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Possible Medieval Synagogue Uncovered Near Sea of Galilee

A medieval building that may have been used as a synagogue has been uncovered at the site of Huqoq, a village near the Sea of Galilee in Israel. Constructed during the 12th – 13th centuries, it is located on top of the ruins of a 5th-century Roman synagogue. The medieval builders reused the north and east walls of the ancient synagogue, as well as ancient columns and pedestals, placing them on stylobates. The medieval building's floors were decorated with floral and geometric mosaics. Clearly a public building, it likely served as a church, a mosque, or a synagogue. During the 12th and 13th centuries, the Crusaders and the Mamluks battled for control of the area around Huqoq.

Yet one clue suggests that the building might have served as a synagogue because archaeologists found benches lined the east, north, and west walls, something commonly seen in



synagogues. "So far, I've found very little evidence of a Jewish presence in the area, which makes this structure both extremely exciting and frustrating," said Arnold Franklin, a history professor at Queens College of the City University of New York. One textual reference is from an early 14th-century traveler Ishtori Haparchi, who visited Huqoq and reported seeing a "synagogue with a very old floor." Scholars speculate that perhaps this building was that synagogue."

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