# THE GREAT EGYPTIAN AND COPTIC MARTYR THE MIRACULOUS SAINT MENA



SAINT MENA COPTIC ORTHODOX MONASTERY

MARYUT - EGYPT



H.H. Pope Kyrillos VI
Founder of the new Monastery of St. Mena

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The back cover:

Lower photo: The exterior entrance of the new Cathedral of

St. Mena in the Monastery.

Upper photo: The interior mosaic dome of the Cathedral.



His Holiness Pope Shenouda III The 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



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#### **INTRODUCTION \***

The tortures of the Martyrs and Confessors are more desirable and beautiful to God's heart than the prayers of hermit monks and the praise of angels. In other words, their awesome, powerful and intense love for God caused them to endure all for His sake.

The Holy Church places martyrs in a higher rank than hermit recluses and remembers them in her prayers and intercessions ahead of Popes, Bishops, and saints. They occupy a higher and nobler position than those in direct service to God. They experienced the place of inexpressible love; a love that is felt and known in the suffering heart of God, who endured pain for us.

If we honor monks for their desertion, in part, of the world and the martyrs who left the world totally and died in action, what would be our honor for someone who combined both characteristics and obtained the crowns of monk and martyr? St. Mena was one of the spiritually strong men whose life combined both crowns. He obtained the crowns for purity, solitary hermitage, and martyrdom.

May we have the blessing of the prayers of the great martyr, the miraculous Saint Mena, and all the martyrs and saints be with us. Amen.

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<sup>\*</sup> Excerpts from the sayings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III about the great martyr, the Miraculous Saint Mena.



## In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

### SAINT MENA'S FAMILY, HIS BIRTH AND HIS CHILDHOOD

### The Saint's family:

Saint Mena, this great heavenly creation, was the son of lovely Egypt with ancestral roots in Nikeus<sup>†</sup>.

His grandfather on his father's side was the governor of the region. His father Eudoxius was a wealthy man loved by his fellow citizens for his many virtues. Because of his mercy, this man's brother envied and betrayed him to the Emperor Carinos<sup>†</sup> with false information. The emperor did not accept this report and appointed Eudoxius as a governor to the Africa region.<sup>†</sup> Later, however, the brother eventually became a governor.

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The remains of Nikeus town near Zawyet Razin, Minuf district, El-Minufiya Governorate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> Emperor Carinos took over the Roman Empire during the period between 238 and 284 A.D.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> Africa region was affiliated with the Roman Empire. It occupied the place of the states of Tunisia, Algeria and part of Libya.

### The son of prayers:

Eudoxius' wife, Euphemia, the mother of the saint, was a godly woman who lived a life of prayer and fasting. She was barren, and continually prayed to the Lord Jesus to give her a child of purity, and because of this she kept a special fast daily until evening. She gave many donations to strangers, widows and orphans.

During the commemoration of Virgin Mary's death, on the 21st Toba, Euphemia went to church and saw women in state of joy and delight carrying their children. She stood contrite before the icon of the Lord's mother, raised her heart, wept, and pleaded deeply with the Lord Jesus to give her children. While she was praying, she heard a voice coming from the icon of the Lord Jesus, as He was cradled in the arms of His mother, St. Mary the Holy Virgin, saying: "Amen, Mena." She rejoiced and went home to tell her husband Eudoxius about what had happened. His heart was filled with great joy.

When the days of her pregnancy were completed, Euphemia gave birth to this Saint and named him Mena\* according to the voice she heard. This was about the year 286 A.D.

<sup>\*</sup> Mena is a Pharaonic name that means constant, permanent or fixed.

### The Saint's childhood training:

Mena's parents gave careful attention to provide him with spiritual instruction. They trained him in church doctrine and took him to saintly priests who taught him with theology books. He learned quickly and would revisit the church day and night. He was committed to praying and fasting, so his soul was full of virtue and purity. He was a spiritual boy similar to the prophet Samuel.

When he was 11 years old his father passed away. Three years later, his mother passed away. He inherited their great wealth. However, he continued practicing his spiritual life of prayers, fasting, donations, and benevolences.

### **Joining the Army:**

Later, at the age of 15 years, Mena entered the army when a royal decree was issued, in all cities, commanding those who were fit for military life to enter the army. Mena was among those chosen. The governor, who took over after his father, appointed him as his deputy to lead the army. All the people loved him for his meekness and humility.

### DECREE OF PERSECUTION, MENA GOES TO THE DESERT

In 303 A.D., the two emperors Diocletian and Maximian issued a decree commanding\* the people to worship and sacrifice to idols. Saint Mena could not endure seeing so many people submitting to this decree and becoming demon-possessed through the deception of satanic command.

The saint arose, courageously distributed his inheritance and property among the needy, retired from his post, and left for the wilderness. It was possible there to experience what he desired, the intimacy with the Trinity through his Savior and beloved Jesus. He repeated the saying:

"I have seen rebellion and disputes in the city. So I have escaped and resorted to the wilderness hasting for my God and Savior Jesus Christ."

In the wilderness, he fasted until evening and spent whole nights in prayer.

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<sup>\*</sup> This was the first decree and it did not entail the killing of the transgressors.

#### The Saint's vision:

After 5 years in the wilderness, having engaged in deep denial of self, fasting and prayers, as well as devout meditation and Bible reading, Mena was standing and praying one day, and God's heavenly grace shone upon him. He saw the heavens opened and a multitude of shimmering angels carrying gleaming golden crowns, placing them on the heads of the saints who had completed their suffering and witness. The saints were shining like the sun and the angels were carrying them with great honor to the heavens.

Then Saint Mena yearned to become a martyr in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord heard the longing of his heart fired with love. While he was thinking about this, a voice from Heaven came to him and said:

"Blessed are you Mena because you have been called to godliness since your childhood. Therefore, you will receive three imperishable crowns in the name of the Holy Trinity for whom you have suffered: one for your celibacy; one for your solitude in the wilderness; and one for your martyrdom. Your name will be more famous than many martyrs as I shall make people of each tribe and tongue come and worship Me in your church that will be built in your name in the region of Egypt... Moreover, you will receive inexpressible honor and glory in My eternal kingdom."

#### HIS SACRIFICE OF MARTYRDOM

### Mena going to the city:

Immediately after the saint heard the Heavenly Voice, he was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit and indescribable happiness, arose and walked towards the city. By coincidence, the governor and a great multitude of people were meeting together in the city square celebrating a feast. The saint stood in the middle of the celebration and said in a loud voice: "I was sought by those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me." (Is. 65:1, Rom. 10:20)

The crowd was astonished by this appearance and there was silence. They could not speak because of the awesome glory surrounding the Saint, which commanded respect in spite of his holy humility and rough clothing. The governor asked about what had occurred. The saint answered him, "I am a Christian." The governor was astounded and told him: "You are a stranger and dare to come amidst the celebration? Do you desire to interfere with the annual ceremony of the Kings' feast, ignoring their commands?" During this time, the eyes of the crowd were upon the Saint, scrutinizing him, his noble appearance, and his rare courage despite his humble clothes. Some of the people at the celebration said to the governor, "We know this young man well. Five years

ago, he was the commander of our troop and he was an honorable prince respected by everyone".

At that moment the governor in surprise shouted at the Saint saying, "You there, why did you leave your military life? Moreover, why did you confess that you are a Christian?"

The Saint answered: "I am really a solider, but because of your worship of idols, I preferred to be a soldier for my Lord Jesus Christ the King of heaven and earth. I dwelt in the wilderness with the lions in order not to intermingle and perish with you".

Then, the governor ordered that he be cast in prison until the next day when the celebration of the Kings' feast would end so that the governor would have more time to torture him.

### The trial before the governor:

The following day, the governor commanded that Mena be brought to him and began shouting at him saying: "How dare you come in the midst of us yesterday, careless of the decree, unafraid of the Kings?"

