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Discoveries

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PEREGRINATIONS

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Discoveries

New rooms discovered at St. Helena's house

New rooms have been discovered in the domus (house) of Empress St. Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, in the bowels of the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, which "... are nothing less than the living quarters of Helen's court ladies," said superintendent Francesco Prosperetti. "We have shed more light on the main entrance into the domus and better established the



divisions between the various rooms," said archaeologist Anna De Santis. The Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme or Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem is a Roman Catholic minor basilica and titular church in the Esquilino district of Rome. According to tradition, the basilica was consecrated circa 325 to house the relics of the Passion of Christ, including parts of the True Cross, brought to Rome from the Holy Land by Helena. At that time, the Basilica's floor was covered with soil from Jerusalem.

Re-written from [ANSA](#).

One of Britain's oldest churches discovered on Holy Island of Lindisfarne

Archaeologists have discovered one of Britain's oldest churches on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, off the Northumberland coast. It may originally have been built in or shortly after the mid-7th century as part of the monastic spiritual epicenter from which much of northern and central England was eventually Christianized. This could be the site of one of Holy Island's original early Anglo-Saxon period churches – perhaps even one built by the founder of Lindisfarne, St Aidan.



The monks chose the most challenging and difficult location to build their church – potentially for politically symbolic reasons. The building stood on a totally exposed, extremely wind-blown rocky promontory facing directly towards the great royal palace of the monks’ first patron and benefactor, north-east England’s most important early Christian king, the 7th -century St Oswald of Northumbria. The church was constructed just two or three meters from the cliff edge, known in Anglo-Saxon times simply as “The Precipice.” So far, the archaeologists have found dozens of pieces of broken masonry – including crudely-worked window surrounds – in a style suggesting that the mason was more accustomed to working in wood than in stone. A final potential clue to its age has been found at the extreme eastern end of the church. It is the probable base of what may well have been the original altar installed there by St Aidan in or immediately after he founded the monastery in 635.

Interestingly, the building was constructed of gleaming white sandstone that would have reflected sunlight particularly well, giving the impression that it was quite literally radiating the purest white light. The gleaming structure perched on its 20-meter high clifftop would have been clearly visible from the royal palace at Bamburgh as a white building surrounded by sea. Also discovered were the massive foundations of what appears to have been a large signaling tower on the same promontory – presumably to

enable simple messages to be sent directly to the king's palace at Bamburgh, some four miles across the sea to the south. The eight meter square tower (with walls 2.5 meters thick) would probably have been up to 12 meters high – and would also have been used to communicate with monks living on the Farne Islands, seven miles away. It's known from ancient accounts that a tower on that promontory was used, for instance, to receive a beacon signal from those monks when St Cuthbert (subsequently regarded as the patron saint of northern England) died there in AD 687.

The excavation is being directed by Newcastle University archaeologist Richard Carlton of the Newcastle-based company, The Archaeological Practice, as part of the Northumberland County Council-backed Peregrini Lindisfarne Landscape Partnership project, majority financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Re-written from [The Independent](#).

Medieval-era graffiti discovered in cave in Upper Egypt

An Egyptian mission has stumbled upon a cave in Upper Egypt which contains Medieval-era Arabic graffiti. The cave was discovered during an archaeological survey carried out at the archaeological sites located in the area known as the Golden Triangle in the Red Sea governorate. Deputy Minister of Antiquities Mohamed Abdellatif told Ahram Online that studies revealed that the cave was a rest house for pilgrims, traders and passengers who used it to protect themselves from the hot weather during their trips from Egypt to Mecca or Palestine. During their stay in the cave, said Abdellatif, they carved graffiti on the walls, some of which remain while others have disappeared due to erosion.



Mohamed Tuni, an archaeologist at the governorate's Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Department, said that the texts are composed of two sections. The first reads: "there is no God except Allah" while the second reads: "God has returned the poor slave Youssef Bin Hatem Al-

Shati to his family in 755 of Hegira. May God have mercy on him and his parents and all the Muslims. Amen.”

Re-written from [Ahrum Online](#).

