

15 July 2008

By: Gabriel Gache, Science News Editor



David Shalom presenting the artefact he found  
Israeli Antiquities Authority

## [Ancient Relic Found in Israel's Mediterranean Waters](#)

### *Ancient sailors used talismans to ward off evil*

A white marble disc some 20 centimeters across, flat on one side and convex on the other, perforated in the center and presenting two concentric circles on the convex side, was found in the Mediterranean coast of Israel near the ancient Yavne-Yam port city. The Israeli authorities said in a press release issued this week-end that the 2,500 year old artifact is believed to be a talisman representing an eye meant protect the ships of superstitious sailors against evil. Yaakov Sharvit, director of the Marine Unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority, said that the item would have been most likely placed on the bow of an ancient warship or a cargo ship. "We know from drawings on pottery vessels ... that this model was very common on the bows of ships and was used to protect them from the evil eye and envy, and was meant as a navigation aid and to act as a pair of eyes which looked ahead and warned of danger. But we thought the eyes were only on fighting ships, not merchant ships. Only four eyes like these have been discovered in the world," Sharvit explained. The relic was found by lifeguard David Shalom, who was swimming off the coast of the Palmahim beach and who immediately turned it to the authorities. "This was an act of good citizenry," he said. Shalom says that he was snorkeling in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea when he saw something curious on the bottom so he went diving for it. "It captured my curiosity, so I asked someone what it was. I didn't think it was something so important, but I'm very happy that it is," Shalom said. The former ancient port city of Yavne-Yam was created somewhere in the Middle Bronze Age and remained inhabited until the Middle Ages, after which the current city of Yavne was created in the vicinity of the ancient settlement. For the past three decades, the area has been a gold mine for archaeologists who were looking for maritime artifacts and who dug up anything from fishing and maritime equipment to ovens and pots dated as far as the Late Bronze Age.