The Saint replied: "I answered you yesterday. As I said, and I repeat again saying that your worship is defiled." The governor said: "Now tell me why did you give up your life in the military? And where were you after you left during this long period?"

The Saint answered: "For the sake of my love for Jesus Christ, I chose to be with the wild animals in the wilderness. This is better than living with those who do not know God [and worship idols], that I not perish with you."

The governor spoke: "I was told about your honorable ancestry and the glory of your fathers. Now, sacrifice according to the decree of the king and I shall write to him requesting that he give you a rank higher than that of your father."

The Saint answered: "Do you command me to leave my God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has the power to destroy the soul and body in hell, and follow your profane idols? I shall not leave my Master and God Jesus Christ, the Living Son of God. On the contrary, I ask Him day and night to make me worthy of obtaining the Crown of Life. You should know that I do not fear you and will not obey you. You are rejected with your king and gods."

When the governor heard this, he commanded that the Saint be tortured in many ways. He tortured him, for example: whipping him with oxen leather whips, hanging him on the hinbazin [a large wheel on which the person's body was hung that pinned the individual between the ground and the wheel and in order to squeeze and scrape him], tearing his body by dragging him across iron rods fixed in the ground, rubbing

his body with coarse hair, putting flames under his body, and breaking his teeth. God, however, supported and healed Mena in everything.

### **Sending the Saint to the Prince:**

When the governor saw the Saint's persistence and insistence in not submitting to his command, he wrote a letter to the Prince and told him that Mena was a soldier who left military life because he refused to obey the King's command to kneel before the gods. And he explained he did not have him killed in order to leave Mena's desire for martyrdom unfulfilled.

The governor gave four soldiers the letter and custody of the Saint to deliver to the Prince. The soldiers gagged Mena's mouth and put an iron collar around his neck, dragging him until they reached the coast. Then they tied the Saint's hands and feet, put him in the bottom of the ship and set sail.

While the Saint was in the bottom of the ship, with his hands and feet bound, he heard a voice telling him:

"Do not be frightened my beloved Mena. I am Jesus your King and God. I shall be with you wherever you go. I shall strengthen and support you and stay by you until you fulfill your destiny of martyrdom."

Therefore, the Saint was ecstatically happy. His face glowed with Light. The ship arrived at the shore, and when the soldiers took him out, they found his body well, his face luminous as an angel of God, and they could not look at him.

### The trial before the prince:

The soldiers took the Saint and the governor's letter to the Prince, who was judging a group of Christians for their faith. When he read the letter, he looked at the Saint and said to him: "Come and kneel before the gods to avoid a horrible death". Mena answered him: "I do not kneel except before my Lord Jesus Christ, and He supports and strengthens me to endure your tortures." The prince sent him to prison until he could study his case.

The Saint was put in a prison which held five hundred twenty Christians who were about to shed their blood in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They rejoiced when they saw him and blessed him. The Saint encouraged them to endure pain and found comfort in being with them.

### The appearance of Jesus Christ to the Saint:

During this time, the sweet gentleness of the Lord's Presence came to the Saint who had heard His kind voice, but now He appeared to him in prison. The Lord told Mena about what would happen to him and what He had prepared for him. Then He anointed his body, gave him a blessing of peace, the peace that the world could not take away from him, and ascended to Heaven.

The next day the Prince called for him and said: "Is your heart ready now Mena to present incense to the idols and kneel before them to stop the pain?" The Saint answered him: "I do not kneel to gods made by people's hands and leave my real God".

### The trial of sawing the Saint's body:

The Prince became angry and commanded that the Saint should be whipped a hundred times with flexible leather ox whips. When the Saint did not submit and deny his faith, the Prince commanded that he would be put in the squeezer [el masarah: a machine for torture] and be cut in half by a saw [monshar: a machine that severs the body]. When the soldiers put the iron saw on the Saint's body, it melted like wax near a fire by the power of the Savior's Holy Hands that anointed the Saint's body. The Saint blessed His kind God.

#### MARTYRDOM

When the Prince discovered the Saint's firm adherence to his faith, he gave command to behead him by the sword and that his body be burned and his ashes thrown in the sea.

The soldiers took him to the place of execution. He walked with them happily praying, singing praises. Mena spoke to the crowds who were gathering and following behind him to remain firm in their belief in Christ as he reached the place of execution.

### At the arena of martyrdom:

The Saint knelt and raised his eyes toward heaven and prayed a fervent prayer putting his soul into the hands of his Heavenly Father. After praying, Jesus Christ with His Glory descended from Heaven on chariot of Cherubim with thousands and thousands of praising angels. The Saint bowed down to Him and the Lord gave him peace and many promises.

After the Saint heard the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, he extended his neck and the executioner struck him harshly. Thus he completed his martyrdom on the 15th day of Hatour in the year 309 A.D.

### The attempt to burn the Saint's body:

When the Saint completed his torture in martyrdom, the soldiers started a fire and threw his body in it, where it remained in the flames for three days and three nights. However, because of the power of his mighty God, the fire did not affect the body.

Some of the believers who followed the Saint at the time of his martyrdom came and took the body from the fire, praising the Lord Jesus because He was so greatly glorified in His beloved Mena. They wrapped him in precious shrouds and buried him with honor in a magnificent place in that town in Africa.





Some remains of St. Mena city, deposited in the Greco - Roman Museum in Alexandria

#### THE BODY OF THE SAINT

### **Transporting the body to Maryut:**

Commands were issued that the pious military leader, Athanasius, lead his troop against the Berbers' attacks on the Maryut area. He preferred to have the body of Saint Mena with them because of his great belief in the Saint's blessings to protect them.

When the leader opened the tomb, a great light that shone as the sun came out of the Saint's body and illuminated the place. The commander did not reveal this marvelous sight to anyone, in order not to be prevented from moving the martyr. He gave the body of St. Mena to the soldiers in secret and they carried the saint to the ship and set sail.

### Fire coming out of the body:

During the ship's sailing to Alexandria, some creatures arose from the water. They had long necks and faces similar to camels and stretched their heads into the ship. The soldiers were terrified that the creatures might devour them and take the body of St. Mena, but immediately arrows of fire came from the Saint's body into the faces of creatures, driving them under the surface of the sea. This was repeated many times until the creatures bowed their necks before the chaste body,

and left. The soldiers were astounded by the great power of the Saint's body and all the non-believers who witnessed this sight received Christ as their God and Savior. Everyone received blessings from the body of the saint.

### The body's arrival in Maryut:

Five days later, they arrived at Alexandria and left for Maria Lake. They put the body on a ship and headed west where they fought the Berbers and defeated them.

When the mission of the military troop was over and they were returning to Africa, they placed the Saint's body on a camel, but the camel did not move. Though they struck him many times, it stood still in its place. So they moved the Saint's body to a stronger camel, but it also did not move. They moved the body from one camel to another putting it on all the available camels. What happened with the first camel was repeated each time. The commander Athanasius realized that it was God's will that the body of the Saint would stay in this place.

Since the commander desired that the blessing of the martyr would accompany them, he took a wooden block and painted a picture of the Saint with the camel-like sea creatures who had attacked them, kneeling at his feet. He put the picture on the body so that the blessing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> Maria Lake is known now as Maryut Lake.

would be on the picture that he would take with him. He also painted a similar picture and buried it along with the body of the Saint in an imperishable wooden coffin in that place with a special explanation about the Saint's life, built a small tomb, and placed the body in it with great dignity. Then he went back to his country with his troop of soldiers.

### DISCOVERING THE SAINT'S TOMB IN MARYUT AND POPULATING THE AREA

After the return of the leader Athanasius and his troop to their country, the tomb of St. Mena remained unknown for a long time until the Lord chose to reveal location of the body of His martyred saint. This changed when many miracles took place at the site of the tomb. Thereafter, a number of churches were built near the tomb area in Maryut. A city was established and called the Martyr's City.