Hidden murals discovered at Anba Bishoy Monastery



A collection of archaeological murals and drawings was uncovered in Wadi al-Natroun’s monastery of Anba Bishoy during restoration and maintenance work carried out by the Ministry of Antiquities. The murals and drawings, dating from the 9th-13th centuries, were accidentally discovered when the a cement layer was removed from the walls of the monastery’s church, said Assistant Antiquities

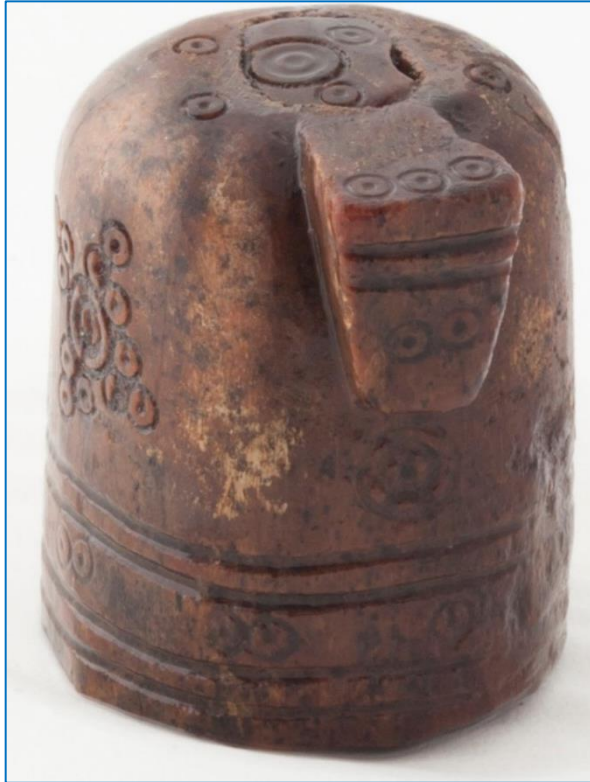
Minister for Archaeological Areas’ Affairs Mohamed Abdellatif. Ahmed al-Nemr, a member of the committee documenting Coptic antiquities, said that the drawings were done in a Frisco style and depict a group of saints and angels, below which are some Coptic writings.

Re-written from [Egypt Independent](#).

800-Year-Old ‘Knight’ Chess Piece Discovered in Norway

Chess fans today may not recognize this decorated thimble-shaped object, but a recently discovered 800-year-old game piece from Norway is actually a knight. Archaeologists discovered the exquisitely-preserved chess piece in a 13th-century house in Tønsberg. The game piece, which is made mostly out of antler, would have been used to play what was called shatranj (or chess). There is likely some lead inside the piece to help it “stand firmly on the chessboard,” a team of archaeologists from the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) said in a statement. Discovered just before Christmas 2017, “the piece is richly decorated with circles on the bottom, several dotted circles on the sides and at the top. The protruding snout on the top has two dotted circles,”

archaeologists said in the statement. “By looking at the ancient form of chess, shatranj, the piece from Tønsberg appears to be a horse,” which is known today as a knight, they said.



“The game of chess was taken up in the Arab world after the conquest of Persia in the seventh century and was introduced to Spain in the 10th century by the Moors. From Spain, the game spread rapidly northwards, and may have been known in Scandinavia shortly afterwards.” While the knight resembles chess pieces from Arabia, it doesn’t mean that it was actually made there, but rather it is an “Arabic-inspired chess piece.”

The 13th-century house where the chess piece was found is in an area of Tønsberg known as Anders Madsens gate. Located near a medieval castle, excavations in this gate area started in autumn 2017 and have revealed several medieval streets and houses. A wide variety of artifacts, including combs, ceramics and antlers, were found during the excavations.

Re-written from [Live Science](#).

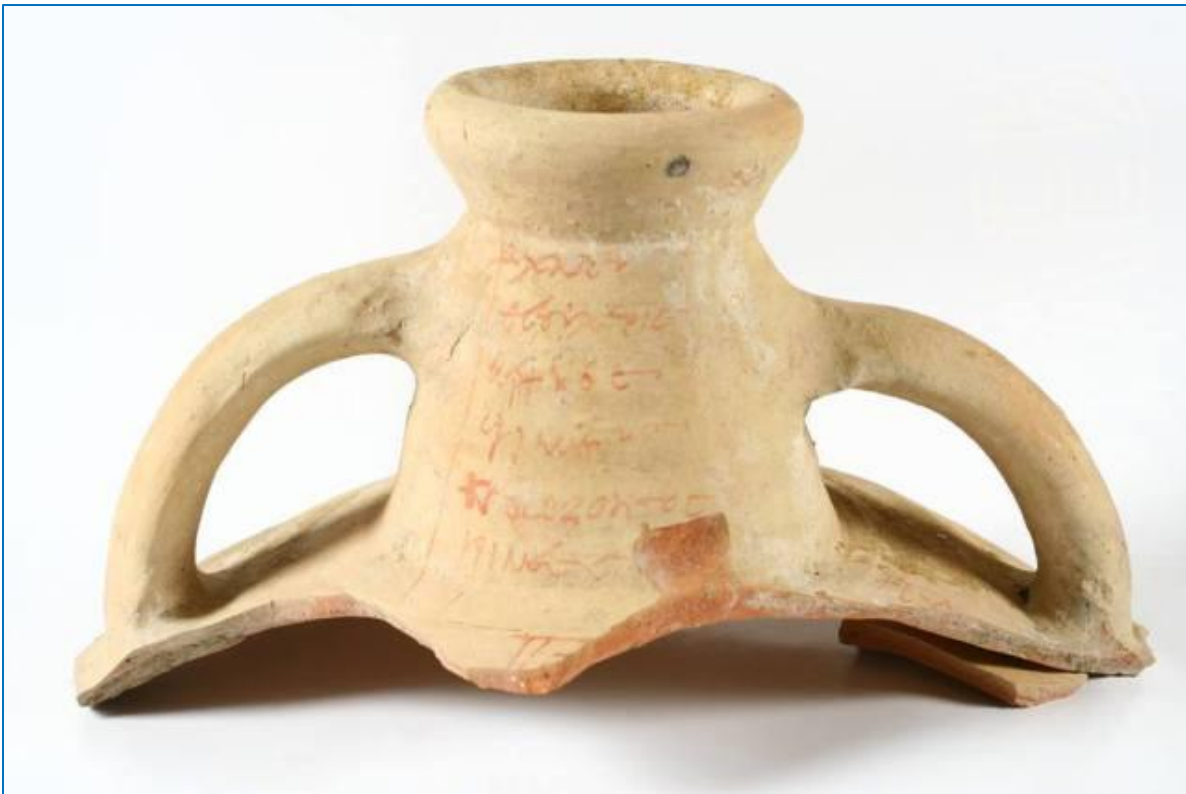
Byzantine Amphora with Inscription Dedicated to Christ, Virgin Mary Found in Roman Fortress Trimammium in Northeast Bulgaria

Part of an Early Byzantine amphora with a fully preserved inscription in Ancient Greek dedicated to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary has been discovered during the latest excavations of the ancient Roman/medieval Byzantine, Bulgarian fortress of Trimammium near the Danube town of Mechka, Ruse District, in Northeast Bulgaria. Built as a Roman fortification and later a road station in the 1st century CE, the



Trimammum Fortress was destroyed in barbarian invasions in the early 7th century. It was later resettled and used by the First Bulgarian Empire (632/680 – 1018) and the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185 – 1396/1422).

The amphora found, by archaeologists Varbin Varbanov and Deyan Dragoev from the Ruse Regional Museum of History, dates back to the 6th century. It features a fully preserved six-line inscription in ancient Greek:



Mary gives birth to Christ.
God's mercy is a win.
To St. Mary.
To the Savior God.
An amphora with sweet olive oil

The amphora itself, likely made in some of the provinces of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, may have been used to transport olive oil for performing rituals in a local church in the Trimammium Fortress. Since the amphora from the Danube fortress of Trimammium is fragmented, the inscription also probably included information about the quantity of the vessel's olive oil contents, not unlike other amphorae from the same period discovered in the Roman Danube city of Novae near Bulgaria's Svishtov. The other side of the amphora features the letters "E+Y", which could be an abbreviation

denoting a person's name or olive oil, and the letters "TPI" which is probably an abbreviation of Trimammium's name.

Re-written from [Archaeology in Bulgaria](#).

Why Archaeologists Are Excited About a Viking Comb

Perhaps no one has ever been as excited to see a comb as Danish archaeologist Søren Sindbæk. He and a team of archaeologists from Aarhus University recently unearthed one at a historic Viking town called Ribe in Denmark. Even more exciting, he says, the word "comb" is inscribed on one side while what amounts to the version of "to comb" is on the other.



For anyone who's not a career archaeologist or Viking history enthusiast, the find may seem trivial, but it could potentially tell historians about the birth of a Viking alphabet and, as a result, how the historic Viking Age rose to prominence.

To understand why the comb is important, you have to rewind to the late 8th century, a critical moment in time for the Vikings. It was the dawn of the Viking Age, which began just before 800 C.E., and language in the region had undergone hundreds of years of evolution.

Then, suddenly, the alphabet changed. The runes, or letters, used by the group's predecessors became more uniform and modern to match the evolved way of speaking. Tall and vertical, the new lines were easy to carve into wood or stone, says Sindbæk. "We don't know why or when that happened," he says of the new alphabet being used. "It

doesn't seem to be gradual." Meaning the new alphabet was likely created by one person or one institution and then disseminated. But why, when, and by whom? Archaeologists aren't sure.

