03/12/2021

# BYZANTINE BASILICA WITH MASS GRAVES AND INSCRIPTIONS TO DEACONESSES UNEARTHED IN HOLY LAND



A new church recently unearthed in the Holy Land is being hailed as one of the earliest and largest Christian basilicas found in Israel.

It is also one of the most unique, as archaeologists have discovered mass graves all over the territory, including several prominent graves and inscriptions dedicated to deaconesses and other holy women, reports Haaretz.

Besides the unusual amount of funerary inscriptions and the prominent place given to women, we found that this church is like one huge cemetery—everywhere we touch we find these strange mounds of skeletons," says Prof. Alexander Fantalkin from Tel Aviv University, who heads the dig.

The oldest inscription found, which dates itself to 416 AD, reads: "In memory of the priest Gaianos and Severa the deaconess." The early date suggests the building already existed before the mosaic paving of the nave of the church.

Such memorial inscriptions are not rare for Byzantine churches, but the number of deaconesses and women mentioned in one church is rare, sys Prof. Joseph Patrich

from the Hebrew University, who took part in the dig.

The central apse of the church housed the main altar and a tomb—the only tomb in the church not to have been unused. Presumably, this was the tomb of the saint to whom the church was dedicated. Unfortunately, however, no mosaics or inscriptions that could identify the saint have survived.

Fantalkin believes the tomb may have been associated with the one of the four virgin daughters of the Apostle Philip who were gifted with prophecy (Acts 21:9).

There is also a memorial to a “Holy Mother Sophronia,” who could have been the abbess of a nearby convent.

“The Church of the Deaconesses,” as some are calling it today, was destroyed by a



r, such as





orthochristian.com