



SACRED PLACES

& Popular Practice in the Mediterranean



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RAMSES²



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PREFACE

This collective volume originated from a research project funded by Ramses², a network of thirty-three research centers and laboratories of the CNRS in human sciences in the Mediterranean region. It is part of the European Research Area and has been funded for four years by the European Commission.

The book aims to create a larger and more comprehensive picture of the Mediterranean's role concerning sacred places, popular practices and pilgrim routes, as well as highlighting the role of interconfessional dialogue and exchange. It aspires to fill a gap of the general lack of understanding and appreciation of the importance of other kinds of sacred sites to different people and the intent is to broaden perspectives to include a better understanding of what kinds of places are important to people of different cultures and religions.

The wealth of history within the Mediterranean Basin can offer the potential for a composite project that includes pagan, Jewish, Christian and Muslim sacred sites and an insight into their individual value and role. The project also highlights the truly diverse nature of the region and how different traditions, rituals and forms of worship were and still are practiced.

The project has three partners: the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex Med) affiliated to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF) and the University of Alicante. The six contributors originated from different Mediterranean countries: Egypt, Greece, Italy and Spain. We collaborated closely on the project development, reading each other's work at different stages. We attended diverse religious events such as moulids and saints' feasts together and discussed them to exchange perspectives from different backgrounds.

The material collected in this book, documenting the lives of sacred moments in different areas of the Mediterranean Basin in the past as well as in the present, the identification of sites, background information on sites, myths and roles as well as photographs, reflects the complexity of this confessional interaction, and thus provides a body of evidence of great interest for general non-specialist readers. The first chapter is a voyage in the past and the present to six major sanctuaries of antiquity which became sites of worship of

Christian martyrs and saints, and where Christian churches were built in almost the same places. These sites have continued to shelter places of pilgrimage and worship. The second chapter discusses three important cults related to Alexandria in the Greco-Roman period. It does not aim to present a scientific research in religious studies, but rather it constitutes a voyage in popular rituals and imagination. When we researched the development of the Alexander cult from the Ptolemaic period to the Islamic period, we were searching neither for his tomb nor the historic reality of his existence, but aimed to study the way people think and why they attribute many places to his burial place and the center of his cult. The third chapter presents four figures of the Coptic faith, Greek Orthodoxy in Egypt and Jewish pilgrimage sites deeply connected to Alexandria and its environs. It establishes the relation between a saint and a place with a description of ritual practices on the saint's feast. The fourth chapter deals with the mouldids in Alexandria, their origin, the practices, the popular beliefs, and the most important mouldids in the city. The fifth chapter analyses the holy caves and sanctuary caves of the Middle and Modern Ages in the eastern Iberian Peninsula. It presents the Christian and Islamic holy caves and demonstrates the fact that the phenomenon of holy caves is universal, as well as most of the rituals practiced in these areas, although they are promoted by different social, economic and religious motivations.

Past and present coexist intensely in this research, which allows the reader to find out the historical development of an area and the religious practices of its inhabitants in depth. The five chapters of the book underline the relationship between the geographic location, the social context and worship. They show also how and why a place became sacred, and why it stopped being sacred. We are satisfied that the book also achieved wider objectives: to open the discussion on the worship of the other, to know about him and discover that he is not as different as we think.

Finally, I would like to thank a number of people without whom this book could not have been possible. Sadly, it is impossible to mention them all here but I hope they will recognize their contributions in the pages of this book. First of all, Dr. Mohamed Awad, director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center and Dr. Sahar Hamouda, deputy director of the center, for the opportunity to coordinate the book as well as for all their support during its preparation, the research and writing. I must express my warmest gratitude to all the contributors for their effort and cooperation. I benefitted immensely from discussions and advice from my colleague Dr. Kyriakos Savvopoulos. My

deepest thanks go to Dr. Carole Escoffey for the language revision, to Mina Nader for the cover design and layout, to Mohamed Mehaina for the maps and to Abdallah Dawestashy for most of the photos in chapters three and four. Special thanks go to Omar Elhamy who contributed to the research of the fourth chapter and to Christopher Marrs from the University of Texas for his great help in the research of the third chapter. I also gratefully recognize the support I received from Raphaël Soudée.

Yasmine Hussein
Alexandria, April 2010



CHAPTER ONE

FÊTES CHRÉTIENNES ORTHODOXES DANS LES LIEUX DES
SANCTUAIRES ANCIENS: TÉMOIGNAGES DES VOYAGEURS
EUROPÉENS ET PÈLERINAGES ACTUELS (XVII^E-XXI^E SIÈCLE)

FÊTES CHRÉTIENNES ORTHODOXES DANS LES LIEUX DES SANCTUAIRES ANCIENS : TÉMOIGNAGES DES VOYAGEURS EUROPÉENS ET PÈLERINAGES ACTUELS (XVII^e-XXI^e SIÈCLE)

Ioli Vingopoulou

Les grands sanctuaires de l'Antiquité dans la Grèce du Sud (Delphes, Olympie, Athènes, Délos) où se déroulaient les jeux panhelléniques, rassemblaient tous les quatre ans les fidèles, tant pour participer ou assister aux jeux, que pour le culte des dieux.

Avec la fin du monde ancien, les sanctuaires ont cessé de fonctionner et le christianisme s'est installé petit à petit aux mêmes endroits et dans les mêmes sanctuaires. Les lieux de culte du panthéon olympien ont laissé leur place aux martyrs et aux saints, et des églises chrétiennes ont été fondées presque aux mêmes endroits. Les sites ont continué à abriter des lieux de pèlerinages et de culte païen.

Pendant la longue période depuis la chute de Byzance jusqu'à l'aube de la Grèce moderne, et durant l'occupation des puissances étrangères (Vénitiens, Génois, Ottomans, Français, Anglais), ces anciens lieux de culte ont été tantôt abandonnés, tantôt maintenus. Parfois, de nouveaux sont apparus dans des endroits voisins.

Les voyageurs européens qui envahissent l'espace grec du XVI^e au XX^e siècle suivent fidèlement le flux de tous les courants culturels, politiques, spirituels qui ont bouleversé l'Europe durant cette période. Pour les voyageurs occidentaux le voyage en Grèce, réel ou imaginaire, était un long périple de « mémoire » qui se construisait en fonction des circonstances, des buts et des intérêts de chacun. Ces voyageurs, porteurs d'idées d'une autre réalité chrétienne, perçoivent et commentent les ruines des anciens sanctuaires et les lieux du culte orthodoxe chrétien à travers le prisme de leur « Grèce personnelle » qui se trouvait piégée dans la mémoire historique¹.

À partir du XX^e siècle, les routes et les itinéraires du voyage organisé ont amené les visiteurs dans les anciens sanctuaires mais aussi dans les lieux vivants où le culte chrétien orthodoxe s'exprime par de grandes fêtes religieuses. Ces nouveaux itinéraires en circuit dans les sanctuaires de la Grèce du Sud (Athènes, Delphes, Olympie, Argolide, îles de la mer Egée) se sont enrichis petit à petit par des visites dans des lieux de culte orthodoxe chrétien de la période byzantine et post byzantine.

Notre recherche a identifié un grand nombre d'églises chrétiennes qui se trouvent sur les lieux des cultes anciens et où, actuellement et au moins une fois par an, on célèbre un saint et l'on organise des cérémonies, des processions et des fêtes (panégyries). Ce jour-là le site reste accessible au public au-delà des horaires habituels de visite. Pour notre recherche, nous avons collecté plus de 5000 photos prises sur place. La contribution de Georges Paschalidis, Vangelis Tsiamis et Stathis Doganis dans ce domaine a été très précieuse. De la très riche bibliographie sur tous ces sujets nous avons procédé à une sélection indicative des titres. Les sanctuaires choisis pour cette présentation témoignent de la grande importance de ces lieux de culte aussi bien dans le monde ancien que dans le cadre des fêtes contemporaines (panégyries).



Fig. 1.1 Carte situant les sanctuaires choisis pour cette étude: Delphes, Délos, Éleusis, Athènes, Patras et Chios, très importants dans le monde ancien et tous actuellement lieux de cérémonies chrétiennes.

Éleusis

Située à 22 kilomètres d'Athènes, sur le golfe du même nom, Éleusis est aujourd'hui une ville industrielle dont les origines remonteraient à la préhistoire. Liée au culte de deux grandes déesses du panthéon hellénique que sont Déméter et Korè, elle était l'une des cités-État (polis) les plus anciennes de

l'Attique. C'était ici, dans la région la plus fertile des environs d'Athènes, que s'est développé le culte des deux divinités. Celui-ci s'est ensuite répandu et imposé dans tout le monde grec ancien. Ville natale du grand poète tragique Eschyle, elle fut, comme Delphes et Délos, l'un des principaux centres spirituels et religieux panhelléniques de toute l'Antiquité.

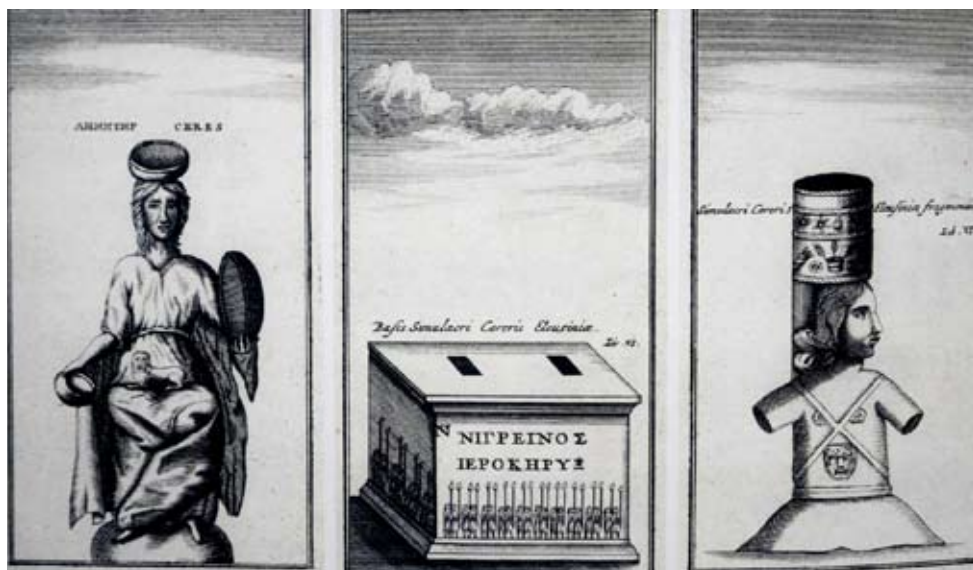


Fig. 1.2 Dessins de G. Wheler représentant la statue de la déesse Déméter, la base d'une statue et la caryatide des Propylées, publiés dans G. Wheler *A Journey into Greece in Company of Dr. Spon*, Londres, 1682

Le mythe

Déméter (Cérès) était la déesse de la fécondité de la terre, du blé et de ses produits. D'après « l'Hymne à Déméter », inclus dans les hymnes dits « Homériques » qui constituent une collection unique de textes honorant les dieux olympiens, elle était à la recherche de sa fille Perséphone enlevée par Hadès (Pluton) et amenée dans le monde des Enfers. Une grotte dans la falaise, à droite de la Voie Sacrée menant au sanctuaire, était considérée comme l'endroit où la fille avait disparu. Désespérée et furieuse, la déesse abandonna l'Olympe et commença à chercher sa fille aimée. Après une course errante de neuf jours et de neuf nuits elle arriva, sous l'aspect d'une vieille femme, à Éleusis (*eieusis* signifie arrivée). Bien accueillie par la famille royale, Déméter devint la nourrice du petit prince et essaya de le rendre immortel par le feu. Son acte découvert par la famille royale, ainsi que son identité, elle obligea les gens à élever un temple et leur apprit à célébrer les

Mystères afin qu'ils y pratiquent les rites pour apaiser son âme. Enfermée dans son sanctuaire à cause de sa colère, la terre est devenue stérile et les gens mourraient ainsi que les bêtes. Ainsi Zeus (Jupiter) ordonna son frère Hadès de laisser Perséphone retourner auprès de sa mère. Mais celui-ci, ne voulant pas perdre sa femme, lui donna à manger de la grenade, fruit qui l'a liée définitivement aux âmes des morts. Le retour de Perséphone éclaira le visage de Déméter et «la terre se para de feuilles et de fleurs»². Reconnaisante, la déesse enseigna aux Éleusiens la culture de la terre pour leur bonheur matériel et les Mystères pour leur évolution morale et spirituelle (promettant ainsi une vie heureuse après la mort).

Le mythe représente le cycle annuel de la terre, les vicissitudes régulières de la végétation, la vie, la mort de la nature et par extension la vie-même des gens. Selon les anciens écrivains, la déesse Déméter a offert le blé grâce auquel les hommes ne vivent plus comme des bêtes sauvages et leur fit grâce des Mystères d'où ils puisent l'espoir pour la vie et la prospérité³.

Les fêtes pendant l'Antiquité

On vénéra donc la déesse du blé et de la fertilité de la terre à qui l'on consacrait des processions et des cérémonies religieuses annuelles : les Petites et les Grandes Éleusines (ou Mystères d'Éleusis). Les initiés, qui seuls étaient admis au culte, n'avaient pas le droit de révéler les événements auxquels ils avaient assisté dans le Téléstérion (salle des cérémonies). La peine de mort réservée à celui qui révélerait l'essence divine de ces rites permit de garder le secret à travers les siècles. Même Pausanias (II^e siècle ap. J.-C.) n'a osé décrire ni le sanctuaire, ni les rites après un rêve qu'il avait fait. On sait que jamais personne n'en a trahi les secrets et que les rares sources en notre possession sont d'une interprétation difficile ; ce sont des calomnies proférées par les Pères de l'Église.

Les Mystères étaient ouverts à tous les Grecs, sans distinction de classe ou de sexe ; même les esclaves y étaient admis. Ils ont pris un caractère panhellénique.



Fig. 1.3 La chapelle de la Vierge et les ruines du Téléstérion (salle des cérémonies) en 1890–1895

Au premier degré d'initiation, au mois d'anthestérion (février), on célébrait les Petits Mystères, à Agra sur la rive gauche de la rivière Ilissos à Athènes. Après les semailles, au mois de boédromion (septembre-octobre), se déroulaient les Grands Mystères, fêtes mystiques qui duraient neuf jours en souvenir de la course errante de Déméter. Chaque jour avait son propre rituel. Durant la nuit du 20 boédromion se déroulaient les plus importantes cérémonies dans le Téléstérion, où les initiés participaient à des rites sacrés. Après avoir procédé à des libations et des purifications, un drame sacré se développait, plein de symboles et les initiés touchaient le salut de leur âme⁴.

Histoire du site



Fig. 1.4 Le site archéologique et la chapelle de la Vierge au sommet de la colline où se trouvait l'acropole mycénienne en 1920–1930

L'histoire d'Éleusis remonte au II^e millénaire av. J.-C. et la cité a connu une période de grand épanouissement sous le règne du roi mythique Céléos (1500-1425 av. J.-C.). Les vestiges d'un mégaron mycénien prouvent qu'une première forme de culte existait déjà à cette époque. À la riche tradition

mythologique, on doit le rattachement d'Éleusis à l'État athénien. Les descendants des rois légendaires à Éleusis conservèrent des privilèges, dont le plus important était le titre de prêtre-suprême des Grands Mystères. La ville, qui était l'un des plus importants dèmes de l'Attique, passa sous l'autorité d'Athènes au VII^e siècle av. J.-C. D'importantes reconstructions furent réalisées au temps de Solon (650-600 av. J.-C.) et c'est le tyran Peisistrate (550-510 av. J.-C.) qui fit aménager le Téléstérion. Après avoir été incendié par les Perses, durant les guerres Médiques, le sanctuaire fut reconstruit à l'initiation de Périclès (V^e siècle av. J.-C.). Durant les siècles suivants, Spartiates et Macédoniens l'ont totalement respecté. À l'époque romaine, les empereurs honorèrent le sanctuaire panhellénique et furent initiés, eux aussi, aux Mystères, dont ils exprimèrent l'intérêt par le biais de plusieurs oeuvres publiques. La célébration des fêtes ainsi que le culte de Déméter furent interdits à la fin du IV^e siècle ap. J.-C. par l'empereur Théodose II. Des croix gravées sur des dalles datant de cette période montrent comment les premiers chrétiens croyaient ainsi repousser les démons païens. Le site tomba ensuite à l'abandon et les invasions barbares finirent de dévaster les monuments. Bien avant la domination ottomane il était déjà désert⁵.

Voyageurs européens et fouilles archéologiques



Fig. 1.5 Vue du village et de la vallée, de la colline avec la chapelle de la Vierge, dessin de W. Gell, gravure publiée dans *Society of Dilettanti: The Unedited antiquities of Attica*, Londres, 1817

À partir du XVII^e siècle, les voyageurs européens cherchèrent des traces de l'antiquité en suivant les textes anciens. Parmi les tous premiers visiteurs du lieu notons J. Spon et G. Wheler. En 1676, durant l'exploration des lieux, ils prirent la statue de Caryatide pour celle de Déméter. Ils copièrent quelques inscriptions, et,

comme le texte de Pausanias ne contenait pas de descriptions détaillées, ils s'avèrent finalement incapables de reconstituer l'image du site. Vers 1801 Edward D. Clarke durant ses longues pérégrinations et recherches des antiquités en Orient arrive à Éleusis. En suivant les renseignements du consul français, il trouva la statue de la Caryatide-Kistophoros enfouie jusqu'au

cou dans le fumier. Pour les habitants du petit village construit sur les ruines de l'ancienne Éleusis, cette statue était sacrée, parce qu'elle apportait la fertilité à la terre et ils croyaient qu'en perdant cette statue leur village serait saisi d'un grand malheur. Au cours des fêtes, ils allumaient des bougies, en même temps qu'ils faisaient des prières pour avoir une bonne récolte. Pour cette raison, il était absolument défendu de l'enlever. D'après la légende locale, dès qu'on enlève la statue, elle revient à sa place. Quand Clarke la fit transporter en direction de Smyrne, le bateau coula et la statue fut sauvée. La Caryatide se trouve aujourd'hui au musée Fitzwilliam de Cambridge en Angleterre. Le grand écrivain romantique Chateaubriand, durant son voyage vers Jérusalem, visita Éleusis en 1806. Dans sa relation de voyage, il parle en détail de tout ce que les voyageurs précédents ont vu, copié, et enlevé du site⁶. La Société des Dilletanti, les premiers qui ont entrepris systématiquement des fouilles dans les sites anciens,

ont voulu examiner cet endroit aussi. Mais, à cause de la présence d'un quartier habité sur la colline et du manque de financements, le projet fut interrompu.

L'archéologue Lenormant reprit ce travail en 1860⁷ et finalement l'abbé Le Camus, en 1896, nous laisse la description suivante :

«Deux dames sont installées sous un vaste parasol au bord du puits Callichoron. Veulent – elles y vénérer le souvenir

des Grecques illustres qui jadis chantaient ici et dansaient en l'honneur de Prosperine retrouvée et de Cérès sa mère réjouie... nous-mêmes après avoir tout examiné... depuis ces successions de Propylées extérieures et intérieures assez inexplicables jusqu'à la Pierre Sans Rire «Αγέλαστος Πέτρα» où jadis Cérès désolée se serait assise, à travers des plateformes de niveaux différents indiquant des enceintes diverses, après être montés jusqu'à la chapelle de la Vierge sur la colline pour dominer ce vaste champ de ruines... nous sommes incapables de nous faire une idée un peu plus nette de l'ancien temple qui d'après Strabon fut le plus grand de toute la Grèce...»⁸



Fig. 1.6 Les fouilles aux Propylées du sanctuaire effectuées par l'archéologue français Lenormant en 1860

À partir de la fin du XIX^e siècle et jusqu'à nos jours les fouilles révélèrent des traces de la longue histoire de cette ville. Le site archéologique, avec les ruines dont la datation remonte de l'époque mycénienne jusqu'au V^e siècle ap. J.-C., offre aux visiteurs une image suggestive de ce qu'était un sanctuaire antique. On constate, par les dessins et les gravures des voyageurs ainsi que par les premières photos et plans des fouilles, la présence d'une petite chapelle chrétienne au sommet de l'ancienne acropole.



Fig. 1.7 La chapelle de la Vierge au sommet de la colline au milieu du village, dessin de W. Gell, gravure publiée dans *Society of Dilettanti the Unedited Antiquities of Attica*, Londres, 1817

La fête de la Vierge

C'est dans cette chapelle, dédiée à la Vierge surnommée « *Messosporitissa* » (celle de la période des semailles) qu'aujourd'hui, tous les ans, le 20 et le 21 novembre, se déroulent des vêpres la veille et une messe le lendemain. L'appellation de la Vierge comme *Messosporitissa* la caractérise comme protectrice des semailles qui ont lieu pendant ce mois. Le site archéologique reste accessible exceptionnellement l'après-midi pendant la fête de l'église et les fidèles traversent la dernière partie de l'ancienne Voie Sacrée et passent à travers les ruines de la cour, des anciens temples, des Propylées, du Plutonium et du Téléstèrion. Ils portent des fleurs pour la décoration des icônes, des paniers avec des pains et tout le nécessaire pour les vêpres. À la place de l'ancienne acropole mycénienne, existait déjà depuis la fin du XVIII^e siècle la petite chapelle de la Vierge. Des débris de l'ancien temple ont été incorporés à l'édifice et le clocher est presque totalement construit avec des pierres anciennes.



Fig. 1.8 La montée des fidèles vers la chapelle à côté du Téléstèrion



Figs. 1.9, 1.10 Les fidèles traversent l'ancienne voie sacrée



Fig. 1.11 Les fidèles et les pains à bénir dans la cour de la chapelle



Fig. 1.12 La messe se déroulant devant la chapelle de la Vierge



Fig. 1.13 Distribution des kolyva pour commémorer les âmes des défunts.

Un grand nombre de personnes, habitant les environs et même Athènes y participent. Les vêpres ont lieu dans la cour devant la chapelle, car celle-ci est de dimension très modeste. Les paniers garnis de pains sont placés autour d'un ancien bloc de marbre tenant lieu d'autel et le prêtre, après avoir allumé toutes les bougies, les bénit. Au préalable, les fidèles avaient donné au prêtre la liste des noms des personnes de leur entourage. Pendant la cérémonie, ce dernier les récite, réjouissant les participants qui pensent ainsi que seront assurés à leurs proches une bonne santé, une bonne fortune et du bonheur.. À la fin des vêpres et si le temps le permet, les fidèles, à la lumière du crépuscule, distribuent les morceaux de pains bénis à tous les participants en échangeant des vœux : «santé», «à la bonne heure», «souhaitons de même pour l'année prochaine» toujours en évoquant la présence de la Vierge. Quelquefois, les fidèles préparent des «kolyva» pour commémorer les âmes des défunts. Les «kolyva», qui à la fin de l'Antiquité et aux temps modernes étaient des offrandes de blé et de fruits, de nos jours sont préparées généralement à la maison et se composent de blé bouilli, mélangé avec de la farine, des fruits secs, du sésame, du persil, du sucre, des grains de grenade et divers aromates. Au cours d'un cérémonial soigné on les distribue ; c'est un acte d'honneur réciproque pour ceux qui les donnent et ceux qui les reçoivent.

Toute la cérémonie de l'*artoklasia* (bénédiction et distribution des pains) est d'une grande et profonde suggestivité. Les «signes» qui attachent la cérémonie actuelle aux anciennes coutumes et mémoires du mythe de Déméter et de Perséphone sont connus et font parfois l'objet de conversations. Ces «signes» sont transmis aux enfants soit par leurs parents qui les prennent avec eux pour être présents à la cérémonie soit aux écoliers qui visitent le site le lendemain matin, le jour de la fête de la chapelle.

La mairie d'Éleusis et les associations culturelles de la ville participent en offrant des rafraîchissements.

Le matin du 21 novembre, de bonne heure, les fidèles arrivent dans la chapelle décorée pour assister à la messe de la fête de la Présentation au Temple de la Vierge. Une partie de l'office se déroule dans la cour et les fidèles occupent l'emplacement de l'ancien sanctuaire. Les vœux et souhaits pour une bonne continuité résonnent parmi les ruines en attendant l'année prochaine.

L'actuelle ville industrielle qui enveloppe l'ancien sanctuaire, ses habitants et la continuité des coutumes anciennes parallèlement au mode de vie contemporain dans cette région assez polluée, ont figuré dans un documentaire récent : *Αγέλαστος Πέτρα*⁹ qui réalisa d'une façon exceptionnelle la continuité référée. La fête annuelle de la Vierge Messosporitissa dans le sanctuaire de l'ancienne déesse persiste de nos jours et rappelle que les besoins humains et les croyances religieuses qui les soulagent n'ont pas changé au cours des siècles.



Fig. 1.14 Détails à l'intérieur de la chapelle de la Vierge



Fig. 1.15 Le départ des fidèles après la cérémonie



Fig. 1.16 Pains bénis en petits morceaux placés à côté du Téléstèrion

Patras

Patras, située à 216 km d'Athènes, a connu une première période de prospérité pendant l'époque romaine et elle continue, grâce à sa situation géographique, à jouer un rôle important pendant l'époque byzantine et les siècles de l'occupation ottomane. Au XIX^e siècle lors de la fondation de l'État grec, elle entra dans une période de développement remarquable et depuis elle devint, au XX^e siècle, la troisième ville la plus importante et le troisième plus grand port du pays.

Un ancien oracle

À Patras existait un ancien oracle, près d'une source sacrée, dédié à la déesse Déméter. D'après le voyageur et écrivain Pausanias (II^e ap. J.-C.), les fidèles consultaient l'oracle pour des questions de santé. On attachait un miroir par une fine corde et on le faisait descendre jusqu'à la source de l'oracle afin qu'il effleure la surface de l'eau. Par la suite on évoquait la déesse par des prières, on brûlait de l'encens et on regardait dans le miroir qui reflétait une image du malade mort ou vivant¹⁰.

Saint André et Patras

D'autre part la ville de Patras fut sanctifiée par le sang de Saint André, du Protoclytos, premier disciple appelé par Jésus. Après un long voyage à travers l'Asie Mineure et la Grèce continentale actuelle, l'apôtre aboutit, à un âge très avancé, en terre d'Achaïe et à Patras, où il accomplit plusieurs miracles et guérisons. L'endroit de la source miraculeuse était le lieu de prédication de l'apôtre. Condamné à mort par le proconsul Aigéatus pour avoir converti la femme de ce dernier au christianisme, il subit, selon la tradition, à proximité de la mer et non loin de la source, la mort par crucifixion. Selon la tradition, la date de sa mort est fixée au 30 novembre, probablement durant les derniers mois du règne de Néron. Les reliques étaient gardées à Patras jusqu'au IV^e siècle, date de leur transfert à Constantinople. Une première basilique chrétienne fut élevée sur le lieu de son martyre. On pense qu'elle a existé jusqu'au début du XVIII^e siècle. En 1770 l'église de Saint André aurait été détruite entièrement par les Albanais¹¹. À côté de la source et à la place de l'ancienne église, on édifia la première église moderne (1836-1843). Cette basilique fut l'oeuvre du célèbre architecte du XIX^e siècle Lysandros Kaftantzoglou. La nouvelle église à coupole, une des plus grandes de la péninsule balkanique, fut fondée en 1908 et inaugurée, après maintes aventures, en 1974.



Fig. 1.17 La grande église à coupole de Saint André

La source, comme au temps de Pausanias, se trouve aujourd'hui dans un emplacement souterrain spécialement aménagé en voûte et accessible par quelques marches. Un puits se trouvant près de l'église du saint est rempli de l'eau de la source. Il est connu depuis comme «le puits de Saint André». A l'entrée de la source, une inscription en marbre découverte en 1876 relate : «Cette eau, jadis à la déesse Déméter, est miraculeuse. Ici fut crucifié André patron de la ville».

Le crâne de Saint André est gardé dans un coffret en argent en forme d'église. Il était resté à Patras jusqu'à la conquête de la ville par les Ottomans.



Fig. 1.18 La source souterraine à côté de l'église de Saint André



Fig. 1.19 Dessin de l'église de Saint André, et l'entrée de la crypte où se trouve l'agiasma (eau bénite); publié dans Bibliothèque Internationale de l'Alliance Universelle, II2, Patras, 1896



Fig. 1.20 La prosternation devant les reliques de Saint André dans sa grande église

En 1458, le Despote de Morée, Thomas Paléologue, en quittant le Péloponnèse, le transporta à l'ouest. Plus tard, grâce à Bessarion (lettré byzantin réfugié en Italie) le Pape Pie III récupéra le saint crâne et fut célébrée une cérémonie grandiose, en 1503. Les reliques furent prises par les Francs lors du sac de Constantinople en 1204, durant la IV^e Croisade. Ils les transportèrent à Gaeta en Italie et par la suite à Amalfi. À part le crâne qui fut remis, en 1964, par le Pape Paul VI, il ne reste aujourd'hui dans l'église qu'un fragment de doigt, une partie de sa main et deux morceaux de sa Croix Sainte¹².

