

2,000-year-old 'Tomb of Cerberus' with fresco of three-headed dog uncovered in Italy

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In the painting, Hercules is seen battling the three-headed hound of Hades, cerberus, in his twelfth and final labour. Photograph:(Others)

Story highlights

The tomb was discovered in an archaeological survey being carried out on a farmland before the maintenance work of the water system of the city starts

A sealed 2,000-year-old tomb, which had a fresco of Cerberus - Ancient Greek mythology's three-headed dog - was uncovered in Italy.

The archaeologists discovered the burial chamber in Giugliano, a suburb of Naples, which is believed to be around 2,000 years old.

It was discovered on a farmland during an archaeological survey which was done before the maintenance work on the city's water system started.

Previously, a large number of burial sites were found by archaeologists in the same area that likely date from the Roman Republic era (510-31 BC) to the Roman Imperial Age (31 BC – AD 476).

The undiscovered tomb features various frescoes, which are present on its walls and ceilings in largely pristine condition.

In the various frescoes, the most notable mythological figure drawn is that of the three-headed dog, believed to guard the gates of the underworld. Because of this, the burial chamber was named the 'Tomb of Cerberus'.

The attention-grabbing painting represents the 12th and most dangerous of the Labours of Hercules when he was guided by Mercury to Hades to capture the three-headed monster dog Cerberus.

Other mythological figures present in the frescoes were ichthyocentaurs, a centaurine-type sea god which has a human's upper body, the tail of a fish and the lower anterior half and forelegs similar to that of a horse.

The archaeologists discovered the burial chamber after they spotted a wall which was built using an ancient Roman construction technique, which is called opus incertum.

An unprecedented discovery

To enter the burial chamber, tiles covering the ceiling opening had to be removed by the archaeologists carefully, which led them to an 'unprecedented' discovery.

"The tomb has frescoed ceilings and walls in perfect condition, with mythological scenes that go all around the room and figurative representations among which, a three-headed dog stands out," stated Mariano Nuzzo, the superintendent of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the Naples metropolitan area.

"Three painted klinai, an altar with vessels for libations, the deceased still placed on the funeral beds with rich objects – complete the picture of a discovery which, in this area, is unprecedented," he added.

There has been continuous work to excavate more of the tomb without damaging its interiors.

"The emotion aroused by the privilege of such a discovery is indescribable. The territory of Giugliano, after years of oblivion, is finally returning significant vestiges of its glorious past, to be preserved and protected, thanks to a common effort," Nuzzo added.

(With inputs from agencies)