

Hikers discover menorah and cross etched into cave walls in Israel

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Credit: Israel Antiquities Authority

(Phys.org)—A group of hikers exploring caves over Hanukkah week in

the Israeli Judean Shephelah lowlands has found what appear to be ancient religious etchings on the walls of a cistern, an underground reservoir holding rainwater—initial analysis of the etchings, a menorah and a cross, by experts with the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) suggests they could be thousands of years old, perhaps dating back to the Second Temple period.

Dating the etchings by conventional means such as carbon dating is impossible, of course, but the remoteness and difficult access to the site suggest that the etchings were likely not made in modern times, IAA representative Sa'ar Ganor said in an interview.

Also, interestingly, the menorah etching featured seven branches (three on either side and one in the middle for lighting) rather than the nine commonly used today. This, Ganor pointed out, suggests that the menorah etching was likely created during the time of the Second Temple, when candelabra were used to light the [temple](#), from approximately 516 BCE until 70 CE, when it was destroyed. In modern times, followers of the Jewish faith light the eight small candles on either side of a menorah from the candle in the middle as part of a Hanukkah ceremony to commemorate the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem.

In the same cave, the hikers also found an etching of a cross, a symbol that has been used by Christians to express their faith for thousands of years. How the two etchings came to exist in such close proximity is a mystery, though Ganor notes they likely were made hundreds of years apart by people hiding in the caves for very different reasons. Near both of the etchings was yet another etching—one depicting a key, which has not been studied well enough to reveal its possible identity or meaning. Ganor called the discovery an exciting find and hinted that there may be other etchings involved, as well—a team has been assembled to study the caves, though the actual site is being kept hidden to prevent amateur enthusiasts from causing damage.

More information: [www.antiquities.org.il/article ...
&subj_id=240&id=4242](http://www.antiquities.org.il/article...&subj_id=240&id=4242)

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