Les Voyageurs européens

Ciriaco Anconitano qui passa par Patras en février 1436 a décrit avec exactitude probablement le lieu autour de l'ancienne source¹³. En 1676, l'Anglais G. Wheler a vu, presque en ruines, l'église qui se trouvait sur le lieu du martyre. D'autres voyageurs ont également décrit l'église de Saint André : L. Aldersey (1587), C. Magni (1691), A. Morison (1698), R. Pococke (1740) et R. Chandler (1766)¹⁴. En 1801, Ed. Dodwell nous laisse parallèlement à une description, une gravure, selon laquelle la crypte et le «*agiasma*» (eau bénite) sont présentés tels qu'ils sont et fonctionnent de nos jours¹⁵. En 1805 le voyageur W.M. Leake trouva la source annexée à l'église de Saint André au même endroit qu'aujourd'hui¹⁶.



Fig. 1.21 Vue de la source sacrée agiasma. Gravure publiée dans Ed. Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece*, Londres, 1819



Figs. 1.22, 1.23 Les croyants boivent et se purifient à l'eau bénite

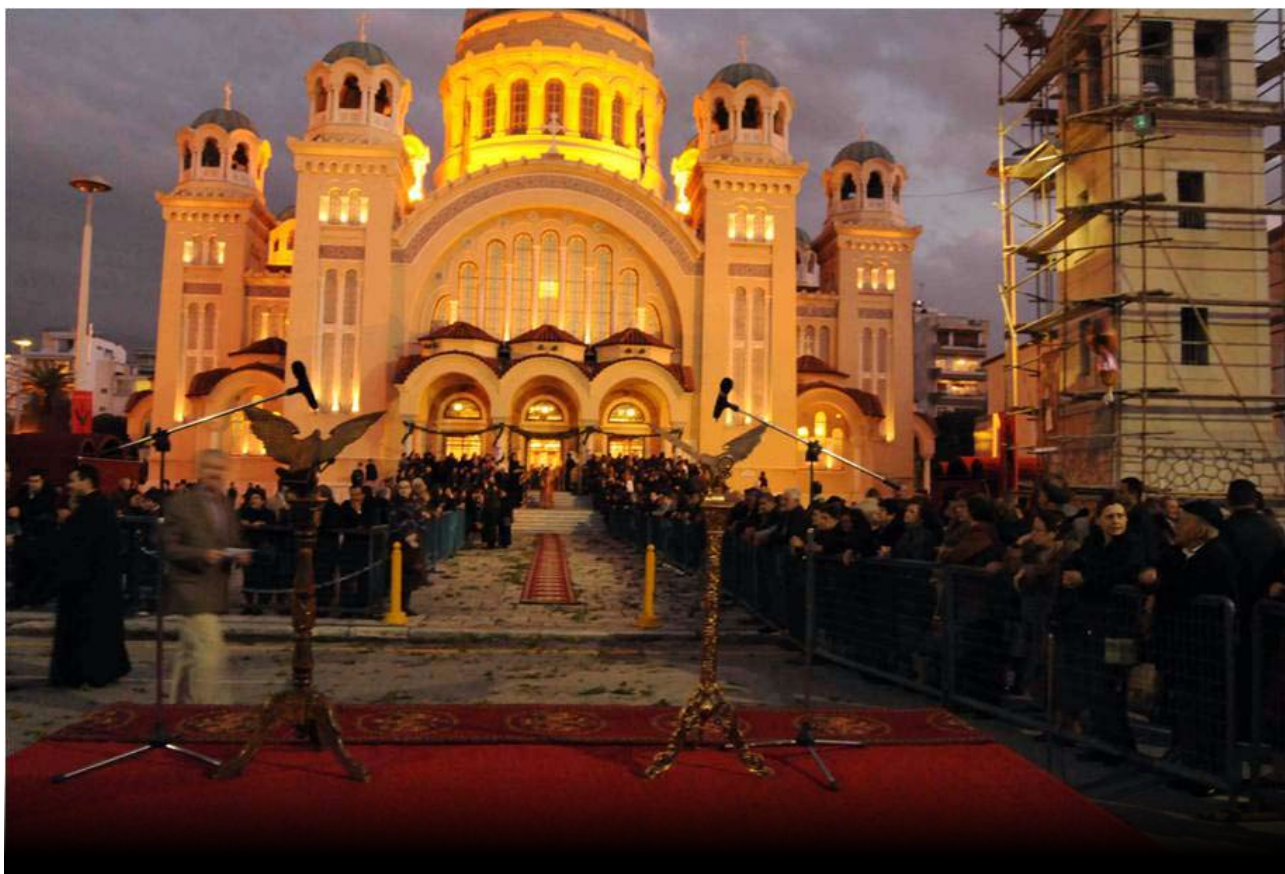


Fig. 1.24 L'attente de l'arrivée de l'Archevêque d'Athènes et de toute la Grèce

La Fête de Saint André

La mémoire de Saint André est honorée par tout le monde chrétien le 30 Novembre, jour de sa mort. À Patras la cérémonie, appelée «*Protoklitia*», a un caractère officiel et majestueux. La veille ont lieu les vêpres en grande pompe. Les fidèles descendent dans la crypte où ils se lavent à l'eau bénite «*agiasma*» et en emportent dans de petits flacons ; ils se prosternent ensuite devant les reliques. L'importance de la fête est caractérisée par la présence de la plus haute personnalité ecclésiastique de la Grèce orthodoxe, l'Archevêque d'Athènes et de toute la Grèce. Le jour de la mémoire du saint, le 30 novembre, après une messe où participent les évêques de la Sainte Synode de l'Église Grecque, une procession a lieu : les reliques du saint sont exposées ainsi que l'icône argentée à son effigie. Orchêstres de la ville, écoliers, institutions et associations diverses, autorités locales, tout le clergé et les gens du pays défilent à travers les rues principales de la ville moderne de Patras, tandis que la crypte à l'eau bénite attire la foule des fidèles.



Fig. 1.25 Les fidèles devant la crypte



Fig. 1.26 Les écoliers participent à la procession



Fig. 1.27 Le clergé à la procession



Fig. 1.28 L'icône du saint transporté pendant la procession

Athènes

Les Fêtes des Panathénées

Pendant l'Antiquité, à Athènes on célébrait tous les quatre ans des fêtes en l'honneur de la déesse Athéna, protectrice de la ville et maîtresse de l'Acropole, ainsi que de tous les Athéniens (pan-athéniens) : les Panathénées. Ces fêtes se célébraient le 28 hecatomvaionos (juillet-août), jour de l'anniversaire de la déesse Athéna. Selon les sources anciennes, les fondateurs de ces fêtes étaient considérés tantôt Thésée, héros par excellence de la ville d'Athènes, tantôt Erichonios, l'enfant, mi-homme mi-serpent, de la déesse Athéna et du dieu Héphaïstos (Vulcain). Probablement la fête se célébrait dès le VII^e siècle av. J.-C., au début à un rythme annuel. Elle aurait inclus une procession, un sacrifice, un banquet et l'offrande d'une voile à la vieille statue en bois d'olivier de la déesse Athéna¹⁷.

Les Grands Panathénées, organisés tous les quatre ans depuis le VI^e siècle y ont ajouté des jeux athlétiques et plus tard des concours musicaux. Il s'agissait de l'expression du respect pour la déesse et une sorte de revue de l'histoire des institutions démocratiques d'Athènes¹⁸. Le trajet de la grande procession tout le long de la voie des Panathénées démontre le caractère public et politique de la fête. La procession démarrait du quartier populaire de Céramique (cimetière et région commerciale), passait le long de l'Agora (centre social et politique de la ville) pour aboutir au temple d'Athéna sur l'Acropole¹⁹. Toutes les classes sociales, les groupes politiques, les femmes, les métèques et les alliés des colonies participaient aux Panathénées. La procession est représentée sur la frise qui parcourt le mur du temple du Parthénon (V^e siècle av. J.-C.). Cette bande de bas-relief de 160m de long, et ses 378 figures humaines et les quelques 200 animaux, est l'oeuvre de Phidias et de son atelier.



Fig. 1.29 La frise du Parthénon, V^e siècle av. J.-C., représentant la procession des Panathénées, aujourd'hui exposée au British Museum à Londres et au Musée de l'Acropole d'Athènes

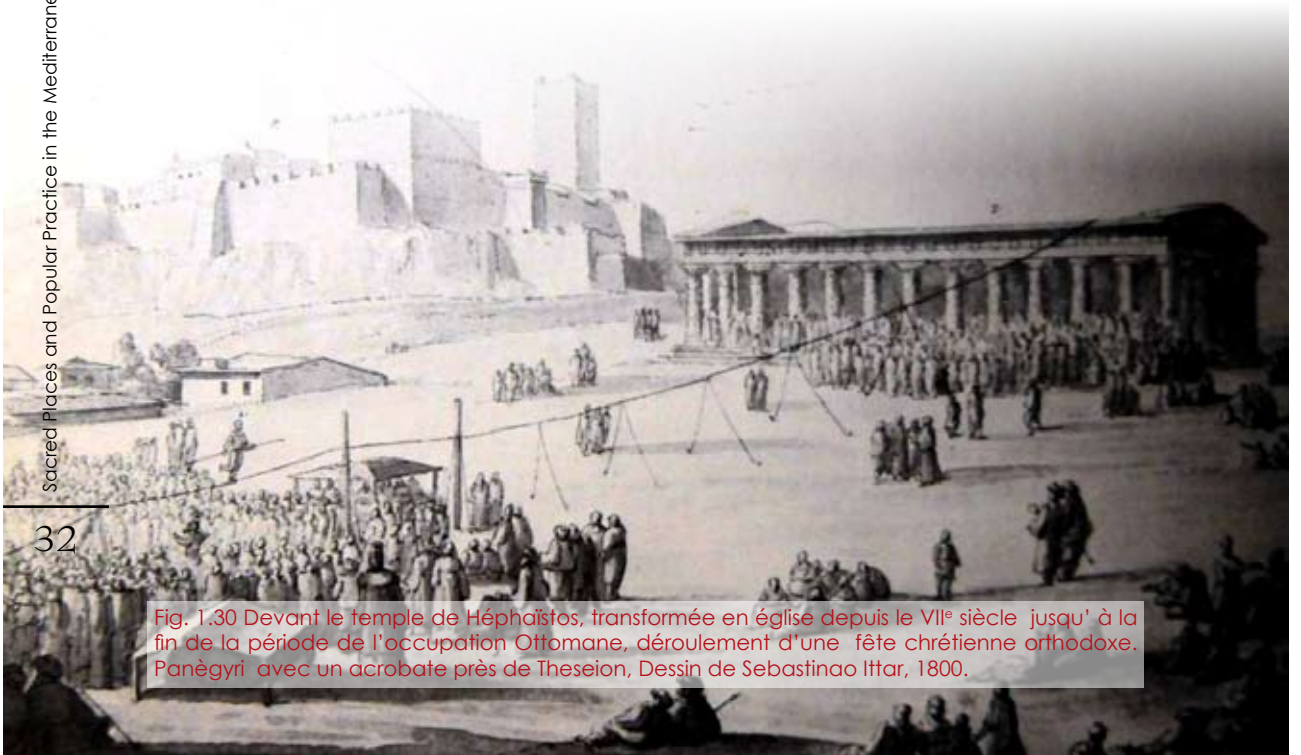
Elle est considérée comme l'un des chefs d'œuvres les plus représentatifs de l'art classique²⁰. Les Panathénées exprimaient les valeurs fondamentales de la ville et consolidaient les liens entre les habitants, dans une atmosphère d'abondance et de splendeur manifestant parallèlement la force et la piété de cette civilisation au niveau panhellénique²¹. Les fêtes ont été interdites vers la fin du IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.

L'Agora d'Athènes

La voie des Panathénées traversait le lieu de l'Agora où avaient lieu toutes les activités administratives, politiques, juridiques, commerciales, sociales, culturelles et religieuses des Athéniens. Cet endroit était habité depuis l'époque tardive néolithique, devenant dès le VI^e siècle av. J.-C. le centre politique et gardant ce caractère de centre vital jusqu'à la fin de l'Antiquité. Les édifices publics ont été érigés progressivement au fil des siècles²².

Malgré toutes les destructions subies durant les invasions barbares, elle fut habitée sans interruption jusqu'au VII^e siècle ap. J.-C. Dès lors abandonnée, elle fut réinvestie au X^e siècle, et c'est à partir de là que s'étendit la ville d'Athènes. La voie des Panathénées n'était pas pavée, exceptée la partie sud. Soixante-six couches de cailloux découvertes par les fouilles sur son côté nord prouvent que le chemin fût utilisé pendant plus de 1000 ans, dès le VI^e siècle av. J.-C. et jusqu'au VI^e siècle ap. J.-C.²³. Sur le côté ouest de l'Agora, s'élève intact le temple dédié à Héphaïstos, protecteur des forgerons, et à Athéna, protectrice des artisans. Il existe toujours, bien conservé, non loin de la voie des Panathénées. Le temple se transforma au VII^e siècle en église chrétienne dédiée à Saint George²⁴. Des temps modernes et même après la fondation de l'État grec et jusqu'en 1931, date à laquelle débutent les fouilles, nous possédons des images de l'activité religieuse et sociale aux environs du temple.

Fig. 1.30 Devant le temple de Héphaïstos, transformée en église depuis le VII^e siècle jusqu'à la fin de la période de l'occupation Ottomane, déroulement d'une fête chrétienne orthodoxe. Panègyri avec un acrobate près de Theseion, Dessin de Sebastinao Ittar, 1800.



À l'emplacement de l'ancienne Agora, se trouve un quartier habité tout le long de l'époque byzantine et la période de l'occupation ottomane jusqu'au commencement des fouilles en 1931. Une église chrétienne dédiée aux Saints Apôtres existe depuis l'an 1000 jusqu'à nos jours. Aménagée plusieurs fois même jusqu'au XIX^e siècle, elle fut reconstruite, en 1954-56, par l'American School of Classical Studies à Athènes²⁵.



Fig. 1.31 Les ruines du temple de Héphaïstos dans l'Agora d'Athènes

La Fête des Saints Apôtres

L'église, monument archéologique, ne fonctionne comme église chrétienne que le jour de la fête des Saints Apôtres (29-30 juin). Le 29 juin, pour les vêpres, les objets du culte sont transportés à l'église par la voie de Panathénées, depuis l'église Saint Philippe, dans le quartier d'à côté. Ce dernier, connu aujourd'hui sous le nom de Monastiraki, a toujours été l'emplacement du marché, et ce depuis la période byzantine et jusqu'à la fin de l'occupation ottomane, mais aussi depuis la fondation de l'État grec jusqu'à nos jours. Une icône des Saints Apôtres, offerte par les forgerons du quartier à proximité du site, rappelle que, sur un même pied d'égalité que la déesse Athéna, Héphaïstos (Vulcain) avait son temple dans l'Agora, reconnu comme le dieu protecteur des métiers du fer et de la métallurgie. Des reliques des Apôtres Philippe, Pierre et Thomas, devant lesquelles se prosternent les fidèles, sont exposées. La distribution des pains bénis se déroule dans la cour de l'église au pied de l'Acropole.



Fig. 1.32 L'église des Saints Apôtres existant depuis l'an 1000 et reconstruite en 1954-56



Fig. 1.33 Les prêtres amènent les reliques des apôtres qui seront exposées dans l'église



Fig. 1.34 L'icône des Saints Apôtres offerte par les forgerons du quartier



Fig. 1.35 La bénédiction des pains



Fig. 1.36 Une fidèle se prosternant devant les reliques

Le 30 juin, après la messe, l'icône des Saints Apôtres revient à l'église Saint Philippe après avoir fait tout un tour dans le quartier des forgerons et des antiquaires. Sur la voie des Panathénées, découverte par les fouilles (là où se déroulait pendant des siècles l'ancienne procession), se déroule de nos jours une procession chrétienne, accompagnée d'un orchestre municipal, et où est brandi le drapeau de l'Association des Forgerons du quartier. Son trajet s'effectue en sens inverse, accompagnant les reliques et l'icône des saints. Les gens du quartier et les touristes y participent. Le souvenir des splendides fêtes athéniennes est de rigueur pendant que les chrétiens pratiquants vivent pieusement ces festivités annuelles de l'église des Saints Apôtres sur le lieu de l'ancienne Agora.



Fig. 1.37 La procession des reliques



Fig. 1.38 La cour de l'église pendant les vêpres

Chios

Chios est une île du nord-est de la mer Egée. Au plus haut sommet d'une colline dans la partie sud de l'île, l'église du prophète Elie se trouve à côté d'un sanctuaire de la déesse Athéna, au-dessus du petit port d'Emboreios. Ce dernier assurait la protection des navires qui entraient dans le détroit de Chios et qui desservaient les localités continentales, déjà à l'âge de bronze. Sur la plus haute (230m) des deux collines protégeant le lieu, là où se trouve actuellement la chapelle chrétienne, commence l'enceinte de l'ancienne acropole. Un peu plus bas se trouve le sanctuaire dédié à Athéna qui fonctionnait depuis le VIII^e siècle av. J.-C. Le temple est daté du VI^e siècle av. J.-C. ainsi que les restes d'un village tandis que des vestiges d'un « mégaron » remontent probablement au VII^e siècle av. J.-C.²⁶.



Fig. 1.39 La chapelle du prophète Elie sur le sommet de la colline



Fig. 1.40 Vue de la côte prise du sommet de la colline où se trouve la chapelle du prophète Elie

Le Prophète Élie

L'Eglise honore le prophète Elie le 20 juillet. Ce dernier, dans les croyances populaires, est identifié au soleil. Dans l'Antiquité, le dieu Soleil était au service de Zeus et était adoré aux sommets des montagnes. Le prophète Elie est lié de différentes façons à l'eau, surtout celle des pluies. Les traditions néohelléniques puisent des éléments pour la vénération du prophète dans les textes bibliques²⁷. En ce qui concerne les lieux où sont bâties les églises, le texte homérique²⁸ est modifié de manière à ce que chaque région ait sur un sommet son prophète Elie. On dit que le prophète était un marin qui, ayant décidé de quitter la vie maritime, voulut habiter dans un lieu où personne ne connaissait la mer. Il prit donc une rame, et s'achemina en demandant à chacun le nom de l'objet. Tant que les gens lui répondaient que c'était une rame, il montait plus haut jusqu'à ce qu'il arrive au sommet d'une montagne et que quelqu'un lui réponde que c'était un morceau de bois; prouvant la méconnaissance du milieu maritime en ce lieu. Alors, il s'y installa²⁹. Cette tradition connue dans plusieurs endroits transpose le conte homérique, dans lequel Ulysse, guidé par Tirésias doit prendre une rame et faire des sacrifices dans un lieu où les gens ne reconnaîtront pas l'objet et le prendront pour une pelle, donc ces gens ne connaissent pas la mer.

La tradition néohellénique donne à ce prophète une identité qui surgit par les soucis, les vicissitudes et les désirs du peuple : le manque d'eau et la sécheresse qui détruit les récoltes et les troupeaux et provoque la famine, le char brûlant du soleil dans les espaces célestes du mois de juillet, le sommet de la montagne, lieu intermédiaire entre le ciel et la terre d'où descend avec la foudre l'eau de Dieu, en sont autant de symboles ; ainsi que la prière simple du peuple : « et que le prophète Elie aux cieux...pour que Dieu nous verse de l'eau...»

La fête, le panégyrie

Les panégyries (παν-ἀγυρίς= pan-réunion), sont des fêtes religieuses et des bals collectifs comprenant un ensemble de manifestations où l'on honore la mémoire d'un saint auquel est dédiée l'église d'une région, d'une ville ou d'un village³⁰.

Selon une recherche récente la manière de rendre hommage au saint ainsi que les cérémonies relatives démontrent jusqu'à un certain point la relation entre la religion et les traditions anciennes, grecques ou romaines. Dans la société byzantine, elles évoluent et sont incorporées au sein de l'église et sont protégées par le droit³¹. Les foires commerciales où s'achètent et se vendent bêtes et produits agricoles, constituaient un élément important du commerce tant au Moyen Âge qu'aux temps modernes³².

Dans plusieurs régions de Grèce, les sommets étaient des lieux de culte depuis la préhistoire. Celui du prophète Elie, avec ses propriétés solaires et météorologiques s'installe facilement sur les montagnes grecques parce que ces lieux avaient toujours été sacrés³³. Ainsi, à l'exemple de Chios, le panégyrie du 20 juillet accueille les fidèles, les visiteurs, les gens du village et les étrangers. La veille, au coucher du soleil, la montée des pentes abruptes vers l'église rapproche les gens et rend l'atmosphère plus familière. Au sommet, tout est déjà préparé afin de recevoir les fidèles et les habitants du village ont entrepris toutes les préparations nécessaires pour le banquet. Le sentier autrefois montait du côté du temple ancien, aujourd'hui il est fermé pour la protection du site. Après les vêpres, la paroisse offre un dîner.

Cette réunion annuelle était, et demeure toujours, une occasion de rencontre des habitants de l'île et des rapatriés, qui reviennent pendant les vacances d'été. Le lendemain après l'office, un petit repas est aussi distribué aux participants. L'église reste ouverte pour plusieurs jours pour les quelques visiteurs pieux et ferme jusqu'au prochain panégyrie du prophète Elie.



Fig. 1.41 Préparatifs pour le banquet offert par la chapelle pendant le panégyrie



Fig. 1.43 L'icône du prophète Elie richement décorée pour le panégyrie



Fig. 1.42 Le pain à l'intérieur de la chapelle



Fig. 1.44 Le repas des fidèles

Délos

Au milieu de la mer Égée se trouve une île sacrée pour le monde grec ancien : Délos, lieu de naissance du dieu Apollon. Au centre des Cyclades (les îles qui forment un cercle autour de Délos), à mi-chemin entre le continent grec, l'Ionie en Asie Mineure et la Crète, l'île se développa très tôt en tant que port de commerce et devint plus tard une ville très importante pendant les époques hellénistique et romaine. De plus, Délos a connu une variété de cultes de divinités non grecques, et tous les syncrétismes pouvant en découler. Actuellement elle compte parmi les sites archéologiques les plus impressionnants, attirant une grande foule de visiteurs, surtout pendant les mois d'été.



Fig. 1.45 Carte de Délos publiée par J. Pitton de Tournefort dans *Relation d'un voyage du Levant*, Paris, 1711

Le mythe

L'Hymne homérique à Apollon (VII^e ou VI^e siècle av. J.-C.) raconte que Lété, enceinte de Zeus, cherchait vainement un endroit où accoucher parce qu'Héra (Juno), éprise de jalousie, l'empêchait d'être accueillie nulle part. Lété trouva refuge sur un rocher à peine visible à la surface des flots, où elle errait sans fin. Alors Lété promit à l'îlot rocheux, errant comme elle que son enfant à naître n'abandonnerait jamais le lieu mais le rendrait prospère et renommé. Quand finalement la déesse de l'enfantement Eileithyie, que Héra tenait aussi à distance, arriva à Délos, Lété mit au monde d'abord Artémis,

puis ensuite le plus beau de tous les immortels, Apollon. La terre immense sourit et se couvrit de fleurs, l'univers fut inondé de lumière : Phoibos nouveau-né, la chevelure flottante, rejeta ses langes et se mit en marche avec sa cithare et son arc recourbé. L'îlot, jusqu'alors invisible, devint visible (*délos*) et le mythe ajoute qu'il fut amarré au fond de l'abîme par des chaînes de diamant. Le fait important est qu'il devint l'un des lieux sacrés les plus fréquentés et les plus honorés de la Grèce antique.

D'après un autre mythe relatif à cette île, les Achéens en campagne vers Troie passèrent avec leur flotte par l'île et en profitèrent pour enlever les trois filles de leur hôte, qui étaient descendantes de Dionysos et petites filles d'Apollon : elles s'appelaient Spermo (semence), Oino (vin) et Elais (huile). Elles pouvaient assurer de cette façon les victuailles nécessaires aux soldats puisqu'elles avaient la possibilité divine de transformer en blé, vin et huile d'olive tout ce qu'elle touchaient³⁴.



Fig. 1.46 La voie des Lions, le lac sacré et le palmier planté à l'endroit où selon l'hymne homérique, Létéo a accouché d'Apollon

Les fêtes pendant l'Antiquité

D'après l'Hymne à Délos de Callimaque (III^e siècle av. J.-C.), dans l'île natale d'Apollon, dans cette terre qui aime les danses et les chants, la musique et la danse semblaient ne jamais s'arrêter. Le cœur de femmes d'Apollon Délien opérait, pendant les sacrifices, une danse sacrée. C'était la danse des Déliades qui, selon la tradition, répétait la danse mythique des nymphes jouissantes lors de la naissance d'Apollon. Parmi les cérémonies de remerciements et afin d'obtenir la clémence des dieux, la plus ancienne danse, appelée « gheranos », fut exécutée. Il s'agissait d'une danse mixte et à démarche labyrinthique exécutée pour la première fois en l'honneur d'Apollon par Thésée et ses compagnons de passage dans l'île en revenant de Crète. Déjà depuis le VII^e siècle av. J.-C. des compétitions de danse et de musique avaient lieu pour honorer Apollon, tandis que dans l'hymne homérique, Délos est présentée comme l'île où le dieu se réjouissait le plus ; les Ioniens s'y réunissaient en famille pour lui rendre hommage avec des combats de boxe, des danses et des chants. À l'époque hellénistique des groupes d'enfants prenaient part aux jeux en récitant un chant à contenu mythologique au son d'un joueur de flûte. Enfin Lucien (II^e siècle ap. J.-C.) relate qu'à Délos toutes les cérémonies de sacrifices s'effectuaient en musique³⁵. Hormis Apollon, selon la tradition, d'autres déesses et nymphes habitèrent dans l'île sacrée et y furent vénérées. À la fin du printemps (avril-mai), le sixième jour du mois artémision, jour sacré de la déesse Artémis (Diane), des sacrifices et des danses lui étaient consacrés, en même temps qu'on fêtait la nymphe Vritomarti, identifiée à la déesse. Cette dernière avait plusieurs sanctuaires à Délos sous ses différentes identités.

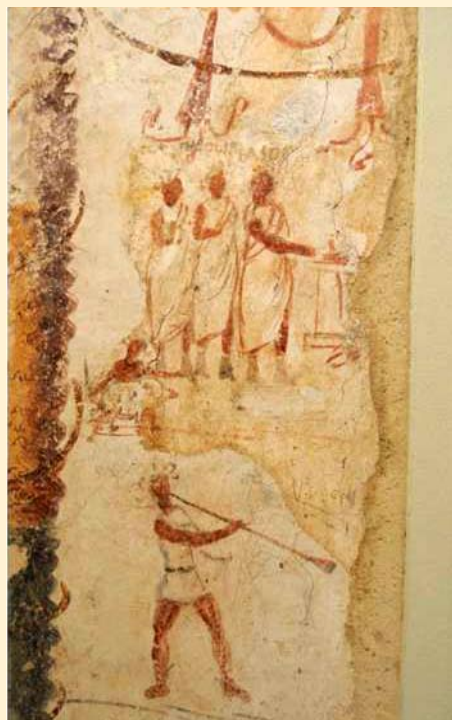


Fig. 1.47 Fresque ancienne représentant une scène de sacrifice provenant d'une maison à Délos exposée au Musée Archéologique de Délos. Même les sacrifices ne s'effectuaient sans danse et sans musique.

À côté de son sanctuaire, à la tombe des Hyperboréens, les jeunes hommes avant leur mariage déposaient le premier duvet de leur barbe, et les jeunes filles une mèche de leurs cheveux.

En plein été, au mois d'ekatombaion (juillet-août) les habitants de l'île honoraient Aphrodite (Vénus) décorant sa statue, sacrifiant et dansant peut-être la danse des Déliades et la danse mixte «*gheranos*» symbolisant la démarche dans le labyrinthe³⁶.

L'histoire du site

Vers 2 500 av. J.-C. les plus anciens habitants de l'île construisirent leurs huttes sur la plus haute colline, Kynthos, afin d'observer et de contrôler la vallée et la mer. Les Mycéniens s'installèrent près de la mer et le premier sanctuaire d'Apollon, fondé depuis les temps homériques, connut son apogée pendant la période archaïque (VII^e-VI^e siècle av. J.-C.) et l'époque classique (V^e-IV^e siècle av. J.-C.). Des Grecs, de tout le monde ancien, se rassemblaient pour honorer le dieu de la lumière Apollon et sa sœur jumelle Artémis, déesse de la lune. En l'an 166 av. J.-C., quand les Romains gouvernaient et régulaient la navigation en mer Égée, ils instituèrent une franchise douanière à Délos. Alors, une grande foule de commerçants, de banquiers, et d'armateurs du monde connu, s'installèrent sur l'île et avec eux vinrent des bâtisseurs, des sculpteurs et des artisans de mosaïques, qui construisirent de somptueuses villas. Ce petit point sur la carte de la Méditerranée devint le «*maximum emporium totius orbis terrarum*». Quelque 30 000 personnes y habitaient et le commerce d'importations et exportations s'élevait à 750 000 tonnes par an. Délos fut détruite en 88 av. J.-C. par l'ennemi des Romains, Mithridate, roi de Ponte et en 69 av. J.-C. par des pirates. À partir de ce moment-là, Délos tomba graduellement en décadence. Durant les premiers siècles de notre ère existait encore une importante communauté chrétienne mais après le VI^e siècle ap. J.-C. l'île fut complètement abandonnée et les édifices tombèrent en ruine³⁷.



