

2015

### Discoveries

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#### Recommended Citation

. "Discoveries." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 5, 2 (2015).  
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol5/iss2/9>

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A Byzantine church ruin in Athrun, Libya similar to one that will be featured at the Ashmolean Museum

## **Byzantine 'flat-pack' church to be reconstructed in Oxford after spending 1,000 years on the seabed**

Centuries before the Swedes started flat-packing their furniture, the Holy Roman Emperor Justinian had his own version, sending self-assembly churches to newly conquered parts of his empire. Now one of the “Ikea-style” churches, which spent more than 1,000 years on a seabed after the ship carrying it sank, is to be reconstructed for the first time in Oxford. The Byzantine church will be on display at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology as part of the exhibition *Storms, War and Shipwrecks: Treasures from the Sicilian Seas*, opening in June. Paul Roberts, co-curator of the exhibition, said: “Everything in the exhibition will be from under the sea. It’s very different from what’s been done before. All these different movements of people and goods have left their imprint on the seabed in a way you don’t get on the land.” Among the most intriguing exhibits are the remains of the portable church, which dates to around 550 AD. The museum, which is attached to the University of Oxford, will erect it using up to six of its pillars and the early pulpit or ambo. No museum has attempted to reconstruct the pieces until now, and the Ashmolean director Alexander Sturgis said he hoped it would be easier than putting together flat-pack furniture.

From his base at Constantinople, Justinian sent out stone-carrying ships – known as *naves lapidariae* – carrying marble church interiors to sites in Italy and north Africa to fortify and

regulate Christianity across his empire. There they would be installed inside the shell of a building put together with local material. “You show your power by planting churches,” Dr Roberts said. “He sent out flat-pack, self-assembly churches – Ikea churches.” Remains of the completed buildings still survive in Ravenna in Italy, in Cyprus and Libya. Yet the ships were so heavy that some became unbalanced and capsized in stormy weather. It is unclear where the remains in the exhibition were heading. Hundreds of the prefabricated marble elements of a church basilica were found in a shipwreck off the coast of Sicily in the 1960s by German archaeologist Gerhard Kapitan, and most of it has been kept in storage. Still more remains on the seabed. The exhibition will display other discoveries from the bottom of the sea off the coast of Sicily made by underwater archaeologists over the past 60 years. 🐼

From: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/byzantine-flat-pack-church-to-be-reconstructed-in-oxford-after-spending-1000-years-on-the-seabed-a6732376.html>

## Archaeologists Find Exquisite Medieval Ring with Obsidian Gemstone in Bulgaria’s Rock City Perperikon



A massive gold-plated silver ring with an obsidian gemstone dating from the Late Middle Ages has been discovered by the archaeologists excavating the ancient and medieval rock city of Perperikon (Perperik) near the southern Bulgarian city of Kardzhali in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. The team of archaeologist Prof. Nikolay Ovcharov has presented its latest finds from Perperikon with the completion of the 2015 excavations and restoration works in the rock city. “We discovered the ring back in September but it was in a very bad condition, and covered with a thick layer of patina,” Ovcharov explains, as cited by the [24 Chasa](#) daily. They were especially impressed with the fine polishing of the gemstone made of obsidian, i.e. volcanic glass, “This semi-precious stone is very hard to process so we have really come across an incredible jewel,” says the archaeologist.

It is believed that the gold-plated silver ring belonged to an aristocrat from the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1396 AD), or, alternatively, to a Byzantine noble as the Perperikon Fortress changed hands between Bulgaria and Byzantium a number of times in the Late Middle Ages. The discovery of the ring with the obsidian gemstone is said to confirm once again the wealth that the rock city of Perperikon enjoyed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeologists have already found hundreds of gold and silver coins, earrings and other decorations as well as crosses or engolpions (encolpions) worn on the chest by Eastern Orthodox Christians. 🐼

From: <http://archaeologyinbulgaria.com/2015/11/05/archaeologists-find-exquisite-medieval-ring-with-obsidian-gemstone-in-bulgarias-rock-city-perperikon-complete-excavations-of-its-acropolis/>

## Archaeologists Unearth Large Early Christian Basilica with Roman Grave Right Outside of Bulgaria's Capital Sofia

One of the largest Early Christian basilicas in Bulgaria, which is located in the Buhovo Monastery “St. Mary Magdalene” near the town of Buhovo in Sofia Municipality, to the



northeast of Sofia's main urban area, has been completely unearthed, with the archaeologists also discovering a grave of a Roman citizen from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The ruins of the Early Christian basilica in Buhovo are situated about 27 km away from the Sofia downtown, the location of the archaeological structures of the Ancient Thracian and Roman city of Serdica. The basilica has now been

fully explored and researched, after three years of archaeological excavations led by archaeologist Snezhana Goryanova from the National Institute and Museum of Archaeology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The Early Christian basilica in the Buhovo Monastery which dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century, is of impressive size – it is 41 meters long, and 27 meters wide at its widest section. According to archaeologist Snezhana Goryanova, the basilica was a one-apse, nave and two aisle plan with a narthex, and two accessory rooms.

