



Saint Mena



Follow in the Footsteps

The Life of the Great Martyr

Saint Mena

by
Mary & Amani Bassilli

copticopa@yahoo.com
www.copticriches.com
www.gumroad.com/copticriches

Copyright © Amani Bassilli, 2020
All rights reserved.

Painting on the Front Cover
Artist Emad George
Tel: 01227 889583 (Egypt)
Used by permission.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Used by permission.

Follow in the Footsteps

THE SHULAMITE

*“Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed your flock,
Where you make it rest at noon”*

THE BELOVED

*“If you do not know,
O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock” (Song 1:7,8)*

The Song of Songs is a dialogue between Christ, the Beloved, and His bride, the human soul or the Church. When the bride enquires about the whereabouts of the Beloved, He directs her to *“follow in the footsteps of the flock”*. The flock are the saints; the *“footsteps of the flock”* are the life stories of the saints. They are those whose faith we are to follow, *“considering the outcome of their conduct”* (Heb.13:7).

CONTENTS

	Page
Antiphon.....	6
Chapter One	
<i>The Saint's Life</i>	8
Chapter Two	
<i>Tortures & Martyrdom</i>	17
Chapter Three	
<i>The Journey of the Relics</i>	26
Chapter Four	
<i>Miracles</i>	33
Bibliography and Series	40

Antiphon

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.5:10)

“What will it profit a man
if he gains the whole world,
and loses his own soul?”

To the voice of their God
the blessed martyrs listened.
They renounced this world
with its transient glory;
they gave their lives unto death,
their bodies unto fire,
they bore great tortures,
for the Son of God.

The weapons of warfare
of Christ’s martyrs are not carnal,
they are not ones of the earth,
but are the powers of God.
Their chariot is the Cross,
their sword the true faith.

They destroy idols
and rebuke them that worship them.

They testify to Christ
that He is the True God.

Because of their great love for Him
and the expectation of the good things
that endure forever,
they scorned death.
They gained inexpressible crowns,
their glory lies in heaven,
Christ is their bridegroom.
The tribulations and crowns
of the martyrs
are worthy of praise
for they renounced this world
with its transient glory,
they yearned for the heavenly Jerusalem,
the dwelling of Christ.

You, too, imitated their striving
and their glorious manner of life,
O Abba Mena the Martyr.
You gained the imperishable crown,
You rejoice with them
and the Saviour
for ever and ever.

Remember us before the Lord.

CHAPTER ONE

The Saint's Life

“To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil.1:21)

FAMILY

“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Matt.7:18)

Saint Mena was of noble birth. His grandfather was the governor of the city of Nikeus Pshati in the province of Menoufiya in Egypt, the city from which his parents came. His father, Eudoxius, was renowned for his virtues and godliness. Euphemia, his mother, was deeply devout, observing diligently the fasts and prayers of the Church, having compassion on strangers, widows and orphans, and remembering them always in her prayers.

THE ENVY OF THE DEVIL

“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20)

The saint's grandfather was succeeded by Anatolius, Eudoxius's brother. However, the people of Nikeus Pshati honoured Eudoxius more highly than his brother, for they loved his meekness, kindness and godliness. So the devil kindled the fire of jealousy in the heart of Anatolius, who misused the favour he had with the Roman Emperor Carinus by writing to him false allegations against his brother. After consulting with his men, however, the emperor did not yield to Anatolius's malicious charges

against his brother, but rather thought of a way of not humiliating Eudoxius, namely by keeping him in his post as governor, but elsewhere.

Emperor Carinus sent Eudoxius his captain Hypatus with an edict appointing Eudoxius governor over the region of Afrikiya in North Africa, in place of its deceased governor. He also ordered Hypatus to accompany Eudoxius, together with his wife, servants and possessions, to their new region to ensure their safety and comfort. As for the people of Nikeus Pshati, they were deeply saddened, to the extent that even Anatolius regretted what he had done.

THE SON OF PRAYER

Euphemia was barren and this was her big distress. But her trust in the Lord kept her praying fervently and earnestly, entreating Him to grant her a child, remembering His words that *“whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive”* (Matt.21:22).

On the 21st Toubah (29 January), the feast day of the Virgin Saint Mary’s Dormition, Euphemia was among the crowds who flocked joyfully to the church. Her heart full of sadness, she stood before an icon of the Virgin Saint Mary, and poured out her heart to the Lord, asking Him to look upon her sadness, and vowed that if He granted her a child, she would bring him up in His fear and love. Then she heard a voice saying: ‘Amen, Mena’. A great fear fell upon her, yet her heart was full of joy.

When Euphemia returned home and informed her husband of what had happened and of the voice she had heard, his heart was filled with joy also and he said to her: “We trust in our God who is able to do as you have heard, because ‘Amen’ means ‘So be it’ ”.