Fig. 1.48 Les ruines de l'ancienne ville de Délos

Les voyageurs européens

Grâce à la Renaissance et à l'étude des textes anciens, Délos fût ressuscitée dans la mémoire. En 1445, le premier européen qui la visita est Ciriaco Anconitano. Les descriptions et les croquis de ce marchand italien amateur d'antiquités ont fourni un précieux témoignage sur l'état du site de Délos au milieu du XV^e siècle. Il dessina des statues et recopia nombre d'inscriptions qui émergeaient de l'enchevêtrement des ruines³⁸. Les voyageurs J. Spon et G. Wheler, en 1675, furent les premiers à parcourir le site et nous laissèrent une très intéressante description, dont celle des restes du colosse des Naxiens, les fragments de la grande statue d'Apollon³⁹.



Fig. 1.49 Vue des ruines à Délos, gravure publiée dans O. Dapper, *Description exacte des Îles de l'Archipel*, Amsterdam, 1703



Fig. 1.50 Représentation de Délos, gravure publiée dans G. Wheler, *A journey into Greece*, Londres, 1682



Fig. 1.51 Les ruines de Délos en 1829, gravure publiée dans A. Blouet, *Expédition scientifique de Morée*, vol. III, Paris, 1835

Mais c'est le botaniste J. Pitton de Tournefort, en 1700-1702 qui, lors de son voyage dans les îles de l'archipel, visita plusieurs fois Délos et essaya d'identifier les ruines en consultant toujours les textes des auteurs anciens, grecs et latins. Son texte est enrichi d'une carte où sont notées les ruines visibles à son époque, et fait aussi référence au texte de Plutarque : «...[le général athénien Nicias]... *traversa le canal pour entrer dans Délos ; on ne peut imaginer de plus pompeux que cette entrée ; Nicias informe que les prêtres députés des villes de Grèce débarquaient ordinairement en désordre, et qu'on leur ordonnait souvent de chanter les hymnes d'Apollon sans leur donner le temps de s'habiller... le lendemain on fut étonné de voir passer cette procession sur le pont jeté durant la nuit et couvert de riches tapis, avec des parapets peints et garnis de fleurs ; tous ces préparatifs avaient été apportés d'Athènes : la compagnie marcha en bon ordre, bien parée, chantant agréablement... Nicias fit dresser un grand palmier de bronze... et il destina les revenus d'une ferme considérable pour un repas où il voulut que les Déliens fussent invités tous les ans, afin de s'attirer par leurs sacrifices les bienfaits des dieux...*»⁴⁰

Les anglais J. Stuart et N. Revett des Dilettanti, arrivèrent en 1753, et furent attristés à la vue du site désert et par le pillage des marbres opéré par les habitants des îles environnantes et par les différents conquérants de la mer Égée (Vénitiens, Francs, Génois, Turcs, etc.) afin d'embellir leurs habitations⁴¹.

Le Français C.N.S. Sonnini de Manoncourt durant son voyage en Orient, visita Délos, en 1778. Dans la narration de son voyage, écrite dans l'esprit de son époque et qui remémore la grandeur du beau temps de la Grèce et l'actuelle désertification, il note entre autres : « *Mais l'île de Délos autrefois si opulente et où se célébraient avec tant de pompe les cérémonies religieuses, en présence d'un concours immense qui s'y rendait de tous les points d'Orient, n'est plus à présent qu'un désert livré aux animaux, inondé et couvert de ruines et de décombres*»⁴².

Les premières fouilles furent effectuées en 1772 par l'officier prussien de l'armée russe en Mer Egée, Pasch van Krienne, et les découvertes aboutirent à Petrograd et à Bucarest⁴³. D'autre part, les membres de l'Expédition Scientifique de Morée en 1829, firent quelques recherches archéologiques sur certains édifices⁴⁴. Pourtant c'est seulement en 1873, que commencèrent des excavations systématiques par l'École Archéologique Française d'Athènes et par l'École Archéologique d'Athènes. Elles s'intensifièrent de 1904-1914.

Aujourd'hui elles sont poursuivies par l'Office des Antiquités de Grèce. Un des sites anciens parmi les plus grands et les plus prestigieux au monde offre aux visiteurs une claire et unique image du sanctuaire et de la ville ancienne.

Le panégyrie

Actuellement, l'île de Délos reste inhabitée, et y résident seulement des gardiens et des spécialistes de l'archéologie et de l'art. Une petite chapelle, consacrée à Sainte Kyriaki, fut érigée au début du XX^e siècle parmi les ruines du quartier du stade. Dans la région où existait le sanctuaire du fondateur légendaire et premier roi de Délos, Anios aux trois filles, Spermo, Oino et Elais, et tout près des ruines du gymnase, derrière le stade et sur la place du quartier du stade, le sixième jour (jour sacré de la déesse Artémis) de juillet (mois sacré de la déesse Aphrodite) on célèbre actuellement la Sainte Kyriaki «*athléphore*» (celle qui subit bien des soucis)⁴⁵.



Fig. 1.52 La chapelle de la Sainte Kyriaki

Tard dans l'après-midi du 6 juillet des bateaux spécialement affrétés transportent, de Mykonos au petit port de Délos, les participants du panégyrie. La joie et l'entrain se déploient déjà dans les petits bateaux. Tout le nécessaire pour les offices religieux et le banquet, qui durera

toute la nuit, est apporté. Les autorités permettent exceptionnellement la visite des lieux toute la nuit des vêpres. La Sainte Kyriaki, chapelle typiquement mykoniate, appartenait à une famille originaire de Mykonos.



Fig. 1.53 L'arrivée des participants au site pour le panégyrie avec le nécessaire pour l'office et le banquet



Fig. 1.54 Préparation des tables pour le banquet du panégyrie à l'emplacement des ruines de l'ancien gymnase

Elle est aussi entretenue ces dernières années par les gardiens du site archéologique. Au crépuscule, le prêtre bénit le pain, le vin et l'huile. La famille du panégyra, l'hôte du panégyrie, est celle qui assume les frais du banquet pour ses amis et les habitants de l'île qui retrouvent leur vieille coutume annuelle. Les visiteurs (grecs et étrangers), tous dispersés dans le site, assistent à la cérémonie des vêpres qui se déroule dans la cour de la chapelle. Après ils se dirigent vers les ruines du gymnase où sont dressées les tables du banquet. La famille qui se charge du dîner continue ces dernières dix-sept années à «sacrifier», à préparer les plats et à participer aux festivités. Ce banquet, offert par la famille de l'île voisine (l'île cosmopolite de Mykonos) réunit une foule de visiteurs : grecs et étrangers, jeunes et adultes, pratiquants ou non, sur les anciennes dalles et ruines. Le repas est suivi par des chants et des danses qui durent toute la nuit jusqu'à l'aube et nous rappellent le texte de Lucien (II^e siècle ap. J.-C.) : «ουδέ οι θυσιαί άνευ ορχήσεως αλλά συν ταύτη και μετά μουσικής εγίνοντο» (même les sacrifices ne s'effectuaient sans danse et sans musique)⁴⁶. Le lendemain matin, après la messe, les participants du panégyrie cèdent leurs places aux visiteurs-touristes du site archéologique.



Fig. 1.55 Grecs et étrangers dispersés dans le site et assistant à l'office des vêpres durant la pleine lune



Fig. 1.56 Musicien originaire de Myconos jouant de la traditionnelle tsabouna

Fig. 1.57 Villageois grec jouant un instrument de musique traditionnel, une genre de musette. Gravure publiée dans N. Nicolay, *Les Navigations*, Lyon 1563

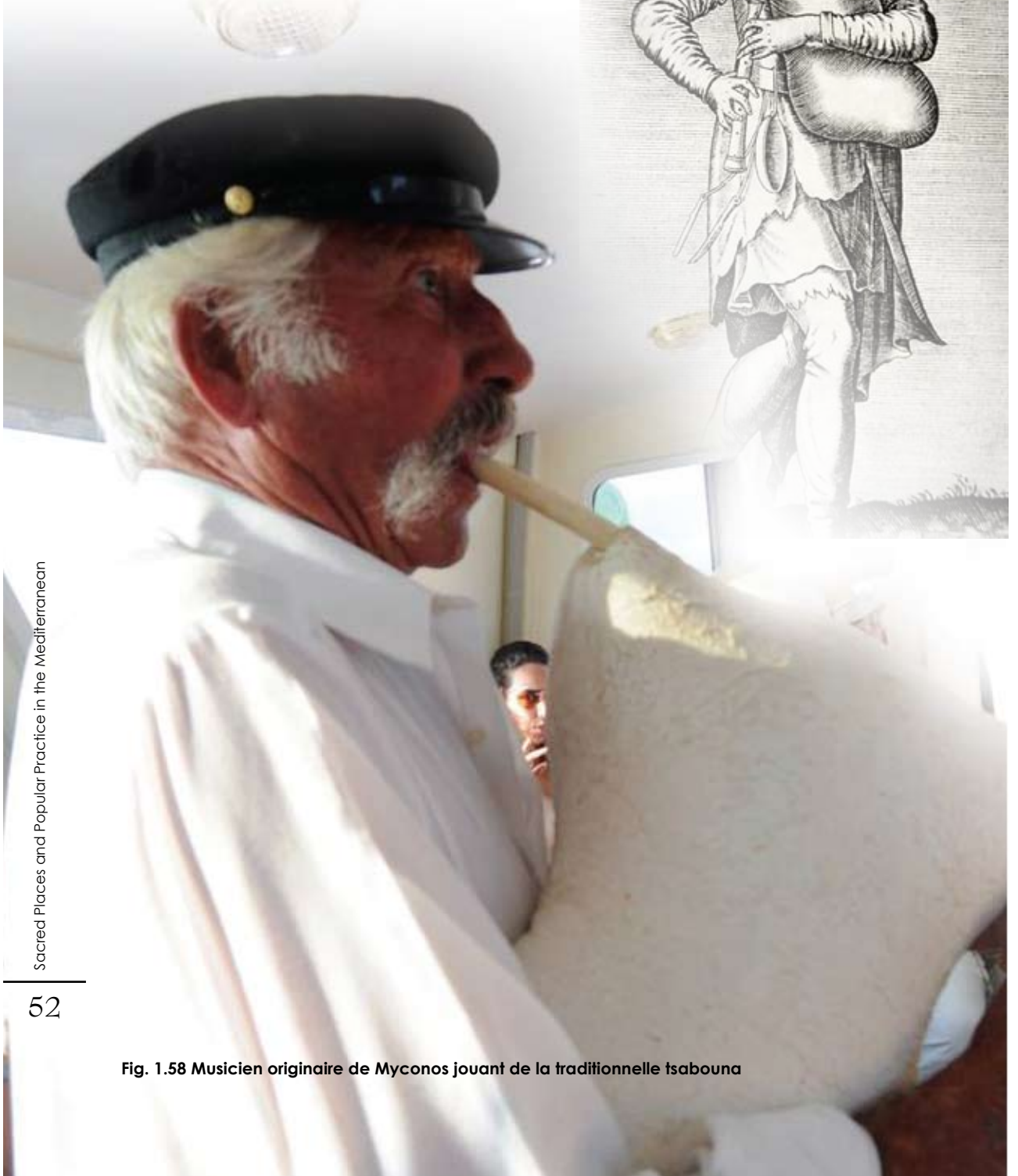


Fig. 1.58 Musicien originaire de Myconos jouant de la traditionnelle tsabouna



Fig. 1.59 Détails de la fresque du Monastère de Saint Jean Baptiste à Serres dans la Grèce du Nord



Fig. 1.60 Jeunes danseurs, grecs et étrangers, durant la nuit du panégyrie de la Sainte Kyriaki



Fig. 1.61 L'office des vêpres dans la cour de la chapelle, à la pleine lune et à la lumière des bougies

En ce lieu, à Délos, sur les ruines de l'ancien gymnase, tous les ans se manifeste par des «sacrifices», chants et danses le besoin originel des gens de communier, de célébrer et remercier les dieux pour la joie de vivre.



Fig. 1.62 Le bateau résonne des chants de la fête du panégyrie de la Sainte Kyriaki

Delphes-Arachova

Delphes, site connu pour son ancien oracle du dieu Apollon, Phoibos, le brillant, possède une situation géographique importante, située à un carrefour de la Grèce continentale. Le site se trouve aux pieds de deux énormes rochers du Mont Parnasse, ce qui lui confère une incomparable beauté. Un bois d'oliviers traverse la vallée et aboutit à la baie qui scintille au soleil comme une mer. Tout est grandiose sans être sauvage, tout est ordonné, tout est imposant. La fontaine Castalie, qui jaillit depuis l'Antiquité depuis la crevasse qui sépare les deux rochers, est liée aussi à la légende et au culte d'Apollon. Sur le col du Mont Parnasse, avant de descendre vers Delphes, se trouve le village pittoresque d'Arachova, où les rites et les coutumes de l'orthodoxie sont plongées dans le riche passé mythologique et historique de la vallée voisine.



Fig. 1.63 Vue de la vallée de Delphes pendant l'hiver avec les ruines du sanctuaire d'Apollon

Le mythe

Parmi la très riche mythologie liée à Delphes notons la légende qui raconte que les premiers oracles étaient donnés par la mère «Terre», patronne du sanctuaire avec Poséidon (Neptune), dieu des sources. Fils de Gaia (terre), le serpent Python fut le gardien de son oracle. Par la suite c'est Apollon qui en prit le pouvoir. Après sa naissance à Délos, cherchant un lieu propice pour fonder son sanctuaire, il vint à Delphes. Il tua le dragon chthonien, Python et

le laissa pourrir. De ce pourrissement germa et s'épanouit la force du dieu de l'harmonie, de la lumière et de la divination. La lutte symbolise le combat entre le bien et le mal, entre l'ordre et le désordre. Apollon personnifiant l'ordre, la paix et la vie, entre en conflit avec Python, dragon qui représente la mort et empêche les eaux de couler. Pour se purifier de ce meurtre, Apollon se réfugie dans la vallée de Tempé et pendant huit ans, il sera un simple berger, donnant ainsi l'exemple de la purification obligatoire après un crime. Alors l'oracle de la Terre cède sa place à l'oracle d'Apollon et le nouveau maître y apporta des idées nouvelles. Ces dernières allaient avoir, pendant des siècles, une grande influence sur la vie sociale et politique de la Grèce ancienne⁴⁷.

Les fêtes au sanctuaire de Delphes

Pour honorer Apollon, on célébrait des fêtes (Delphinia, Thargélia, Septéria, Théophroneia, Likhites et autres) qui rappelaient certains événements de sa vie. En l'honneur de la victoire du dieu sur le dragon et de sa purification on célébrait en grande pompe à Delphes, grand sanctuaire et oracle d'Apollon, les «Pythia». Ces jeux panhelléniques avaient lieu d'abord tous les huit ans, puis tous les quatre ans durant le mois boukatios (août-septembre). Pendant ces fêtes des compétitions avaient lieu. Au début c'était des concours musicaux et poétiques et, à partir du VI^e siècle av. J.-C., on ajouta des concours athlétiques, hippiques et poétiques. Le premier jour on procédait à des sacrifices et on jouait un drame sacré représentant le meurtre du dragon. Le second jour avait lieu une grande procession à laquelle participaient les prêtres en costume d'apparat, les représentants des cités-États et les athlètes, puis l'on procédait à un grand sacrifice. Le troisième jour était le jour du banquet où l'on festoyait avec les dépouilles des animaux sacrifiés. Le quatrième jour était consacré aux concours musicaux (hymne à Apollon avec cithare, solo cithare, chant avec flûte et solo de flûte, tragédies et danses comiques) qui avaient lieu dans le théâtre. Au cinquième jour venaient les concours athlétiques : longue course, double course accompagnée de la musique de la double flûte, le pentathlon (course, lutte, saut en longueur, lanceurs de disque et de javelot), la lutte, la boxe, le pancrace (lutte et boxe) et la course armée. Deux jours étaient consacrés pour les jeux hippiques et athlétiques, c'est pourquoi les jeux duraient en tout huit jours⁴⁸. Les danses avaient une place dominante pendant les fêtes, et les poètes anciens Alcée et Pindare s'y réfèrent. Notons qu'hommes et femmes dansaient autour des symboles

sacrés. La danse, afin de vénérer le dieu qui avait fait grâce aux hommes du sens du rythme et de l'harmonie, jouait un rôle prépondérant⁴⁹.



Fig. 1.64 Vase antique, V^e siècle av. J.-C., représentant des athlètes pendant une course à pied, Metropolitan Museum, New York



Fig. 1.65 Vase antique à figures noires, Musée Archéologique de Florence, et vase antique à figures rouges représentant des rondes, Villa Giulia, Rome

L'histoire du site

La présence humaine remonte à la préhistoire. À l'époque mycénienne existait l'oracle d'une divinité féminine, probablement Gaïa, déesse de la Terre. Ce n'est qu'au VIII^e siècle av. J.-C. que commence le développement du sanctuaire et de l'oracle, quand le culte d'Apollon s'affirme. Le sanctuaire prend désormais sa forme définitive. Le VI^e siècle av. J.-C. marque le début de l'apogée de la gloire et de la puissance matérielle et morale du sanctuaire. Cette renommée, en dépit des guerres, des tremblements de terre, des périodes de troubles et des invasions, perdure jusqu'à la fin de l'Antiquité. L'édit de Théodose le Grand (394 ap. J.-C.) qui interdit les cultes païens et ferme les sanctuaires fut le coup de grâce pour l'oracle. Des églises paléochrétiennes ont été construites et les ruines d'une église byzantine, dédiée à Saint Georges, se trouvaient dans la zone du sanctuaire. Les incursions barbares, des Goths et des Huns, achevèrent de dévaster le site antique. Le sanctuaire est définitivement abandonné aux VI^e-VII^e siècles et disparaît peu à peu sous les avalanches de rochers et de terre. Un petit village, Kastri, a été fondé à son emplacement. À l'époque de la domination franque (1200-1460), Delphes faisait partie du fief du seigneur franc, le duc de Salona (Amphissa). Le peu que l'on sait de Delphes à l'époque de l'occupation ottomane (1460-1821) est dû aux voyageurs occidentaux. Les fouilles ont commencé vers 1860, mais en 1870 la plupart des maisons du village ont été détruites par un tremblement de terre. Finalement, en 1891, l'École française d'Athènes obtient l'autorisation d'entreprendre des fouilles (qu'elles continuent à effectuer en collaboration avec l'Office des Antiquités de Grèce) et le village de Kastri est transplanté plus à l'ouest, là où se trouve actuellement le village de Delphes⁵⁰.



Fig. 1.66 Le théâtre antique au sanctuaire d'Apollon à Delphes ; au fond les ruines du temple où se trouve l'oracle

Les voyageurs européens

Après Ciriaco Anconitano qui, en 1436, en cherchant les ruines de Delphes copia des inscriptions, ce sont J. Spon et G. Wheeler qui établissent, comme partout dans la Grèce du Sud, la recherche des antiquités suivant les sources des textes anciens. Malgré le plan topographique du site qu'ils esquissent, excepté l'emplacement de la source Castalia et du stade, le sanctuaire leur est inconnu ou erroné. Leur référence au village proche d'Arachova nous permet de certifier l'existence d'une église consacrée à Saint Georges : *«Arachova est un grand village de deux cent ou trois cent feux, au Levant de Castri... Il ya plusieurs églises dont la principale est Panagia et les autres sont Saint Georges, Saint Demétre et Saint Nicolas... Nous remarquâmes dans une petite église de Saint Georges un chapiteau ionique et quelques marbres antiques...»*⁵¹. De même G. Wheeler, qui copia Spon, fait les mêmes observations⁵².

Le siècle suivant, période importante de la redécouverte de l'Antiquité à travers les voyages, presque tous les voyageurs, qui par leurs relations ont alimenté cet intérêt, ont publié d'importantes oeuvres⁵³. Ils sont passés à Delphes, et ont essayé de donner une image de l'emplacement et des ruines visibles de l'ancien sanctuaire⁵⁴. Ce fût Leake qui fut le premier à noter la nécessité de démolir le village. Et c'est de Cornille que nous est parvenue la première description de la fête de Saint Georges à Arachova : *«Il nous restait encore à franchir le dernier échelon du Parnasse. Nous gravissons de rocher en rocher, avec une peine infinie : nous nous reposons près d'un arbre où l'on attache tous les ans, trois agneaux consacrés à Saint Georges. Au signal donné d'en haut, les palicares d'Arachova s'élancent à la conquête de cette nouvelle toison. Le premier qui touche le but descend au milieu des acclamations, portant sur ses épaules l'agneau qu'il préfère. Le second choisit ensuite, le troisième ne choisit plus. Quand les rivaux arrivent ensemble, ils s'en retournent les mains vides et l'épreuve recommence»*⁵⁵.

Saint Georges

Saint Georges, vénéré par tout le monde chrétien, vécut et subit le martyre sous le règne de Dioclétien. Les premières représentations du saint le montrent debout en uniforme militaire. Depuis le XI^e siècle, il apparaît tuant le dragon. Selon la légende, le saint tua le dragon qui vivait près d'une source et laissait couler l'eau seulement après avoir dévoré une personne. Saint Georges donna la liberté à la princesse Silène en Libye, et restitua l'eau aux habitants

de la région. Dans l'iconographie de l'Église chrétienne orientale, le dragon a la forme d'un serpent tandis qu'en Occident il a celle de Satan⁵⁶.

Le jour de sa mort et de sa mémoire, le 23 avril (date étroitement lié à Pâques et au printemps), est considéré comme le passage à une nouvelle époque et est accompagné par des coutumes souhaitant et symbolisant la prospérité et l'abondance des fruits de la terre. Si le 23 avril tombe durant le Carême, Saint Georges est fêté le lundi de Pâques. C'est un des saints les plus aimés. D'une part par les populations agricoles et pastorales, qui considèrent la fête comme le début du printemps, du déplacement des troupeaux et des accords sur les travaux d'élevage, d'autre part par les populations insulaires pour lesquelles l'eau est un élément très précieux parce que rare. La fête de ce saint dans plusieurs régions de la Grèce est associée à des jeux athlétiques, courses, luttes et compétitions hippiques⁵⁸.



Fig. 1.67 L'icône de Saint Georges

Les fêtes à Arachova

Actuellement au village d'Arachova, voisin de Delphes, on célèbre la fête de Saint Georges, patron du village. Elle est nommée ici Panégyraki (petit panégyrie). Comme Apollon qui tua le dragon Python et institua son oracle, le saint chrétien tua le dragon et libéra les eaux⁵⁸. La chanson populaire d'aujourd'hui mêle les deux légendes⁵⁹.

Au village d'Arachova la mémoire du héros local de la Guerre de l'Indépendance, Georges Karaiskakis, prend aussi place aux fêtes qui se déroulent pendant plusieurs jours (22-25 avril). La bataille victorieuse de Karaiskakis contre les Turcs, même si elle eut lieu le 24 novembre 1826 est liée à Saint Georges : grâce à lui le général, appelé aussi Georges, a pu remporter la victoire. Certaines années, durant le Panégyraki, on représente aussi la bataille.

Ce panégyrie comprend, à part les rites religieux, une grande procession et des épreuves athlétiques pendant lesquelles les hommes du village portent les costumes traditionnels. Il y a une course à pied, à l'emplacement de la bataille contre les Turcs. On s'affronte aussi au saut, au lancer du poids, au soulèvement de la pierre et à la lutte. Pour la lutte, le prix décerné aux vainqueurs est un petit agneau et une médaille à l'effigie de Saint Georges et du héros Georges Karaiskakis. Ces fêtes en l'honneur de Saint Georges ont été mentionnées par les voyageurs européens H. Cornille (1835), Frederica Bremer (1859) et Dora d'Istria (1863). Le Panégyraki se termine par une grande ronde autour de l'église et par un banquet commun⁶⁰.

En détail, les festivités commencent par des coups de canon et le résonnement des cloches depuis la veille du jour de la fête de Saint Georges, vers six heures du soir. Suit la danse typique, le Panigyraiki, à un rythme lent, effectué par les anciens du village dans la cour de l'église avant les vêpres. La procession de l'icône de Saint Georges et de ses reliques dure plus de deux heures, fait le tour du village et tard le soir on se rend à la place principale pour des danses traditionnelles. Pour la procession, tous les habitants de tous les âges, et même les visiteurs portent des costumes traditionnels typiques d'Arachova. Les autorités politiques et ecclésiastiques participent et l'on brandit un drapeau sur lequel l'image de Saint Georges est encadrée par la phrase-symbole de la Guerre de l'Indépendance «la liberté ou la mort» tandis que des tapis et d'autres produits de l'artisanat local sont exposés à tous les balcons.



Fig. 1.68 Devant la cour de l'église de Saint Georges, les habitants en costume traditionnel

Le lendemain, jour de la fête de Saint Georges, on monte après la messe vers le champ de bataille et les jeux commencent par la course à pied : course d'adolescents, course de jeunes hommes et course des anciens. Elle se déroule sur la pente, dans le sens de la montée ; les athlètes portent des costumes traditionnels et l'épreuve est accompagnée par la musique des tambours et des flûtes.



Fig. 1.69 La course à pied de jeunes hommes sur le champ de bataille



Fig. 1.70 La musique accompagne les jeux

Un des moments les plus intéressants de la fête est une sorte de pièce théâtrale autour de la fontaine du village. Trois jeunes filles représentant la princesse de la légende sont placées devant la fontaine où l'eau a cessé de couler. D'autres filles du village chantent la chanson du Panégyraki et quand on entonne les vers «libère l'eau, mon dragon, que le panégyrie boive», l'eau revient à la fontaine.



Fig. 1.71 Théâtre autour la fontaine du village; trois jeunes filles, représentant la princesse de la légende de Saint Georges, sont placées devant la fontaine où l'eau a cessé de couler

Sacred Places

En pleine allégresse générale, les vainqueurs de la course reçoivent le trophée : un petit agneau que les représentants leur posent sur les épaules, en même temps que la ronde commence dans le préau de l'église. Des agneaux à la broche, comme pour les fêtes des Pâques, cuisent un peu partout et dans l'après-midi des compétitions se suivent une course de 5.000 mètres et finalement des danses traditionnelles se déroulent sur la place du village.



Fig. 1.72 Le vainqueur de la course à pied avec son trophée, un petit agneau sur les épaules, se dirige vers la cour de l'église



Fig. 1.73 Ancienne statue représentant un Moschophore (porteur de veau) offrande pour la déesse Athéna, VI^e siècle av. J.-C., Musée de l'Acropole à Athènes

Le 24 avril, après l'office, les jeux athlétiques continuent dans la cour de l'église. Les athlètes portent s'ils le désirent le costume traditionnel. Au début c'est le saut sans élan, car durant l'Antiquité à toutes les compétitions le saut s'exécutait comme ceci, et avec des poids, des haltères. Puis suivent le simple saut, le triple saut, le soulèvement de la pierre et le saut en hauteur. Les vainqueurs reçoivent un petit agneau et une médaille avec l'effigie du Saint et du héros de la Révolution. Des manifestations musicales et des danses clôturent la journée.



Fig. 1.74 Compétition du soulèvement de la pierre



Fig. 1.75 Vase antique représentant un soulèvement de dalle, V^e siècle av. J.-C.

Le 25 avril, après la messe et la prière devant le monument de Georges Karaiskakis, les épreuves sportives comprennent le lancement de la pierre, la lutte et le tir à la corde. Une grande table est dressée devant l'église avec la participation des habitants et des visiteurs. On offre de l'agneau à la broche, des œufs de Pâques, du fromage, du pain et du vin. À la fin du panégyrie, au crépuscule c'est le moment du «*chaliasma*» (destruction). D'après un ordre précis, des danseurs se tenant par la main forment un cercle. D'abord les prêtres, puis les autorités, puis suivent les anciens et enfin tous les participants. Ils encerclent l'église trois fois, le canon lance trois coups et le cortège du haut de la rue aux escaliers descend et traverse le village. Partout on entend des vœux : «*Que le saint vienne à notre aide* » et «*à l'année prochaine* ».



Fig. 1.76 Athlètes en compétition de lutte



Fig. 1.77 Relief antique représentant des athlètes en lutte, V^e siècle av J.-C., Musée Archéologique d'Athènes

Conclusion

Cette présentation des sites et des fêtes chrétiennes orthodoxes dans les lieux des sanctuaires anciens à Délos, Éleusis, Patras, Athènes, Chios et Delphes-Arachova nous permet de dresser les constats suivants :

- 1) La longue continuité du culte dans les lieux sacrés de l'Antiquité à nos jours.
- 2) Quelques éléments païens ont été assimilés aux rites chrétiens.
- 3) Les fêtes sont publiques et ouvertes aux étrangers.
- 4) Les cérémonies et les festivités s'accomplissent la plupart du temps en plein air, rien n'est caché ou occulte.
- 5) L'eau ou *agiasma* (eau bénite) tient toujours une place importante pour la purification.
- 6) La procession, et l'exposition des icônes et des reliques sont des éléments fondamentaux ainsi que la bénédiction et la distribution des pains à tous les vêpres.
- 7) Les voyageurs européens, en cherchant depuis le XVII^e siècle une Grèce surtout ancienne, sont passés à côté de ces fêtes, tantôt ils les citent simplement, tantôt les décrivent et quelques fois constatent leurs affinités païennes⁶¹.
- 8) Banquet, repas gratuit, musique et danse prouvent le caractère profond du panégyrie : la joie de vivre.

