

Rare Egyptian mosaic goes on display in Israel

by [Max Lewontin](#) in the [October 28, 2015](#) issue

(The Christian Science Monitor) A multicolored mosaic showing an ancient Egyptian settlement went on display recently in an unlikely location: a parking lot in Israel.

The mosaic—made of some 17 tile colors—shows a complex map of streets and buildings in ancient Egypt, archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority said. A Greek inscription suggests that the map depicts the settlement of Chortaso, Egypt, where the prophet Habakkuk was once buried, the website LiveScience reported.

Dating back some 1,500 years to the Byzantine period, the mosaic once sat on a church floor, the archaeologists said in a statement.

Now it rests in the modern Israeli city of Kiryat Gat (also spelled Qiryat Gat) in an industrial park. The unusual discovery was made two years ago with the help of area schoolchildren. The mosaic was temporarily removed from the park for restoration.

The public unveiling was part of a larger Factories from Within festival at the industrial park held during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

The archaeologists said that the mosaic may yield some clues about who once lived in that location.

“The appearance of this Egyptian city on the floor of the public building in Qiryat Gat might allude to the origin of the church’s congregation,” Israeli archaeologists Sa’ar Ganor and Rina Avner said in the statement.

The church building is long gone, Ganor said, noting that what had been preserved represented a very significant find.

“Two sections of the mosaic were preserved,” the IAA release reported. “Animals, such as a rooster, deer, and birds—and a special goblet with red fruits—are portrayed on one part of the pavement. . . . The investment in the raw materials and their quality are the best ever discovered in Israel.”

A second relic also found in Kiryat Gat depicts a Nile River scene showing a boat with a rolled-up sail and three-dimensional buildings, the archaeologists said, noting the level of detail the artist used to depict the buildings.

But there's also a mystery surrounding the Byzantine mosaic, LiveScience reported. While Christian traditions place Habakkuk's burial site in Chortaso, his final resting site is unknown, with Israel and Iran both claiming to hold the tomb of the minor prophet.

IAA spokeswoman Yoli Shwartz called the mosaic "extraordinary," saying the society wanted to display it in the unusual place it was discovered.

This article was edited on October 13, 2015.