### The healing of the lame child 320-325 A.D.

There was a child who was lame from birth in a village near the Saint's tomb. This child crawled until he was out of the village. As he wandered from the village, he saw the light of a lamp in the distance, and he crawled quickly until he reached the place that was the tomb of the Saint. There he fell asleep for a time.

His parents went out to search for him. At last, they found him sleeping there. While they were shouting at him, he jumped up and ran until he entered the village. There, he told everyone he met about what had happened. The whole village went out, saw the light above the tomb, and glorified the Lord. Then, they brought all those with diseases and unclean spirits and all were healed. The news spread all over Maryut.

### The shepherd discovers the place of the body:

A shepherd was in this wilderness area pasturing his sheep near the location where the Saint's body was buried. Once while they were grazing, a scabby lamb went down in a pool of water near the body. When it emerged from the pool, it rolled itself in the dust. Immediately, the lamb was healed. When the shepherd saw that, he was exceptionally astonished yet very happy; and began to search among his sheep for the diseased ones to bring one after another into the pool of water and roll each one in the area of the miraculous dust. All were healed immediately. He glorified the Lord for His love and for allowing him to discover this place.

# The Emperor of Constantinople's daughter healed of leprosy:

The news of this place spread extensively as a

fountain of blessing and healing for all types of diseases, becoming famous worldwide. The Emperor of Constantinople heard of this and sent his only daughter who was afflicted with leprosy, accompanied by a staff of servants, to this area in Egypt to be healed.

The princess arrived in Maryut and mixed some of the miraculous dust and water together and put them on her body. She spent the whole night at that place. Saint Mena appeared to her and introduced himself to her. He asked her to dig in this place to find his body. When she awoke, she discovered that she was totally healed. She called the soldiers, ordered them to begin digging, and she found the body of the Saint. She sent word to her father telling him about what had happened. He rejoiced and built a small chapel above the tomb.

### The Church of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic\*:

The citizens of the city of Alexandria and the area of Maryut appealed to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, 20<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria that a large church be built to accommodate visitors. Pope Athanasius was unable to comply with their wishes due to the persecution he was experiencing by the Aryan rulers. Eventually, he was able to build the church during the era of Emperor Govian

<sup>\*</sup>Later is known as Saint Athanasius the Apostolic.

(363-364 A.D.) The church was built in a very beautiful design, decorated with expensive marble. Underneath was established a passageway to the area where the holy body of Saint Mena was placed. The council of Coptic Bishops attended the anointing and consecration of the church. This was on the first day of the month of Abib in 373 A.D.

### The Church of Pope Theophilos in Maryut:

Many years later during the reign of two kings, Arcadios and Anorios, sons of the King Theodosius the Great, Pope Theophilos the 23rd Patriarch of Alexandria (385-412 A.D.), went to celebrate the Feast of the Martyr Mena on the 15th of Hatour at the church. He saw large numbers of visitors suffering from overcrowded conditions in the church and many people standing outside as well. So he wrote to King Arcadios about this and the king ordered a larger church be built with passageway to the church built by Pope Athanasius. When Pope Theophilos completed it, he gathered a number of Bishops and Christians from all over Egypt to anoint it with honor and glory on the 15th day of the Coptic month of Baoona.

Pope Timothy, the 26<sup>th</sup> Patriarch, (458-480 A.D.), completed the decorating of the church, and built a large baptistery in its western area.



The staircase leading to the Tomb



The Tomb of Martyr Saint Mena



The Church of Saint Athanasius, and below the Tomb of Saint Mena.



The octagonal baptistery building



The Altar of the Church of Saint Theophilus

The remains and the bases of the four pillars that carried the altar's dome

### Founding the City of Saint Mena:

King Zinon, a lover of Jesus Christ, who reigned from 474-491 A.D., visited these churches and received a blessing from the Martyr's body. He built a great palace beside the church.

Pope Timothy told king Zinon about the barbarians who would raid Maryut and cause trouble for the churches, so the King ordered all the nobles in the kingdom to each build a palace there. He also wrote to the Christian aristocracy in Alexandria and Egypt that each of them must also build a place there. This continued until they turned the area into a city called 'Martyroupolis,' that is the Martyr City or Marble City. Many people moved there and King Zinon prepared a troop of 1200 soldiers to protect the city against the raids of the barbarians.

#### The road services for the visitors:

Maryut Lake was a navigational route for ships. It was linked to the Canobian branch of the Nile River through a canal called Nowacratos Canal. The visitors intending to visit the church of Martyr Mena, coming from Alexandria or the Delta, would arrive by ship at the western bank of Maryut Lake and travel by land to the church.

During the reign of King Anastasios (491-518 A.D.), the governor, Philoxinity, realized the difficulties facing the multitudes traveling the road that crosses the desert area between the lake and the church. So he built homes beside the lake to house the visitors, and rest houses to receive the crowds. Within the area of these homes and rest houses, there was a market place for the visitors to buy what they needed and storage places for their baggage. He named this area after himself. Along the road between the lake and the church, he also built rest houses for the travelers and provided drinking water. The city expanded and became very large.

With the increased arrival of the sick coming to be healed, large baths were built in the city that received water through a long canal and supplied a large number of basins and baths. There were great underground furnaces to heat these baths. Everything was coordinated in order to accommodate visitors who arrived from many distant lands, making it possible for them to receive a blessing.

In the northern part of the city, a special church was built. The whole city was comprised of a large number of utilities and markets in addition to glass factories and pottery ware. The city became a metropolis full of marble palaces and healing baths.

### The fame of the Saint and Abu Mena Marble City:

The sick came from all over the world to be healed through the intercession of Saint Mena. Small clay bottles manufactured in the area were filled with the oil from the lamp, which hung above the Martyr's body, or with water from the fountain near his tomb. The visitors would take them to their countries as blessings and for healing.

One of the evidences of the wide fame of the Saint is that these bottles have been discovered in many different places such as Colona, Heidelberg of Germany, Marseille of France, Delmatia, Yugoslavia, Milan and Rome, and in England as well as Dengela of Sudan and the Holy City of Jerusalem. These bottles had the picture of St. Mena on both sides with the Marine creatures at his feet. Some of them had crosses or the Name of the Lord Jesus engraved on them. The Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria have a large number of these.

The period between the fifth and seventh century A.D., was the golden age for the visitors of the church and city of Saint Mena. The city was the second place for pilgrimage after Jerusalem.







### **Removing the Marble from the Church:**

In 833 A.D., the Khalif Elmotasem decided to build his new capital and dispatched representatives to the remote cities to collect marble pillars and costly building materials.

He sent a person called Aliazar to Egypt who was a follower of Nastor the heretic, and he took the marble pillars of many churches in Alexandria, ruining them. He also removed the colored marble of the Saint Mena Church in Maryut.

When Pope Yosab the First, the 52<sup>nd</sup> patriarch, heard this, he was deeply saddened. He was concerned that the church should be restored quickly, so he brought engraved paintings and put them in the place of the removed ones.

# The Church Property Seized and Visitors Stop Arriving:

During the era of Pope Shenouda the First, the 55<sup>th</sup> Patriarch, (859-880 A.D.), a number of the Arabs imposed their authority over many towns and seized the property of the Church of Martyr Saint Mena in Maryut. They besieged the city of Alexandria for a very long time causing recession and suffering. The Church of Martyr

Saint Mena in Maryut, a source of delight for all the Orthodox Egyptians, became a total desert and visitors stopped coming. The memorial of Saint Mena, however, was unharmed.

### The Church during the 12<sup>th</sup> century:

The last historic evidence about the existence of the Saint's body in this area is mentioned in a book attributed to Abu Saleh the Armenian 1177-1204 A.D.. He wrote in his book about the Maryut Area, and about the Church of Abu Mena the Martyr, who had three crowns. He also noted that in the church the holy body of the Martyr Abu Mena was buried, and from his body many wonders and miracles happened continually. The church possessed much property. Its decorations were extremely beautiful and inside many colored marble pillars were standing and also decorating the floor. Such unique beauty had never before been seen.