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CHAPTER TWO

SACRED PLACES AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES IN
ALEXANDRIA DURING THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD



SACRED PLACES AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES IN ALEXANDRIA DURING THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD

Yasmine Hussein

Religion played an important role in both the Egyptian culture at large and the everyday lives of Egyptians. Thus, examining religion is an integral part of the process of understanding history. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus in his *History*, book II, mentioned that Egyptians, as a people, were more religious than any other nation he had known. And according to a recent Gallup Poll¹, Egypt was cited as one of the most religious country in the world: 100% of Egyptians polled answered "Yes" when asked whether or not religion played an important role in their daily lives. Both as a part of Egypt and as its window on the Mediterranean, Alexandria has been a favorite place to study the importance and influence of religious life in both the topography and the society. Since its foundation by order of Alexander the Great in 331 BCE, religious phenomena were at the heart of the history of Alexandria. The city became not only a place of interaction between the cults of the Greeks and those of the Egyptians, but also a center for the subsequent development of those cults and the creation of new ones.

Pilgrimage was part of ancient religious life, the phenomenon of pilgrimage and the ceremonies that accompanied it demonstrate the process of religious layering in space and time. In this respect, there was considerable continuity: the same ideas and places were considered sacred several times, only under different names, while the same rituals were practiced in other faiths, without their origins being recognized. The definition, the function and the description of these expressions differed and evolved during the long period starting from Ptolemaic Alexandria until modern times.

The Greek language used in Alexandria as the official state language during the Hellenistic period did not have a specific term corresponding to the word "pilgrimage". The word "pilgrim", derived from the Latin *peregrinus*, was used to designate the stranger or traveler, emphasizing the idea of physical displacement. What provided the real meaning to this movement was the place, which was the object of the pilgrim's attention². In this period, as in earlier periods in Egypt and Greece, people visited religious sites usually with a specific purpose, such as to seek advice from an oracle, to obtain a cure, protection and personal safety or initiation into a mystery cult, although

in the case of festivals involving contests they went to compete or just attend. All over the ancient world, there were shrines dedicated to different gods, while at the same time a god could have numerous sanctuaries. However, what made the difference and the importance of a specific sanctuary was its miracles or its historical and legendary relation to the place. For this reason, the choice of only three major cults among other several cults existing in Hellenistic Alexandria is limited to the specific relation between these cults and the city. The most brilliant representatives of this process are the Alexandrian dynastic cult, the Sarapis cult and the Isis cult as Sea Mistress including her different manifestations: Pharia, Pelagia, Euploia and Sotera. In focusing on these for purposes of the present investigation, certain selections and omissions are necessary. For example, the case of Isis Pharia shall be discussed only in so far as it is essential for understanding the goddess's role in the protection of sailors; the divine figure of Isis as the mother deity has had to be omitted.

The Dynastic Cult

The dynastic cult of Ptolemaic kings in Egypt was built around the legend and body of Alexander the Great. In Alexandria, there were two reasons to venerate Alexander his Great. In the years following the official recognition by the oracle of Ammon as the son of Zeus-Ammon, he gained a cult with its own priests as the legitimate



Fig. 2.1 Head of Alexander, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

Pharaoh of Egypt, as the several Pharaonic-style monuments erected in his name reveal at Karnak and Luxor, obtaining the titles the Prince of Victory and the Beloved of the God Ammon.

The sources also mentioned that he had a cult in his capacity as Ktistes (founder) of the city³. This veneration served the needs of the Ptolemaic royal



Fig. 2.2 Temple of the Oracle of Ammon at Siwa

family who sought to invest their spiritual ancestor with the maximum amount of power and at the same time use this power as a vehicle to create their own dynastic cult.



Fig. 2.3 Alexander depicted as a Pharaoh in the relief decoration of the bark chapel in Luxor Temple



Fig. 2.4 Statuette of Alexander as the founder or *ktistes*, of Alexandria, found in the city, but now in the British Museum

As kings of Egypt, the Ptolemies encouraged these cults of Alexander. Earlier, they had spread rumors claiming that the companion of Alexander the Great and the chief founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Ptolemy I Soter (savior), was the illegitimate son of Philip II and thus Alexander's half-brother and legal successor in order to legitimate his authority and strengthen his ties to the founding of the city.

The establishment of a dynastic cult in both Egyptian and Greek forms took place in stages. First came the cult of Alexander in its Egyptian form during his life. Following the death of Alexander the Great in his thirty-second year, Ptolemy Soter maintained the cult of Alexander the Great with the presence of his body in Memphis. He seems to have achieved his plan by promoting the state cult of Alexander the Great and by establishing its head priest as the state's superior priest⁴. His son, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, transported the body of Alexander the Great to Alexandria in 280 BCE, following the

establishment of the city as capital of Egypt. He also instituted games and sacrifices in honor of Alexander the Great. The next step was the establishment of the savior gods cult for his deceased mother and father in connection with the cult of Alexander the Great, as well as the institution of the festival of Ptolemaieia. The third and most important step was Ptolemy II Philadelphos' creation of a cult for himself and his sister-wife Arsinoe II as Theoi Adelphoi (the brother and sister gods). It was at this point that there existed a dynastic cult that associated the living king and his eponymous priests with his deceased ancestors and to Alexander's priest⁵.



Fig. 2.5 Coin minted in Alexandria depicting Ptolemy I Soter and Berenike I, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria



Fig. 2.6 Coin minted in Alexandria depicting Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II with the inscription Adelphoi, avers Ptolemy I Soter and Berenike I with the inscription Theoi

Following the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon on 11 June 323 BCE, according to the Greek historian and writer Diodorus of Sicily who came to Egypt in 59 BCE, Alexander's body was embalmed in Babylon and, after a period of two years, the funeral procession moved toward its destination. A procession escorting the hearse left Babylon and thousands of people gathered along the route to see the body of Alexander the Great for the last time. According to Pausanias, a battle took place in Syria after which Ptolemy Soter brought the body to Egypt. The body was kept in Memphis.



Fig. 2.7 Engraving of *The Death of Alexander*, after the painting by Karl von Piloty, 1886

Ptolemy Soter wanted the hero's body buried in Egypt in order to fulfill the prophecy of Aristander, the favorite seer of Alexander the Great, who had predicted that the country in which his body would be buried would be the most prosperous in the world. During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphos, Alexander's body was removed from its tomb at Memphis and transferred to Alexandria where it was reburied. Later Ptolemy IV Philopator placed the bodies of his dynastic predecessors and that of Alexander the Great in a common shrine called the Soma⁶. It became the main attraction in Alexandria, a place of pilgrimage. Locals and foreigners visited the site and



Fig. 2.8 Mid-nineteenth century reconstruction of Alexander's catafalque based on the description by Diodorus

the body of Alexander the Great was treated as a sanctuary. It is certain that the ritual worship of the dynastic cult, including of Alexander the Great, of Ptolemy Soter, and of Theoi Adelphoi, was practiced at the Soma, considered holy due to the presence of Alexander's body. The exact location of the Soma is uncertain, although it is agreed to have been in a visible place within the city. A point of worship in the city was the so called the "Altar of Alexander" mentioned in the *Alexander Romance* of pseudo Callisthenes. This work is an example of Ptolemaic propaganda. According to the legend, the oracle of Ammon in Siwa told Alexander of a city that would



Fig. 2.9 The semi-circle of statues of Greek poets and philosophers discovered at the Sarapeum of Saqqara, the supposed first burial place of Alexander in Egypt





Fig. 2.10 Engraving of Alexander laying out the street map of Alexandria by André Castaigne, 1898–1899

preserve the memory of his name forever. According to the legend, having identified the site in a dream, Alexander ordered the foundation of Alexandria, where he discovered an ancient shrine of Isis. In that same dream, an old man announced to Alexander that he would be invincible and his city would be the "capital of all the inhabited land", where his body would rest and where

kings of all nations would come to honor him as a god. Such propaganda strengthened the connection between Alexander the Great, Isis and the city. This emphasis on the body and his tomb in the propaganda literature was also confirmed by history. The body of Alexander the Great was both a sacred relic and a political symbol of the utmost importance.

Several ancient writers mention the Soma: Strabo (67-23 BCE) indicates that it was part of Basilea and included the tombs of kings and that of Alexander the Great. Zenobius, a contemporary of Hadrian, mentions that Ptolemy IV decided to gather all the remains of his ancestors in a mausoleum with the body of Alexander the Great. In the epic poem the *Pharsalia* of Lucanus, it was said that the monument stood on a mountain in the form of a marble tower surmounted by a pyramidal dome. All around were small chapels to receive the bodies of the Ptolemaic kings, the whole being protected by a fortified wall. From Ptolemy I to Cleopatra VII, the Ptolemies used the veneration of Alexander the Great for political reasons by linking their own cult to his. The main objective of their strategy was to associate all rituals, and thus the importance of their own cult, with the burial place of Alexander the Great. This also allowed the Egyptian population to participate in a worship in which they would have recognized familiar rituals and ideology.

There were three major festivals in Alexandria in the Hellenistic period: a nameless festival, the Basilea, and the Ptolemaieia. The available information in ancient sources concerns the festival of Ptolemaieia⁷. The visual element was very important in this phase of history; the royal family desired to legitimize their authority to the Egyptians, at the same time as to the other Greek cities and kingdoms.

According to Callixenes of Rhodes, the festival began with a procession of women; each woman personified a different Greek city of the Ptolemaic Empire, followed by the appearance of the chariot of Dionysus, the clergy, and then the arrival of the royal chariot with statues of Ptolemy I and Alexander the Great. This procession acknowledged Alexander as a god on a par with the Olympic gods, not only as one of the founding gods. It also sought to incorporate the cult of the Ptolemies to that of Alexander. Older versions of the *Alexander Romance* provide evidence of celebrations in honor of Alexander. Passages from book XXI, chapter II of the Armenian version mention two festivals honoring Alexander's birth and the anniversary of his foundation of Alexandria. Though there is limited information regarding the ritual itself, one can imagine that it did not differ from that of other cults. He had an altar and shrine, the procession was an important part and was followed by games and sacrifices, the dedication of statues in several temples, and priesthood.



Fig. 2.11 Head of Alexander, Alexandria Museum of Antiquities in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

The cult of Alexander and the festival in his honor extended beyond Alexandria: a festival in Thasos seems to have honored Alexander the Great. A head of Alexander the Great in the Archeological Museum of Thasos indicates that the statue comes from a temple-like building. The Ionian towns venerated Alexander at Theos. The Erythrians had an early cult of Alexander and they maintained it well into the Roman period. The city of Erythraea's budget in the early second century included funds for sacrifices in his honor. In the city of Bargylia, the citizens repaired a statue of Alexander the God.

In the city of Ephesus the Alexander cult and its priests were still present in the second century CE⁸. An inscription found at Priene in Asia Minor dating to 130 BCE referring to an Alexandreion, indicates that at that time there was an organized cult of Alexander with a priesthood and a temple. A Macedonian grave of the fourth century in Pella has engraved on its walls dedicatory texts addressed to Heracles, Heros Alexandros and Kassandros. The connection of Alexander with Heracles invites one to believe in a popular worship of Alexander.



Fig. 2.12 Alexander on Bucephalus drawn by Victor Adam and printed in two-tone by Lemerrier in Paris, 1859

Pilgrimage

As a hero-god, Alexander was very important for the whole Hellenistic world but only the Soma, his mausoleum in Alexandria, seems to have been a pilgrimage destination. The connection of dynastic worship rituals to the burial place of Alexander was extremely important. As a holy place, the Soma became the destination of two phases of pilgrimage. The first phase of pilgrimage was practiced by the royal family, nobles, priests, visitors of high importance and ambassadors. This elite private pilgrimage to the real burial place continued throughout the Roman period, encouraged by Roman emperors fascinated by the legend of Alexander. The Soma was one of the most renowned and respected sanctuaries in the Roman Empire, the subject of veneration and admiration by the Roman emperors, such as Julius Caesar, Octavian, Caligula, Hadrian, Severus and Caracalla who visited the grave of Alexander in search of association with his greatness. According to Dion Cassius, when Septimius Severus visited the body, he was shocked by the ease of access and ordered the tomb to be sealed. The Roman Emperor Caracalla made the last recorded visit to the tomb in the year 215. Herodian relates in detail the tour by Caracalla of the Soma.

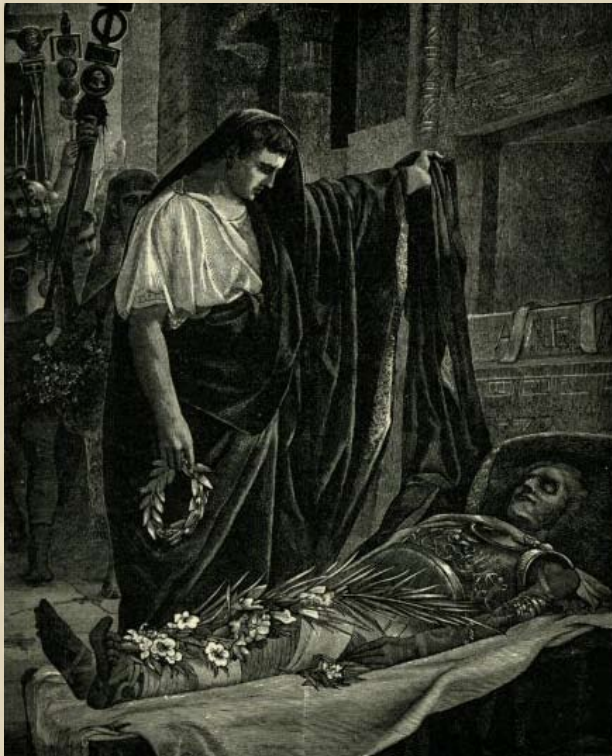


Fig.2.13H. Showmer's imaginative reconstruction of Caesar's (probably Octavian's) visit to Alexander's tomb in Alexandria, engraved from a painting, late 19th century



Fig. 2.14 Engraving by Fragonard of the painting of Augustus (Octavian) visiting Alexander's tomb in Alexandria, by Sebastien Bourdon, Louvre, 1643

Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria led the transformation of pagan institutions into churches to accelerate the conversion of the city into an entirely Christian one. After the end of the fourth century, there exists no reliable information on the Soma. Saint John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, in the early fifth century CE in Homily XXVI on the Second Epistle of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, refers to the lost tomb of Alexander. He asks for the tomb of Alexander but nobody is able to indicate its location: *"For, tell me, where is the tomb of Alexander? Show it me and tell me the day on which he died... And his tomb even his own people know not, but this man's the very barbarians know."* At the same time, he also warned against the worship of coins bearing the head of Alexander with the horns of a ram.

With the advent of Christianity and the disappearance of the Soma, another phase of pilgrimage appeared and reached its zenith in the Islamic period. The privileged pilgrimage to the actual tomb of Alexander the Great was converted to a form of popular worship in holy places imagined or invented by the people.



Fig. 2.15 Coin depicting Alexander the Great with the ram's horn of the god Ammon, minted at Lampsacus by Lysimachus, 298–281 BCE

During this period, people wore medals with the name of Jesus Christ on one side and Alexander the Great on the other. There are several charms of this type in the Cabinet of Medals of Paris, which bear the image of Alexander the Great as Hercules on one side and a scorpion and the name of Jesus Christ on

the other. Although the tomb of Alexander the Great disappeared, the holy aspect of the hero and his cult were preserved even during the Byzantine period. Procopius of Constantinople says in the late sixth century, that until the reign of Justinian sacrifices were made in honor of Ammon and Alexander the Macedonian. Even if these accounts are not historically accurate, the most interesting point here is the need to recover the sacred body. This relationship between his body, Alexandria and people was so strong that several attempts were made to maintain it and/or reinvent it in a new form. Thus, Muslims recognize Alexander as *Eleskander* or *Dhu'l Karnayn*, "with the double horns" because of his portrait with ram horns on Ptolemaic coins. Many tend to believe he was a prophet mentioned in the Quran⁹. In the case of Muslims, the phenomenon of recovery of sacred places was associated with a collective memory of veneration which was particularly strong in Alexandria. This combination of different religious practices in the face of historical upheaval created a cult for the masses to follow. Arab travelers, including Ibn Abdel Hakam (871 CE), Al-Massoudi (944 CE), and Leo Africanus (sixteenth century) reported visiting the tomb of Alexander as a mosque, without specifying its exact location. It seems that the Muslims of Alexandria remodeled the cult of Alexander and attributed a new holy place to him. The most detailed description is that of Leo Africanus, repeated by European travelers after him.



Fig. 2.16 Coin depicting Alexander the Great with the ram's horn of the god Ammon, minted in Alexandria

He told of a small building, revered by Muslims who deposited offerings there and that attracted pilgrims from abroad¹⁰. The Alexandrians invented a supposed location, perhaps more than one, where they could express their devotion to the founder of the city. Two buildings have long been suspected to be the location of the tomb of Alexander and hold great significance in local tradition. The first case is this of the old Church of Saint Athanasius, converted after the Arab conquest into the Attarine Mosque.

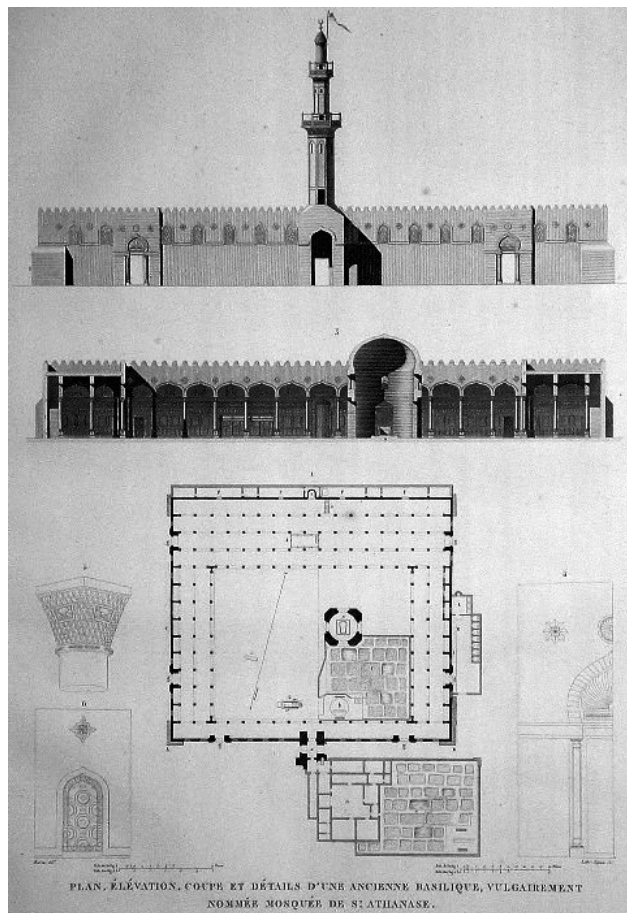


Fig. 2.17 Plate 38 from the *Description de l'Égypte*, Antiquités V, Section and plan of the Attarine Mosque, drawn by the scholars of the Napoleonic expedition, 1798

This choice may be due to the presence of a Pharaonic sarcophagus of granite decorated with hieroglyphics discovered by Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798. The local people claimed that this sarcophagus was the tomb of Alexander the Great. When the British defeated the French in 1801, the British traveler and collector of antiquities Edward Daniel Clarke took the sarcophagus and shipped it to England. In 1822, when Champollion deciphered the hieroglyphs, it was realized that the sarcophagus bore cartouches of Nectanebo II, the last native Pharaoh of the thirteenth dynasty (360-341 BCE). The sarcophagus was transferred to Alexandria in an uncertain period. This explained why local people made the connection between Alexander the Great and this location.

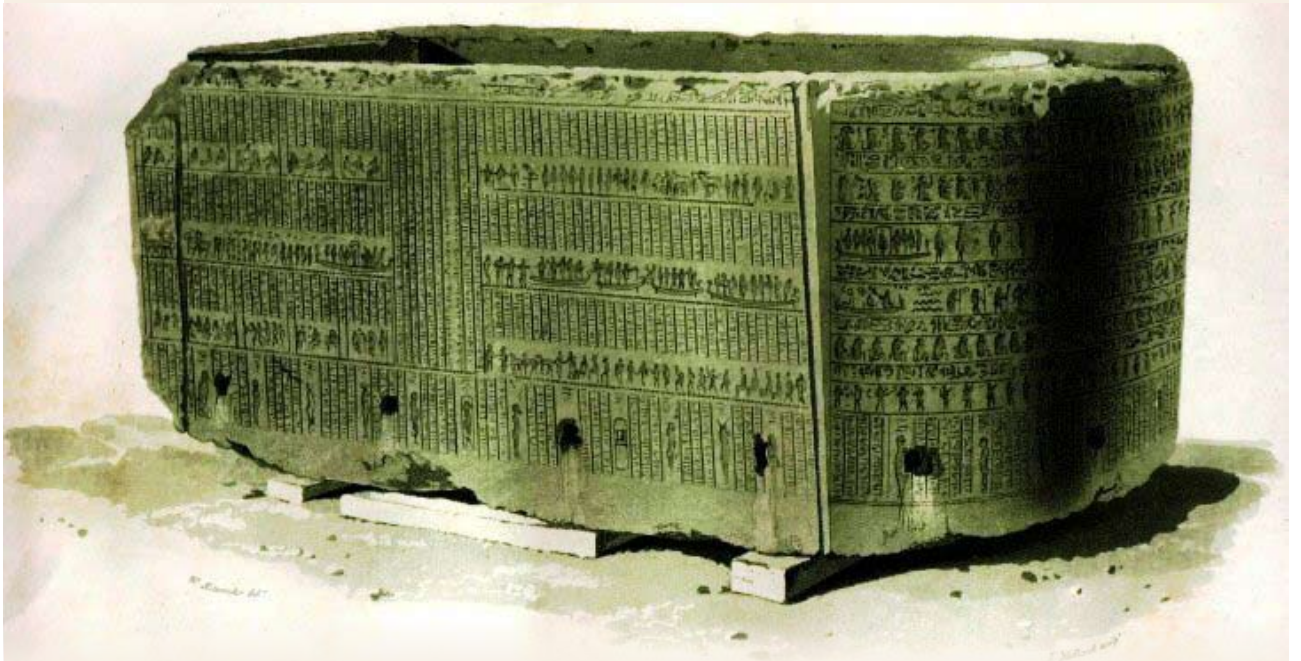


Fig. 2.18 The sarcophagus of Nectanebo II, drawn by W. Alexander and engraved by T. Medland and published in *The Tomb of Alexander* by Edward Daniel Clarke, 1805



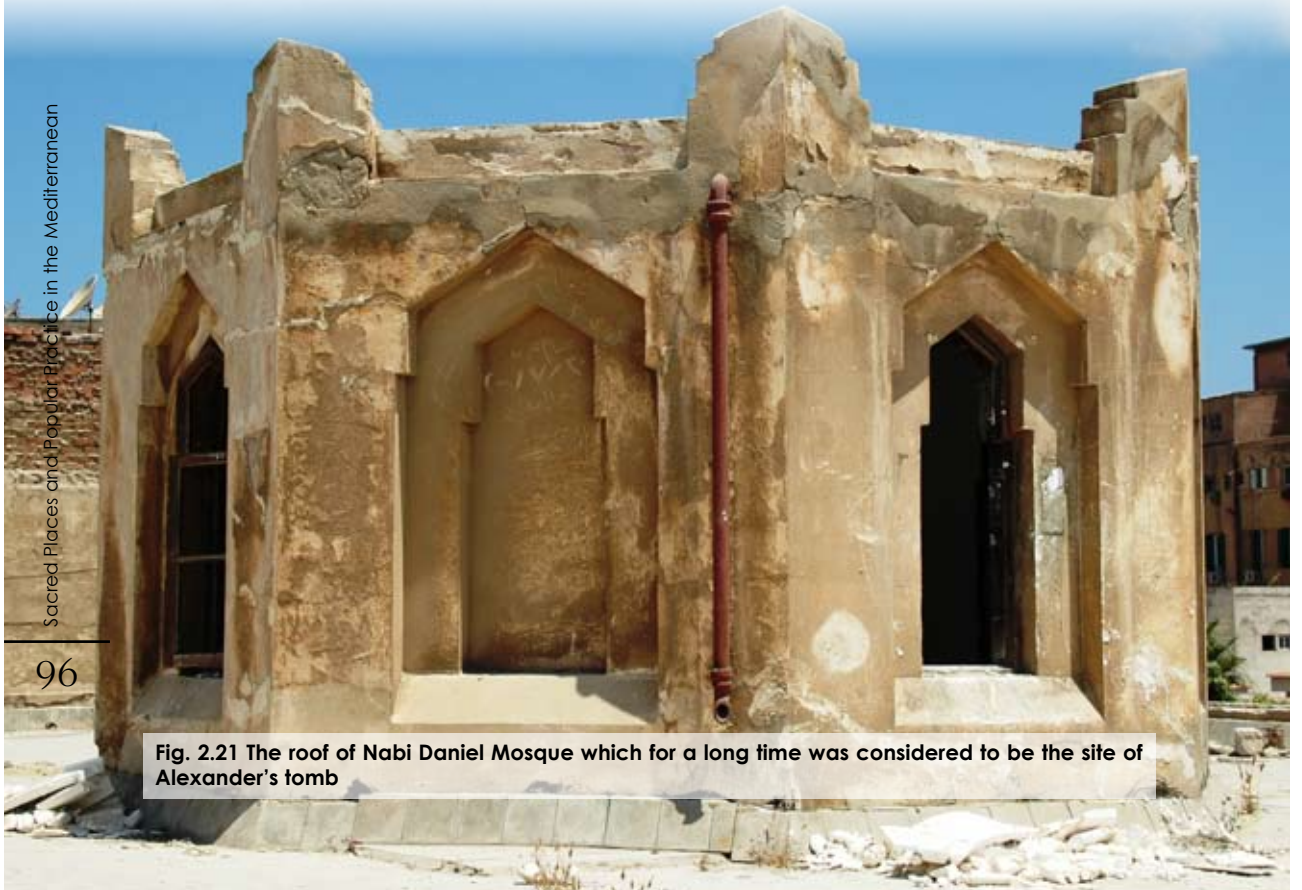
Fig. 2.19 The Attarine Mosque today



Fig. 2.20 The interior of Attarine Mosque

The other presumed location is the site of the Mosque of Nabi Daniel. A smaller sanctuary, probably the Mosque Dhu'l Karnayn, existed in the same location before the construction of the Mosque of Nabi Daniel. However, Evaristo Breccia,¹¹ conducted excavations in the mosque in 1925-31 and found nothing. There is reason to think that the Mosque of Nabi Daniel might be the location of the Soma. The prophecies of the biblical prophet Daniel were written 250 years before Alexander was born, and yet they describe him and his kingdom in detail. The prophet Daniel mentioned Alexander the Great as the "Leopard", the "Horn" of Greece, and the "Mighty King" who would swiftly conquer the kingdoms of the world¹². This relation between the prophecies of the prophet Daniel and the personage of Alexander the Great suggests the idea that the mosque might be the location of the Soma. Another fact that contributes to this belief is that the Mosque of Nabi Daniel is a pilgrimage destination of the Bohras¹³. Pilgrimage to the shrines of saints is an important part of the devotional life of the Bohras, who come once a year from India to Alexandria in order to visit the supposed shrine of the prophet Daniel.

Fig. 2.21 The roof of Nabi Daniel Mosque which for a long time was considered to be the site of Alexander's tomb



This leads us to think that maybe the shrine of the prophet who prophesied the conquest of Alexander was mistaken for the shrine of the conqueror in the popular imagination. However, the shrine found in this mosque is the shrine of sheikh Mohamed Ibn Daniel Al Musuli who came to Alexandria at the end of the eighth century of the Islamic calendar and is usually mistaken for that of the prophet Daniel¹⁴. In addition, the close distance between the Mosques of Nabi Daniel and Attarine might have contributed to the confusion. This religious landscape was not closed to new cults. There was a superposition facilitated by the presence of sacred places, which called for a reverence of their history. The holy figure and its place of worship became commonplace. Thus, the Soma became a church or a mosque and Alexander the Great became the prophet Dhu'l Karnayn. Attendance of the same shrines by visitors from different faiths and different periods is a religious phenomenon rooted in the Mediterranean in general. The acts of devotion signify religious continuity surrounding inherited and shared sacred places.



Fig. 2.22 The interior of Nabi Daniel Mosque today

The Sarapis Cult

The Sarapeion, which contained the Temple of Sarapis, was Alexandria's most important sanctuary, and one of the most famous pagan sanctuaries of the Greco-Roman period. It was also the center of a cult which spread widely across the Mediterranean in the Greco-Roman period.



Fig. 2.23 Statue of Sarapis, with his long beard, the five locks of hair on his forehead and his headdress, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

The Origin of Sarapis

Alexander the Great, upon his arrival in Memphis, visited the temple of Osiris-Apis. This was not a coincidental act since Osiris in his Apis-bull form was one of the most popular cults of Memphis not only during the years of Alexander the Great but also during the late period of the native dynastic history, especially in the regnal period of the last thirteenth dynasty. The main concept of this cult is the death and resurrection of Osiris in the body of the Apis-bull. In the sanctuary of Apis in Memphis, which during the Ptolemaic period was renamed the Sarapeion, sacred bulls were housed within the sanctuary and after their death, were mummified and placed in underground galleries, composed of corridors and narrow holes cut into the wall, known as *loculi*.