Once the new system of runes was adopted, European regions under Viking control would have been able to use one uniform method of written communication. Trade would have been easier to facilitate.

That the comb is named after itself indicates an early adoption of the alphabet, says Sindbæk. "There's a sort of redundancy," he says of signs of adopting the new runic alphabet. "You add it to obvious things." Henrik Williams from Uppsala University in Sweden has also studied runes extensively. His theories for why the comb might be inscribed with its own name differ from Sindbæk's. The first is that it could have helped people who have cognitive diseases like dementia or children learning the language. "There were no schools, so teaching a child how to read and write runes might be done by writing words on household items," he says.

Another theory is that runes may have been thought to convey a special purpose or even magical properties. It wasn't until the new alphabet became more widely adopted that archaeologists find evidence of it being used for common forms of communication like sending notes. Ultimately, says Williams, "Both explanations are just hypotheses, but every new find of this character constitutes a new piece of the puzzle."

Re-written from [National Geographic](#).

Another set of paw prints: More cats in the late Middle Ages



As special as the 15th-century St. Peter's Church in Wormleighton is, what concerns us is a small tile out of the way, in the nave, where a cat left its indelible paw prints. It joins the viral sensation of the inky cat prints published by [@erik kwakkel](#). Dutch Anglo-Saxonist Thijs Porck, too, had an internet sensation in his account of cats marking their territory on manuscripts, causing one scribe to inveigh:

Here is nothing missing, but a cat urinated on this during a certain night. Cursed be the pesty cat that urinated over this book during the night in Deventer and because of it many others [other cats] too. And beware well

not to leave open books at night where cats can come. Cursed be this cat for peeing over my book!

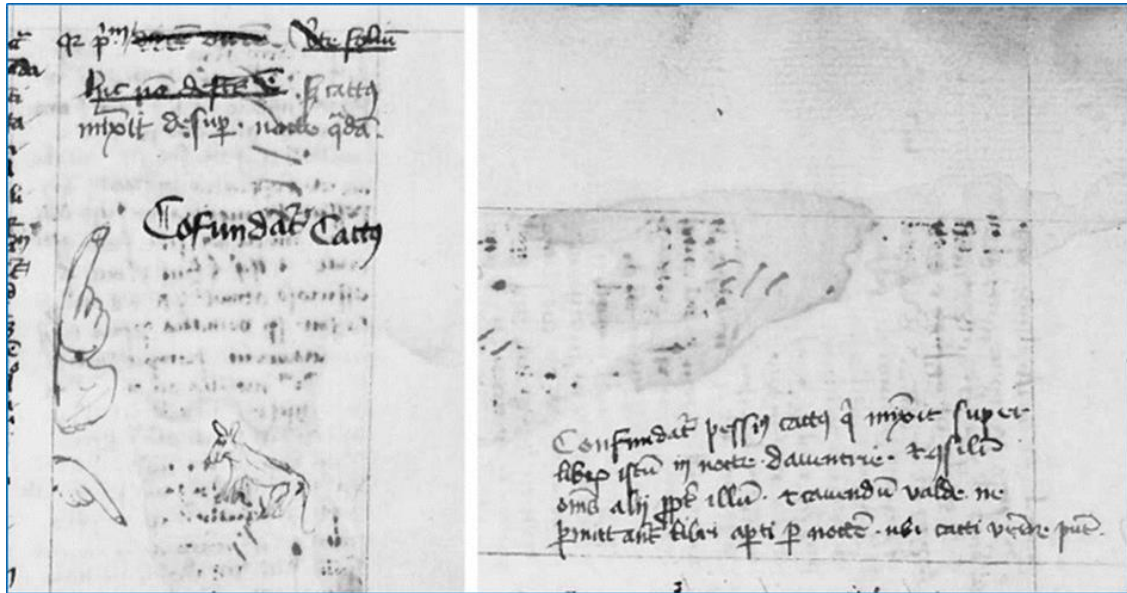


Photo: Cologne, Historisches Archiv, G.B. quarto, 249, fol. 68r).



Cat paws in a 1420 century manuscript. Photo: taken at the Dubrovnik archives by [@EmirOFilipovic](#).



Because the cats kept down the mice population, who chewed away on the edges and centers of manuscripts, their ways were tolerated more or less.

The tile's imprints show an acceptance of the cat, who likely also kept vermin out of the church or at least in the yard where the ceramic tiles were made.

Re-written in part from [Dutch Anglo-Saxonist](#) and [Midland Churches](#). 🐾