The divine promise was fulfilled; Euphemia became pregnant and looked forward to the day when her child would be born. When her days were completed, she gave birth to a boy, the son of prayer, c 285AD.

SAINT MENA'S UPBRINGING

“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (2Tim.3:15)

Many wanted to name the baby after his grandfather Ploudianus, but Euphemia refused, remembering the voice, saying: ‘Amen, Mena’ which she had heard. So she named him ‘Mena’.

On the day of Mena’s birth, there was great joy in the house of Eudoxius and Euphemia, and the people of the whole city came to congratulate them. Eudoxius and Euphemia made a great feast for the poor and needy, and Eudoxius set free many prisoners and distributed alms to the needy, the widows and the orphans.

Euphemia did not forget her promise to the Lord. She and her husband took great care in bringing up their son Mena spiritually. They taught him to pray continually, to read the Holy Bible daily, to obey all the commandments of the Lord and to be a helpful and an active member of the Church. Mena grew in grace daily. He trained himself in perpetual prayer, following the words of the Holy Bible *“Pray without ceasing”* (1Thess.5:17) and *“Pray that you may not enter into temptation”* (Lk.22:40).

HIS PARENTS' DEPARTURE

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” (Ps.27:10)

When Mena was eleven years of age, c.296 AD, his father departed and three years later, his mother

Euphemia also departed. Although Mena's heart was sad at the departure of his parents, yet he did not forget the Christian teachings they had taught him, and he remained dedicated to serving God, who was his sole Comforter. Mena not only inherited great wealth and possessions from his parents, but he also inherited a vast treasure of spirituality. He withdrew to the church, filling all his heart and all his time with the service of his Beloved Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

JOINING THE ARMY

"Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God" (Ps.92:13)

A year after the departure of Mena's parents, c.300 AD, an imperial edict was issued conscripting soldiers to the army. Although Saint Mena was only fifteen years of age, he joined the army because he was strong in body. Fermianos, the leader of the army, who had been a friend of Eudoxius, took Mena and gave him the position of his deputy. Mena was loved by everyone for his meekness and godliness. He was sincere and popular among the soldiers.

TO THE WILDERNESS

"Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The rulers take counsel together, against the Lord" (Ps.2:1,2)

On 23rd February, 303 AD, when Saint Mena was eighteen years old and had been in the army for three years, the two tyrannous Roman Emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, issued their famous edict commanding everyone to worship and sacrifice to the idols, Apollo and Diana. The edict read, "Since the gods have delivered us from our enemy and we have enjoyed their favour, we now instruct everyone in our empire, whether soldier or

townsman, bishop or priest, reader or monk, young or old, slave or free, to worship our gods, Apollo and Diana. We instruct every man in our empire, that as soon as this edict reaches you, to carry out our orders, not carelessly but with zeal. Whoever refuses shall be punished severely. No one shall be able to escape from our hands. The punishment of whoever disobeys shall be death by torture”.

The decree reached the regions of North Africa where it was read in public. The governor began to enforce it, and soon it reached the army. Mena could not bear to see so many people fall victim to the devil’s deception. So, after distributing all his wealth and possessions to the poor, he went to the desert to enjoy living with his beloved God and Redeemer, saying with David the Psalmist, *“Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. For I have seen violence and strife in the city”* (Ps.55:7,9).

CALLED TO MARTYRDOM

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev.2:10)

Mena lived in the wilderness for five years, in asceticism: fasting and praying, keeping vigils, reading and contemplating the holy books, making one hundred metanoias in the morning and one hundred and fifty in the evening, and striving against the wiles of the enemy.

One day whilst he was standing in prayer, the glory of God shone around him, and he saw the martyrs, who were persecuted and killed for their beloved Saviour, being crowned by the angels. His heart yearned to become a martyr for the sake of the Lord.

As the saint dwelt on this, he heard a voice from heaven saying to him: “Blessed are you, Mena, because you have been called to godliness since your youth. You will receive three unfading crowns according to the name of the Holy Trinity for whose sake you have suffered: one for your chastity, one for your asceticism and the third for your martyrdom. Your name will be famous among the martyrs. I will make people from every nation and language come and worship Me in the church which will be built in your name. And you will receive great glory in My everlasting kingdom.’

Filled with joy, Saint Mena arose immediately and left the wilderness for the city to publicly profess the Name of his beloved Saviour.

TO THE WORLD

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon (his) Beloved?” (Song 8:5)

It was the annual celebration of the feast of the Roman gods, Apollo and Diana. On entering the city, Mena stood amidst the crowds and in a loud voice began repeating the words of the Holy Bible, saying: *“I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me”* (Rom.10:20). The crowds fell silent; no one was able to utter a word because of Mena’s awesome appearance, although he wore only the rough anchorite clothing of the wilderness.