In its southeast corner was a funeral room where the archaeologists found the grave of a Roman citizen who appears to have been important for the local Early Christian community. In the grave, archaeologists found a coin, the so-called obol for Charon, the ferryman of Hades who, according to Ancient Thracian, Greek, and Roman mythology, carries the souls of the newly deceased across the rivers Styx and Acheron in the underworld. “Under one of his heels,



we have found a coin of Emperor Constantius Gallus (r. 351-354), Caesar of the Eastern Roman Empire under Emperor Constantius II, helping to date the burial. Other artifacts found in the grave include bracelets, crosses, and fragments of glazed tiles used to adorn the exterior walls of the basilica.



During the later Middle Ages and Early Modern period (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries), long after the basilica had been destroyed, its ruins became the site of the necropolis of a nearby Bulgarian settlement. After the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the site had been completely abandoned and forgotten. It would be found again at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by locals following a legend that told of its existence. In 1881, these locals built the small church St. Mary Magdalene which is still in operation today, but is in dire need of repairs and rehabilitation. 🐼

From: <http://archaeologyinbulgaria.com/2015/09/08/archaeologists-unearth-large-early-christian-basilica-with-roman-grave-right-outside-of-bulgarias-capital-sofia/>

## **Vatican Library digitizes ancient manuscripts, makes them available for free**

One of the oldest libraries on the planet is digitizing its archive of ancient manuscripts — and they're all available to view free of charge. The Vatican Apostolic Library is undertaking an extensive digital preservation of its 82,000 document collection. Over the course of a few years, with the assistance of Japanese company NTT DATA, the library has catalogued nearly 4,500 manuscripts online — and it hopes to reach the 15,000 mark within the next four years.



Vatican librarian, wearing white gloves, turns the pages of a facsimile copy of the Borgianus Latinus, a missal for use at Christmas made for Pope Alexander VI. Photo by Alessandro Bianchi/REUTERS

Monsignor Cesare Pasini, Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library, called the project a “true effort in favor of the conservation and dissemination of knowledge at the service of culture throughout the world;” writing on the library’s site that the project could eventually lead to 40 million digitized pages and 43 petabytes worth of data. The entire undertaking is expected to take at least 15 years and cost more than \$63 million dollars — an effort the Vatican Library is attempting to support, in part, by crowdsourcing funding.

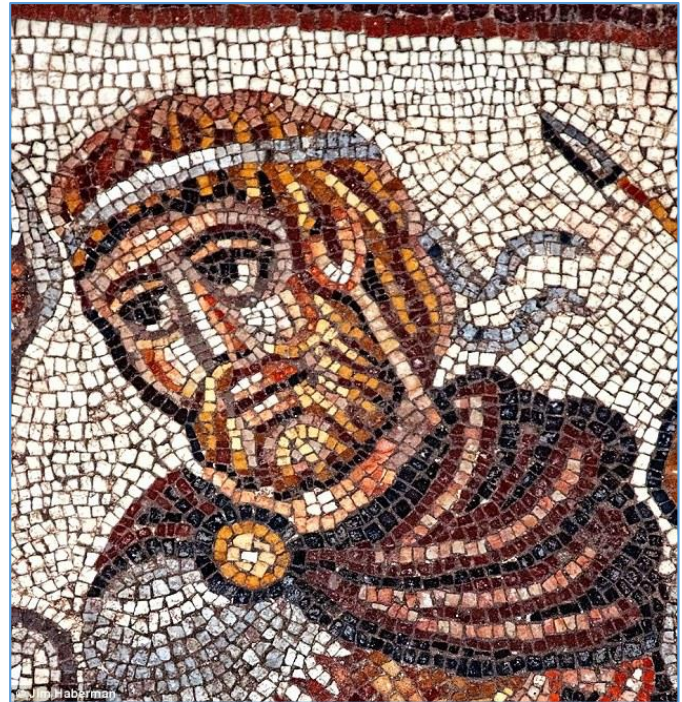
“Thanks to Digita Vaticana it will be possible to contribute to an undertaking on which the preservation and safeguard of the oldest knowledge depends,” the site writes. “Technology gives us the opportunity to think of the past while looking towards the future, and the world’s culture, thanks to the web, can truly become a common heritage, freely accessible to all, anywhere and anytime.” The current list of digitized manuscripts can be viewed through the Vatican Library website. <http://www.digitavaticana.org/?lang=en> 🐼

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/vatican-library-digitizes-ancient-manuscripts-shares-free-charge/>



## **Mosaic of Alexander the Great meeting a Jewish priest is the first ever non-biblical scene to be discovered inside a synagogue**

A team of archaeologists led by Professor Jodi Magness, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill came across the intriguing scene in the floor mosaic which includes three horizontal strips containing human and animal figures, such as elephants. The largest top strip contains the scene showing a meeting between two men, who perhaps represent the legendary warrior and a Jewish high priest. In the scene, a bearded soldier wearing battle dress and a purple cloak leads a bull by the horns, followed by other soldiers and elephants with shields tied to their sides. He is meeting with a grey-haired, bearded elderly man wearing a ceremonial white tunic and mantle, accompanied by young men with sheathed swords, also in ceremonial clothes.



Professor Magness said the identification of the figures in this mosaic is unclear because there are no stories in the Hebrew Bible involving elephants. “Battle elephants were associated with Greek armies beginning with Alexander the Great, so this might be a depiction of a Jewish legend about the meeting between Alexander and the Jewish high priest,” she said. “Different versions of this story appear in the writings of Flavius Josephus and in rabbinic literature.” The Huqoq excavations, which also involved a team from the Israel Antiquities Authority, began in 2012 when the first mosaics were found at the site, including an image of Samson. This summer, more of the floor has been uncovered, including a dedicatory inscription, figures, animals and mythological creatures arranged symmetrically around it. These include winged cupids holding roundels with theatre masks, muscular male figures wearing trousers who support a garland, a rooster, and male and female faces in a wreath encircling the inscription. In 2012, a mosaic showing Samson and the foxes was discovered in the synagogue’s east aisle. The next summer, a second mosaic showing Samson carrying the gate of Gaza on his shoulders was found. “It is not clear if there is a thematic connection between the Samson scenes and the other mosaics in the east aisle,” Professor Magness said. Adjacent to Samson are riders with horses, apparently representing Philistines and the Biblical figure is depicted as a giant in both scenes, reflecting

later Jewish traditions that developed about the judge and hero. Biblical scenes are not uncommon in Late Roman synagogue mosaics, but only one other ancient synagogue in Israel, at Khirbet Wadi Hamam, is decorated with a scene showing Samson. “The discovery of two Samson scenes in the Huqoq synagogue suggests that it was decorated with a Samson cycle - the first such cycle known in Israel,” said Professor Magness. 🐘



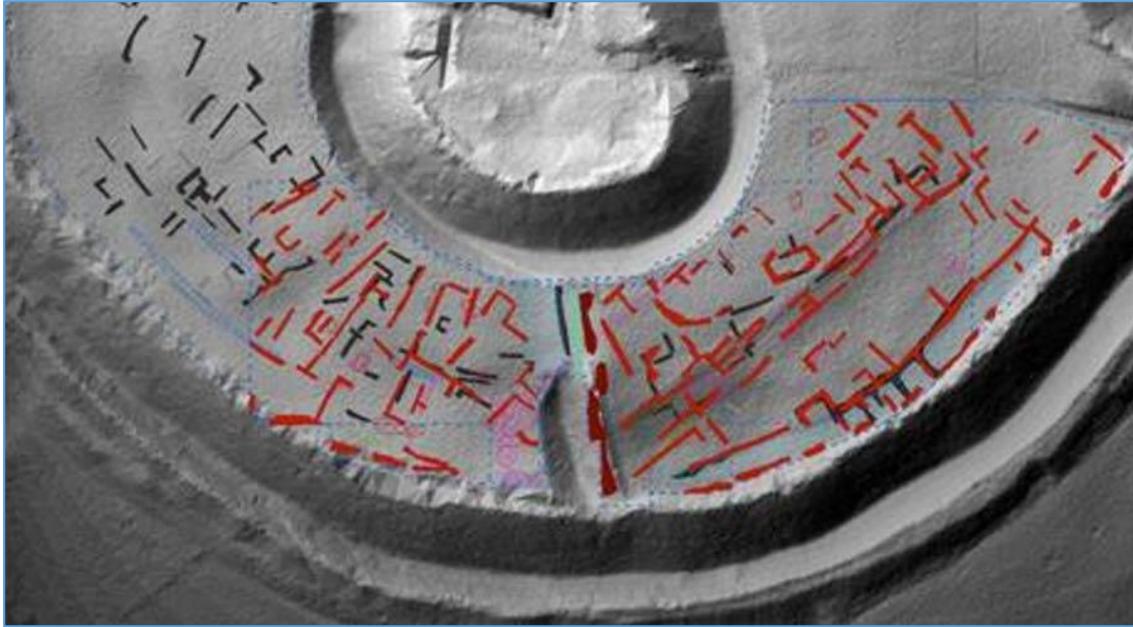
From: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3161093/Mosaic-Alexander-Great-meeting-Jewish-priest-non-biblical-scene-discovered-inside-synagogue.html#ixzz3tgtzeVXG>

## Archaeologists find vast medieval palace buried under prehistoric fortress at Old Sarum

Archaeologists in southern England have discovered what may be one of the largest medieval royal palaces ever found – buried under the ground inside a vast prehistoric fortress. The probable 12th century palace was discovered by archaeologists, using geophysical ground-penetrating ‘x-ray’ technology to map a long-vanished medieval city which has lain under grass on the site for more than 700 years.