This information is important to understand the nature of Sarapis, since he represents the hellenized version in name and image of the Egyptian god Osiris-Apis (Osor-Hapi)¹⁵. Still, the hellenisation of Osiris was not a process that started in the Ptolemaic period. Already, the Greeks mercenaries and merchants of Memphis, settled in the Egyptian capital before the Ptolemies, had transliterated the name of the god to Osirapis¹⁶. Thus, this god seemed to be the most appropriate god to introduce as an Egyptian cult for the Greeks, and also to promote as the state cult of the Alexandrian royal house, taking into account its immense popularity in the traditional capital of Egypt, Memphis. Ptolemy Soter must have come to this conclusion during his first years in Egypt, when as Satrap (323-305 BCE) he resided in Memphis and came in contact with the Pharaonic heritage, the Egyptian priesthood, and the Greek presence in the traditional capital of the Land of the Nile.

The Political and Religious Function of Sarapis

By the creation of Sarapis and his connection to the royal family, the Ptolemies desired to legitimate their rule as Pharaohs of Egypt not only to the Greek community but also to the Egyptians¹⁷. In Alexandria, Sarapis played the function of a civic deity, protector of the city. Thus, the deity was closely connected to the Ptolemaic rulers as a patron god. From the reign of Ptolemy IV (221-205 BCE) onwards there was a decline of interest in Sarapis due to the decline of the Ptolemaic dynasty itself, which is another indication of the close connection between the god and the Ptolemies. However, his popularity was restored in the Roman period and his sanctuary became a major center of pilgrimage. Several Roman emperors made a pilgrimage

to the Sarapeion in Alexandria. During the visit of Vespasian, an image appeared to him, which he interpreted in terms of his future empire¹⁸. Later, during the visit of Hadrian, Sarapis "performed several miracles" while Hadrian spent vast amounts on the renovation of the temple¹⁹. He also dedicated a basalt statue of an Apis bull to the temple.



Fig. 2.24 The basalt statue of the Apis bull dedicated by Emperor Hadrian, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria



Fig. 2.25 The end of the underground gallery of the Sarapeion of Alexandria where the Apis bull was discovered



Fig. 2.26 Oil lamp bearing the image of Sarapis, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria



Fig. 2.27 Black basalt head of a statue of Sarapis, 2nd century CE, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

Caracalla, who was also called Philosarapis, remained in the holy place of Sarapis and dedicated his sword with which he had killed his brother to Sarapis²⁰.

During the Roman period, coins, terracotta objects and temples testified to the continuity of the spread of the cult of Sarapis. Sarapis was a familiar figure on Roman lamps. He was represented in relief on the lamp in the form of a ship named, apparently, after him²¹. He appears again in relief, either complete or as a bust, on the discs of numerous terracotta lamps. On the Alexandrian coins minted during the Roman period, Sarapis appeared



Fig. 2.28 Coin minted in Alexandria showing the temple of Sarapis in a Greek architectural setting, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

with great frequency. The figure of the god is often presented with Roman emperors who are shaking hands with the god or participating in rituals²².

The main characteristics of Sarapis:



Fig. 2.29 Bust of Sarapis, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

The god was firstly connected with the Greek counterpart of Osiris, Hades, and later with Asclepius and Dionysus²³. The sculptor Bryaxis was responsible for his gold and ivory statue in Alexandria. Sarapis is typically portrayed as a bearded male, similar to Hades, Zeus, Asclepius and other venerable, mature Greek male deities, with a Kalathos, or basket for measuring grain, on his head and five locks on his forehead. The Kalathos was related to a major aspect of Sarapis as god of fertility, a connection both to Osiris and Dionysus. Yet, in the early Ptolemaic period, the god was connected to Osiris and Hades, gods of the Underworld. Due

to this connection, Sarapis was often represented wearing the Atef crown on the coinage of the Ptolemaic period. The healing function was attested by the fact that from the third century on, the sanctuary of Sarapis in Canopis was a main center for healing rituals²⁴. Sarapis may have finally had a certain relation with the early Christian community; it seems that some early worshipers of Christ could have possibly worshiped Sarapis, confusing him with Christ because of his cult as a unity; a universal god or *Pantheos* who heaped the characteristics of all other gods.



Fig. 2.30 Coin showing Sarapis wearing the Atef crown, next to Isis



Fig. 2.31 Coin showing Sarapis Pantheos

A letter by Emperor Hadrian refers to Alexandrian worshipers of Sarapis calling themselves Bishops of Christ: *"Egypt, which you commended to me, my dearest Servianus, I have found to be wholly fickle and inconsistent, and continually wafted about by every breath of fame. The worshipers of Sarapis (here) are called Christians, and those who are devoted to the god Sarapis (I find), call themselves Bishops of Christ"*²⁵.

The Temple of Sarapis and the Cult Statue in Alexandria

The chief center of worship of Sarapis was the great Sarapeion of Alexandria, which was considered a wonder and a destination of pilgrimage throughout the Mediterranean world, until its destruction. The Sarapeion was situated on a prominent site on a hill in Rhakotis, the Egyptian district in the southwestern part of Alexandria. This choice could symbolize the importance of the Egyptian community within the city and at the same time denote the effort of the Ptolemies to create a contact point between the Egyptians and the Greeks. The Sarapeion is one of the few Alexandrian temples to have been extensively excavated²⁶. The site is marked today by Diocletian's Column, the misnamed Pompey's Pillar, in Kom el Shogafa district, the natural high ground to the south-west of the modern city.

The construction of the main temple dates back to Ptolemy III Eurgetes (246-221 BCE). According to the written sources, the Ptolemaic sanctuary survived the first two centuries of Roman rule before burning down. However, a new temple was built between 181 and 217 CE. The Roman the Sarapeion was larger than the Ptolemaic one.



Fig. 2.32 The mistakenly called Pompey's Pillar was erected on the site in the years of Diocletian's reign and since then it has become the symbol of the site. It is the highest in situ ancient column in the world

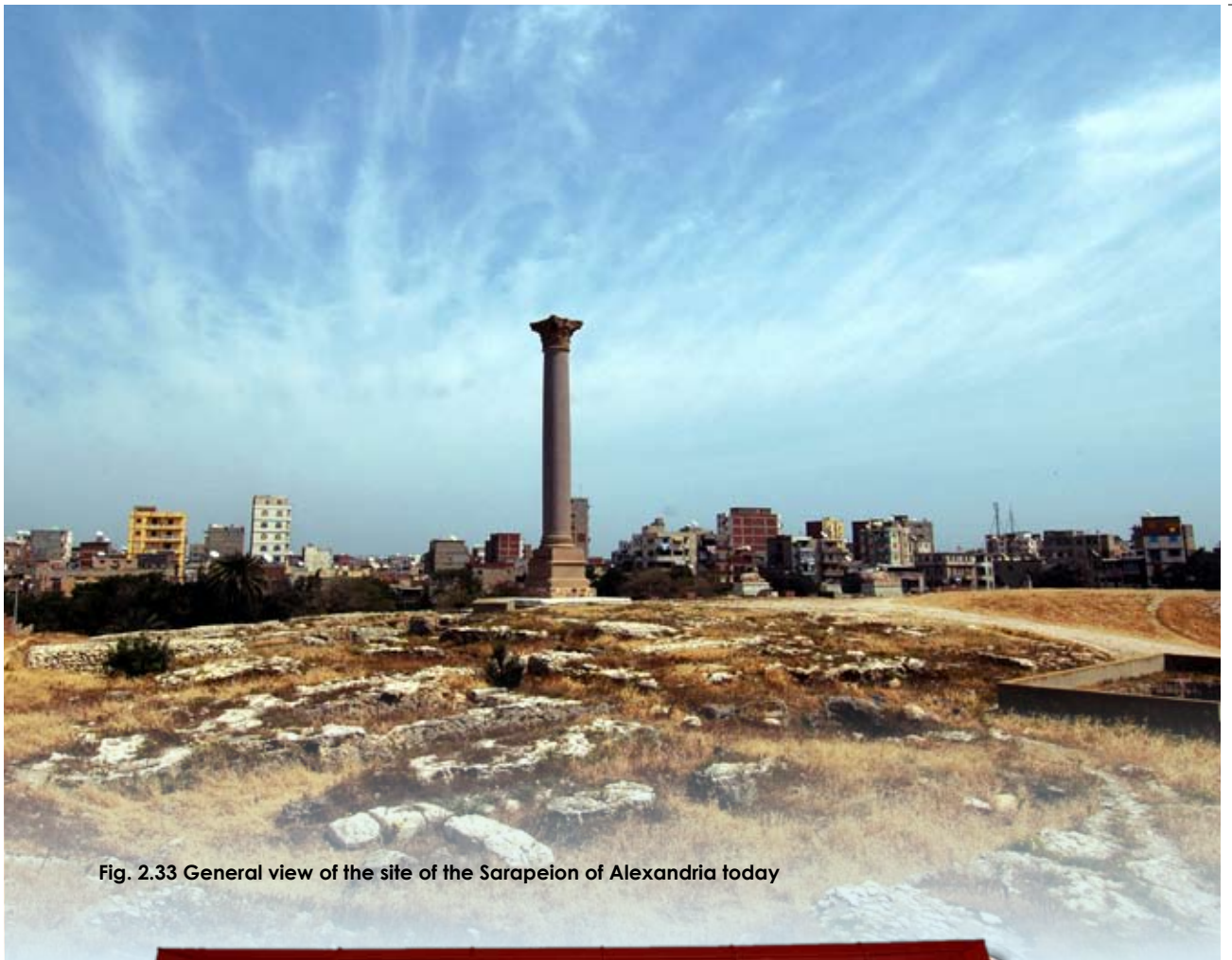


Fig. 2.33 General view of the site of the Sarapeion of Alexandria today

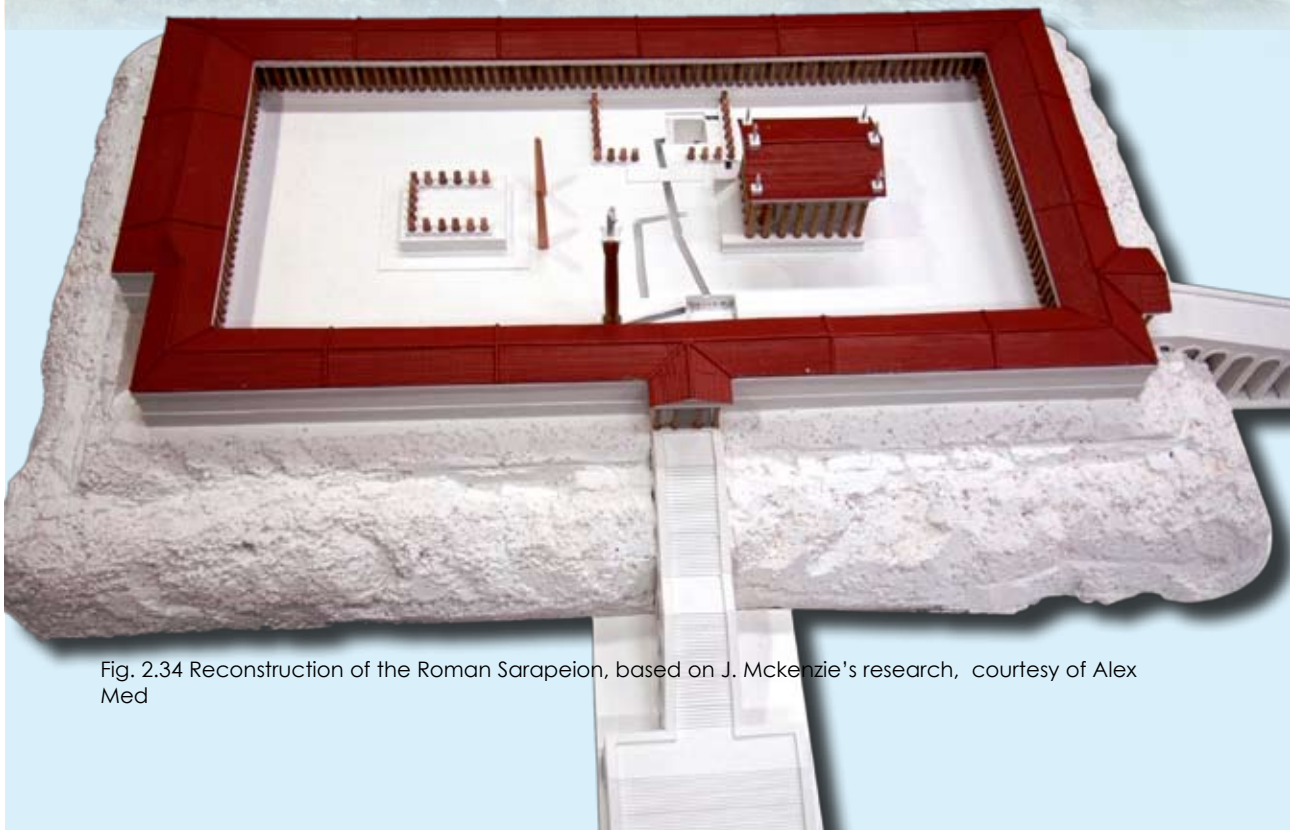


Fig. 2.34 Reconstruction of the Roman Sarapeion, based on J. Mckenzie's research, courtesy of Alex Med

The cult statue itself was an attractive destination of pilgrimage because of its miraculous appearance. Rufinus, writing in 402 CE related, *"In it there was a statue of Sarapis so large that its right hand touched one wall and its left the other."* On the day that an image of the sun was to be carried into the Sarapeion, a small window allowed a ray of sunlight to fall on the lips of the statue in a kiss of renewal. Hidden magnets suspended the image in the air, and the walls were believed to be covered with plates of gold covered by silver and then bronze. Quodvultdeus also tells us: *"In Alexandria, the following diabolical representation was to be found in the temple of Sarapis: an iron quadriga, which was neither supported on a base, nor attached to the wall by any brackets, remained suspended in the air and gave to mortal eyes the incredible impression that the gods were coming to succor them. In fact, a magnet had been fixed at this point in the ceiling and held the whole contraption suspended."*²⁷

Obviously, scholars doubt the truth of these accounts, but the temple of Sarapis in Alexandria was a main destination for pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean: the believers wanted to see the statue and to witness its miracles. According to Socrates Scholasticus, even in the fourth century, the Egyptians believed that if Sarapis were offended, the Nile would not overflow²⁸. In addition, the "Sarapeia", the festival dedicated to Sarapis, is documented throughout Egypt, up to the fourth century CE²⁹.



Fig. 2.35 Head of Sarapis, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

In 391 CE, following the edict of Theodosius prohibiting pagan worship, Christians destroyed the sanctuary. The destruction was an iconic event marking the end of paganism. The destruction of the Sarapeion is illustrated in the papyrus codex of the *Alexandrian World Chronicle*. Rufinus describes the destruction of the cult statue in detail. According to him, Christians hesitated to offend the figure of Sarapis, then, at the instigation of Theophilus, one of

the soldiers took an axe and struck the god on the jaw. When the sky did not fall, the head was hatched, the rest of the huge idol was broken into pieces, the head carried through the town, and the god burned in front of the pagans. When the Nile flooded the next year and the Christian patriarch took over the Nilometer, the title of Sarapis as "Lord of the Waters" was used by Christians referring to the god and, from then on, Theophilus, the patriarch of Alexandria and his successors, announced the day the Nile began to rise, just as the priests of Sarapis had done before them³⁰.

The Spread of the Cult of Sarapis

During the Greco-Roman period, the cult of Sarapis was spread throughout much of the Mediterranean world by traders and other converts. Initially, political reasons contributed to the spread of the Sarapis cult. The cult of Sarapis was introduced in Athens in around 200 BCE as the official cult of the state. The testimony of Pausanias that the Athenians introduced Sarapis as their god from King Ptolemy may reflect this fact, even if he neglected to indicate which of the kings of that name was involved: "*Going thence [from the Prytaneion] we come to a sanctuary of Sarapis, a god whom the Athenians received from Ptolemy*"³¹. In Corinth, artifacts related to Sarapis, including three heads, have been found in spread locations, which suggests that the god was probably worshiped in private shrines as well as in the sanctuaries. Another major cult center of Sarapis was the Greek holy site of Delos, where Egyptian priests established three Sarapeia in the third century BCE. On the coast of Caria, where, during the third century the cities were allies of Ptolemaic Egypt, there is evidence of a cult during this period at Halicarnassus.

A temple was dedicated to Sarapis in Ostia, the port of Rome, in 127 CE. The inscription "IOVI SERAPI" was discovered on the site³². The Emperor Hadrian ordered the construction of a copy of the Canopus Sarapeion at his villa in Tivoli and he struck coinages that bore his effigy accompanied by Sarapis. The Emperor Caracalla built a temple dedicated to Sarapis on Quirinal Hill. A Roman sculpted head of Sarapis, dating to the second or early third century CE, was discovered in London at the Walbrook Mithraem, and a temple of Sarapis is mentioned in an inscription found at the Roman site of Eburacum (modern York). Thus, the cult of Sarapis reached the most distant areas of the Roman Empire.



Fig. 2.36 Ruins of Temple of the Sarapis in Rome, at the foot of Quirinal Hill

The Isis Pharia Cult



Fig. 2.37 Coin showing Isis Pharia holding the inflated sail in both hands, minted in Alexandria by Hadrian

The most popular foreign deity worshiped in Greek cities during the Hellenistic period was the Egyptian goddess Isis. The Egyptian myth tells how Seth murdered his brother Osiris, the first god-king of Egypt. Seth cut Osiris' body into pieces and scattered them across Egypt. Isis collected the pieces and magically revived her brother-husband Osiris, who became King of the Underworld. Virgin, she also conceived a son, Horus, who ruled Egypt.

Ptolemy I Soter founded the Isis cult, in the form it would be introduced into Greek society. The Egyptian Aset became Isis; she was identified with Hellenic deities such as Demeter, Aphrodite and Io.



Fig. 2.38 Terracotta figure of Isis-Aphrodite, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

As the Sea Mistress, Isis is the inventor of navigation, the use of the sail and the protector of sailors³³. To explain this new power of Sea Mistress, a new myth appeared, yet she had been known since the indigenous dynastic period as a great sailor herself, as she had traveled to Byblos, on the coast of the Levant, in order to bring back the sacred Ark of Osiris³⁴. During the Hellenistic period, a new element was added to the myth consisting of the role of the island of Pharos where the goddess landed while searching the seas for her brother-husband Osiris, removing her coat to form a sail. Several aretologies³⁵ lend the goddess this statement: "It was I who invented the maritime activities". The connection to the sea seems to have been a development derived especially from Alexandria, being the major port of Egypt. Travelers sailing from the great port of Alexandria spread her cult all over the Mediterranean. Backed by the regime, the new cult spread throughout the Hellenistic kingdoms.

The Relation between the Cult of Isis and the City of Alexandria

The cult of Isis in the form Pharia is strongly related to Alexandria. In Egypt, Isis emerged as the protector of the Ptolemaic dynasty's power. According to Fraser, Isis emerged as the counterpart of Sarapis, at the same time she gradually became associated to Ptolemaic queens. Ptolemaic control of Cyprus and the desire of the Ptolemies for sea power served as a motivation to involve their wives in the role as protectors of sailors, with their de facto roles as protectors of the fleet and the maritime empire. This recalls the Egyptian tradition of associating the wives of the Pharaoh with Isis. Cleopatra III was the first queen who was



Fig. 2.39 Colossal head of late Ptolemaic queen probably Cleopatra II or III in Isis style, 2nd century BCE

declared the living personification of the goddess. This phenomenon reached its zenith with Cleopatra VII who, according to Plutarch, obtained the title of "the New Isis"³⁶. The statues of Isis-style queens, discovered by archeologists in Pharos' water area and in Hadra district in Alexandria, represent the best examples of queens from the late Ptolemaic period.

Therefore it seems that the queens eventually lent the goddess a new function as protector of sailors. Isis Pharia seems to have been a late Ptolemaic development with immense popularity during the Roman period. The connection between the cult of Isis as Pharia and the economic life of Alexandria is obvious. Throughout the Greco-Roman period, Alexandria remained among the most important cities in Mediterranean trade. With its harbors, it was an important center of shipbuilding.



Fig. 2.40 The Sophilos mosaic showing Alexandria as a deity with a ship's headdress, second century BCE from Thmouis, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

At the same time, the Roman Isis Pharia played an important role in protecting shipping convoys, ensuring the grain supply of Rome. Politicians and voters began to appreciate the need for the safe arrival of regular large-scale grain shipments. In the second century CE, the Assyrian rhetorician Lucian of Samosata wrote a detailed description of the "Isis", a very large ship that operated in the Mediterranean. He described the "Isis" when he saw it in Athens' seaport, Piraeus. This underlines the importance of votive currencies to the goddess as discovered in this area.

There was also a powerful metaphor: the sea is the wave of destiny from which humankind was born and Isis is the savior-goddess whose intervention could lead humanity on a safe course. Isis acts as an inspiration that guides and protects the lives of men and during the passage through death to an after life. Like the lighthouse for seafarers, Isis is a guide for humankind not only in life but also after death. The location of Isis Pharia temple at Pharos is not a coincidence: Isis Pharia is not the goddess of the Lighthouse, she is the Lighthouse goddess.



Fig. 2.41 Coin minted in Alexandria depicting Isis Pharia holding a sail in front of the Pharos, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

The Epithets of Isis as a Sea Mistress

Isis as a Sea Mistress had four different epithets³⁷ that have been found in inscriptions and coins to describe her function or relation to the sea:

Euploia, "of safe navigation", indicates that the goddess was protector of navigation. This epithet originally came from Arsinoe-Aphrodite Euploia, in her sanctuary in Cyprus, and after the identification of Arsinoe with Isis the goddess took the epithet as her own qualification of navigation deity.

Pelagia, "of the sea", is a more general epithet that appears in various texts spanning the first century BCE to the second century CE.

Sotera, "savior", is used broadly to describe Isis in a general context including maritime, among others. In the Delphic dedication of the Sarapeion, the text is addressed to Isis "Savior Astarte-Aphrodite-Euploia". Thus, she was restored to her role as the protector of navigation. This epithet is often linked to Euploia and invoked in case of an emergency at sea.

Pharia has no etymological reference to the sea but it is full of semiotic connotations, and is mentioned in literary Roman texts. This epithet refers to the island of Pharos as a favorite sojourn of Isis. This is of significant geographical value. The pun should also be noted: in the term "Φάρος" the letter Φ capitalized and with acute accent on the á designated the lighthouse, the island and Alexandria by metonymy. While "φαρος" with lower-case φ means the sail. The epithet may mean Isis Pharia as Isis of the lighthouse of Pharos or Isis with a sail. Both terms used together give a better sense of her roles as a goddess of navigation. The epithet was more commonly used to invoke this face of the goddess from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Ritual Manifestations

The cult of Isis as Sea Mistress and goddess of navigation was born in Alexandria and spread in the ancient world to all major ports. This gave rise to acts of worship, both private and public. Private or public hymns and prayers formally expressed faith in the audience that the goddess granted to seamen. An example is the "Isis aretologies", hymns inscribed on a temple in Fayum dating from the late Ptolemaic period and attributed to a priest named Isidoros.

Private Devotions

The texts give no specific information on aspects of daily rituals dedicated to the maritime role of Isis, perhaps because these rituals were not different

from the daily ritual of worship of Isis. Possibly it also included songs, praise, dressing of the statue and offerings. Certain dedication formulas recall this aspect of the sea by use of epithets. There was a very personal relationship maintained by sailors with Isis, which would disappear to give way to an intellectual or doctrinal image transmitted by the aretology.

It is known from a passage of Juvenal (XII, 26-28) that mariners rescued from a shipwreck offered a votive tablet to Isis, and patients cured by the goddess followed the same example. One finds examples, like the relief of Delos and the fragment of Thasos. Before setting out to sea, some offered small votive reliefs or objects in the shape of small limestone anchors with depictions of marine animals to the goddess. Sailors used coins with "Isis with the sail" worn on a chain as an amulet. Boat-shaped lamps, with or without the image of Isis, including one of her epithets, were used as votive offerings. The most common example of such practice is the famous lamp found at sea near the port of Pozzuoli in Italy, which now resides at the British Museum. Such boat-shaped lamps have been found in Alexandria dating from the second century CE.



Fig. 2.42 Coin minted in Alexandria depicting Isis Pharia holding a sail in front of the Pharos

The votive inscriptions on some of these lamps could be an expression of wishes for a safe voyage and acknowledgement of Isis as the goddess of their fate. Finally, this belief in the power of Isis on navigation and the sea explains the fact that boats often bore her name.

Acts of Collective Worship

The production of monuments bearing the figure of Isis with a sail was quite rare, especially in sculpture. Two oval glasses from Roman times in the Cabinet of Medals at the Cairo Museum are engraved with an assembly of Egyptian gods; on each, Isis appears in her maritime form with a sail swollen by the wind. In 1984, a large and detailed image of a Hellenistic galley with the name "Isis" inscribed on its bow was found on a fresco of Aphrodite at ancient Nymphaion, near modern-day Kertsch, on the Black Sea. The vessel dates from the mid third century BCE; it was probably a trireme and assumed to be 60 meters long, 15 meters wide and 15 meters high. It was probably an Egyptian vessel sent to spread the cult of Isis and the association of Aphrodite with Isis led the priests to commission the fresco.

The earliest coins bearing the image of Isis Pharia date from the reign of the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in the first half of the second century BCE. Later they have been found in various cities like Alexandria, Byblos, and Corinth. On Alexandrian coinage, Isis Pharia is presented next to the lighthouse of Pharos. This presentation in combination with inscriptions of the Roman period indicates the existence of a shrine on the island. Since the Isis cult proliferated in the late Ptolemaic period, the shrine and the cult might date from the same period as well³⁸.

Lamps and terracotta figurines with figurative depictions of Isis found on or near the Pharos were possibly connected to her festival. Among these figures, there were priestesses of Isis or figures playing music, dancing or bearing miniature shrines. These cultic roles and their ritual context seem to have such an importance that the people would carry them into their homes or tombs³⁹, while pilgrims carrying the lamps followed the procession until reaching the sea. This ritual influenced the Christian ritual of following the procession of the icon in the saint's ceremony with lamps and candles. In addition, the ritual survived until the Muslim period in the lamps of Ramadan carried by the children in a singing procession, during the first night of the holy month.



Fig. 2.43 The Islamic lamp or fanous used in the procession of Ramadan

The festival of Navigium Isidis or Vessel of Isis marked the reopening of sea routes in the Mediterranean in spring, particularly on 5 March after the harsh winter months. The celebration of this festival started in Alexandria during the first century BCE. The festival was rooted in the traditional feasts celebrated in honor of finding the body of Osiris at Byblos. It was celebrated in the ports, but not exclusively, sometimes the veneration of Pharia also occurred near the coast in the hinterland to prevent drought and to invoke the rain, calling upon the goddess' dual function as goddess of land fertility and protector of sailors. The description of Apuleius in the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses* states that the feast in Corinth was performed in accordance with the Greek language and rites, suggesting that the festival was practiced in several ways. It would have begun with a carnival followed by a procession in which women dressed in white. Then musicians and temple servants joined a crowd of men and women carrying lamps and candles. Men shaved their head and the women wore their hair in the Egyptian style. These were followed by the high priests, images of the gods Anubis and Isis, and two priests bearing the Sacred Bark. The festival headed to the port where a beautifully decorated ship bearing the name of Isis awaited them. The high priest would then recite ritual prayers, purifying the ship and dedicating it to Isis, while the crowd threw offerings into the sea. Back at the temple, sailors conducted a prayer and the high priest proclaimed the launching of the ships. The ceremony also took place in river ports such as Philipoupolis on Hebros in Thrace and along lakes such as Lake Garda and Lake Nemi in Italy.

The feast of Sacred Pharia known in the Roman period as *Sacrum Phariae* was celebrated in Egypt on the same day as the Sarapis festival on 25 April. It was also the time to send the convoy of grain to Rome by the port of Alexandria, so the goddess was celebrated for her two main functions: fertility and protection.



Fig. 2.44 Statue of Isis found in Messene

Isis Pharia from Alexandria to New York through Paris

For a long time, Isis in her various forms captured the imagination and souls of travelers and sailors from around the world from antiquity until modern times. The cult of Isis may have influenced early views of the Virgin Mary, as the figure of the Virgin and the child Jesus was deeply influenced by Isis Lactans. The epithet of Stella Maris "Star of the Sea" was common to the Virgin Mary and Isis who were both adored by sailors⁴⁰. From the fourteenth century, Parisians believed the name of their city to have been derived from the name of Isis who had been worshiped in a temple where now stood the Abbey of Saint Germain-des-Prés. According to the writer Jean Tristan, an ancient coin found in Paris dating from the reign of the Emperor Julian and depicting his wife as Isis Pharia was the origin of the belief that the name of Paris was derived from Isis Pharia. Tristan said: "*The Parisians received their name from Paria Isis, because of the cult of this goddess which had been introduced in Illyria and in Gaul, in the region west of the River Seine and in Lutecia, called Lutecia of the Parisians or Farisians because of this*"⁴¹. This belief was also reported by many writers and historians such as Lemaire de Belge, in 1550, Gilles Corrozet, in 1608, Pierre Bonfons and Jacques du Breul in 1512, Andre Favyn in 1612 and the scholar Court de Gebelin who wrote in 1773: "*No one ignores that Paris was originally enclosed in the island (Ile de la Cité). It was thus, since its origins, a city of navigation... It took as its symbol a boat, and as tutelary goddess, Isis, goddess of navigation; and this boat was the actual one of Isis*"⁴². According to the historian Charles Dupuis, in 1794 the Parisians celebrated the goddess "*making offering and lighting candles at the New Year and even during the rest of the year*"⁴³. Later, during the eighth century the city of Melun was called Iseos because of the goddess who was venerated there⁴⁴. On 20 January 1811, fascinated by the goddess, Napoleon Bonaparte issued instructions to put a figure of Isis on the coat-of-arms of Paris.