Pyrrhus the prefect wanted to know what was happening, so Mena answered him, saying: “I am a Christian”. Pyrrhus was amazed and said to him: “Are you a stranger in this city or have you come here amidst the celebrations to deliberately hinder the annual festival of the emperors, disdaining their orders?”

While Pyrrhus was questioning the saint, the eyes of everyone focused on Mena: on his radiant face, rough anchorite clothing, and extraordinary courage. Then some men shouted out to Pyrrhus: “We know this man! Five years ago he was serving as a soldier in the regiment called Loutouriakon under the leadership of Fermianos the tribune!”

On hearing this, the prefect was taken aback and rebuked the saint, saying: “Young man, why did you leave your army service? And above all, why do you profess that you are a Christian?”

The saint replied: “Indeed, I was a soldier. But when I heard of the impious edict, I decided to live in the desert and serve as a soldier of my Lord Jesus Christ”.

ARREST

“When they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk.13:11).

On hearing this, the prefect ordered that the saint be arrested and thrown into prison until he would yield to the emperors’ orders and worship the gods. However, the following morning he summoned the saint before him and began to revile him, saying: “You unbeliever! How did you dare come amidst us yesterday, giving no heed to the orders, nor fearing the emperors?”

Mena replied calmly, “I told you yesterday and will answer you the same today: Your worship is an abomination.”

Then Pyrrhus said: “See how patient we are with you, because you are a youth and especially because you were a soldier and the son of an army leader! Now tell me, where did you go when you left the army five years ago? Where have you been during this long period of time?”

The saint replied: “I chose to be free to worship my God, wandering in the wilderness and the precipices of the

earth, in hunger and nakedness, and living among the wild beasts, than to live in the world among prodigals, and perish. For it is written: *‘Do not gather my soul together with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men’*” (Ps.26:9).

The prefect was at a loss in deciding what to do in the face of Mina’s courage. He tried coaxing him to make him denounce his faith and sacrifice to the gods, and thus please the emperors, saying, “Step forward and offer sacrifices to the gods! Return to your duty as a soldier. Have pity on your life, and save yourself from torture. Sacrifice to the gods, and I will write to the emperor to grant you a distinguished rank, higher than that of your father’s”.

Mena replied, “I care for none of what you say, but my prayer day and night, is to please my God, and gain the incorruptible crown”.

Blessed are you, O saint,
promise of the true God,
whose name came forth
from the mouth of our Saviour.

Blessed are you, O saint,
chosen by heaven to be
a pure vessel,
a sacred temple,
and an illumined torch.

CHAPTER TWO

Tortures and Martyrdom

*“To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ,
not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”
(Phil.1:29)*

WHIPPED

Pyrrhus became frustrated with Mena. He ordered that he be stretched out and whipped with raw ox hide thongs until the earth became soaked with his blood. While this was being carried out, the saint was rejoicing, submerged in the beloved Name which he had learnt to repeat all day long since his childhood. The onlookers wondered at him, and one of them, Pkasius, shouted to him, saying: “Have pity on yourself, man! Come forward and offer sacrifices to the gods before your body is destroyed!”

But the saint replied: “How can I do that? Shall I forsake my God? Nothing can separate me from Him, neither persecution nor torture”.

ON THE HERMETARIUM

Then Pyrrhus ordered his men to put the saint through the bitterest of tortures until he would obey. He gave orders that the saint be hung on the hermetarium and his body scraped. This was carried out until the saint’s bones showed through. The stiff-necked prefect stood and called out to the saint in the midst of his pain, saying: “Do you feel this torture or not?”

The saint replied: “Your tortures are my treasure. They prepare crowns for me in the presence of Christ my King and God”.

Bewildered at this manner of speech, Pyrrhus asked: “Does your God, Mena, know that you endure all these sufferings for the sake of His name?”

“How can He not know?”, Mena replied, “We are His flesh, His bones and the members of His body. He is the One who searches the hearts and minds, and knows the hidden and the manifest”.

“Why does He leave you to suffer, then?” Pyrrhus asked. Mena replied: “He permits these sufferings to happen to us to cleanse and purify us.”

Pyrrhus was amazed and said to him: “I pity you. Do you want me to leave you for two or three days to reconsider the matter?”

But Mena replied: “I have already considered the matter long before I came here. Everything of this world is vain and doomed to perish”.

TEARING HIS FLESH

Pyrrhus was deeply vexed. He ordered his men to prepare sharp iron spikes, fix them in the ground and then pull Mena to and fro over them until his flesh would lacerate. The saint endured this torture with great joy and called out to the prefect, saying: “Your punishments and tortures cannot move me or separate me from the love of Christ. Do you not know that it is written: *‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?’*” (Rom.8:35).

