layer of rock. Archaeologists were unaware of the fact that they had discovered new structures connected to each other by stairways.

Barak Monnickendam-Givon, Co-Director of excavations on behalf of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, explained that “We are convinced that everything that now includes the square of the Western Wall was supported by a colonnade. We will dig further to prove it. Once the excavations have been completed, there will be a clear division between the liturgical activity reserved for the prayer of the devotees and the tourism one, with visitors coming to discover the archaeological site". Tehila Sadiel, the second Co-Director in charge of the excavations, specified that "Among the various objects, we found terracotta crockery, some bases of oil lamp used to make light, a stone cup exceptional for the period and a fragment of *qalal*, a large stone container used for water, perhaps linked to the Jewish practices of the purification ritual”.

After all, over the millennia, Jerusalem has been built and rebuilt several times by all the populations who have inhabited and conquered it. The layers of houses, streets and sacred places overlap each other, and it is therefore easy to find a new layer of history hidden under some brick floors.

Under the Wailing Wall there are already tunnels that can be visited and that run along the 485 meters of wall that surrounded the ancient Temple and which are now hidden under the houses of the Old City.

**In Pompeii, many discoveries: a Thermopolium, a ceremonial chariot, the Etruscan origins of the city**

The Greek geographer Strabo traced the origins of Pompeii to the Osci, a population of Samnite lineage belonging to pre-Roman Campania, for many centuries considered the most valid one, even if the foundation of Pompeii, which took place at least 700 years before its tragic end in 79 AD, continued to be shrouded in mystery.

The latest excavation campaigns tell us that Pompeii would have been an Etruscan city in terms of language and culture, albeit built with a different style than the one typical of its founders. The discovery presented by the Director Massimo Osanna and archaeologist Carlo Rescigno is based on the hundreds of amphorae, vases, cruets and cups with inscriptions found in the excavation of the sanctuary built along the road that connected the city to the sea, an open-air construction with a rectangular plan, re-emerged a few hundred meters from the Southern walls of the city, in what is referred to as the “Fondo Iozzino”. The found cups bear graffiti with ritual phrases accompanied by the name of the person who made the offer at the sanctuary, all Etruscan names, some of which have never been found before in the territories of Campania but known in the centers of Etruscan origin in Lazio and Tuscany. Furthermore, the deity honored on these objects is always indicated with the generic name "Apa", which means "Father" in Etruscan and it represents a clear reference to the religious culture of the Etruscans. In addition, there is the sanctuary of Apollo, the main Pompeian sacred area, where historical and more recent excavations have revealed cups with inscriptions once again in the Etruscan alphabet and language.

The almost intact environment of a ***Thermopolium,*** a food shop to which was added a street food section with various types of dishes, from snails to a sort of paella. The Thermopoly of Regio V, one of the diners of Pompeii, with the image of the Nereid on horseback, had already been partially excavated in 2019. Now it has resurfaced in its entirety with new rich decorations of still lifes, findings of food remains, bones of animals and victims of the volcano eruption. In the new excavation phase, further still life scenes with representations of animals emerged on the last arm of the counter that had been brought to light. Bone fragments of the same animals were found inside the containers obtained in the thickness of the counter, containing food that was meant for sale. Among these, there are two mallard ducks exposed upside down, ready to be cooked and eaten, a rooster and a dog on a leash. In addition, human bones were found, damaged because of the passage of tunnels made in the 17th century by clandestine excavators in search of precious objects and various pantry and transport materials (nine amphorae, a bronze patera, two flasks, one common table pottery bowl). For the first time such an environment has been excavated in its entirety and it has been possible to conduct all the analyzes allowed by today's technologies by an interdisciplinary team made of physical anthropologist, archaeologist, archaeobotanist, archaeozoologist, geologist, volcanologist, to understand which products were sold and which food was eaten.

The discovery of a ceremonial chariot, an extraordinary find that emerged intact from the excavation of the suburban villa in Civita Giuliana, north of Pompeii, beyond the walls of the ancient city, is part of the joint activity that aims to fight illegal activities of clandestine excavations in the area by "grave robbers".

A large **ceremonial chariot** with four wheels, with its iron elements, bronze and tin erotic decorations (it was perhaps a wedding chariot or destined to the cult of Ceres or Venus), the mineralized wooden remains, the imprints of organic elements (from the ropes to the remains of plant decorations), was found almost intact in the portico in front of the stable where the remains of 3 horses had already emerged in 2018, including one with a harness. The excavations, which also made it possible to verify the extension of the underground tunnels, took place partly below and close to modern houses, with consequent structural and logistical difficulties, due to the 6 meters of depth. Vehicles for transport have been found in the past in Pompeii, such as the one of Menander's house, or the two chariots found in Villa Arianna, but nothing like the chariot of Civita Giuliana, a ceremonial chariot, probably the *Pilentum,* not used for everyday activities or agricultural transport but to accompany the community's festive moments, parades and processions.

Press Office Leader srl

*comunicazione@leaderonline.it*

**for info:** [**www.bmta.it**](http://www.bmta.it)