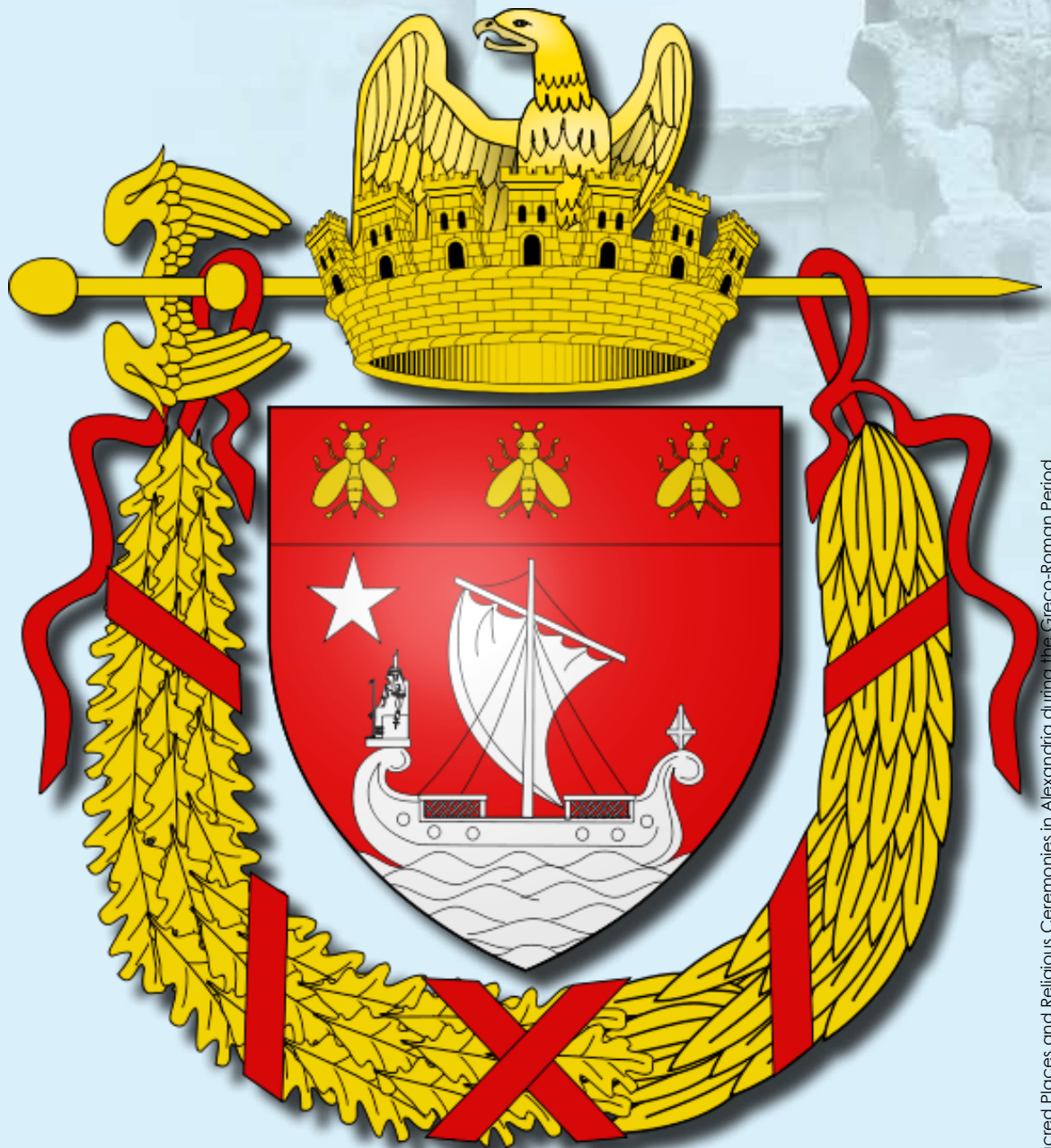


Fig. 2.45 Letters patent granted to the city of Paris by Napoleon on 29 January 1811, on which the coat-of-arms has three golden bees on a red background. It shows a silver star above the nave, and the goddess Isis on the prow of the ship.



Fig. 2.46 Engraving of *The Fountain of Regeneration in the Debris of the Bastille* commemorating the French Revolution, engraved after a series of drawings exhibited at the Salon de Paris. It depicts the Festival of Unity held in 1793, four years after the Revolution. A crowd gathers around a statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis which has been erected on the site of the infamous Bastille prison to signify the regeneration of the French people

The connection between the Sea Mistress and liberty was born in Paris on 10 August 1793 when a group of patriots installed a statue of the goddess where the Bastille prison had stood. Known as the "Fountain of Regeneration", in the engraving of the fountain the goddess represents the regeneration of the French people. This engraving was published in 1797 as part of a series of commemorative prints of events of the Revolution.

The history of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor was linked to Isis Pharia through the cult of liberty of the French Revolution. The Statue of Liberty, which was designed by the French sculptor Bartholdi and constructed by Gustave Eiffel, was originally an idea suggested by Bartholdi to his friend Ferdinand de Lesseps, when traveling in Egypt, to be placed at the entrance of de Lesseps' project for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1867. Bartholdi, as a Freemason, was deeply steeped in Egyptian rituals, and it has been said that he conceived the idea of the original statue as an effigy of the goddess Isis, representing "Egypt Enlightening the East". Only later Bartholdi converted it to a Statue of Liberty for New York Harbor, when it was rejected for the Suez Canal due to lack of money and recuperated by the Freemasons to represent "Liberty Enlightening the World".



Fig. 2.47 The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World

Today in modern Alexandria, Isis Pharia remains the symbol of the city and we can see her image on the top of the governorate building and the chamber of commerce.



Fig. 2.48 Detailed view of Isis Pharia above the entrance of the Governorate of Alexandria



Fig. 2.49 Detailed view of Isis Pharia above the entrance of the Chamber of Commerce of Alexandria



Fig. 2.50 The Governorate of Alexandria

Endnotes

- 1 The Gallup Poll provides a variety of management consulting, human resources and statistical research services in more than 140 countries around the world
- 2 Maraval, P., 2002
- 3 Walbank, F. W., 1984
- 4 Holbl, G., 2001
- 5 Chaniotis, A., 2005
- 6 Soma means "body" while Sema means "tomb"
- 7 Fraser, P.M., 1972
- 8 Chaniotis, A., 2005
- 9 The story of Dhu'l Karnayn appears in sixteen verses of the Quran, specifically verses 18:83-98. Extensive studies on the influence by Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes on the Quran 18:60-102 by Wheeler have shown that it was the Quranic commentaries that adopted the Alexander stories among other near eastern stories to explain the verses 18:60-102. Wheeler, B. M., 1998
- 10 Leo Africanus
- 11 Director of the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria 1904-1932
- 12 Book of Daniel: 7:6, 8:5-7 and 11: 3-4
- 13 The Ismaili of Fatimid Egypt became divided into two groups, one accepting the Imamate of Imam Nizar, who was the eldest son of Imam Mustansir billah and the other supporting Mustaali. The followers of Mustaali are known by the name of Bohras also spelled Bohara or Vohra meaning "to trade." They now live in India.
- 14 Al Gohary, A., 2008
- 15 In ancient sources, there are two other versions concerning the origin of Sarapis that have already been abandoned by scholars after the re-discovery of the two Sarapeia in Memphis and Alexandria in the first half of the twentieth century. According to the Roman version of *Alexander Romance*, Sarapis' cult was established by Alexander. This must have been a misunderstanding of the Roman titular of the god as Πολιεύς, founder, for which we should take into account the priest of Sarapis rather than Alexander himself. In addition none of Alexander's historians (Plutarch, Arrian, Clement, and Tacitus) refer to Sarapis, while they refer to the establishment of Greek cults as well as to the cult of Isis. The second version is included in the text of Plutarch and Tacitus, according to which the statue derives from Sinope during the reign of Ptolemy Soter, and

- following the advice of the Egyptian priest, historian and advisor Manetho and the Greek priest Timotheus, the statue and its cult was established in Rhakotis. Yet, none of these versions are valid today. See: Fraser, P.M. 1972. p.246-249
- 16 Dunand, F, 2004. p. 215-216
 - 17 Dunand, F., and Zivie-Coche C., 1991
 - 18 Tacitus, *History* 4, 82; Dio Cassius, 65, 8, 1
 - 19 Witt, R.E., 1971
 - 20 Dio Cassius, 77, 23, 2-3
 - 21 Walters, 1905
 - 22 The last Roman coin presenting Sarapis dates to the regnal period of Maximinus II (311 CE)
 - 23 Fraser, P.M. 1972
 - 24 Ibid
 - 25 Hadrian to Servianus, 134 CE (Quoted by Giles, II 1977, p86)
 - 26 At the end of the nineteenth till the middle of the twentieth century, the site was excavated by the Greco-Roman Museum: from 1895 to 1898 under the direction of G. Botti and until 1920 under that of E. Breccia. From 1898 to 1902 it was the turn of a German expedition directed by A. and H. Thiersch. From 1942 to 1945, another excavation campaign was undertaken by the director of the Greco-Roman Museum, Alan Rowe. Of particular importance are recent excavations and reports by the Australian archeologist Judith McKenzie who continued the work done by earlier archeologists and the work of the Alex-Med team of architects who investigated the remains of the Sarapeion in order to create a modern updated reconstruction.
 - 27 Quodvultdeus in Merkelbach, R., 1995
 - 28 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, viii
 - 29 Frankfurter, D., 1998
 - 30 Trombley, F. R., 1993
 - 31 Pausanias, I., 18, 4
 - 32 Bloch, H., 1959
 - 33 Leclant, J., 1986
 - 34 Witt, R.E., 1971
 - 35 Aretalogy is a form of sacred biography in which the attributes of a deity are listed in the form of a poem or a text, the first ones in this case were those of Kyme, Ios and Thessaloniki.

- 36 Fraser, P. M., 1972
- 37 Bricault, L., 2006
- 38 Fraser, P.M., 1972
- 39 Dunand, F., 1979 and Török, L., 1995
- 40 Fraser, P. M., 1972
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Bauval, R. G., 2006
- 43 Dupuis, Ch., 1794
- 44 Baltrusaitis, J., 1985

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CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH HOLY PLACES IN ALEXANDRIA
AND ITS ENVIRONS

CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH HOLY PLACES IN ALEXANDRIA AND ITS ENVIRONS

Yasmine Hussein

The establishment of Christianity in Alexandria took place gradually. It started in a syncretistic form with pagan cults during the first century and the first half of the second century¹. With the increase in the number of Christians, they suffered severe persecution under the rules of Septimus Severus, Decius and Valerian, reaching a peak of violence under Diocletian (284–305). By the beginning of the fourth century, the Christian Church, despite all imperial persecutions, was firmly established. The pagans and Christians were still more or less equal in number. Although, some pagan elements survived and even influenced the new cult, Alexandria was a Christian city by the sixth century.



Fig. 3.1 A map of Alexandria showing pilgrimage sites in the Greco-Roman and Early Christian Period, courtesy of Alex Med

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Probable site of the Soma | 2. Serapeion | 3. Isis Pharia Temple |
| 4. Agora, Saint Mark's First Church | 5. Saint Mark's Martyrium | 6. Caesarium |

During the persecution period, many devoted Christians encouraged religious prisoners, kept them company during their trials, and accompanied them to the place of their execution. This attitude gave rise to hagiographic and martyrdom accounts which became famous, and martyrs replaced the

pagan deities in veneration. The cult of saints began with the commemoration of the martyrs; the fathers of the Church recommended perceiving the martyrs as intercessors and advocates in all troubles.

The new cult of saints and martyrs had as main objective the veneration of relics. The bodies of martyrs may also have carried a more concrete kind of power similar to that of shrines of pagan deities in previous centuries. According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, "*Relics may loosely be defined as the venerated remains of venerable persons. This should be taken to include not only the bodies, bones, or ashes of saints, heroes, martyrs... but also objects that they once owned and, by extension, things that were once in physical contact with them. According to the principles of contagious magic, any personal possession or part of a person's body can be thought of as equivalent to his whole self, no matter how minute it may be, or how detached in time and space. Thus a bone... can carry the power or saintliness of the person with whom they were once associated and make him or her present once again.*"²

From the third century, the increase in the number of martyrs and the corresponding creation of holy places guarding their relics invited the sacralization of those persons and places³. But this movement did not increase before the fourth century because of the belief that Christianity differed from paganism in the fact that the One God existed and could be venerated anywhere. According to Clement of Alexandria "*the true temple is the assembly of Christian people,*"⁴ and Origen adds: "*the holy place is the pure soul.*"⁵ This must explain the almost total silence of the sources until the fourth century about what later came to be known as a holy place. Saints' tombs became sacred places of direct and physical contact with sanctity. Expressions of this type of veneration on sites associated with sacred events or holy people are mainly represented by pilgrimage aiming at the acquisition of the protective and healing powers ascribed to relics. The pilgrims came to pray as an act of gratitude, as the achievement of a vow, a request for forgiveness, or a demand for a favor. They came to pray in this specific place, because this was a place of memory where they could see, hear, and even touch a part of the sanctity that had been passed on through relics.

Alexandria played an important role in Christian pilgrimages throughout the ancient world and for the modern Coptic community for several reasons. The proximity of Alexandria to Palestine and its position as an important port linking the western and eastern Mediterranean made it an inevitable stop

on the way to pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Several holy sites were venerated, such as the Church of Saint Mark the Apostle, and later, the city of Saint Menas. For Copts, Alexandria is the cradle of Christianity in Egypt; the first Christians in Egypt were mainly Alexandrian, the city was the place of all important events of Coptic history, and Christians from almost all the known world at that time came to Alexandria to study. In modern times, in 1967 the Six Day War with Israel changed the face of Coptic pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Pilgrimage to the holy city became forbidden as a matter of national law and wartime politics. This political situation was also a factor in the revival of ancient Coptic destinations of pilgrimage to replace, not in importance but in practice, the prohibited destination of Palestine.

The Copts of today refuse to use the term *moulid* that they consider an Islamic term. Their argument is that the term *moulid* means literally "birthday", and they insist that the feast of their saint is celebrated on the anniversary of the saint's death which is a "rebirth" into eternal life. They prefer terms such as "*ihlifal*" (feast) or "*tidhkar*" (commemoration). Actually, for Muslims also the *moulid* of a saint is the anniversary of his death conceived as his "rebirth" in heaven. For both communities in general the saint's real birth is his death and his bones are preserved from corruption.

The convivial ambiance of the *ihlifal* with its attractions, gathering, animation, meals, prayers and healing, is common to both Muslims and Copts. Coptic *ihlifal* are considered occasions to make circumcisions and the traditional tattooed crosses on the right wrists to identify a person as a Copt and to protect him.

Most of the Coptic *ihlifal* in Alexandria take three days starting on the evening preceding the feast and finishing after the Divine Liturgy on the next day. The most important moment is *Al-Laila Al-Kebira* (the great night)⁶ when a special procession with icons and relics takes place.

Four important holy persons will be presented in this study for their close relation with Alexandria and their significance in the Coptic faith: Saint Mark the Apostle who introduced Christianity in Egypt, Saint Menas, the famous martyr whose relic has been an important destination of pilgrimage from late antiquity till nowadays, Pope Kyrillos VI who was very close to Saint Menas and whose feast is the most important saint's feast in Egypt and finally Father Bishop Kamel who is a modern example of holiness and sanctity.



Fig. 3.2 A painting of Saint Mark at Alexandria's Greek Orthodox Church, telling the story of the saint, showing his arrival in Alexandria, indicated by a depiction of the Pharos, the sea and the boat, his martyrdom and the patriarchs

Saint Mark the Evangelist and the Apostle

The Coptic Orthodox Church traces its origin to the apostolic mission of Saint Mark, to whom the tradition, following Papias of Hierapolis, ascribed the authorship of the oldest Gospel⁷. Saint Mark the Evangelist has been connected with the city of Alexandria since the earliest Christian times. Coptic Christians believe he arrived in Alexandria around 60 CE and stayed for about seven years. During this time, Saint Mark converted many to Christianity and performed miracles. He is considered the founder of the Church in Alexandria.



Fig. 3.3 Saint Mark's mosaic icon in the room of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria

الكنائس
Coptic

According to the Christian Coptic Church, upon arriving in Alexandria, Saint Mark found a cobbler called Anianus and asked him to mend the broken strap of his shoes. Anianus was the first person in Alexandria who listened to the preaching of Saint Mark and was the second bishop of the Church of Alexandria after Saint Mark⁸. In addition, Saint Mark managed to establish the Catechetical School of Alexandria, which developed from humble origins to become the most authoritative theological institution of the ancient Christian world⁹.



Fig. 3.4 Mosaic showing the meeting of Saint Mark and the Egyptian cobbler Anianus, in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria



Fig. 3.5 Mosaic showing Saint Mark ordaining Anianus a bishop right before leaving the city, in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria

After the foundation of the Church, Saint Mark left Alexandria for two years. Upon his return to Alexandria, he found the believers had increased in number and built a church for them in the place known as Boukolou (the place of the cows), to the east of Alexandria by the seashore.



Fig. 3.6 Mosaic showing the clerical school that Saint Mark established in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria

During Easter Day of 68 CE when the Christians celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Saint Mark, the pagans assembled for the festival of Sarapis. A group of pagans attacked the church and arrested Saint Mark and dragged him through the streets. The next day, the pagans tortured him until he finally died on 25 April. They wanted to cremate his body so that there would be no remains for his followers to honor. At this point, according to the Coptic sources, a violent wind began to blow and torrential rains poured down on the populace, which dispersed. The believers seized this opportunity to rush out and collect the body, which they wrapped and carried back to the church. After the funeral rites had been performed, the body was placed in a quickly prepared grave in the eastern section of the church which has carried his name ever since.¹⁰ His body was kept there, in a church built on the spot in 310. From that date, the oriental and western churches celebrate

his festival on 25 April and Christians make a pilgrimage to visit his tomb¹¹. His body was honored in Alexandria until the ninth century as the founder of the Christian Church in Egypt.



Fig. 3.7 Mosaic showing the pagans grabbing the saint and dragging him through the streets, in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria



Fig. 3.8 Mosaic showing the body of the saint saved by the believers in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria



Fig. 3.9 Mosaic showing the pagan soldiers putting the saint in a cell where angels healed him in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Alexandria

Saint Mark and Alexandria



Fig. 3.10 Icon of Saint Mark

The memory of Saint Mark is attached to three places in the city. First, the Martyrium of Boukolou, which over the centuries came to be the only authorized grave. The name of Mark was also attached to the Agora and the port, where he began his mission. From there he would have entered the city and met Anianus in the Agora who became his successor. Saint Mark was especially revered in this part of town, at least during the medieval period. The first church of Alexandria was supposed to have been built on the site of the house of Anianus before being replaced by another dedicated to Saint George. The third place connected to Saint Mark is the Angeleion. Here Mark was tortured and murdered¹².

In 828 CE, the body of Saint Mark was stolen from the Alexandrian church by two Venetians, to be enshrined in the grand new Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice. However the head of the saint remained in Alexandria and it was a tradition that every newly appointed patriarch had to go on the second day of his ordination to where the head was placed, accompanied by the bishops, priests and the people. He would kneel and bow before the holy head, then pray and raise incense, reading from the Book of Mark, and ending the prayers by asking for God's mercy. Every pope is named the successor of Saint Mark¹³.

At the same time, the body of Saint Mark was highly venerated in Venice. His relics were powerful religious and social symbols attracting many pilgrims to Venice and increasing the city's population. The Venetians celebrated the saint three times a year: on 25 April, the date of his death, on 31 January, the day of the transportation of his body and on 25 June, the day when the relic was re-buried in Saint Mark's Basilica.

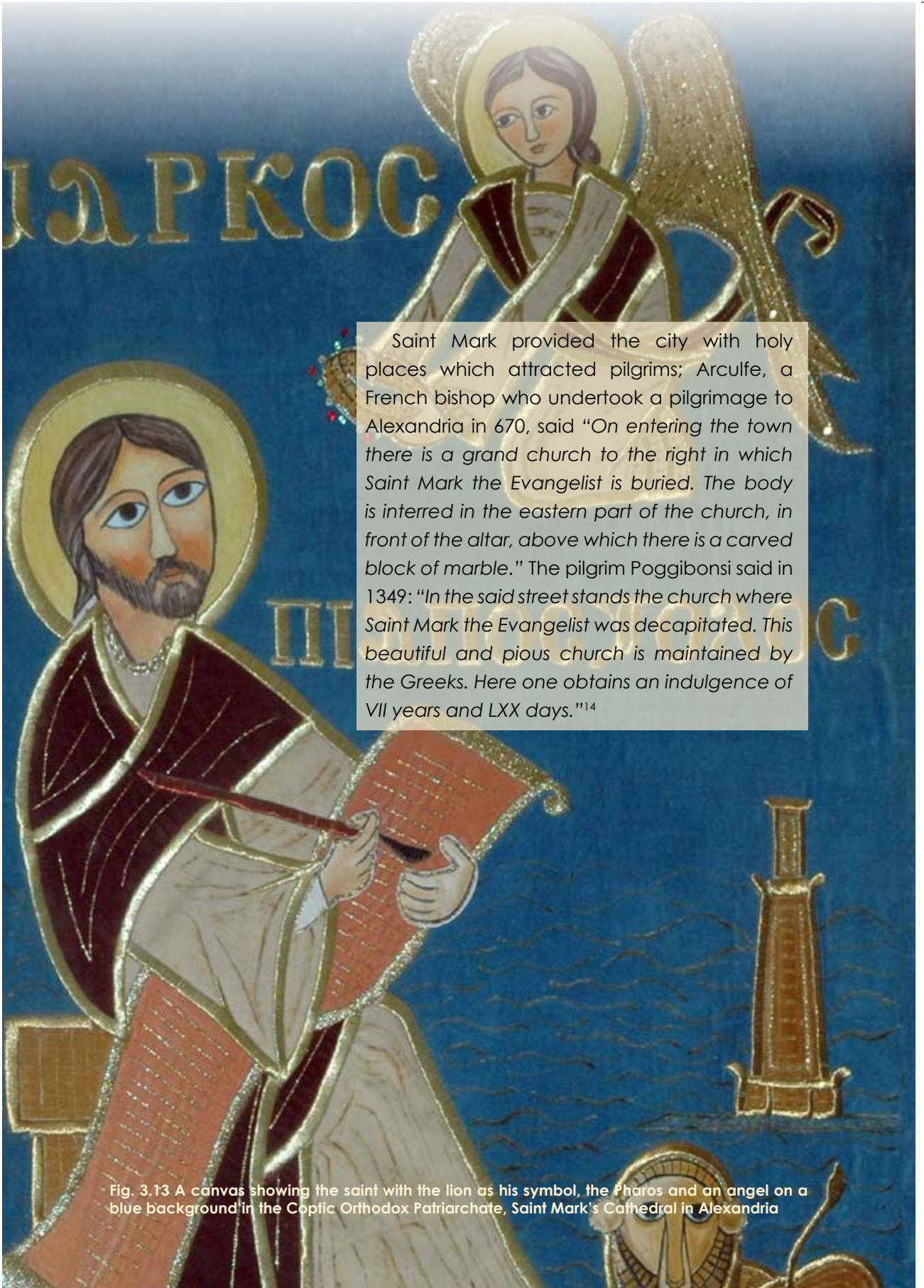


Fig. 3.11 Detail of the rooftop of Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice

On 24 June 1968 and in the tenth year of the papacy of Pope Kyrillos VI, the relics of Saint Mark were returned to Egypt in great pomp and ceremony, attended by President Nasser and the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. Saint Mark's Coptic Cathedral in Alexandria is the seat of the Pope of Alexandria, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The cathedral is said to stand on the site of the church founded by the Evangelist.



Fig. 3.12 The Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria



Saint Mark provided the city with holy places which attracted pilgrims; Arculfe, a French bishop who undertook a pilgrimage to Alexandria in 670, said "On entering the town there is a grand church to the right in which Saint Mark the Evangelist is buried. The body is interred in the eastern part of the church, in front of the altar, above which there is a carved block of marble." The pilgrim Poggibonsi said in 1349: "In the said street stands the church where Saint Mark the Evangelist was decapitated. This beautiful and pious church is maintained by the Greeks. Here one obtains an indulgence of VII years and LXX days."¹⁴

Fig. 3.13 A canvas showing the saint with the lion as his symbol, the Pharos and an angel on a blue background in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Saint Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria

Saint Menas the Wonder Maker



Fig. 3.14 Saint Menas eulogizes in the monastery

Saint Menas became the most important pilgrimage destination in Alexandria from the fourth century until the present. The story of Saint Menas is symbolic of the transitional period when the Roman Empire embraced Christianity. Menas was both a Roman soldier and an Egyptian. In the same way, the details of his life are of particular interest because they are related to two main characteristics of the Coptic religion: asceticism and martyrdom.

The life of Saint Menas must be considered on two distinct levels: on the one hand, by compiling historical information based on official documents (acts of trials, names of prefects, governors and emperors); on the other, on the heroic level which is an important characteristic of all hagiographies (the

hearing of voices, the intervention of angels, the supernatural resistance to torture, healing and miracles ...). Because of the combination of these two levels of interpretation, it has not been possible to draw a linear story of Saint Menas. On the contrary, we observe the juxtaposition of several versions, with common or diverging elements. Within this framework, it is judicious to retrace the stages of Saint Menas' life, pointing out the different versions when details show their divergence or their complementarities.

If it is unanimously accepted that Menas was Egyptian and that his family was from Niceous near Memphis, his date and place of birth however give rise to two very different versions. The first one claims that he was born in 275 in Libya in a Roman province where his father was governor, whereas the second interpretation claims that Saint Menas was born in 286 in the town of Niceous. All the versions agree on the saint's Christian education. The Church's version goes farther even by lending a mystic aspect to his birth. His parents, Eudoxius and Euphemia, are described as true devout Christians. His mother, unable to conceive, prayed whilst crying before the icon of the Virgin. She heard a voice saying "Amen", and that is why she chose the name Mina (Menas) for the son that she finally conceived.

When he reached fourteen years of age, according to all the sources, Eudoxius died and Saint Menas joined the Roman army. Three years later, he left the army because he refused to kill his fellow human beings. All the interpretations agree about Saint Menas' retreat into the desert, highlighting the ascetic characteristic of his life during the following five years, and calling him a hermit. During this time, he had numerous visions, in particular of angels crowning martyrs. Five years after retreating to the desert, Saint Menas went back into town to proclaim his faith before the crowd and the Roman prefect.

The Martyrdom and the Relic of Saint Menas

Whilst the traditional Coptic version tells us the place and date of the saint's death (in 296, under Diocletian's reign, in the town of Cotyacum), the hagiographic story gives more details on the torture that he endured. It is said that pagans vainly tried to burn the saint's body. In addition, the supernatural resistance to various tortures that he was subjected to made a number of pagan witnesses convert to Christianity and even after martyrdom. Roman soldiers buried Menas at Mareotis near Alexandria.

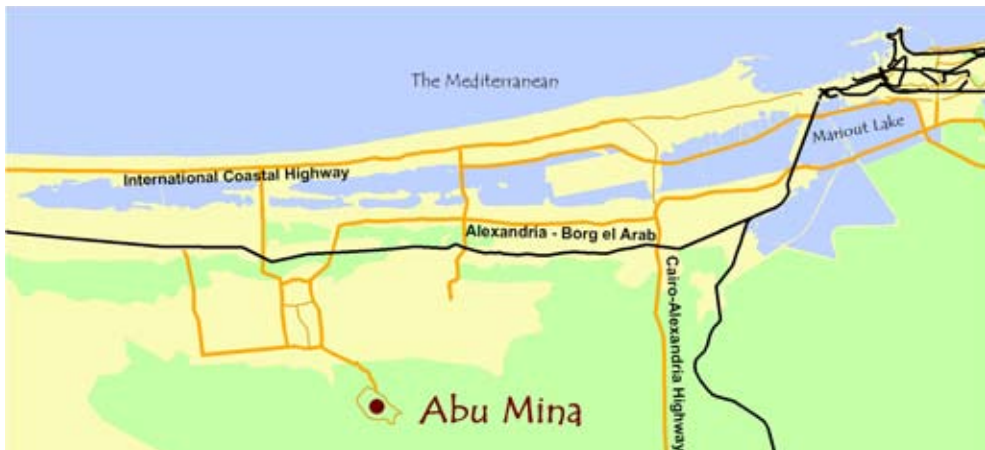


Fig. 3.15 Map showing the location of Abu Mina, courtesy of Alex Med

They carried him there to benefit from his blessing during the journey. As the ship sailed to Alexandria, strange creatures arose from the sea with had long necks similar to camels. Then arrows of fire shot out from Menas' body into the face of the creatures, driving them back under the sea. On the return journey of the Roman soldiers from Mareotis, the camels bearing the body refused to move.



