

# Archaeologists find early depiction of a menorah

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In this undated handout photo made available by the Israeli Antiquities Authority on Friday, Sept. 11, 2009, showing an ancient stone engraved with a seven-branched candelabra, or menorah, seen at a synagogue in the northern Israeli town of Midgal, near Tiberias, after archeologists uncovered the carved stone. The menorah was engraved in stone around 2,000-years ago and found in a synagogue recently discovered by the Sea of Galilee and is thought to be one of the earliest depictions of a menorah. (AP Photo/IAA, HO)

(AP) -- Israeli archaeologists have uncovered one of the earliest depictions of a menorah, the seven-branched candelabra that has come to symbolize Judaism, the Israel Antiquities Authority said Friday. The menorah was engraved in stone around 2,000 years ago and found in a synagogue recently discovered by the Sea of Galilee.

Pottery, coins and tools found at the site indicate the synagogue dates to

the period of the second Jewish [temple](#) in Jerusalem, where the actual menorah was kept, said archaeologist Dina Avshalom-Gorni of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

The artist might have seen the menorah during a pilgrimage and then recreated it in the synagogue, she suggested.

A small number of depictions of the menorah have surfaced from the same period, she said, but this one was unique because it was inside a synagogue and far from Jerusalem, illustrating the link between Jews around Jerusalem and in the Galilee to the north.

The menorah, depicted atop a pedestal with a triangular base, is carved on a stone which was placed in the synagogue's central hall.

The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman legions in 70 A.D.. The Arch of Titus in Rome, erected to mark the Roman victory, depicts troops carrying the menorah from [Jerusalem](#) to symbolize the defeat of the Jews. The menorah became a Jewish symbol and is featured today on Israel's official emblem.

Most other depictions of the menorah were made only after the temple's destruction, and if this finding is indeed earlier it could be closer to the original, said Aren Maeir, an archaeology professor at Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

"If you have a depiction of the menorah from the time of the temple, chances are it is more accurate and portrays the actual object than portrayals from after the destruction of the temple, when it was not existent," he said.

The ancient prayer house was discovered in the town of Migdal, usually identified as the birthplace of the New Testament's Mary Magdalene,

whose name is thought to be based on the town's.

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