When Mena’s whole body was torn, the prefect ordered his men to fetch coarse pieces of sackcloth and rub them into the wounds. But while they were carrying out this torture, our merciful Lord did not allow the saint to feel the severity of the pain.

FLAMES BENEATH HIS RIBS

At the prefect’s order, the soldiers brought burning torches and placed them beneath Mena’s ribs for two hours. The prefect was amazed at seeing Mena praising God, instead of groaning. Thus he asked him: “What is this that I see? And how can it be?”

The saint replied meekly: "My Lord Jesus Christ gives me power, peace and joy, as it is written in the Scriptures: *'When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God'*" (Is.43:2,3).

Pyrrhus asked him: "Since you are a soldier, how do you know the Scriptures?"

Mena replied: "Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *'You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them... But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you'*" (Matt.10:18-20).

The prefect replied: "Stop this talk at once! Offer sacrifices to the gods and return to your duty as a soldier!" But the saint answered him: "I am a soldier of the heavenly King, as I have told you before. Your tortures are in my flesh, but my spirit and mind worship God, the heavenly King".

BREAKING HIS TEETH

At this the prefect ordered that Mena be struck on the mouth until his teeth would fall out. Mena's tongue was silent but his heart overflowed thanks to his God who considered him worthy to suffer for the sake of His name. Helidorus, one of the guards, turned to Pyrrhus and said: "My lord, Christians endure tortures because death to them is sweeter than life!"

SENT TO THE GOVERNOR

Finally, weary of torturing Mena and having failed to convince or force him to denounce his faith, Pyrrhus decided to send him to the governor who would deal with his case personally. So he wrote to the governor that Mena had served in the army as a valiant soldier, and being a Christian had therefore been ruthlessly tortured. Nevertheless, he had not relented and obeyed the emperors' command of sacrificing to the gods. The prefect

gave the letter to a group of guards and sent Mena with them on board a ship to the governor of an adjacent region.

HEARING THE LORD'S VOICE

On board the ship, as Saint Mena was absorbed in prayer, talking to his Beloved, the Creator of heaven and earth, a voice called to him from heaven, saying: "Do not be afraid, My beloved Mena, because I will be with you wherever you are taken. I will go before you to the court of judgment and until you complete your strivings". The Saviour filled the countenance of His martyr with grace such that the guards responsible for handing him over to the governor could not look at his radiant face.

IN PRISON

On reaching the harbour, the guards took Mena along with the other Christian prisoners and delivered them to the governor who immediately ordered them to be thrown into prison until he would deal with each of them in turn. In the prison, Mena encouraged his brethren in tribulation, like the gallant general who inspires his soldiers to fight the battle for their king. They were greatly comforted by him.

SEEING THE LORD

The Lord's tender mercies did not end at letting Mena hear His kind voice, but He also appeared to him in prison. He revealed to him the things that would befall him, and the things He had prepared for him. Then the Lord touched his body and gave him His peace.

RE-WHIPPED

The following day, the governor summoned Mena to the judgment council, and began coaxing him, trying with all his might to flatter him. When all his efforts failed and he saw that there was no way to make Mena change his

mind, he threatened him with death if he would not yield and offer sacrifices to the gods. When Mena did not yield, the governor ordered him to be whipped a hundred times with raw ox-hide thongs.

SAWING HIS BODY

The tyrannous governor was not satisfied with this torture but ordered his men to saw the saint's body. When the saw was placed on Mena's body, the iron became as wax placed by fire. Mena praised the Lord for not allowing the tortures to have any power over him.

Martyrdom

“I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness” (2Tim.4:7,8)

The governor was at a loss to know what to do with the saint's case. So he passed the following sentence: “Since Mena, the Christian soldier, has refused to obey the emperors' decree and sacrifice to the gods, I therefore command that his head be taken by the sword and his body burnt in fire”.

He gave the command to his soldiers to enforce it at once. As the soldiers led Mena to the place of execution, he walked with them rejoicing, exulting and singing hymns of praise. He addressed the multitudes of men, women and ascetic monks who followed him, strengthening them to hold fast to their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When they arrived at the place of execution, Mena knelt down, raised his eyes towards heaven and prayed fervently, commending his spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father, saying: “I thank You, O God, Heavenly King, my Lord Jesus Christ, for You have not forsaken me nor left me to be destroyed by the enemy. But You granted me to glorify Your holy Name. Protect me also in this hour, O Lord, and grant me to endure till the end. Receive my spirit, O my God Jesus Christ, that I may worship You for ever”.

After praying, Saint Mena stretched out his neck and was beheaded. He suffered martyrdom on 15th Hatour (24 November), 309 AD, during the reign of Diocletian and Maximian, the tyrannous Roman emperors.

BURNING HIS BODY

On the day of the saint's martyrdom, the soldiers lit a fire and threw his body into it, where it remained for three days. But by the power of Almighty God, the fire had no effect on the saint's body. A group of the faithful who had followed Saint Mena during his trial and martyrdom, took the body from amidst the flames, wrapped it in precious linen and buried it with great honour in a fittingly adorned burial place in the region of Afrikiya.

Noble champion, valiant warrior,
Christ's martyr, blessed Abba Mena:
well did you fight the good fight;
you have finished the race,
you have kept the faith.

The Lord Jesus, the King of all ages,
has crowned you in glory and honour.
He has taken your spirit
to the heavenly resting places.
You rejoice with the saints
in eternal life.

Doxology for Saint Mena

The hosts of heaven honour your warfare,

O Saint Abba Mena, Christ's martyr.

The apostles and prophets

glory in the tribulations

which you endured for Christ's name.

You confessed Christ before men.

He also shall confess you

before His Father in heaven

and the holy angels,

when He shall come into His kingdom,

and say to you:

"Come, My blessed one,

and inherit eternal life".

You endured as a good soldier of Christ,

you denied the king of this world,

you confessed the King of heaven,

you rejected the temporal,

and chose those of eternity,

those which eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

the things which Christ our God has prepared

for those who love Him,

indeed, for you, Saint Abba Mena, Christ's martyr.

Remember us before Christ our Lord
that He may forgive us our sins.

CHAPTER THREE

The Journey of the Relics

*“The Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints;
they are preserved forever” (Ps.37:28)*

Our gracious God miraculously preserved for the Church Saint Mena’s relics from ravage and destruction down through sixteen centuries.

TO MARIUT

Shortly after Saint Mena’s martyrdom, Berber troops ravaged the district of Niepaieat in Mariut. The Loutouriakon regiment of soldiers was ordered to proceed from Afrikiya to Mariut to protect its people.

Athanasius, the commander of the regiment, was a pious man who believed in the blessing of Saint Mena. He conferred with the Christian soldiers under him to take Saint Mena’s body with them to be their protector against the Berbers. When they uncovered the coffin, a bright light shone from the saint’s body. They buried the coffin amidst their clothing and took it with them on the ship heading for Alexandria, from where they would travel to Mariut.

On their way, fearful sea creatures with faces like camels stretched their long necks into the ship, aiming to attack those on board. Athanasius and his Christian soldiers cried out to God, asking Saint Mena to intercede for them that God might save them. Immediately, arrows of fire darted from Saint Mena’s body into the creatures’ faces, making them retreat back into the waves. When those creatures returned a second time and the arrows of

fire prevented them, they bowed their heads before the body of the saint and disappeared from sight into the sea.

After five days spent in praise, rejoicing and thanksgiving, the ship arrived in Alexandria. The soldiers put the saint's body on a camel and made their way to Mariut. The hand of the Lord was with them, and they conquered the Berbers through the blessing of Saint Mena.

On returning to Afrikiya, the soldiers placed the Saint's body on a camel but the camel was unable to move. They transferred it onto another camel stronger than the first, but the camel was unable to rise up. In this manner they placed the saint's body upon all the camels that were with them, yet there was not one which was able to carry it. Athanasius felt sad but he perceived then that it was God's purpose that the saint's body remain in its native country.

Athanasius prepared two wooden tablets and had them engraved with the image of Saint Mena dressed as he had known him in the apparel of a soldier, with images of the strange creatures which resembled camels at his feet. He laid one of the icons on the saint's body to be blessed, and then took it with him that it might be a means of protection in the sea and in war.

Athanasius laid Saint Mena's body in a coffin of precious wood, together with the second icon and commemorative writings. He had a small edifice built over the coffin in the form of a vaulted tomb. Years passed without anyone knowing that the body of a saint was buried there.

DISCOVERED BY THE SHEPHERD

A shepherd used to take his sheep to graze near the saint's burial place. One day one of his flock which was suffering from scabies waded into a pool close to the saint's burial place. When it came out of the water and started to toss in the dust near the saint's burial place, it was immediately healed. When the shepherd saw this, he was amazed and bewildered. He was able to discover that the mystery of the healing lay in the dust of the place, although he could not understand why. Yet he rejoiced over the healing and searched out the diseased among his sheep, waded them into the water of the pool and rolled them in the dust, and they were immediately healed. He gave glory to God for His love and for revealing to him that blessed place. The news spread and the place became a source of blessing and healing from every disease.

When the news reached the King of Constantinople, he sent his only daughter, who suffered from leprosy, to receive healing there. Escorted by her entourage, the princess reached Mariut and went to the shepherd who explained to her how she could receive healing. He told her that she should wade into the water of the pool and then roll in the dust. The princess followed his instructions. That night, the saint appeared to her in a vision and told her that he was Mena who had been martyred on 15 Hatour. He asked her to dig several meters into the ground until she would find his body.

When the princess awoke, she found that the merciful God had healed her. She called her soldiers and ordered them to dig in that place. On finding the coffin, they all rejoiced, and the princess informed her father of the good news of her healing. He was overjoyed and ordered that a church be built in the saint's name in that very place. The church was consecrated on 22 June (15 Paone), 325 AD.

TO POPE ATHANASIUS' CHURCH

The number of pilgrims visiting the church of Saint Mena increased. So the people of Alexandria and of the neighbouring cities asked their Patriarch Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, the twentieth patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (328-373), to build them another church in the name of their beloved Saint Mena. The Pope granted them their request. The church was beautifully built and a shrine was erected in which the relics of the saint were kept.

To Pope Theophilus' Church

During the papacy of Pope Theophilus, the twenty-third Patriarch of Alexandria (385-412), the saint's shrine became extremely popular and multitudes of visitors went to receive his blessing. So Pope Theophilus wrote to Arcadius, the son of Emperor Theodosius the Great, describing the problem of the insufficient space in the shrine. So the emperor ordered a larger church to be built. It was joined to the church of Pope Athanasius and was also beautifully decorated. A large baptistery was built to its west to baptize the multitudes who flocked to the church professing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Saint Mena. The church was completed in 455 AD.

AMIDST THE MARBLE CITY

During the papacy of Pope Timotheus, the twenty-sixth Patriarch of Alexandria (458-480), a large city was established around the churches, by the command of Emperor Zenon (479-491). It was called 'the Marble City', 'the City of Saint Mena' or 'Abu Mena.' The pilgrims, who came from different parts of the world, carried away with them flasks filled with water from the well which sprang near the shrine and oil from the vigil lamp. The water and the oil were the cause of healing of many diseases.

The relics of the saint remained preserved there until the beginning of the ninth century when the City of Saint Mena was plundered by the Berber tribes, who stole all the marble columns. The city was demolished and deserted. As a result, the relics of the saint were left under a pile of bricks until the beginning of the thirteenth century.

TO BANHA EL ASAL

During the rule of el Mo-izz, the Fatimite who ruled over North Africa and Egypt (1230-1330), the Berbers' raids on Alexandria increased, causing numerous riots and the exile of many of the inhabitants of Alexandria. Therefore el Mo-izz chose a trusted man and appointed him governor over Alexandria. He also appointed a Christian person as chief officer of the provinces. These two arranged to travel together to Pentapolis, escorted by soldiers, to settle matters there.

On their way they passed through Mariut where they found a huge pile of bricks which they thought would be useful for building and could be sold to the people of Alexandria. Amidst the bricks they discovered a sealed box which they rejoiced over, thinking it to be full of gold. When they opened it, they were surprised to find human remains wrapped inside. They delivered it to the governor who ordered his cook to burn the box with its contents. That evening when the cook went to prepare the food he found a pillar of light amidst the fire in which he had thrown the relics of the saint. When he drew nearer and had a closer look, he found the relics wrapped inside the box intact. He hurried and called the chief officer to see what was happening. The chief officer rejoiced and glorified God, being certain that they were the relics of one of the saints. He wrapped them in silk and gave the box to one of his men to take to his house in Ashmoun el

Roman and not to tell anyone of the matter until his return.

When the chief officer returned home, he informed the bishop of the diocese who told him to keep a vigil light before the saint's relics. When the chief officer moved to another province called Banha el Asal, he took the relics with him and continued to light the vigil lamp before them. He commended his unmarried daughter to look after them, and also a priest came to offer incense before the saint's relics.

One night, a monk visited the chief of the province and spent the night there. In his sleep, the monk was awakened by a rider with an illumined face, who said to him, "Follow me". He led the monk to the room where the box was placed. When the monk asked him what his name was, he replied, "I am Mena who suffered martyrdom in the fourth century on the 15th Hatour. The remains of my body lie inside this box", and he then disappeared. The monk told his host and his household what he had seen and heard.

TO FUM EL KHALIJ'S CHURCH

When Father Youhanna el Saigh, the priest of Saint Mena's Church in Fum el Khalij, learnt that the relics of the patron saint of the church were in the house of the chief officer, he travelled to him and told him that the bodies of saints should be kept in churches. When the people of Banha el Asal learnt that the relics of Saint Mena would be taken from their town, they tried to keep them in their church. But Pope Benjamin II, the 82nd patriarch of Alexandria (1327-1339), intervened and ordered that the relics be transferred to Saint Mena's Church in Fum el Khalij.

The congregation of the church of Fum el Khalij hid the relics of the saint in one of the rooms to protect them from plunder. They remained hidden until 7th September 1873, when the saint himself appeared to the priest of the church of Fum el Khalij, telling him of the whereabouts of his relics.