Located inside the massive earthwork defenses of an Iron Age hill fort at Old Sarum in Wiltshire, the medieval city was largely founded by William the Conqueror who made it the venue for one of Norman England’s most important political events – a gathering of the country’s nobility at which all England’s mainly Norman barons and lords swore loyalty to William. The Old Sarum geophysical survey is being carried out by archaeologists from the University of Southampton - and is giving scholars an unprecedented and unique opportunity to more fully understand Norman town planning.





So far they have been able to reveal the buried foundations of literally dozens of ordinary houses – and a vast mystery complex that is likely to have been a huge royal palace. The 170- meter long and 65 meters-wide complex, was arranged around a large courtyard. A space, 60 meters long, was probably a great hall and there appears to have been a substantial tower and multi-story buildings with upper floors almost certainly supported by substantial columns. Its walls measured up to three meters in thickness.



“The location, design and size of the courtyarded complex strongly suggests that it was a palace, probably a royal one. The prime candidate for constructing it is perhaps Henry I sometime in the early 12th century,” said Dr Edward Impey, Director-General of the Royal Armories. It is the first time that archaeologists in Britain have ever found what is probably a previously unknown medieval royal palace of that size. Up until now historians have thought that the only royal residence at the site was a much smaller complex on top of a man-made castle mound.

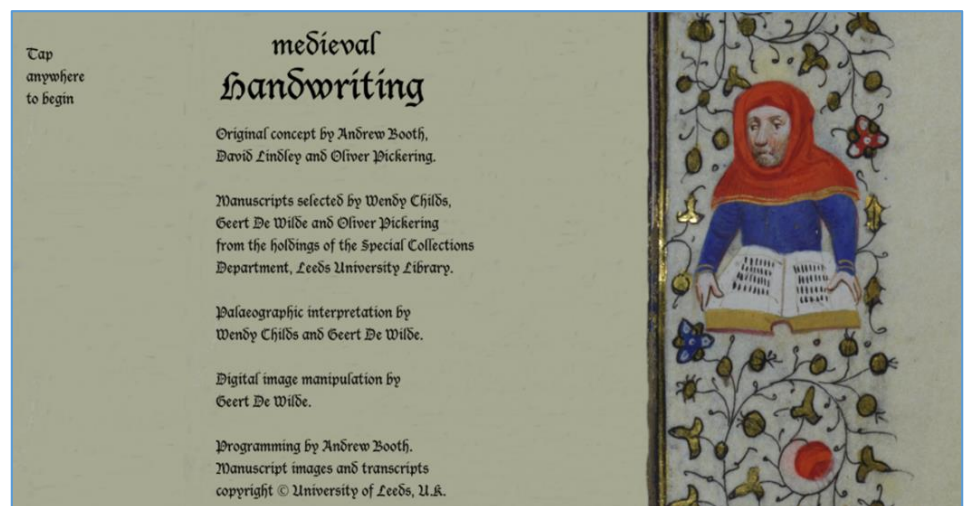
Because the city was largely abandoned up to 140 years after most of it had been built, and because it has remained a green field site ever since, it is giving academics a unique opportunity to study a Norman city. “Archaeologists and historians have known for centuries that there was a medieval city at Old Sarum, but until now there has been no proper plan of the site. Our survey shows where individual buildings are located – and from this we can piece together a detailed picture of the urban plan within the city walls,” said the archaeologist leading the geophysical survey, Kristian Strutt of the University of Southampton. 🐼

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/archaeologists-find-vast-medieval-palace-buried-under-prehistoric-fortress-at-old-sarum-9898759.html>

## Medieval Handwriting App

If you want to study medieval scripts, handwriting, and manuscripts or simply want to get acquainted with some of the finest medieval codices here is an app to get you started. The origins of the app – Medieval Handwriting – with online exercises in palaeography was developed

at the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds, U.K. Users can examine 26 selected manuscripts, zoom in on individual words, attempt transcription and receive immediate feedback. They can optionally compare their transcription with a full transcript. The user's transcripts can be saved and reopened. The saved transcripts are accessible via File Manager apps. The app is available for both **android** and **apple**. 🐼



From: <http://www.medievalhistories.com/medieval-handwriting-app/>