After that, the area was exposed to extensive destruction, and subsequently raided by Bedouins, causing it to be totally abandoned. With the destruction of the church that was above the tomb, the body disappeared under the ruins unharmed until found at the beginning of the 13th century.

### THE JOURNEY OF THE HOLY BODY FROM MARYUT TO FUM EL-KHALIG AREAS

During the control of the Kingdom of Elmoez, specifically the reign of King Eiz Eldeen Aibak, from 1249-1257 A.D., barbarians invaded the city of Alexandria from the west. They captured the inhabitants and stole their property. The King appointed a prince, Folk Eltakwah, and a wealthy Orthodox Christian, Sheikh Elsaniia Eltreki, as heads of his government. During their travels, the prince and the Christian man passed by the Maryut area and stayed there for a number of days.

During their stay, some Arabs went to a hill in search of bricks in order to build houses for themselves and sell the rest to the citizens of Alexandria. While they were digging and searching for the bricks, they found a closed sealed box. They were very happy and thought that it contained silver or gold or precious jewelry. But they were divided about whether to keep the treasure. As a result, there arose a big argument among them. The rest of the Arabs in Maryut gathered and a battle began. When the Prince Folk Eltakwa realized this, he took the box from them and ordered that it be opened. When they opened the box, they discovered a decorated pipe, which they also opened. They unsealed the cover and were amazed to find the bones of a man wrapped in seven layers of fine silk. They did not know whose bones these

were. The Prince ordered one of the soldiers to throw the bones in the stove of the kitchen to avoid a battle with the Arabs.

### Throwing the Saint's body in the fire:

The soldier did as the Prince ordered him and dismissed the others. That night the head cook went to the kitchen to prepare some food. He saw a column of light radiating like the sun from the fire above the holy bones. He was astonished and went quickly to Sheikh Elsaniia. When he told him about what he had seen, the Sheikh accompanied him to the kitchen, who upon seeing the glory of God on the bones, praised God, certain that it was the body of one of the martyrs.

### Moving the Saint's body to the town of Ashmon Elroman<sup>†</sup>:

Sheikh Elsaniia removed the holy bones from the fire, wrapped them with silk shrouds and gave them to one of his honest servants ordering him to take them to Elsaniia's house in the town of Ashmon Elroman. He told him to take care of them and not to speak anyone about them.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> Ashmon Elroman located in Dekrnes town in Dakahlia governorate.

### The body in Ashmon Elroman:

Sheikh Elsaniia returned home and sent for the town bishop. When he arrived, the Sheikh told him about the box and explained that he did not know to whom this holy body belonged. The bishop received a blessing from the body, and ordered him to light an oil lamp before the body.

### The body in Banha Elasal town:

The same man later moved to the town of Banha Elasal and resided there. He took the coffin with him, and created a special memorial, placing the oil lamp before the saint's body.

## The appearance of the Saint and his introduction of himself:

One day, there was a blessed monk visiting Sheikh Elsaniia named Isaac. As he was sleeping one night, the Saint appeared to him and introduced himself as Abu Mena the Martyr of Christ. He asked him to take care of the body until it could be moved to the church.

In the morning, the monk awakened Sheikh Elsaniia and his household. He told them about what he had seen. They were very happy and became interested in creating a memorial area around the body. They brought new large oil lamps and placed them in front of the martyr and kept them lit day and night and increased the honor of this martyr of Jesus. The priest in the area was called to raise incense before the Saint on the days of his memorial.

Sheikh Elsaniia had a virgin daughter called Set Elcopt who gave her purity to Jesus Christ. Therefore, her father asked her to preserve the memorial and care for the body of the holy Saint Mena throughout her life. She was delighted. Because of her purity, she was privileged to actually see the Saint many times. He would thank her for her love and service to him.

### The Saint declares his moving from Banha:

The Lord Jesus Christ desired the pure body of the Saint Mena to be moved to a church named for him on the westside of Masr Elmahrosa. The noble martyr then appeared to Set Elcopt and told her that he would move to another place.

### Moving the Saint's body to Cairo:

When Priest John Al-Saegh, the servant of Saint Mena Church in Fum El-Khalig learned about the existence of the holy body of Saint Mena in the house of Sheikh Elsaniia, and that a virgin called Set Elcopt served the body, he traveled to her and told her that the bodies of saints must be kept in churches. He promised her she could stay with the body of Saint Mena in the church and that she would be allowed to serve in the memorial and care for the body of the martyr the rest of her life. She accepted this, told him that the saint had appeared to her, and said he was going to another place.

When the Christian aristocracy of Cairo became aware of this, they came to take the body of the saint, but the citizens of the village of Banha Elasal did not permit this until Pope Binyamin the Second, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Patriarch (1327-1339 A.D.), intervened and ordered that the body would moved to Saint Mena Church in Fum El-Khalig.

The body of the Saint remained in Ashmon Elroman and Banha Elasal for about eighty years.

# Finding the Body of Saint Mena at his church in Fum El-Khalig:

There were many attempts to steal the body of the blessed martyr which led the Christian aristocracy to keep it isolated. With the repetition of church destruction and restoration, the place of the pipe, in which the body was enclosed, became unknown. It was God's will for this to last a long time. The last time any reference was

made about the body occurred during the era of Pope Mark the Fourth the 84th Patriarch, 1348-1363 A.D.

In the year 1589 of the Martyr's calendar, September 1, 1873 A.D., Saint Mena the Miraculous appeared to the Hegoman Tadros Mena, head of Saint Mena Monastery in Fum El-Khalig, in a dream and ordered him to search for the body. He told him that it was within the church.

After searching, the body was found in a wooden pipe with the name of Saint Mena written on it. There were four other pipes with the names of other martyrs each having his name written on his pipe.

When Pope Kyrillos VI became the Patriarch in 1959 A.D., some of Saint Mena's bones were moved to Saint Mena Church in the area of ancient Cairo called El-Zahraa. On February 15, 1962, another part of the original pipe was moved to Saint Mena Monastery in Maryut.

# THE ARCHEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF ABU MENA CITY IN MARYUT DURING THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES

# The destruction of Abu Mena City during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century:

The Bedouins living in the area commonly attacked and robbed travelers. So Mohammed Ali Basha, 1805-1848 A.D., destroyed the remains of buildings still in the desert to put an end to such activity.

### Rediscovering the city during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:

The German scholar C. M. Kaufmann began his excavations in this area from 1905-1907 A.D. and discovered some artifacts and monuments during this period. He transported 100 large containers to Germany. The boxes were full of magnificent antiquities, for example, the crowns of marble pillars, clay bottles of Abu Mena, in addition to many other items. They are all stored in the Frankfurt Museum in Germany. The world museums endeavored to seize such antiquities from the site, but Kaufmann had already acquired most of them.

History mentions that Bramky Bek, the governor of the western desert at the time, when he inspected the ruins of the city, did not want to leave the remaining marble. So he removed it and used it to build the southern city of Abu Sir. He named this city Borg El-Arab. The discovery of the excavations did not escape the abuse of the Bedouins living in this area once again.

Some of the German researchers, assigned by the German Archeology Institute, with the assistance of the Coptic Museum, undertook new and precise excavations. Various antiquities were moved to the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. During the past few years, the German Institute for Antiquities in Cairo made some additional discoveries in the area under the chairmanship of archeologist Dr. Peter Grossman and the supervision of the Egyptian Antiquities Authority.

#### The area during the modern time:

Due to the historic importance of this place, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has considered the Abu Mena area one of the most important archeological locations in the world. In 1979, UNESCO registered it as one of five areas in Egypt and one of 57 areas in the world that should be cared for and preserved as part of human legacy. They published a book entitled: <u>A LEGACY</u> FOR ALL as a permanent record for human civilization.

