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## Pristine Pre-Roman Tomb Discovered in Italy

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for [National Geographic News](#)

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A 2,200-year-old tomb has been discovered completely intact in central [Italy](#), revealing the remains and ornate possessions of some 30 Etruscans, members of the ancient civilization that ruled the region before the rise of Rome.

The find was unearthed earlier this month by a team of amateur archaeologists working in the woods of Tuscany, 70 miles (115 kilometers) south of Florence (see [Italy map](#)).

The 6.5-foot long (2-meter-long) carved stone chamber contains dozens of urns full of human ashes, a typical burial method of the Etruscans, said Andrea Marcocci, an archaeology student at the University of Siena who discovered the site and directed the excavation.

"All in all, there were 30 urns—3 of them made of stone, 2 bronze, and 25 terra-cotta," Marcocci said.

"The remains probably belong to the members of a single family, the smaller urns holding the ashes of the servants."

Among the vessels, the archaeologists found bronze coins, rings, small terra-cotta plates, bronze mirrors, and a black stone amulet.

"It's noteworthy because it's still intact," Gabriella Barbieri, an official with the Archaeological Superintendence of Tuscany, said of the find.

"In the last 2,200 years nobody broke in the chamber to steal the artifacts, a quite rare occurrence," she said.

### Roman Invasion

The Etruscans ruled central Italy from at least 700 B.C. until they were assimilated by the Roman Republic in the second and first centuries B.C.

(See a [photo gallery of ancient Rome in 3-D](#).)

"We know Etruscans inhabited this area," Barbieri said.

"There are probably lots of buried tombs and ruins spread around the countryside, but we cannot dig everywhere."

The newfound tomb, found in the town of Civitella Paganico, dates back to the second or third century B.C., when nearby Etruscan settlements were being conquered by the Romans.

"Etruscan culture and practices, such as burial ceremonies, were still alive only around the countryside, far from urban centers, where families and small groups made a life cultivating land and rearing livestock," said Andrea Zifferero, professor of Etruscan history and Italian antiquities at the University of Siena.

"The urns and objects found in Civitella Paganico will give us a cross-section of the last remains of rural Etruscan society well after the Roman conquest of the area," Zifferero said.

The ashes and the artifacts are now in storage waiting to be cleaned and restored.

"Researchers will analyze the small fragments of bones mixed with the ashes to find out the age, sex, and possible diseases of those 30 people," Marcocci, the Siena archaeology student, said.

The objects will likely be displayed in a small museum to be built in Civitella Paganico.

### **Local Lore Proves True**

In Civitella Paganico, residents have known for a long time that something interesting was hidden in the woods.

"When I was a child, my father told me there were strange holes in the ground around the woods," Marcocci said.

"So then years ago I went to inspect the area looking for artifacts and actually found the evidence of underground structures. I left them alone because at the time they were well hidden from robbers."

Logging efforts began around the site last winter, and Marcocci became worried that tomb raiders would find and break into the ruins.

He founded the Odysseus Association, a group of young amateur archaeologists, and contacted Barbieri, the archaeological official, to obtain a permit to dig.

The team discovered the urns on the ninth day of digging, Marcocci said.

"It was a overwhelming experience, as we saw we were the first to unearth the place in more than 2,000 years," he added.

Barbieri said authorities will work to protect the area from looters now that word of the discovery is out.

"We know that other intact tombs may be buried around the woods," she said.

Meanwhile the Odysseus Association is planning to apply for a new permit to continue excavating.

"We need to get in before the raiders," Marcocci said.

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