Fig. 3.16 Relief of Saint Menas from the fifth century showing him dressed as a Roman soldier between the two camels and holding up his hands in prayer, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

That is why he is always portrayed with two camels¹⁵ and that he is venerated as the protector of pilgrims and merchants.

Finally, the story of the saint according to the official version of the Coptic Church credits the vision of Saint Menas to King Zinon's daughter. She was cured with his holy water and it was she who, in a dream, had the vision of Saint Menas saying that his body had been buried in Mareotis. Immediately, her father Zinon ordered that the ground be dug up, and the body of the saint was found. Then he had a church built and a town founded there. Menas was Egyptian, he was the son of a governor and a soldier himself. His renunciation was symbolic: from a soldier of Rome he became a soldier of God. The fact that he proclaimed his faith publicly, defying authority and taking on the role of a martyr are an accomplishment of the function of a soldier in the service of God.

The Site of Old and Renewed Pilgrimage

The ruins of Saint Menas site, discovered¹⁶ about fifty kilometers southwest of Alexandria, are amongst the most important historical and cultural sites of Egypt. In 1979, they were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Located on the edge of the desert, Saint Menas turns out to have been one of the biggest pilgrimage destinations during ancient times; it was the Lourdes of the beginning of Christianity, famous beyond the East. The site's reputation comes from the fact that it was the most important center for pilgrimages in its time. The town probably existed before Christianity, notably as a commercial center for the caravans traveling between Alexandria and Siwa and between the north-west and the center of Egypt. However, the site of Saint Menas progressively developed around the saint's tomb.



Fig. 3.17,18 View across the ancient site of Saint Menas and the small wooden church

In 297, the chapel of the tomb was built, and in 365 the church was completed above the crypt. Nevertheless, it became too small to hold the ever-increasing number of pilgrims. This led to the decision by Emperor Arcadius to build a new one, which took from 395 to 408. That grand basilica was the biggest church in Egypt at that time. The martyrium containing the saint's relics was situated to the west of the basilica, above the crypt. A marble staircase of thirty steps led to the tomb. The development of the area around the basilica continued until it became a city called the Martyr City. Many people moved there and some devoted emperors even encouraged the development of the city by sending soldiers to protect it, and to manage the city and the roads to accommodate visitors and pilgrims.

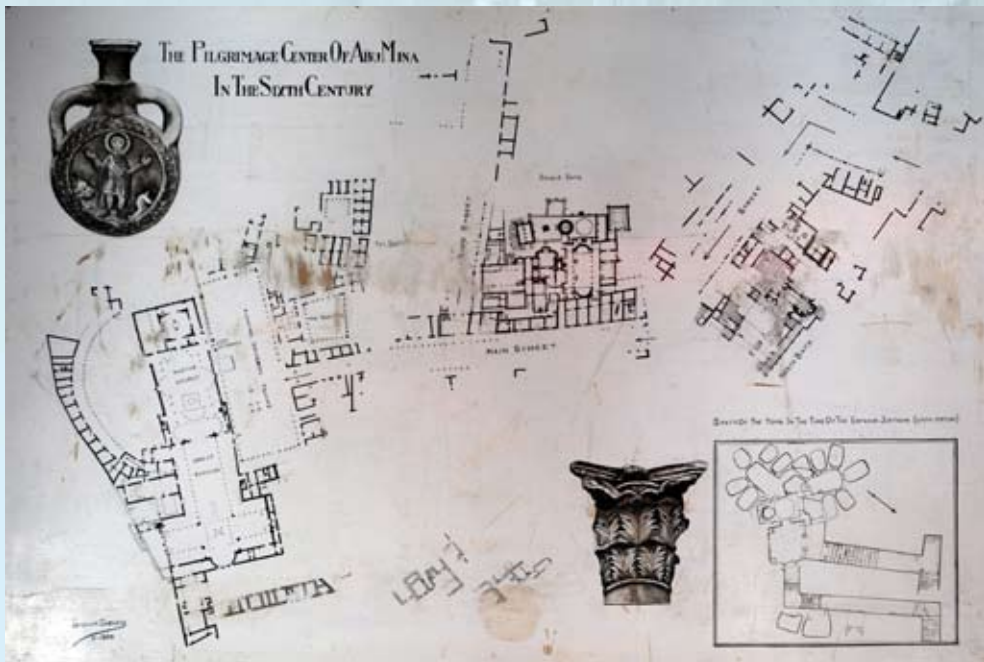


Fig. 3.19 The ancient ecclesiastical center map after Grossman hanging in the wooden church on Saint Menas' ancient site

Pilgrims would arrive by ship on the western bank of Lake Mareotis and continue to the church on land. During the reign of Anastasios (491–518 CE) rest houses, stores and a market were built beside the lake to provide for the increasing number of pilgrims. With the influx of the sick coming to be healed, large baths were built in the city.



Fig. 3.20 Remains of a bath in the ancient site of Saint Menas

The Flasks and the Spread of the Cult

The cult spread to other countries, perhaps due to traveling merchants who honored Saint Menas as their patron. The famous flasks unearthed by archeologists show the extent of that devotion. Numerous fragments of flasks have been found near the tomb. Clearly, these were produced in great quantities, with their characteristic oval shape, two handles, and always decorated with the same image: Saint Menas, wearing a tunic and a coat, with a camel on either side of him. Next to his head, the Greek inscription MENAS AGIOS O, "Saint Menas", can be seen. Some of these flasks have been discovered by archeologists in regions as varied and as far apart as Heidelberg in Germany, Milan in Italy and Marseille in France.

Most of these flasks have been dated between the fourth and the seventh centuries. They were given to the pilgrims either filled with holy water blessed in Saint Menas' Monastery, or with oil from the lamps hung over the saint's tomb. Visitors as well as the legend lent miraculous power to those precious liquids. Indeed, in spite of the important devotion shown to the saint, it is evident that the water and its miracles traditionally played an important role in the entire East, and especially in Egypt, a country where the Nile symbolises life. Thus, following early Christian tradition, heroes in this region are thought

to have the power to heal by water. The numerous findings of fragments of clay objects are another indication of the important number of visitors to the Saint Menas site.



Fig. 3.21 Saint Menas' flask bearing his image dressed as a Roman soldier between two camels. It contained the miracle water that pilgrims took with them as a souvenir of their pilgrimage, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

However, in spite of the flood of pilgrims and the prestige of the sanctuary, the site was destroyed several times because of wars, invasion, oblivion, negligence and even earthquakes.

Several saints of the name Menas were highly honored in the ancient Church. A theory suggests that Menas of Mareotis, Menas of Cotyaeus, and Menas of Constantinople, surnamed Kallikelados, are the same person, and that churches were built in his honor at Cotyaeus and Constantinople, and gave rise to local legends. Some modern churches dedicated to Saint Menas of Mareotis exist outside Egypt in Australia, in Canada and in the USA. Today, a new monastery has been built a few hundred meters from the ruins of the ancient site of Saint Menas.



Fig. 3.22 The modern Monastery of Saint Menas located a few hundred meters from the ruins of the ancient site

The Feast of Saint Menas

The pilgrimage to the new monastery of Saint Menas requires important preparation. Indeed, the venue that hosts the feast as well as thousands of pilgrims must be organised.

In the days beforehand, workers put up large tents, which will be used as resting places for the public and in which numerous television screens will be installed to broadcast the ceremonies as well as religious documentaries about Saint Menas in particular. These tents are also used as waiting rooms for pilgrims before they can go into the rooms where the ceremonies will take place. The first one, attended by Pope Shenuda III himself, is by invitation only. Therefore, most people follow it on the television screens.



Fig. 3.23 Workers put up tents in preparation for the feast of Saint Menas



Fig. 3.24 Final preparations before the arrival of the pilgrims

The clergy censure the usual profane side of pilgrimage. Now, the restaurants, the teashops and the theatrical shows have disappeared. Instead, the monastery offers food and the shows have been replaced by documentaries. Again, outside the buildings, there is a lawn where pilgrims can relax and meet each other. There is also an exhibition with information boards retracing Saint Menas' life as well as the history and evolution of the old and new monasteries.



Fig. 3.25 Pilgrims gathering in the monastery's grounds



Fig. 3.26 The exhibition of the life of Saint Menas and the rediscovery of the ancient site

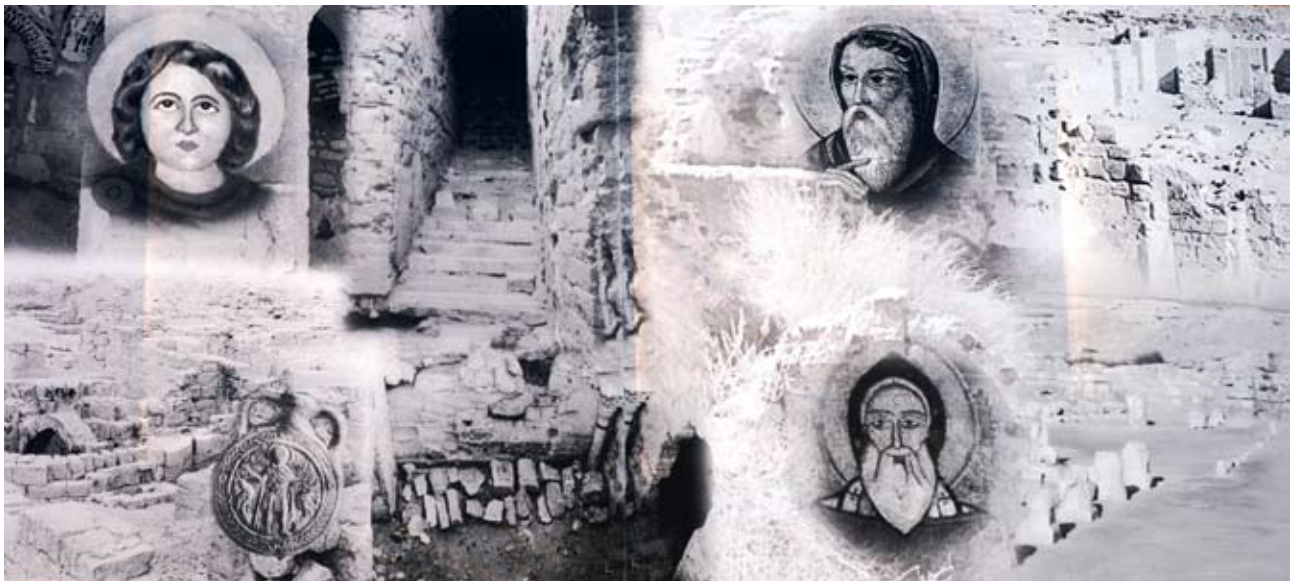


Fig. 3.27 An exhibition of the ancient site on the wall of the modern monastery

In the same way, free catering is available to the participants from several stands. Participants are able to choose hot drinks, *foul* or fava beans and cheese for breakfast. At lunch time, vegetable dishes with rice and potatoes are served. Throughout the day, mineral water dispensers are available, again for free.



Fig. 3.28 Refectory hall

At the same time, there are little shops selling various items and souvenirs related to the monastery, Saint Menas or Christianity. Books, DVDs of religious films, songs as well as sermons and prayers can be found. Calendars, posters, postcards and images of Jesus, the Virgin and Pope Shenuda are also on sale. Their images are also printed on several items and gadgets such as pens and caps. CDs of Coptic liturgical music and sermons by Pope Shenuda III are played to attract the pilgrims.



Fig. 3.29 Souvenir shops



Fig. 3.30 Posters of Coptic liturgical music and sermons by Pope Shenuda III

There are also stands selling popular food products coming from land belonging to the monastery. At a very small cost, pilgrims can buy olives, oil, fruits and vegetables, wine, honey or meat and poultry... Finally, as in the Muslim moulids, there are shops selling sweets and confectionery, but with the image of Saint Menas on their wrappings.



Fig. 3.31 Confectionery shop



Fig. 3.32 Shops selling popular food products



Fig. 3.33 Honey and bread shop

Inside the monastery, everything is arranged for the ceremonies. Inside the chapel and the rooms where the tombs of Saint Menas and Pope Kyrillos VI are, places are set aside for the pilgrims, with chairs, air conditioning and television screens. There are also many photos of the pope



Fig. 3.34 Rooms dedicated to the pilgrims

with several religious dignitaries such as the Sheikh of Al Azhar Mosque as well as with political leaders such as Presidents Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. These photos, of which the Egyptian Christians are very proud, show the Coptic Church's political role in the country.





Fig. 3.35 Gathering moments



Fig. 3.36 Meeting on the lawn



Fig. 3.37 A playground for children

A team of young volunteers from Christian associations is in charge of helping and monitoring the pilgrims, and surveillance cameras are installed for security reasons. Thousands of Christians come from all over Egypt for the Saint Menas pilgrimage. The Church provides buses for their transportation. This gathering is an important moment of communion, of contemplation and devotion. It is also an opportunity for members of the community to gather and to share experiences. Thus, the feast is an occasion to plan marriages, find work or seal business agreements. The lawn is an important meeting place, where families can sit down to eat, discuss and rest. It is also a favorite playground for children. The ceremonies are a very important part of the festivities, a time for fervent singing and praying together. There is not enough room in the church so the monitors give priority to elderly people, women and children. Therefore, many people follow the service

from outside or on the television screens. During mass, the men sit on the left, and the women, with covered hair, sit on the right. They go separately for the blessings and communion at the end of the ceremony. Inside the church, pilgrimage is an opportunity to meditate on the tombs of Saint

Menas and of Pope Kyrillos VI. In the rooms where the tombs are, men, women and children light candles, sing praises and make offerings. Some pilgrims pray with their eyes closed and their heads pressed against the tombs, kneeling or standing up. Some cry. Most of the prayers ask for the protection of Saint Menas and of the patriarch against illness or for a cure. Many accounts of miraculous healings are transmitted orally between the people here. While the parents meditate, they sit their children on the tombs.



Fig. 3.38 A pilgrim prays to Saint Menas' relics



Fig. 3.39 The prayers ask for healing and protection from the patriarch



Fig. 3.40 Women light candles for the saint

Pilgrims also leave pieces of paper on the tombs where they address their requests to the saint and the pope. Lastly, many offerings are laid there. All sorts of items such as flowers, images and photos, watches and trinkets such as plastic hearts can be found at the foot of the tombs. Some pilgrims also offer articles that the monastery might need or even participate in the feast by offering food to the less fortunate.



Fig. 3.41 Ex-voto items

Pilgrims prostrate themselves before the relics, which are kissed and covered in tears or perfume, placing an object or even the simple inscription of a name. in their vicinity, which could then be taken back home. In the neighboring rooms, women singing praise and hymns are seen. Nuns often initiate the singing, people gradually joining in. Special hymns to the saint and liturgical chant are believed to appeal to supernatural powers and at the same time allow the pilgrims to participate in the memorializing of the saint. The pilgrimage is also an opportunity to visit the ruins of the ancient Monastery of Saint Menas where a wooden church has been built. The old site is only one kilometer's walking distance through the desert from the new one. Once on the site, there are guided visits to the ruins and the history of this sacred place is explained. Some people fill bottles with the water flowing underground hoping to benefit from its healing properties.



Fig. 3.42 Women singing praise and hymns

Young Christian volunteers are also there in order to avoid any damage. They are also responsible for the pilgrims' security and stop children from playing and getting lost in the desert. Police officers with dogs are also present.



Fig. 3.43 Pilgrims walk through the desert from the new monastery to the ancient site





Fig. 3.44 The feast is a good occasion to visit the ancient site with a guide from the monastery



People go to meditate and pray in the wooden church. They take their shoes off before going in as they would in many Coptic Orthodox sanctuaries. This practice has its origin in a process of “putting aside” material preoccupations of the pilgrim. Then, they bow down before the images and the altar. Before walking back to the new monastery, they can write down their impressions in the Visitors Book. Each year, a mass is said in the ruins of the ancient monastery but it is difficult to know beforehand the precise date of the ceremony.



Fig. 3.45 The Visitors Book of the site



Fig. 3.46 The wooden church



Fig. 3.47 The interior of the wooden church



Fig. 3.48 Performing the mass in the ruins of the ancient monastery



Pope Kyrillos VI (1902–1971)

Pope Kyrillos VI laid the first stone of the Monastery of Saint Menas in 1959. There was a strong relation between Pope Kyrillos VI and Saint Menas. The pope left a written will to have his body buried in the Monastery of Saint Menas. When the pope died on 9 March 1971, he was buried in Cairo for the time necessary to prepare his memorial in Saint Menas' Monastery and his body was transferred to it in 1973. From that date each year the monastery receives a large number of pilgrims who come to celebrate his feast on 9 March.

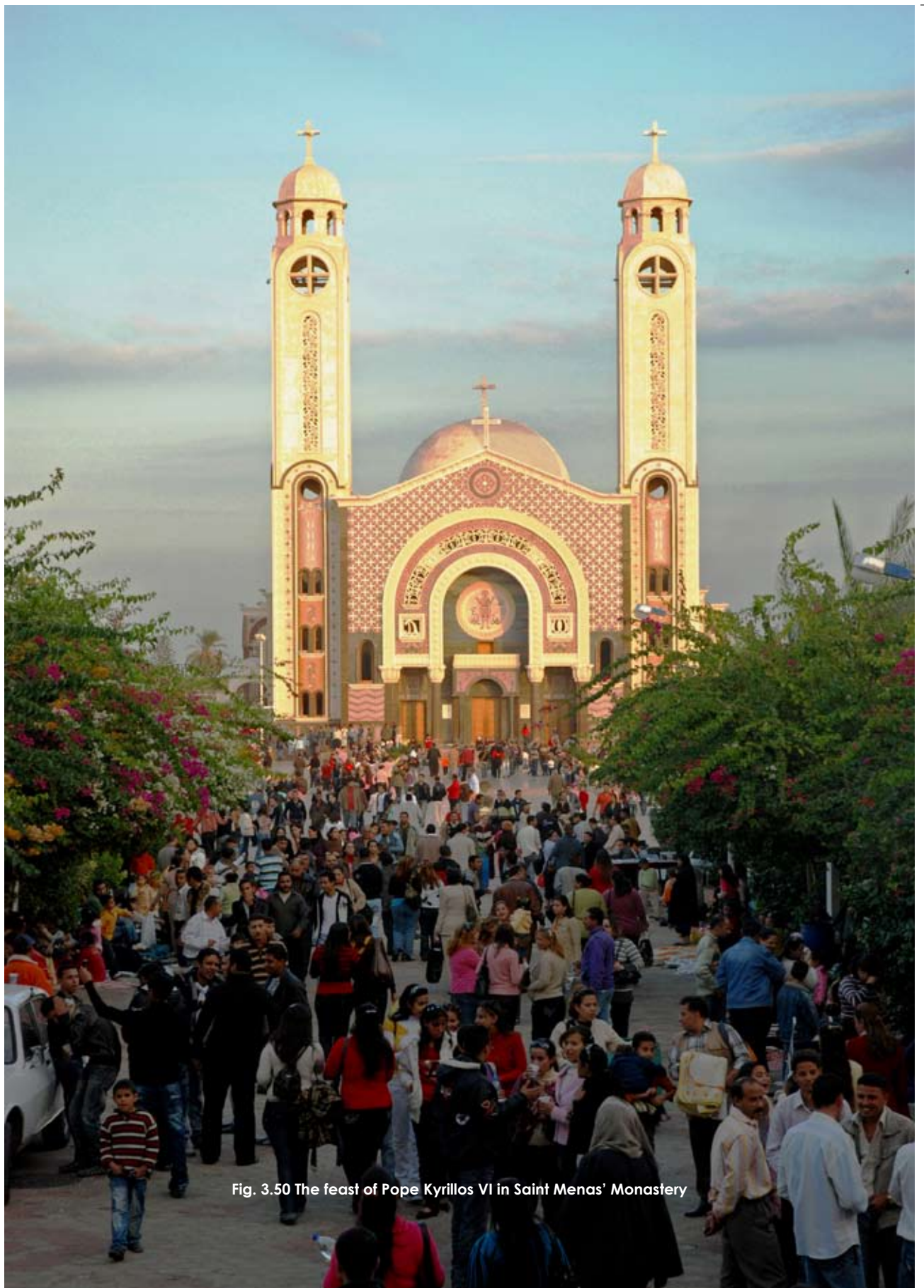


Fig. 3.50 The feast of Pope Kyrillos VI in Saint Menas' Monastery



Fig. 3.51 Pilgrims pray in front of the tomb of Pope Kyrillos VI

Egyptians Copts do not celebrate the feast of Pope Kyrillos VI in the Monastery of Saint Menas only because of the spiritual relation between the saint and the pope, but also because they consider Pope Kyrillos VI as a saint due to his deeds during his life. Azer Youssef Atta was born on 2 August 1902 in the Delta. His father was a deacon. By tradition, the whole family used to attend the feast of Saint Menas and the young Azer was very impressed by this saint. When Azer was 25, he resigned from his job to join Al-Baramus Monastery in Wadi Al Natroun and he changed his name to Brother Mina. On 18 July 1931, the monk Mina was ordained priest and became



Fig. 3.52 Azer Youssef Atta

Father Mina. He decided to live in solitude two miles away from the monastery, but he went back every Sunday to attend the mass and share the Holy Communion¹⁷. At that moment his reputation as a blessed monk started to be known. Many people used to visit him, seeking his prayers and blessings. The believers talked about his capacity to perform miracles of healing and solve difficult problems. In 1944–5 at the Monastery of Saint Samuel, he became the monastery superior; his first action was to renovate the historic buildings. In 1947, Father Mina built the church of Saint Menas in Old Cairo; he lived there till his ordination as the 116th pope. On 10 May 1959, Father Mina became the only monk in the twentieth century to become the Coptic Pope without being a Metropolitan Bishop¹⁸. Pope Kyrillos VI was highly regarded by both Christians and Muslims of Egypt; he was known as a holy man of prayer who possessed the gift of knowledge and of healing. He brought the Coptic Church into a new era of renewed faith and high spirituality. Many Egyptians considered him as a living saint. He received people at any time and anywhere and refused to send anybody away. His ministry was marked by many great spiritual events such as the miracle of the appearance of the Virgin Mary at her church in Zeitoun, the return of the relic of Saint Mark, and the construction of Saint Menas' Monastery.



Fig. 3.53 Father Mina



Fig. 3.54 Pope Kyrillos VI



Fig. 3.55 Pope Kyrillos VI lays the foundation stone of the Monastery of Saint Menas

The election of Pope Kyrillos VI marks a turning point in the modern history of the Coptic faith. The culture of monasticism is spreading among the Copts and the young return to the parishes. This renewal is identified with the person of the Pope Kyrillos VI who personified monastic spirituality in the heart of the movement. The monk who became patriarch gave institutional strength and meaning to the reform. In his ministry, monasteries were being rebuilt, expanded and renovated; they paved roads to facilitate the pilgrims' movements, university graduates chose to become monks or to spend their weekend volunteering to teach the youth and to guide pilgrims in the feasts. Modern technology and communication was introduced in the churches and monasteries.

This renewal has also led to the revolution of the *ihlifal*. The religious authority recruited priests and monks, graduates and city dwellers to change the face of the *ihlifal* and fight for the disappearance of popular superstition and the profane features of these ceremonies. This movement allowed a large number of pilgrims from all areas and social strata to participate instead of the usual popular class only.

During his last days when he was gravely ill, a microphone was connected to his bedroom at his request to enable him to perform the daily liturgy. On 9 March 1971, the pope passed away. Approximately one million Egyptians came to cast a last look at their saint vested in white, wearing his crown and seated in his patriarchal chair. He was buried under the altar in the great cathedral in Cairo. But when his successor, Pope Shenuda III, read his will, he moved his body to Saint Menas Monastery with his patron. From that time, the feast of Pope Kyrillos VI has take place on 9 March every year in the re-established monastery. Copts from all over Egypt organize pilgrimages to attend his feast which has become the most important saint's feast for the modern Coptic faith.



Fig. 3.56 Pope Kyrillos VI seated on his patriarchal throne



Fig. 3.57 The body of the pope exposed for the last farewell of the believers



Father Bishoy Kamel (1931–1979)

Father Bishoy Kamel was considered to be a saint during his life, as was Pope Kyrillos VI. Born Samy Kamel on 6 December 1931 in Om Dinar village near to Damanhur, not far from Alexandria, he grew up in Damanhur, where he received his early education. He was raised as a devout Copt and he learnt the Coptic language. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1951 from Alexandria University. Then he became a teacher in the Sunday school in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Moharram Bey district in Alexandria, while working as a science teacher in Al Raml state school.



Fig. 3.59 The ordination of Father Bishoy Kamel

At the same time, he continued at Alexandria University and received a degree in philosophy and psychology in 1954. He was appointed an instructor at the Faculty of Education of Alexandria University. During his time as a science teacher and Sunday school teacher, he was a very active church servant. He was ordained priest and took the name of Bishoy in December 1959¹⁹.

Alexandria was the center of his life's work as a teacher and as a priest. He instituted many churches in Alexandria and in Egypt, as well as in Europe, Australia and the United States. In Alexandria, he inaugurated Saint George's Church in Sporting district, Saint George's Church in Hadara, Archangel Michael's Church in Mostafa Kamel, Saint Takla's Church in Ibrahemieh, Saint Mary and Saint Cyril's Church in Cleopatra and Saint Peter's Church in Sidi Bishr. In the United States, he founded the first Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint Mark in Los Angeles²⁰.

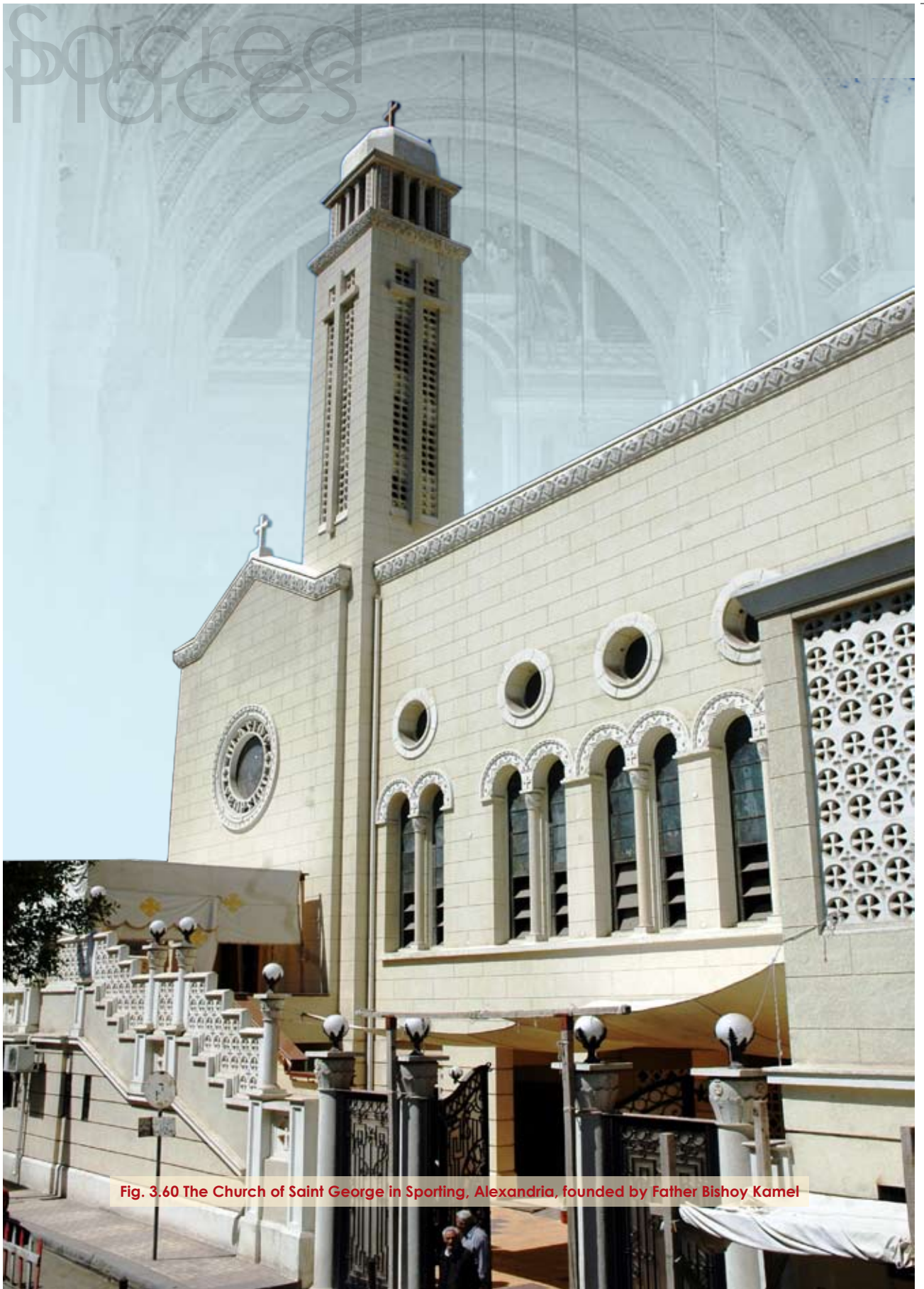


Fig. 3.60 The Church of Saint George in Sporting, Alexandria, founded by Father Bishoy Kamel



Fig. 3.61 View of the interior of Saint George's Church in Sporting, Alexandria

In feasts such as Christmas, Epiphany and Easter, he always distributed food and gifts to the poor in his congregation after the service. Even when he was away from Alexandria, the people of his church felt his presence, his inspiration and his spiritual force. He demonstrated an extraordinary degree of devotion and humility, always wondering why people praised him and felt he did not do enough.