#### **Establishing the new monastery:**

On Sunday, the second day of the Coptic month of Bashns 1675 according to the Martyr's Coptic calendar, May 10, 1959 A.D., the monk Hegoman Mena the Hermit of Elbaramos Monastery (Saint Mary) was anointed as a Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark and the 116<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria with the name Pope Kyrillos VI.

As the head of the church, he had the opportunity to restore the Abu Mena area in Maryut to its original renown and glory. Therefore, establishing Saint Mena Monastery in Maryut was the first project of construction to which His Holiness gave priority after becoming Pope. He requested from the authorities involved that he be permitted to buy the land and build the Abu Mena Monastery. He was permitted to purchase an area of 15 feddans (63,000 square meters) at the northern borders of the Archeological area.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> Day of the Coptic Month of Baona 1675 of the Martyr's Coptic Calendar, July 22, 1959 A.D., a memorial service anointing the Church of Saint Mena was held. This was the first feast for Saint Mena celebrated after Pope Kyrillos' installation. He went to the Abu Mena archeological area and held the Mass attended by a great number of people. This was the first time that a Pope attended a celebration for this Saint here in this area after more than seven hundred years.



Pope Kyrillos VI holding the First Mass in the Archeological area



Pope Kyrillos VI laying the foundation stone of the new monastery of Saint Mena

On Friday, the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic Month of Hatour 1676 Martyr's calendar, November 27, 1959 A.D., His Holiness laid the foundation stone of the new monastery.

This stone lies under the eastern part of the main altar of the monastery's Cathedral. It appears behind the glass façade before the memorial of Pope Kyrillos VI.

Dr. Meinardus\* comments on this achievement, in his book on monasticism in Egypt, that the dreams of Pope Kyrillos' were coming true and being fulfilled after many years. One thousand years later, this holy place is once again a home for monks carrying the name of Ava Mena.

#### The monks' revival of the monastery:

His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI began reviving the monastery with deeply spiritual monks who had many years of experience in the monastic life in order to begin a nucleus of holy monastic life there. Then he anointed monks for the Monastery and they carried the title Ava Mena [father Mena]. On the 4th day of the Coptic Month of Permoda 1679 the Martyr's calendar, April 12th, 1963 A.D., the anointing of new monks for the Monastery began.

<sup>\*</sup> Dr. Meinardus was a professor in the American University in Cairo. Monks and Monasticism in the Egyptian Desert, published in 1961.



Pope Kyrillos VI with the monks of Saint Mena Monastery in Maryut in 1970 A.D.

The first Abbot of the Monastery was His Grace the late Bishop Mena Ava Mena<sup>†</sup> to whom Pope Kyrillos VI gave responsibility of the monastery in 1964 A.D. Pope Shenouda III ordained him as a Bishop on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic Month of Bashns 1696 the Martyr's calendar, May 25, 1980 A.D. During his era, most of the monastery buildings were constructed. Many youths also joined the monastic life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> He passed away in the faith of the Lord December 11, 1996 A.D.



Pope Kyrillos VI holding the Mass with the Hegoman Mena Ava Mena.



His Holiness Pope Shenouda III the 117<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria anointed Father Kyrillos Ava Mena as a Bishop and Abbot of this monastery to succeed Bishop Mena on the day of Pentecost, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Baoona 1719 the Martyr's calendar, June 15, 2003 A.D.

When Bishop Kyrillos Ava Mena became the Abbot for Saint Mena Monastery, he understood the importance of a special House of God inside this treasured and unique monastery and continued the work of Pope Kyrillos to build the Cathedral of St. Mena. He greatly increased the construction with the help of the monks in the monastery. Father Hegoman Saleeb Ava Mena, a monk of the Monastery, designed and studied how to enhance the meaning and symbolic nature of the decorations of the buildings and how to compliment the work of finishing the Cathedral, duplicating the pure and ancient Coptic carvings of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Golden era of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Special attention was devoted to the artistic expression of the Holy Bible which contributes to worshipping God.

The iconostases were created of paneled and inlaid woodwork of tremendous height, as a result of the woodworking artistry of the monastery workshop and the vision of the monks. Exquisite in design and craftsmanship, the Cathedral is not only a building of extreme beauty, but a House of God to the Glory of His Holy Name.

The monks in the marble workshop at the Monastery designed the marble carvings, the iconic mosaic dome, other massive mosaics, as well as the stained glass windows.

#### **Dedication of St. Mena Cathedral:**

On Monday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Tobi, 1721 A.M., January 10, 2005 A.D., Pope Shenouda III anointed with the sacrament of Holy Chrism, the altars of the Cathedral in the presence of thirty-six Metropolitans and Bishops, and monks of Abu Mena and other monasteries.

This was the holy promise to Saint Mena: "Your name will be more famous than many martyrs and I shall bring all people of different tribes and tongues to worship in the church that will be built in your name in Egypt. Moreover, you will receive inexpressible honor and glory in My eternal kingdom. They will see the miracles and wonders that will be done through the holy anointing on your body."

This place has once again become a source of comfort for any sick or troubled person where the God of Divine Care performs many miracles for His Name Sake and by the power of His Holy Spirit.

#### MODERN DAY MIRACLES

# ST. MENA THE MIRACULOUS POPE KYRILLOS VI ST. MENA MONASTERY

The following pages contain only a small collection of true stories that have no explanation except that God works in mysterious ways. Our lives are always connected to Heaven when we believe in the One True God: The Father, His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, One God. To His Holy Name we give praise for His love and constant care of us. Amen.

Someday, when the history books are opened in Heaven and reviewed, the area of Maryut and the miracles of God here will amaze all of God's creation. And we shall all praise Him in one accord, giving glory to Him for His mercy.



#### THE MIGHTY SAINT IN BATTLE

### 1) Martyr Mena protects the Christians on the Island of Crete<sup>(1)</sup>:

On Easter, April 18, 1826, The Turks seized an opportunity to destroy the Greeks, who were all gathered in prayer at the liturgy service of the feast, inside St. Mena Church in Heraklion, on the Island of Crete.

In order to kill the entire congregation of the church so that not one could possibly escape, they gathered a great number of the warriors, armed with knives, swords and various kinds of weapons, and surrounded the church, and other gatherings in every street of the city. To distract the authorities, fires were set in some remote districts of the city.

While metropolitan Calinecus was reading the gospel, a group of the armed Turks came near the gates of the church and were stunned when they saw a strong light filling the church and an older cavalryman with white hair riding a horse and brandishing his sword angrily, similar to the Turkish commander Ayyan Agha. When those who were ready to begin the massacre saw the

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<sup>(1)</sup> O AGIOS MHNAS, Archimandrite Kharalampus Vasilopolo, Athens, 1973, p.p. 38, 41.

rider, they fled in intimidation and returned to their governor to ask him why he had sent the commander Ayyan Agha to disperse them. He replied that he did not know anything, and he had not sent anyone. Ayyan Agha was sleeping at home that night. The Turks then realized that St. Mena was the man who appeared to save the Christians.

In order to establish the miracle and disgrace the Turks, the metropolitan went the following day to the governor to thank him, as though he had sent the commander Ayyan Agha. But the leader told him that he had not sent anyone.

#### Editor's note:

The Saint appeared in the form of an elder because the Greek Church believes that he was martyred in old age. So, he is represented as an elder in the Greek icons, and the Saint manifested himself to them in this customary form.

## 2) Bombs do not hit Saint Mena Monastery at Eginia Island<sup>(2)</sup>:

On Eginia Island, there was a deserted chapel named after St. Mena. Four people, among those who loved the

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibid, p.p. 43 - 49. Eginia is a small Island near Athens.

Saint, rebuilt it and established a fine church, which became a convent. In May 1941, there was a famous battle with the Germans, who dropped many large bombs over the church, but no one was hurt.

Two bombs fell inside the convent, one on the side of the courtyard and another large bomb fell about 3 meters from the church, but it did not explode.

\* Archimandrite Vasilopolo commented on this miracle saying:

"Therefore, during the German war, the citizens of Herakleion took refuge in St. Mena Church, during the air raids, since they believed that it was a safer shelter."

