



An aerial view shows Palestinian workers of Zionist's Antiquities Authority during work at a recently discovered ancient mosque, which dates back to the early Islamic period, in the Bedouin town of Rahat in Israel's southern Negev desert.



Muslim Palestinian workers of Zionist's Antiquities Authority pray amid the remains of a recently discovered ancient mosque. — AFP photos



Jean-Paul Guerlain's partner says threatened by perfumer's son

The partner of Jean-Paul Guerlain accused the famous perfumer's son of waging a "harassment war" against her and of threatening her on several occasions. Stephane Guerlain, the only son of Jean-Paul Guerlain, was summoned to court in Versailles, outside Paris, by Christina Kragh Michelsen, his father's companion. However, he was not present and was represented by his lawyer.

The hearing was the latest judicial episode in the battle between Kragh, a 64-year-old French-Danish woman, and Stephane Guerlain, son of the man who ran Guerlain—one of the world's oldest perfume houses—for almost half a century. Jean-Paul Guerlain, 85, one of the richest men in France, now suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Kragh has been with him since 2005.



Kragh was acquitted last autumn by a court of "neglecting a person incapable of protecting himself". The public prosecutor has appealed against this acquittal. The woman's lawyer said that Guerlain's son is driven by his hatred for his client and wants to "break her down" by waging a "permanent harassment war".

When Stephane Guerlain "arrives in the house, he follows me everywhere", said Kragh. He takes unilateral decisions such as "turning off the heating" in their property in a Paris suburb, she added. Kragh has no "financial interest" in staying with Guerlain senior, but is doing so "out of love", said her lawyer Frederic Belot. She has "lost sleep, lost a lot of weight" and suffers from "psychological problems", he added. Stephane Guerlain's defense team described their client as "an extremely tired man who has been trying for 10 years to protect his father's interests".

The court listened to a recording in which Stephane Guerlain, a lawyer, called Kragh a "bitch" and a "scumbag" and threatened, according to her, to "put her head in a haystack". Kragh is seeking 70,000 euros (\$73,600) in damages. The public prosecutor's office did not agree with the plaintiff, noting that several of the claims were unsubstantiated. The court will deliver its decision on Friday. French luxury giant LVMH took over the Guerlain brand in 1994. Jean-Paul Guerlain remained as master perfumer until he retired in 2002. — AFP

ZIONISTS UNCOVER RARE EARLY MOSQUE IN NEGEV

Zionist entity archaeologists on Wednesday unveiled a rare ancient mosque in the country's south that the antiquities officials said sheds light on the region's transition from Christianity to Islam. The remains of the mosque, believed to be more than 1,200 years old, were discovered during works to build a new neighborhood in the Bedouin city of Rahat, the Zionist Antiquities Authority said in a statement.

The mosque located in the Negev

desert contains "a square room and a wall facing the direction of Makkah", with a half-circle niche in that wall pointing to the south, the IAA said. "These unique architectural features show that the building was used as a mosque," the authority said, noting it probably hosted a few dozen worshippers at a time. A short distance from the mosque, a "luxurious estate building" was also discovered, with remains of tableware and glass artefacts pointing to the wealth of its residents, the

IAA said. Three years ago, the authority unearthed another mosque nearby from the same era of the seventh to eighth century AD, calling the two Islamic places of worship "among the earliest known worldwide". The mosques, estate and other homes found nearby illuminate "the historical process that took place in the northern Negev with the introduction of a new religion—the religion of Islam, and a new rulership and culture in the region," the IAA said.

"These were gradually established, inheriting the earlier Byzantine government and Christian religion that held sway over the land for hundreds of years." The Muslim conquest of the region occurred in the first half of the seventh century. The IAA said the mosques found in Rahat would be preserved in their current locations, whether as historic monuments or as active places of prayer. — AFP

Fiery Scottish Viking festival lifts curbs on female participants



In this file photo participants dressed as Vikings march down a street in the annual Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands. — AFP photos

Women will be allowed to take part in the main Viking-inspired torchlight procession on the remote Scottish island of Shetland for the first time next year, organizers said on Wednesday. The committee in charge of the "Up Helly Aa" festival, which commemorates the end of the Christmas season, said that it was time to lift restrictions on women taking part in the traditionally male-only procession.

"The decision means the festival in Lerwick on Tuesday January 31, 2023 will have a different dimension to it, but we have no doubt that its essence and spirit will remain the same," committee secretary Robert Geddes said. The

event, which is popular among tourists, traditionally involved around 1,000 male participants known as guizers in Viking dress, dividing into squads to parade through the town.

The walk is led by the "Guizer Jarl" or "chief guizer", and culminates in the participants using their flaming torches to set ablaze a replica Viking longship. The modern event, first held in 1881, is famous for its festive parties which often involve traditional Shetland dancing and copious alcohol consumption.

Rural "Up Helly Aa" processions on Shetland, which lies in the middle of the North Sea some 400 miles (640 kilometers) from Edinburgh, started allowing

women to take part in 2015. But the Lerwick committee stood firmly against allowing female participants to get involved in celebrating the island's Norse heritage.

"We felt that it was time to give squads a choice over their guizers, including allowing female participation," Geddes said. The other criteria for participation—that guizers be older than 16 and have lived in Shetland continuously for five years—remains the same for the event, which has not been held since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



In this file photo guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad gather around the longship with burning brands as they take part in the Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands.



In this file photo participants dressed as Vikings carry torches.



In this file photo guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad set fire to the longship with burning brands as they take part in the Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands.