

2011

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. "1,500-year-old church found in Israel." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 3, 2 (2011). <http://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol3/iss2/17>

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1,500-year-old church found in Israel

Israeli archaeologists have discovered a 1,500-year-old church in the Judean hills, including an unusually well-preserved mosaic floor with images of lions, foxes, fish and peacocks. The Byzantine church located southwest of Jerusalem, excavated over the last two months, has been covered again with soil for its own protection.

The small basilica with an exquisitely decorated floor was active between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D., said the dig's leader, Amir Ganor of the Israel Antiquities Authority. "It is unique in its craftsmanship and level of preservation," he said. The excavation revealed stones carved with crosses, identifying it as a church. The building had been built atop another structure around 500 years older, dating to Roman times, when scholars believe the settlement was inhabited by Jews. Hewn into the rock underneath that structure is a network of tunnels that archaeologists believe were used by Jewish rebels fighting Roman armies in the second century A.D. Stone steps lead down from the floor of church to a small burial cave, which scholars suggest might have been venerated as the burial place of the Old Testament prophet Zacharias.





Adapted from http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110202/ap_on_re_mi_ea/ml_israel_ancient_church