### 3) Martyr Mena drives away a soldier of the colonists:

With this miracle, archimandrite Kharalampus Vasilopolo ends his book, in Athens 1973, regarding St. Mena in Greece:

"In April 1943, during the German occupation, the governor of Philia village in Migharithos Atiqus, ordered his soldiers to guard the four corners of the village, in order to observe whether its citizens would help the rebels, who hid in the mountains around them.

"The area on the southern side of the village was situated adjacent to the Church of St. Mena, on the road

to Drestani. One day, at noon, the German guard was surprised by a horseman with a whip in his hand, asking him sharply in German, 'What are you doing here in my house?' The guard answered, 'I am watching the road according to the governor's order.' Then, the horseman told him in a powerful voice, 'Get out of my house quickly.' He dismounted the horse, and lashed him with the whip, saying to him again, 'Go away at once, and don't come near this place again.'

"The German soldier was filled with terror, and fell on his face. The horseman repeated his warning; the guard got up, and quickly informed the governor about details of this event. The latter believed the story of the soldier was just some fantasy and sent another soldier the following day. The same event occurred with the horseman, who spoke to him in German as a man of power and authority.

"The governor was disturbed, so on the third day he went with the two soldiers to the area. When he saw the church, he asked for it to be opened. As they entered, the two soldiers cried out when they saw the icon of Saint Mena, 'This is the horseman who beat us and drove us away!' After they spoke those words, they rejoiced because they knew that what happened was a deed of Saint Mena. The governor ordered no more guards to be assigned to this site, and permitted the citizens to pass in that street freely. Afterwards the

citizens of Philia, asked the intercession of Saint Mena, when they were exposed to any danger from the cruel colonists. Thus, they found salvation and protection." (3)

#### 4) The Martyr Mena and El-Alamain battle:

A) The archimandrite Kharalampus Vasilopolo, recorded in his book about St. Mena, which was published in Athens (1st edition 1973, reprinted in 1995) in Greek under the title:

### "The Victorious in El-Alamain" (4)

"In 1940, during the Second World War, the Germans and the Italians occupied Greece. Some of the Greeks fled to Egypt, the native home of St. Mena, and formed the beginning of the Greek army in order to liberate their country with the help of the Allies.

In 1942, Romel, the German leader of the Axis powers, occupied North Africa with its military and proceeded towards Alexandria, until El-Alamain, where they camped and prepared to attack the city. El-Alamain in

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid, pp. 52, 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(4)</sup> O AGIOS MHNAS, Athens, 1995, pp. 49 - 52. This text expresses the Greek view about Saint Mena.

Arabic means St. Mena,<sup>(5)</sup> because in the past, there existed in this area a magnificent church named after St. Mena with beautiful icons on its walls. One of the icons depicted St. Mena leading a caravan of camels as he saved that city from severe danger in ancient times. During this period, fear engulfed the entire world, especially the Greeks, for if Alexandria fell, they would lose all hope of being liberated from the Nazi threat.

Here, St. Mena, as the Greco-Egyptian records indicate, intervened to put an end to the complete destruction of El-Alamain. At midnight it was determined to begin the battle, and many of the pious people saw the Saint leaving the demolished region (the monument area) and leading camels, as in the icon, to the German camp.<sup>(6)</sup>

It was difficult to describe the terror that struck the strong Germans, who were undefeated until this time. In that hour Hitler's authority ended as the troops retreated. Greece was liberated and freed from Nazi terror through this withdrawal.

Other sects, such as the English Protestants, who were our Allies at this time, venerated this miracle. So, they granted the Patriarch of Alexandria (Patriarch of the

<sup>(5)</sup> According to opinion of the writer.

<sup>(6)</sup> El-Alamain area is situated about 130 km. West of Alexandria, while the monument area of Saint Mena is about 65 km.

Orthodox Greeks), that area to reconstruct the church for Saint Mena, and to record, in gold letters, the names of the children of the Orthodox Church (the Greeks), who were martyred, as a memorial of defeat of the Germans and the Italians at El-Alamain."

### B) The late Prof. Dr. Naguib Mahfouz, the famous Professor of Gynecology at Qasr Al-Ayni Hospital (Cairo University) narrated this story:

"I was acquainted with the well-known English military leader, Montgomery, who called me several times to treat families of the English officers in Egypt. This leader told me that before the El-Alamain battle broke out between the Allied forces and those of the Axis, he saw in a dream, the battle raging between the two camps, and a man pointed with his hands, and the more he made this movement, the more the German forces were defeated. He continued pointing with his hand, until they were completely defeated.

And when Montgomery asked this man about his name, he replied 'Mena.' Several days later as in this vision, the battle broke out, and the German powers were defeated while the English powers triumphed."

Through this victory, God saved Egypt from utter destruction. First of all, had the German forces triumphed they would have occupied Egypt. Secondly, the plan of the English forces was to destroy all the Egyptian

bridges, roads, and railroads, as well as the dams to drown the Nile Delta and prevent the German forces from proceeding east to the Suez canal, thus devastating Egypt and gaining the victory over the Germans.<sup>(7)</sup>

#### C) Dr. Otto F. A. Meinardus wrote that:

"Dr. T.D. Mosconas, librarian of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, refers to a story of a horseman who appeared in Maryut a few days before the great battle of El-Alamain (October 1942), urging the Allied soldiers in Egypt to fight shoulder to shoulder, alleged to be St. Menas.

In the Egyptian Gazette of November 10, 1942, we read St. Menas is now hailed by the Greeks in Egypt as the Savior of Alexandria from the onslaught of the Axis troops... It was a case of Saint Menas vs. Romel, with the first round won by the Egyptian Saint... The Saint's festival was therefore celebrated with due solemnity, and at the cathedral of Saint Saba, Alexandria; His Holiness, Patriarch Christopher II was present at the Doxology. Many devout Greeks are already speaking of proposing to erect a church to St. Menas to be situated some where near the site of the old monastery."(8)

<sup>(7)</sup> Miracles of Mari Mena The Miraculous, part 2, 1987, pp. 76, 80.

<sup>(8)</sup> Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert, Otto F.A. Meinardus, Cairo, 1967, p. 354.

#### D) Testimony of H.H. the Greek Patriarch of Alexandria:

The Greek Church celebrates the anniversary of the martyr Mena, on November 11, according to the western calendar.

On the first anniversary of the martyr, November 11, 1942 after El-Alamain battle, H.H. the Patriarch Christopher II, of the Greek Church in Egypt, published a declaration in Greek and in English, saying:

"Born in Egypt Saint Menas, died a martyr in Cotyeon in Asia Minor<sup>(9)</sup> in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. His remains were transferred by pious Christians to Alexandria and were buried in the western desert in the vicinity of El-Alamain. Since that time this site has become a universal place of pilgrimage for the whole Christian world. The recent military operations in the western desert took place close by Saint Mena's burial place and we are entitled to believe that his blessings contributed to the victory of the Allies and the crushing defeat of the Axis." (10)

### THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS

mentions that, "After El-Alamain battle in 1943,

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<sup>(9)</sup> According to view of some.

<sup>(10)</sup> Miracles of Mar Mena the Miraculous. Published by the Sons of Pope Kyrillos IV, part 2, 1987, p. 83.

patriarch of Alexandria,<sup>(11)</sup> relates deliverance of Egypt to intercession of Menas. The project of renovating of his tomb adjacent to El-Alamain has begun."<sup>(12)</sup>

### SOME DIVINE MIRACLES WHILE ESTABLISHING THE NEW MONASTERY

The construction of the new Monastery at Maryut was accompanied by many wonders, a common phenomenon that occurs when building churches in Egypt. Despite the obstacles that face construction, God's holy hand conducts the course of the building process in a way beyond human reason, faith in God's might increases, and souls are encouraged until the work is completed.

