

Archaeologists uncover 1,500-year-old church dedicated to a 'glorious martyr' near Jerusalem

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Researchers have unearthed the ruins of a 1,500-year-old church from the time of the Byzantine Empire at a site near Jerusalem that was dedicated to an unknown «glorious martyr.»

Excavations by the Israel Antiquities Authority at Ramat Beit Shemesh found the church with a mosaic floor and Greek inscriptions, one of which explains that the church was built in honor of an unnamed «glorious martyr.» While the exact date for the church remains unknown, a mosaic inscription spoke of an expansion to the church during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian, who reigned during the sixth century.

Finds from the church were put on display at an exhibition titled «The Glorious Martyr» starting on Wednesday at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem. The site is also known as «The Church of the Glorious Martyr.»

«In the Byzantine period, locations traditionally associated with major events of the Old and New Testaments, including sites linked to saints and martyrs, were venerated as holy places. Churches containing martyrs' relics became important destinations for Christian pilgrims,» museum noted.

«With its ornate design and prominent situation near the main road to Jerusalem, the highlight of a pilgrim's journey, the Church of the Glorious Martyr evidently drew many believers hoping to receive blessing within.»

The museum also noted that the items discovered at the church included «one of the most complete assemblages of Byzantine glass window panes in Israel.»

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