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Earliest Paintings of Apostles Uncovered in Roman Catacomb

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DISCOVERIES

Early Christian Art

Earliest Paintings of Apostles Uncovered in Roman Catacomb



The humid and closed atmosphere meant that the walls of the tomb of the Roman noblewoman were completely covered with thick white calcium deposits. Two years of restoration have uncovered the fourth-century Christian images. Photo courtesy of Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology.

The images date from the late fourth century AD and were found in the underground chambers of the Catacomb of St. Thecla near San Paolo Fuori le Mura. Professor Fabrizio Bisconti, a university professor at l'Università Roma Tre, notes "It's an exceptional discovery that was made by using a laser technique to uncover the yellow and red pigments beneath layers of calcium deposits. The tomb is believed to have belonged to a noble woman of Rome."



Paul, Peter, John and Andrew. Photo courtesy of Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology.

Chief restorer Barbara Mazzei reported that “Using the laser, restorers were able to sear off all the layers of calcium that had been bound onto the painting because the laser beam stopped burning at the white of the calcium deposits, which when chipped off left the brilliant darker colors underneath it unscathed.”



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