Here are some miracles showing the work of our Holy God through his beloved Saints to glorify His greatness.

#### 1) A tractor moves without a driver:

One day in January 1965, a tractor belonging to the Monastery was pulling a water tank to refill it in Baheeg

<sup>(11)</sup> Farmer, David Hugh, <u>The Oxford Dictionary of Saints</u>, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 299.

<sup>(12)</sup> Of the Orthodox Greek Church.

Valley at the water station. The monk driving the tractor detached the trailer at the station when he discovered how slowly the tank was being filled and drove the tractor away. After a while the driver stopped the tractor and left the driver's seat in order to walk around a bit... talking to God, waiting for the tank to fill... He returned to the tractor and started the ignition while standing on the ground and the tractor took off rapidly all on its own! There was no possibility of stopping it.

As the tractor moved among the Bedouins' tents, it was as if a skillful driver was controlling the steering wheel, guiding it to pass between the tents. It turned right and left so accurately that it did not collide with any tent or person.

Moving away from this area, it made its way around flocks of sheep and camels, reached the railway, and crossed the tracks, still continuing to drive forward. For about twenty-five miles the tractor continued until it came to a small pond of water and stopped. The community knew the tractor belonged to the Monastery and came to ask the Abbot if he would please send someone to take care of it. Who drove the tractor? Why was there no accident? Many believe it was Abu Mena who was driving and certainly that it is a reasonable explanation. The tractor remains in the Monastery as a reminder of God's Holy Hand there.

#### 2) Healing the laborer without a physician:

Here is another wonderful tractor story with a happy ending. During the time of building the first wall of the monastery, one of the workers fell off a tractor, and the trailer full of stones rolled over his legs with its front and rear wheels. A visitor in the Monastery took him in his car to the medical center in the neighboring town of Borg El-Arab, where the physician received them rudely and insisted on referring the case to the police station.

Consequently, the visitor and the laborer returned to the Monastery. The injured man was left in the special room for the workers, while the visitor went to Pope Kyrillos, who was in the Monastery at the time, in order to explain the situation to him. However, before he was able to share the explanation of the events with the Pope, His Holiness told him: "Leave him, he will be cured, and become like a horse, and do not care for this cavalier physician."

Two days later the laborer recovered and resumed his work as if nothing happened.

#### 3) Nine days in a coma:

Mr. Youssef Rezik: the Concrete Contractor says: In 1973, I was working on the wooden structure of the Cathedral of Saint Mena Monastery. One day, I woke up and found myself lying in a hospital bed. Relatives were around me, so, I wondered what I was doing there.

I told them, "I was at Saint Mena Monastery... what happened to bring me here? They replied: "You fell down from the top of the scaffold nine meters high."

It seems that I went into a coma before falling and therefore could not explain what happened to me or how I was transferred to this hospital.

My relatives told me that I was in a coma for nine days and throughout this period I was here in this hospital under medication.

After a physical examination, Dr. Samuel Boctor, Professor of Brain and Nerves surgery determined that it I had a fracture in the bottom of my skull. If I survived, I would live with a lifetime handicap.

The Monastery fathers held a liturgy service daily on my behalf after my accident, asking for the intercession of Saint Mena.

During the period of my coma, while my brother was beside me in the hospital room, he saw a naval officer coming directly toward me. After he made a physical examination, he wrote down a prescription: two ampoules of Penicillin then said: "Be confident, your brother is fine, do not be afraid," after which he went out.

My brother bought the two ampoules and asked the nurse to inject me. When the hospital physicians objected about the consultation with a physician from outside the hospital, my brother told them that: "We do not know him, nobody asked any physician to come."

I was given the two ampoules, regained consciousness, and was cured completely. When the physicians made their examination, they found nothing wrong with me. There was no evidence of wounds from the accident either. I went out of the hospital the next day, returned to my work in the Monastery, and refused the offer of the contractor I was working with to take a week's rest. Then I went to Dr. Samuel Boctor who found me in complete health, and as he wondered about this quick cure he said:

"We were incapable of doing anything for you." He concluded that what happened to me was not a result of medical attention, but a miracle.

#### 4) Return of the stolen stones:

A bulletin, "Voice of the Pastor" published an article titled, "Pope Kyrillos Guards the Stones of the Wall," by the late archpriest Bishoy Kamel.

In this article he wrote that an event occurred to one of the Bedouins who was best in handling the stones during the time of building the wall (fence) of the Monastery of Saint Mena. Unbeknownst to the man, his son would come at night and steal some stones away, hiding them in his house. Suddenly, as he was stealing the stones, he could not move his hand. His family took him to the most famous neurologist in Alexandria, who described it as a hopeless case, a chronically paralyzed hand.

He was taken home to Maryut in despair. Later in a dream, an old man with a big beard appeared to his father and said, "Tell your son to bring back the stones and his hand will be healed." The man awoke and ordered his son to return the stones. On returning the last stone, the hand began to move. (13)

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<sup>(13)</sup> Bulletin Voice of the Pastor, No. 3, 4 1979, issued by: St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria.

### POPE KYRILLOS VI FRIENDSHIP WITH ST. MENA IN THE MONASTERY

There was extraordinary intimacy between H.H. Pope Kyrillos and Saint Mena in the Monastery at Maryut. Whenever he arrived, he felt himself to be in good health, and refrained from using any kind of medication saying, "We have reached the port of salvation", and "At Saint Mena, we are not in need of any medicine." (14)

H.H. Pope Shenouda III, said at the eve of the transferring of the body of Pope Kyrillos from Cairo to Saint Mena Monastery at Maryut:

"All of you know, that he spent long months in that Monastery, for it was the place of his solitude, and the place that reminded him of his old name, Mena, the solitary.

He liked that place very much. And as a solitary man, the more the exterior pressures increased, the more he took refuge there.

This great intimacy between him and the Saint made him write in his will that he had to be buried at Saint Mena Monastery. He would impose severe excommunications, to anyone who transgressed this will,

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<sup>(14)</sup> My memoirs about the life of Pope Kyrillos VI, Fr. Rafael Aba Mena, Hanna Yousef Atta, p. 147.

which affirms his affection for Saint Mena Monastery... There was a great adoration of this Monastery, and his heart's was set on it." (15)

Why are these words that talk about Pope Kyrillos, in a book about the martyr Saint Mena?

The love Pope Kyrillos had for this place, and in which he took such delight, was in harmony with the martyr's desire. "Saint Mena always urged the revival of the monastery at Maryut." (16)

Also, he was desirous that the Pope should stay there. That was clear from the uncommon events, which occurred, whenever H.H. Pope Kyrillos intended to leave the Monastery.

\* Fr. Mena Aba Mena (H.G. the late Bishop Mena) said: "Once, when H.H. the Pope was in the Monastery, he asked his driver to go with the car to a station nearby the Monastery to telephone the Patriarchate in Alexandria and tell them that H.H. the Pope would come. At the station, the car stalled. The driver brought another car and went to Alexandria and brought a mechanic to repair the car, and returned to the Monastery. But when he tried to move the car, it did not

<sup>(15)</sup> My Memoirs about the Life of Pope Kyrillos VI, Fr. Rafael Aba Mena, part 2, p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(16)</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

move in spite of many attempts. Suddenly a severe sand storm blew, so that one could not see more than a half-meter ahead. They returned to H.H. the Pope, who shook his head and went to the icon of Saint Mena saying: "Why are you unhappy? Have we not stayed with you for 35 days?! Do not be upset."

The storm calmed down. H.H. the Pope asked for a glass of water and put in it two drops of the oil of the oillamp, of Saint Mena and prayed on it. Then he sprinkled it over the motor of the car. Immediately, the car moved, after the failure of the mechanic's attempts." (17)

\* "In 1966, the Pope went to Saint Mena Monastery, and decided to go back to Alexandria on the same day for some important meetings. After the Pope prayed the liturgy service, a strong sand storm blew. Then the Pope looked at the icon of Saint Mena, and told him: 'Are you upset because we shall leave you? We shall come back at the earliest convenience'. When the Pope lifted the cross, the storm calmed, and he returned to Alexandria." (18)

It is a wonderful relationship. The love H.H. Pope Kyrillos and St. Mena have together.