THE JOURNEY'S END

In 1959, part of the saint's relics were transferred to the church of Saint Mena in Old Cairo. And in 1962, during the papacy of Pope Kirellous VI, the 116th patriarch of Alexandria, part of the saint's relics were moved to their original place in Saint Mena's Monastery in Mariut, where the Holy Spirit had indicated from the beginning that that was the place where they would remain.

Pope Kirellous VI dearly loved Saint Mena since his childhood. In his lifetime, whenever there was a problem, he would ask Saint Mena to solve it, and if he did not, would reason with him until he answered his request. After his departure, many miracles happen through their prayers.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Saint's Miracles

“Those who honour Me, I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1Sam.2:30)

Due to the great number of miracles performed through the prayers of Saint Mena, he is known as the ‘Miracle Worker’. The following is a selection of these miracles.

RAISING A DEAD MAN

History records for us that during the construction of the church of Saint Mena which Pope Athanasius the Apostolic instructed to be built, one of the builders who was working on the upper floor fell to the ground. He died immediately. Great fear fell on everyone, and they carried his body into the church to bury it the following morning.

That night, Saint Mena in military uniform, came and approached the dead man. He made the sign of the cross on him, and breathed on his face whilst saying: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, and called the dead man to rise. Immediately the man arose from the dead. When morning came and the people arrived to bury him, they were dumbstruck to find him alive. He told them what had happened, and that it was Saint Mena who had raised him. So they glorified God for His great power, which He had manifested through His Saint Mena.

As for the young man, he continued to serve the church all the days of his life, telling of the Lord’s mercy and of what He had done for him.

QUENCHING THE THIRST OF THE PILGRIMS

It happened that on one occasion towards the end of the fourth century there had been no rainfall for a long period of time and the multitudes of visitors to Saint Mena's shrine suffered thirst. They entered the shrine, knelt down and pleaded with all their heart in deep faith, asking Saint Mena to intercede for them to the Lord that He might have mercy on them and hear their prayer.

Through the prayers of Saint Mena, the Lord answered the prayers of the multitudes. Immediately, water gushed from the pillar in front of the saint's shrine, and they all drank from it. They praised God, saying: "There is no God but Jesus Christ, the God of Saint Mena, the Martyr of Christ". A well was dug beneath that pillar, and the water, which flowed continuously, had the power of healing.

SAVED FROM DEATH

The monks of the monastery tell of the following miracle which is considered an instance of the appearance of Saint Mena:

During the construction of Saint Mena's Cathedral at his monastery in Mariut, Yousef Rezk, a concrete layer, fell from a height of about nine meters to the ground. He fell unconscious, bleeding from one of his ears. Frightened, the monks cried out to God, asking the prayers of Saint Mena. They anointed him with holy oil and took him to the hospital in Alexandria. When the doctor examined him, there was no sign of movement from any part of his body. He was given many stimulants and medicines, but to no avail. The doctor said, "Even if Yousef improved, he would either be paralyzed or lose the use of one his senses."

The following afternoon in the hospital, a man dressed as a navy doctor approached Yousef and enquired about what had happened. Yousef's brother informed him of what had happened. Then the doctor held Yousef's head and said: "What is the matter? There is nothing wrong. There is nothing wrong". He turned to Yousef's brother, and said: "Give him this medicine", and wrote on a piece of paper 'Penicillin'.

As the navy doctor was about to leave, Yousef's brother asked if he could remain with his brother overnight. To his surprise, the doctor replied: "It is not up to me to say". The doctor turned to the other patient in the room, held his head and said: "There is nothing wrong. There is nothing wrong. He will be all right". Then he left.

As Yousef improved on the penicillin, his brother asked the nurse if he could be prescribed more of it. The nurse asked: "Who prescribed this medicine?" The brother answered: "The navy doctor sent by the hospital".

The nurse denied that the hospital had sent that doctor or any doctor, and was angry with the patient's brother for having allowed an external doctor to examine him.

The patient's relatives enquired in the monastery whether anyone had sent a doctor friend to visit Yousef, but no one had. Soon afterwards, Yousef felt well enough to be discharged from the hospital. The doctors were amazed and after examining him thoroughly, allowed him to leave.

The first thing Yousef did on being discharged was to visit the monastery and ask if he could return to work straightaway. But the fathers of the monastery refused, requesting him to get sufficient rest. So after one week at home, he returned to his work.

The following are among the miracles recorded in the Monastery of Saint Mena in Mariut:

HE SAW SAINT MENA

Mr Awad Awad of Dkreus recounts on 18/11/1980”:

In September 1979, my five year old nephew, Mena, fell from the second floor whilst sliding down the banisters. On hearing my sister crying next door, I rushed into her flat and took the child to the General Hospital where the doctor gave him a thorough examination. The diagnosis was a brain hemorrhage. Wanting a second opinion, I took Mena to a specialist, explaining what had happened. The specialist said that with an operation, there could be a chance for recovery.

