

Mosaics of Huqoq

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(Courtesy Jodi Magness, Institute for Archaeologies)

In June 2012, Jodi Magness of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill began her second season of excavation in the village of Huqoq, in Israel's lower eastern Galilee. There, in the remains of a Late Roman or Byzantine synagogue, she discovered an extraordinary mosaic depicting female faces flanking a medallion with Hebrew or Aramaic inscriptions. In another area of the floor, Magness uncovered an image of the Biblical judge Samson placing torches between foxes' tails. Although archaeologists have found mosaics in three other synagogues in this area of the Galilee, the example from Huqoq is unprecedented—it's the earliest securely identified image of Samson in a synagogue in Israel. "This scene comes right from Judges 15:4," says Magness, "and shows Samson taking revenge on the Philistines, the Israelites' traditional enemy." It's also interesting that in the Wadi Hamam synagogue only a few miles away, archaeologist Uzi Leibner of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem found a mosaic in 2008 that he thought might also depict Samson. By comparing the clothing and size of the figures—both are portrayed as giants—it's now possible to identify the Wadi Hamam image as Samson as well. The question remains, though, whether Samson had a special significance in this area of Israel.

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