<sup>(17) &</sup>lt;u>Miracles of the Pope Kyrillos VI- Part 1</u>, published by Sons of Pope Kyrillos, third edition, p. 65.

<sup>(18)</sup> My Memoirs about the Life of Pope Kyrillos VI, by Fr. Rafael Aba Mena, Hanna Yousef Atta, Ibid, p. 94.

The following excerpts are special memories that recall the special relationship of St. Mena and Pope Kyrillos.

## St. Mena is sent to guide travelers to the Monastery:

Father Archpriest Mikhail Abd Elmessih of the Church of Archangel Mikhail - Dair Elmalak Elbahari Cairo relates this story:

One day I was heading for martyr St. Mena Monastery at Maryut accompanied by eighteen priests. I was going to meet Pope Kyrillos VI there to submit some matters, and questions having to do with the patriarchate for which I acted at the time, as general vicar.

It was well known that the part of the road between Baheeg village and the Monastery was not paved, and the visitors had to follow a footpath in the desert guided by landmarks placed on both sides of the path. However, on that particular day after we had covered a large part of the way, we discovered that we missed the landmarks and were lost in the middle of the desert. There was no one to ask about the right road even if we were to turn back.

Suddenly a Bedouin appeared and asked us, "Do you want to go to St. Mena Monastery?" This was a strange surprise and we answered positively that we indeed would like to be there. In entire simplicity, he got onto

the wing of the car and began to direct the driver until we reached the monastery. Our hearts were full of thanks and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ who did not permit us to be lost in the vastness of the desert.

It was wonderful to find Pope Kyrillos waiting for us at the Monastery gate, who asked us in fatherly compassion and kindness, "What is the matter, my son? Did you lose your way?" I replied, "We lost the way and God sent us a Bedouin who led us until we came here." The Pope, with an angelic smile on his face said, "Where is he?"

We went looking for the man, but we found no trace of him, and came back and told the Pope that he was not there. Then he pleasantly smiled and said with overwhelming happiness, "My son, I sent to you St. Mena when you lost your way." So we wondered at the unusual relationship between these two saints...<sup>(19)</sup>

# Dr. Hanna Yousef Hanna, Professor of Accounting, recounts another story here:

When Pope Kyrillos VI began the revival of St. Mena Monastery at Maryut, I had a strong desire to visit that holy site. One day, H.H. the Pope asked me to accompany H.G. Bishop Theophilus of Al-Syrian

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(19)</sup> Miracles of Saint Mena the Miraculous, part 2, pp 64-65. Sons of Pope Kyrillos VI.

Monastery to St. Mena Monastery. There were three guest rooms at the monastery at the time and other guests included Fr. Mettias of Al-Syrian (now, H.G. Bishop Domadios). There were no available rooms for us that night, and in spite of the objection of Fr. Mettias, we chose to sleep in the church.

At midnight, Fr. Mettias got up to pray outside the church. After some time I heard the sound of a key being inserted in the lock of the door and when the door was opened, I assumed it was Fr. Mattias. But when I opened my eyes, I saw a young man in a uniform of a Roman leader coming to me. I was troubled, but recognized my beloved martyr St. Mena. I tried to stand to greet him, but lost strength and could not move. He came to me and patted me on the shoulder several times. When I tried to speak, I could not. Then, he left.

In the early morning, after the liturgy service, we returned to Cairo. I immediately went to the patriarchate, and met H.H. Pope Kyrillos, who surprised me when he said, "Why did you behave with St. Mena in such a way? St. Mena, your beloved one came to greet you. Have you not spoken to him? Why were you troubled? What makes you troubled? Cross yourself and talk to him. When he appears to you again, do not be afraid and cross yourself." And that actually happened again...<sup>(20)</sup>

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<sup>(20)</sup> Miracles of Pope Kyrillos VI, part 3, pp 4-5. Sons of Pope Kyrillos.

Here is another beautiful story of God's mercy and of the relationship of St. Mena and Pope Kyrillos:

### Mr. Magdy Aziz Kamel, accountant from Cairo said:

I prayed to God to let my young daughter be admitted to the "Nun's School" in Cairo as her older sister was a student there. We offered the application, but it was rejected because she was below the acceptable age, although we had obtained permission from the Minister of Education.

We went to St. Mena Monastery at Maryut to pray deeply to the Lord Jesus and ask the intercession of the Virgin Mary, St. Mena and Pope Kyrillos that our daughter might be admitted to the school. On March 21, 1994, I went to meet the headmistress, taking with me the book of Miracles published that month about Pope Kyrillos. (Anniversary of the repose of Pope Kyrillos) I asked the Pope to be with me on this errand and that the Lord would give me favor.

The headmistress told me: "You have to make haste now because there is no other opportunity to admit your daughter for next year." Immediately, I paid the school fees, received the books, and my daughter joined the school on the following day.

In spite of her young age, our daughter prayed thanking St. Mena and Pope Kyrillos before sleeping.

The next morning, she told us that while she was in bed she saw the Virgin Mary, who came out of the picture frame. She was afraid and cried, but the Virgin told her not to fear and returned to the portrait. We asked our daughter to show us the picture and were surprised, because it was the same portrait of St. Mena. The next night the matter was repeated; St. Mena smiled at her and returned to the portrait.<sup>(21)</sup>

# Pope Kyrillos asked to be buried in Saint Mena monastery:

Due to this marvelous relationship, the Pope left a written will, to have his body buried in Saint Mena Monastery at Maryut.

When H.H. Pope Kyrillos reposed in the Lord on March 9, 1971, he was buried in St. Mark Cathedral of Anba Rowais in Cairo. After his memorial was prepared beneath the altar of the Cathedral of Saint Mena Monastery at Maryut, his blessed body was transferred to the Monastery November 23, 1973 as he desired. H.H. Pope Shenouda III, who was interested in carrying out the will of H.H. Pope Kyrillos, accompanied by a large

<sup>(21)</sup> The Great Saint MENA The Miraculous. The Most Famous Egyptian Martyr. English Version, St. Mena Monastery Press, 2003, pp. 372-373.

number of the bishops, priests, and the congregation, assembled in a great celebration.

But why did Pope Kyrillos wish to be buried in the monastery? Do God's children give attention to their bodies this way, and to the place where they are buried?

The Holy Bible mentions that the Patriarch Jacob commanded his sons at his death saying: "Bury me with my fathers...There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife" (Gen. 49:29-31). Again, "Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying: God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." (Gen. 50:25)

#### Was Pope Kyrillos in his will similar to Jacob?

As Jacob said: "Bury me with my fathers" did Pope Kyrillos say: "Bury me with my intercessor?" And was it a desire of martyr Saint Mena that he asked the Pope to observe this wish? In any case it is impossible to separate these two holy and beloved persons in the hearts and minds of Christians everywhere.

#### H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

In his speech which he gave on the eve of the translation of the body of Pope Kyrillos from Cairo to Saint Mena Monastery Pope Shenouda said:

"No doubt, that Saint Mena Monastery, is the proper place of the body of the Pope, because he was the founder and the constructor of the monastery. He established it with its walls and recruited its monks.

No doubt, this monastery is associated with Pope Kyrillos. But for Pope Kyrillos' adoration for martyr Saint Mena, we should have called it Pope Kyrillos Monastery. The Alexandrian congregation does not distinguish between calling it Saint Mena Monastery and Pope Kyrillos Monastery".

For more information about the miraculous Martyr Saint Mena and his importance around the world as well as his miracles and the archeological area, refer to the book entitled:

"The Great Saint MENA the Miraculous
The Most Famous Egyptian Martyr"
Published by the Monastery of the Miraculous
Martyr Mena in Maryut.