

Construction project leads to discovery of ancient Jewish ritual bath with mysterious writing

August 7 2015, by Bob Yirka



Inscriptions on the walls of the ritual bath. Credit: Shai Halevy, the Israel Antiquities Authority

(Phys.org)—A team of researchers has descended down into what archaeologists are calling an ancient Jewish ritual bath with mysterious writing on the walls—dating back perhaps 2000 years. The bath was

found by antiquity officials checking out a site designated for a new nursery building.

The bath was found when a hole was discovered in a [construction site](#) and a rock fell down into it and disappeared. Investigation revealed an underground room, with a stone staircase. What was most surprising was the writing on the walls, which appeared to be written in Aramaic. Alarming, the words began to fade as soon as air was let into the bath, causing the researchers to remove the wall and to put it in a climate controlled room where it could be preserved.

The ritual bath consisted of a tub carved into the stone, an anteroom, benches and even a winepress. Initial impressions are that the bath dates from the time of the Second Temple—530BC to 70AD. In addition to the scrawled words there were painted pictures of [palm trees](#), boats, plants and a menorah, which was surprising because it is believed that during the Second Temple, it was considered to be taboo to create pictures of them.

The research team does not yet know what the messages say, but believe the words "served" and "Cohen" are among them—they do not know their purpose either, though they suspect they might be either religious messages, or simply graffiti. In any case, the finding is rare, very few examples of Aramaic inscriptions or texts have been found—some believe it was the language that Jesus spoke. The words in the bath appeared to have been made by smearing with mud or plaster, or in some cases, by carving them into the stone walls. The team notes that together the find represents are rarity because there were so many paintings and inscriptions all at one site. Experts are already at work attempting to decipher the texts and to find an explanation for them being put there in the first place. The Israel Antiquities Authority has also announced that once an examination of the artifacts is completed, everything found will be put on display for the public to come see and admire.

More information: via [Discovery](#), [BBC](#)

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