Mena’s grandmother went to the hospital to ask about his condition. There she prayed, weeping: “O Saint Mena, heal Mena because he is named after you”, and she vowed to give a donation to the monastery. She continued crying out to God until the specialist arrived to re-examine Mena before the operation. When he examined Mena, he was amazed and said, “There is nothing wrong with him. There are no injuries to his head; he is completely normal!” The x-rays that were taken confirmed that a miracle had taken place, and we returned home.

The following day, Mena said, pointing to the picture of Saint Mena, “I saw a man dressed in white”. We realized then that it had been Saint Mena who had saved him from death.

MARKS OF HEALING

On Tuesday 9th September 1980, my wife and I visited the monastery of Saint Mena. Since childhood, my wife had suffered chronic kidney pain which had initiated other illnesses.

We went to congratulate His Grace Bishop Mena, the Abbot of the Monastery, on his ordination. He prayed for my wife and anointed her with the oil of the Unction of the Sick during which she shivered, and felt as if she had been hit on the back, near her kidneys. She turned around and saw the picture of Saint Mena and the departed Pope Kirellous VI.

On arriving home, we found hand marks on her back which are still there today. Since then, the pain and the other symptoms have ceased.

We should not forget to mention that Pope Kirellous VI told her beforehand of this miraculous healing. About a week before our visit to the monastery, he appeared to her, smiling, in a dream, for a few seconds. In the morning she asked me: "What does this vision mean?" I told her: "He is telling you, 'I am with you and will send you Saint Mena to heal you from your illness.' "

LIGHT FROM THE SHRINE

Mr Malak Selwanis recounts:

Since 1978 I suffered from stenosis in the posterior artery and was under the supervision of a famous cardiologist. In 1986, I heard of the numerous miracles of Saint Mena and had a deep feeling that if I laid the relics of this martyr on my heart, I would be healed.

I joined a trip visiting the monastery of Saint Mena, arranged by the church. After receiving the Holy Communion at the end of the Divine Liturgy, we went to the Saint's shrine. There I bowed my head towards the sacred relics and to my wife's and my surprise we saw a flash of light around the shrine. Thinking that it was from a camera, we turned around but saw that there was no one but ourselves and our children. Since then the

symptoms of my illness have disappeared and the pain has never recurred.

THE SAINT'S RELICS SHAKE

Mrs. Afaf Makkar of Heliopolis recounts:

I suffered severe headaches accompanied by weakening sight in my left eye. A brain scan revealed a tumour in the pituitary gland.

On 27th December 1983, I visited the monastery of Saint Mena where I leant my head against the relics of the saint, sobbing bitterly, asking for his prayers. To my astonishment, the box containing the relics shook beneath my head. I felt that that was a sign of the Lord's answer to my prayer.

On 31st December 1983, I went to the hospital for another x-ray. To the amazement of the doctor, the x-ray did not show any abnormality. We knelt down before God in thanksgiving for His lovingkindness towards us, healing me from a serious disease in one week, through the prayers of Saint Mena the Miracle Worker.

A MERE VISIT

Mr Ibrahim Bassilli recounts:

I have come here to the monastery to profess my gratitude to its patron, the great martyr Saint Mena, and to Pope Kirellous VI.

My son Eamon suffered from mediastinal lymph nodes for three years. I took him to see many doctors in Alexandria, but in vain. My brother-in-law accompanied my children and I to the monastery. Strangely, soon after reaching the monastery, my son asked for some food to eat, something which was unusual since his illness. We

found him later joining his friends to play, something which has not happened for three years.

We knelt down before God, thanking Him for all His benefits. We wonder at how God venerates His saints to this extent. A mere visit to the monastery was sufficient to heal my son. I came today to record this confession, declaring the greatness of the saints' prayers before their God, who said: "I will honour those who honour Me".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 *Scripture Verses: New King James Version*
- 2 *The Egyptian Martyr Saint Mena the Miracle Worker*
by Father Bishoi Kamel
- 3 *The Life and Miracles of Saint Mina the Miracle Worker* by Sons of Pope Kirellous VI
- 4 *Apa Mena* by James Drecher
- 5 *The Coptic Synaxarium*
- 6 *The Life of Abba Mena* by St Mena's Church,
Shoubra
- 7 *Mar Mina* by the Monastery of Saint Mena, Mariut
- 8 *Church Psalmody*

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES

- 1 The Virgin Saint Mary
- 2 Michael the Archangel
- 3 Saint George
- 4 Saint Mercurius
- 5 Saint Mena
- 6 Abba Pishoi
- 7 Saint Pope Kirellous VI
- 8 Father Abdel Messieh el Manahri
- 9 Saint Dimiana