

Ancient Tomb of Santa Claus Discovered Beneath Turkish Church

By [Callum Paton](#) On 10/3/17 at 10:54 AM

Archaeologists in Turkey may be on the cusp of solving a mystery thousands of years in the making after they stumbled on a tomb beneath the ruins of an ancient church they believe contains the remains of Saint Nicholas—known popularly as Santa Claus.

A portion of the site believed to contain the undamaged grave was discovered in St. Nicholas Church, [located in Turkey's southern Antalya province](#). The Demre district in which the church is found is known to be the revered Christian saint's birthplace.

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The head of Antalya's Monument Authority, Cemil Karabayram, [told the Turkish press](#) the shrine was discovered during electronic surveys that showed gaps beneath the church.

“We believe this shrine has not been damaged at all, but it is quite difficult to get to it as there are mosaics on the floor,” Karabayram told *Hurriyet Daily News*. In the excavation process, archaeologists will have to loosen each tile from the mosaics and remove them together in a mold.



Turkish experts claim that what was believed to be the original grave of Saint Nicholas (pictured) was in fact the grave of an anonymous priest. They now believe that his undamaged grave was discovered in St. Nicholas Church, in Demre, Turkey.
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The claims over the 1,674-year-old remains of Saint Nicholas would compete with differing narratives that place the original saint's relics as far away as Italy and Ireland.

At the time of his death in 343 A.D., Saint Nicholas was interred at the Church in Demre, formerly known as Myra, where he lay undisturbed until the 11th century. Then, according to different accounts from Italy at the time, his remains were taken during the crusades to either Venice or Bari, Italy. One story, less widely believed, places the bones in an abandoned churchyard in southern Ireland after they were brought there by French

knights.

Most Catholic and Orthodox Christians accept that the Basilica di San Nicola in Bari, Italy, is the final resting place of Santa Claus's remains. However, [Turkish experts](#) are now claiming the wrong bones were removed and those taken abroad belong to an anonymous priest.

Karabayram has said he is very optimistic about uncovering Saint Nicholas's remains. He explained researchers from eight differing fields of study were involved in the process of uncovering the grave.

Santa Claus morphed from the third- and fourth-century Asia Minor bishop Saint Nicholas to the generous figure associated with the Christian holiday of Christmas he is today.

The saint became popularized in 16th century Europe when he became Father Christmas, known for giving presents to young children. Dutch arrivals to the United States called their version of Saint Nicholas 'Sinterklaas,' which later became Santa Claus.