Saint George's Church in Sporting became in a short period one of the best known parishes in Egypt. Although married for several years according to the order of Pope Kyrillos VI, to be able to become a priest of the church, both his wife and himself remained celibate. His wife, Angel, was always seen as *tasouni*, literally "sister" in Coptic, and she is an example to encourage the women's role in the service in the church²¹.

All people who knew him loved him not only as a priest performing the duties of his office but as a true caring father, brother and friend. On 21 March 1979, he died in his home and a few hours after his death, he was transported to the church where his open coffin had been placed²². Vast numbers of Alexandrian Copts and Muslims passed in file around his catafalque to receive a last benediction, and a few hours later people started to arrive from all over Egypt. The torrent of pilgrims continued day and night right up to the time of the funeral on 22 March. The Coptic patriarch and supporting bishops led the prayers. The congregation packed the church, the streets, and the tramway during all the ceremony. The saint was buried in the parish church where he had started his service.



Fig. 3.62 The packed congregation



Fig. 3.63 Copts and Muslims crowded the streets and the tramway during all the funeral ceremony of Father Bishoy Kamel



Fig. 3.64 Tasouni Angel at the funeral

Until now, his shrine is regularly full of pilgrims seeking his blessing because of his reputation as an ascetic, wise man and confessor. Even young people and adolescents who did not know him during his lifetime are numerous to make the pilgrimage to his tomb and ask for his help. Other older pilgrims from Alexandria come when they need to ask for the priest's help, as they did during his life time²³. His shrine in Saint George's Church is significant to the



Fig. 3.65 The tomb of Father Bishop in Saint George's Church, Sporting, Alexandria



Fig. 3.66 Young believers come to pray at the tomb of Father Bishop Kamel

modern Coptic faith: the deeds of this priest are still present in the minds of millions of believers from all Egypt. The churches organize pilgrimages from each city and village in Egypt to attend his feast on 21 March every year. As he provided Alexandria with a number of new churches, and endowed the people with spirituality, Father Bishoy Kamel also offered the city a holy space for devotion during his feast. He personified the modern sense of sanctity and engagement of the holy in everyday life.



Fig. 3.67 A Canadian stamp commemorating Father Bishoy Kamel

THE GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA

Kyriakos Savvopoulos

Greek Orthodoxy in Egypt

While according to tradition, the history of Christianity in Alexandria began with the arrival of Saint Mark in the city during the first century, the Christian Church was officially recognized during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great (306–337 CE). Hence, in 325 CE, the First Ecumenical Council acknowledged the establishment of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. During the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Christian community increased considerably, especially after the prohibition of pagan religion in Alexandria by the Christian Emperor Theodosius, which was marked by the destruction of the Serapeion in 391 CE. Churches were built all over the city, while pagan temples were converted into Christian places of worship, notably the Caesareum, which became the new Christian cathedral.

Nevertheless, despite the victory of Christianity over paganism, ideological disputes continued in Alexandria firstly between Arius and Athanasius in the first half of the fourth century, and later in 450 CE the final split of the Christian Church of Alexandria into the Coptic and Greek Orthodox Churches took place at the Council of Chalcedon. From this period onwards, Alexandria would have two Patriarchs: one Egyptian Copt and one Greek Orthodox, the latter appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The Arab conquest of Egypt in 641 CE resulted in an uncomfortable situation for the Greek Alexandrians. Hence, in September 642 CE a large numbers of Greeks left Alexandria and embarked for Constantinople. Moreover, during the following 500 years, the Alexandrian population declined from around 200,000 citizens during the Byzantine period, to between 60,000 and 70,000. The decline of the population was reflected in the shrinkage of the ninth century Arab city walls which excluded districts of the Greco-Roman and Byzantine city. The new walls included only 300 hectares of the city. The site of the martyrion of Saint Mark was now outside the Arab city walls.

The gradual, but dramatic, shrink of the Greek Orthodox community and its sacred property is illustrated in the documents of Patriarch Kosmas (727–781) who, upon his arrival in Alexandria, records only one Greek Orthodox church in the city. Successive Patriarchs of Alexandria established hospitals and

schools within their monastery, notably Saint Sabba, which was also known as the Greek Hospital. Some patriarchs were also reputed as physicians, such as Kosmas I (727–768), Eutuchios (933–940), Cyril II²⁴ and Nikolaos II (1210–1243)²⁵. Eutuchios constitutes one of the most exceptional figures of this period. He published several works of medical and theological nature, but he became famous as the chronographer of the Alexandrian Church²⁶.

The Turkish conquest in the fifteenth century marked a new era for Christianity in Egypt. Sultan Selim provided the Patriarchate of Alexandria with a firman according to which the Patriarchate was officially recognized by the Turkish authorities, safeguarding its rights including the right to practice the Orthodox faith, yet this period was marked by serious financial constraints for the Patriarchate, since most of its income was derived from the Ecumenical Throne, which was controlled by the Ottoman authorities. Fortunately, the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria received the support of the Russian Church, which helped the Patriarchate to continue its functions.

The Monastery of Saint Sabba

The history of the Monastery or Church of Saint Sabba dates back to the early seventh century. It is situated on part of the original site of the Roman forum, in front of the Caesareum²⁷, built possibly on the ruins of a pagan temple dedicated either to Dionysus, Mythra or Apollo²⁸. It is the only church of Alexandria that is mentioned in the twelfth century records such as the Abu Makari account of Christian shrines. Representations of the monastery include the aerial view of Alexandria by Bassili Barkij (1731), the well-known print of the *Voyages of the Count of Forbin* (circa 1823) and the map of Frederik Norden (1731) which was reproduced with Russian annotations by Konstandios in circa 1798, published in Moscow in 1803.

The church, named after Saint Sabba the Sanctified during the course of the last three centuries, was originally dedicated to Saint Mark. This perhaps explains the existence of the small Chapel of Saint Mark behind the Church of Saint Sabba. Also, several travelers and pilgrims refer to the monastery as the Church of Saint Catherine, due to the altar of Saint Catherine situated in its precinct, as well as the Greek Hospital. Indeed, the monastery was a *hospitium*, meaning that Christian pilgrims of all creeds could find shelter there in case of illness.



Fig. 3.68 Saint Sabba, after its most recent renovations in the 1980s

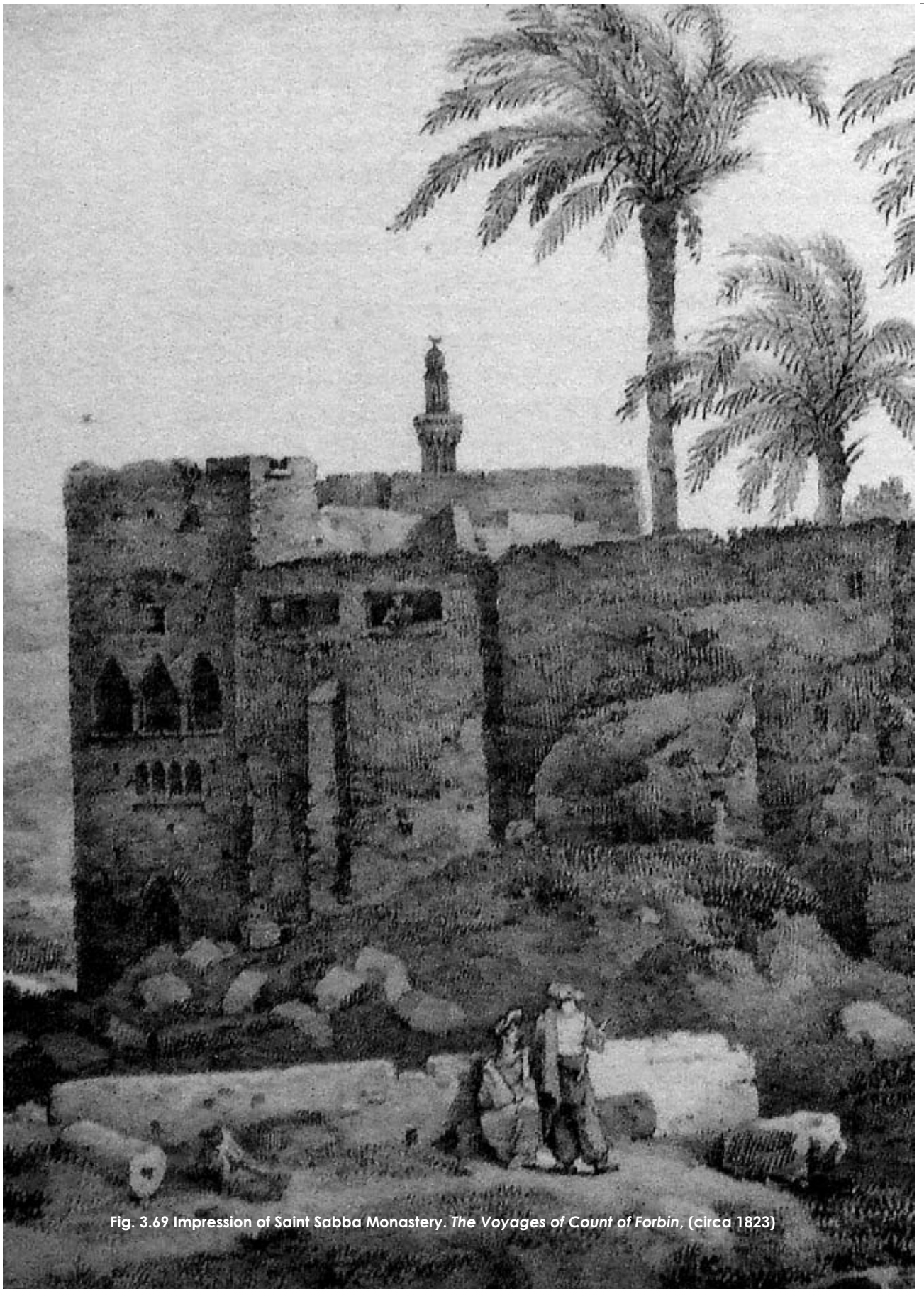



Fig. 3.69 Impression of Saint Sabba Monastery. *The Voyages of Count of Forbin*, (circa 1823)

A black and white photograph of a tall palm tree in a landscape, possibly a monastery or historical site. The tree is the central focus, with its fronds reaching towards the top of the frame. The background shows a hazy, possibly overcast sky and some distant structures or terrain. The overall tone is historical and somewhat somber.

Apart from being a hospital, Saint Sabba Monastery has had several uses during its long history. It served as the patriarchal seat and cemetery²⁹, while in the fifteenth century became a school and training center for the Greek Orthodox clergy. One of the most prominent patriarchal figures of this period was Meletios Pegas, who studied classical philology, philosophy and medicine in Padua. Meletios became the first teacher of the school. Later, he participated in the Synod of Constantinople in 1593, where the Patriarchate of Moscow was officially recognized. Other distinctive patriarchal scholars of this period were Metrophanes Kritopoulos (1636–1639), who studied at the University of Oxford, traveled to Europe and mingled with the greatest scholars and theologians of his day and made Orthodoxy known in the West, and Matthaios the Cantor (1746–1766) who dedicated his life to education and missionary activity in several parts of Africa. Hence, at the most difficult time in its history, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate seems to have retained an international perspective inherited from the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods.

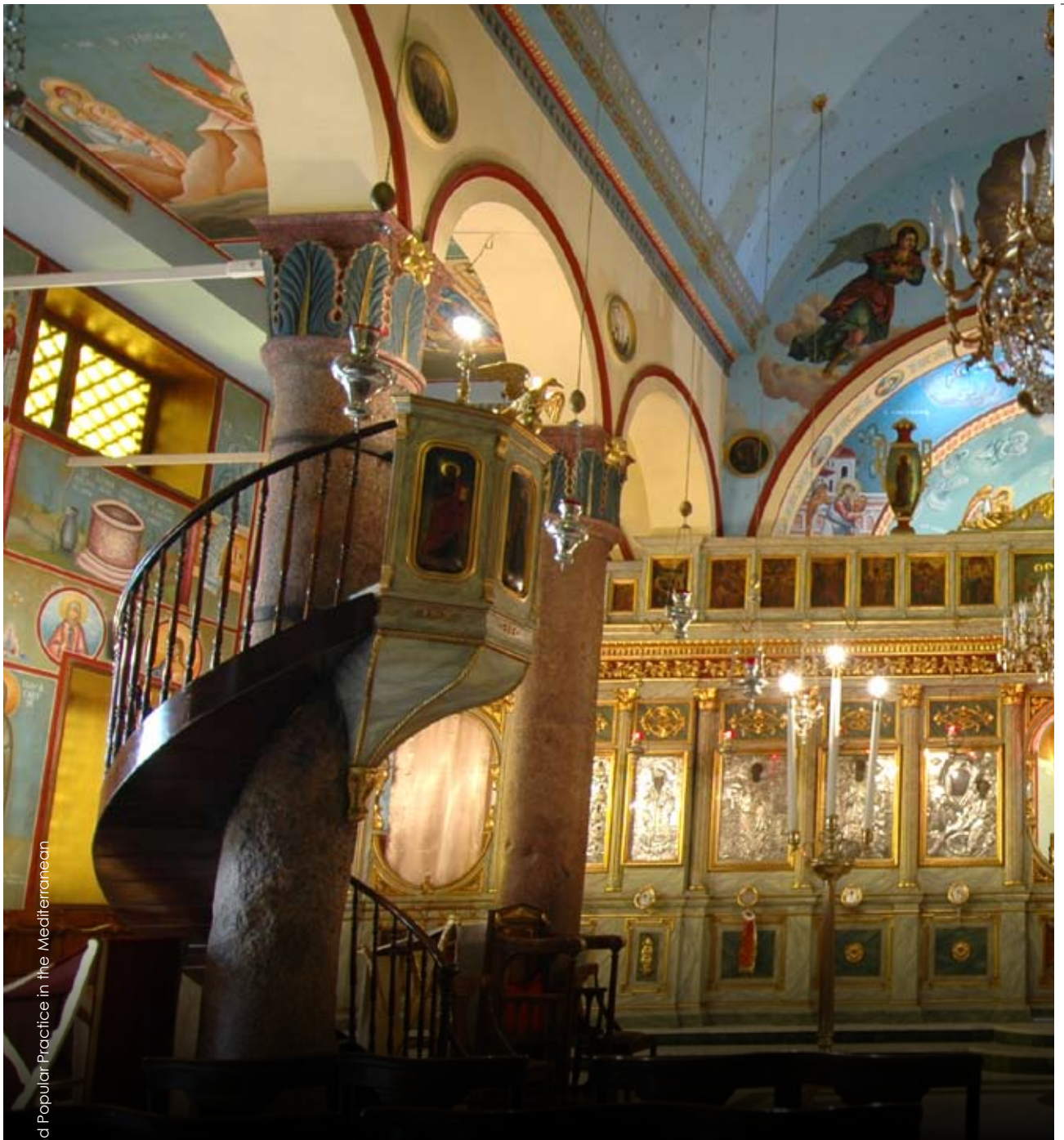
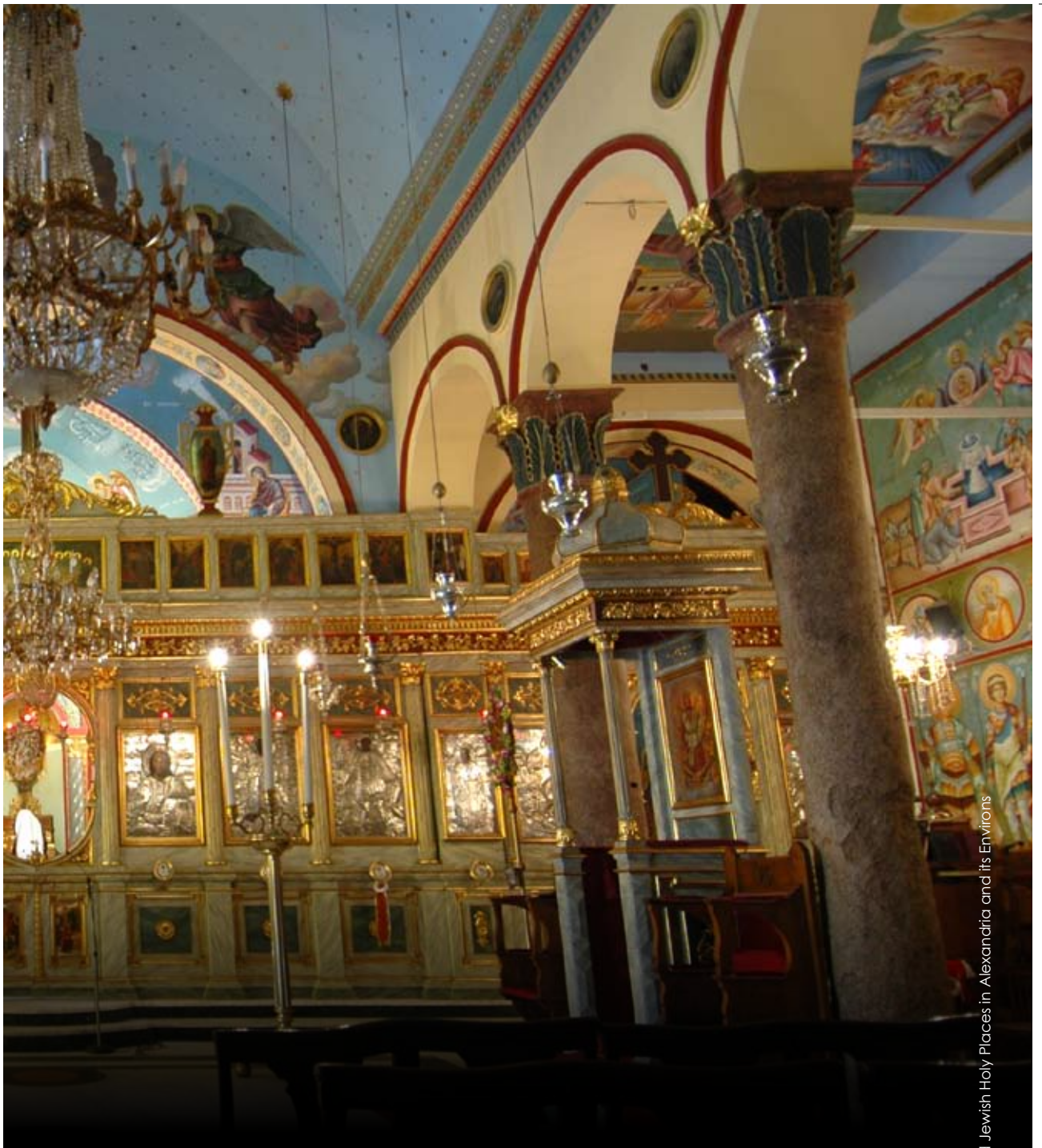


Fig. 3.70 Saint Sabba Monastery: view of the interior towards the templum. Ancient granite columns support the nave.

It is worthy of note that during the Ottoman period, Saint Sabba was used as a Maritime Consular Office for stamping maritime documents of vessels of Greek and other Eastern nationalities, which did not have their own consulate in Alexandria.



From the fifteenth century until very recently (1990 to the present), Saint Sabba has undergone a series of renovations which have considerably changed the church. Today, the floor level of its nave is two meters below the present street level. Six large red granite monolithic columns support the nave, although they do not have ancient capitals.

The Revival of the Greek Orthodox Church (nineteenth century – 1960s)

The renaissance of Alexandria by Mohamed Ali, due to his open-door policies when a mass influx of Greeks started in Egypt, was a phenomenon that contributed to the regeneration of the Greek presence in modern Egypt and notably in Alexandria. The Greek Community (EKA) was established in 1843.



Fig. 3.71 The court and the main building of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

Its growing wealth during this period resulted in the establishment of several institutions of public welfare such as hospitals, churches and schools, serving the growing Greek community. This included the construction of the Evangelismos Cathedral, which remains the biggest church in all Africa. Inaugurated on 25 March 1856, Evangelismos constitutes a true landmark for the Orthodox community of Alexandria.



Greek Religious Tourism and Pilgrims of Memory

Post the 1952 Revolution, the Greek Orthodox community of Alexandria shrunk considerably. Institutions and buildings, once symbols of a flourishing Hellenism, were reduced to silent witnesses of a past cosmopolitan era. In 1972, the building, once the Tossiza School, became the seat of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. During the second half the twentieth century the Patriarchate developed a remarkable missionary activity in several countries in Africa such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

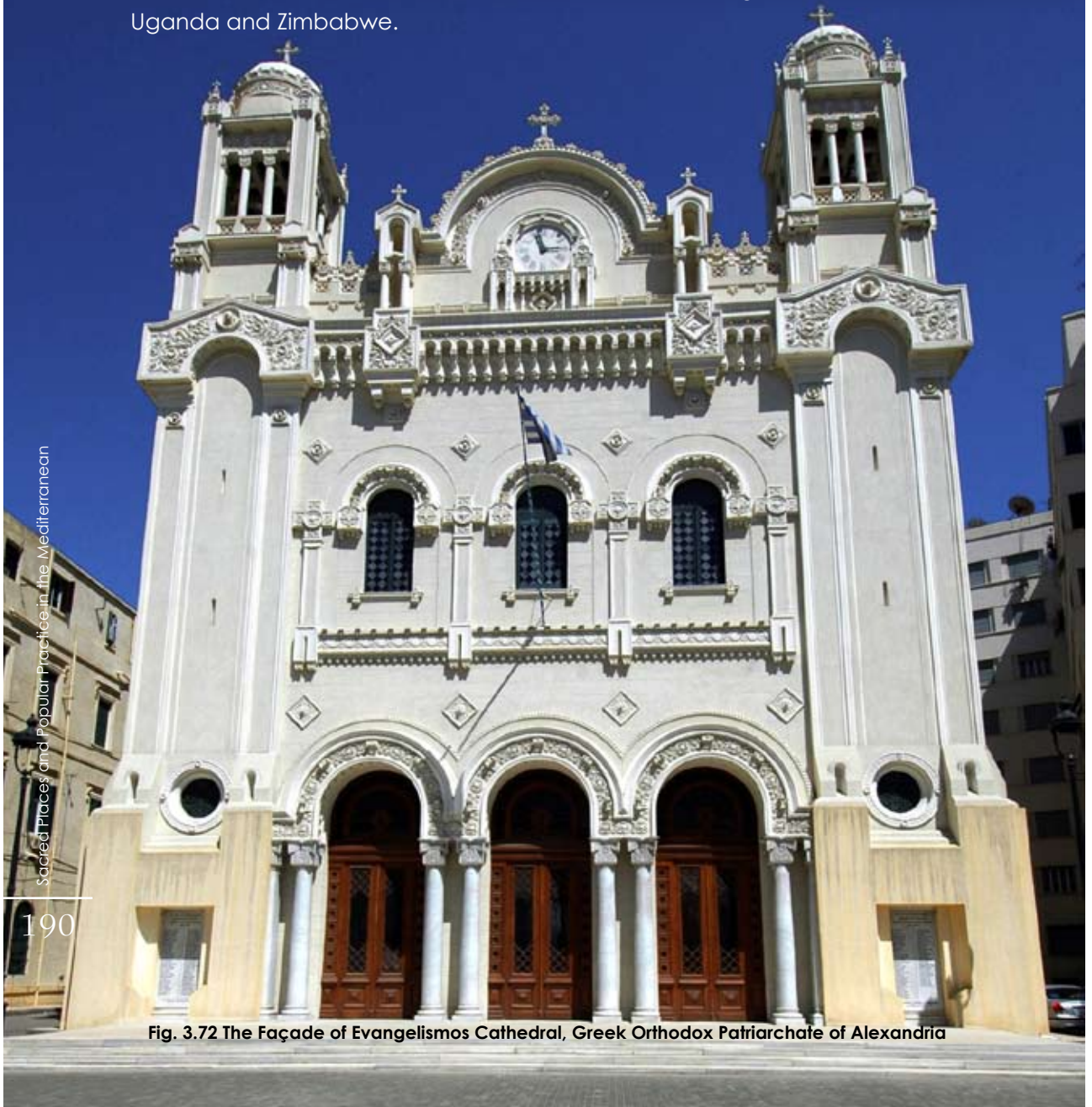


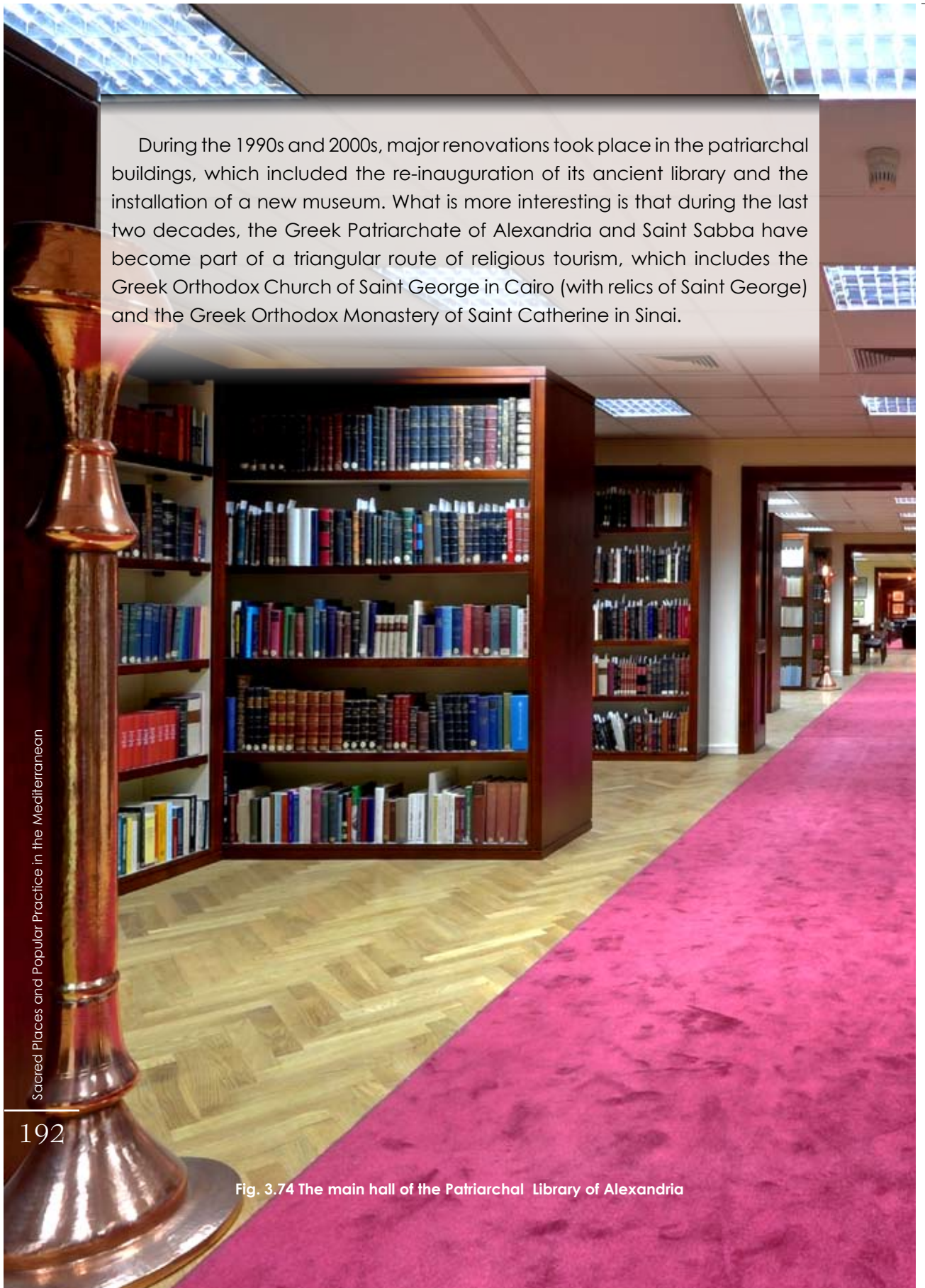
Fig. 3.72 The Façade of Evangelismos Cathedral, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria



Fig. 3.73 The reception hall of the Patriarchal Library of Alexandria

During the 1990s and 2000s, major renovations took place in the patriarchal buildings, which included the re-inauguration of its ancient library and the installation of a new museum. What is more interesting is that during the last two decades, the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria and Saint Sabba have become part of a triangular route of religious tourism, which includes the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Cairo (with relics of Saint George) and the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai.

Fig. 3.74 The main hall of the Patriarchal Library of Alexandria





The Greek Quadrangle of the community buildings and the Cavafy Museum became a destination of "pilgrimage" of Greek Alexandrian memory. Greeks, especially of Alexandrian origin, who constitute maybe the most systematic tourist group in the city, have become pilgrims of memory to Hellenism. Alexandria is a key destination along this route of memory, not only as a sanctuary, but also as a preserver of the spirit of Hellenism.

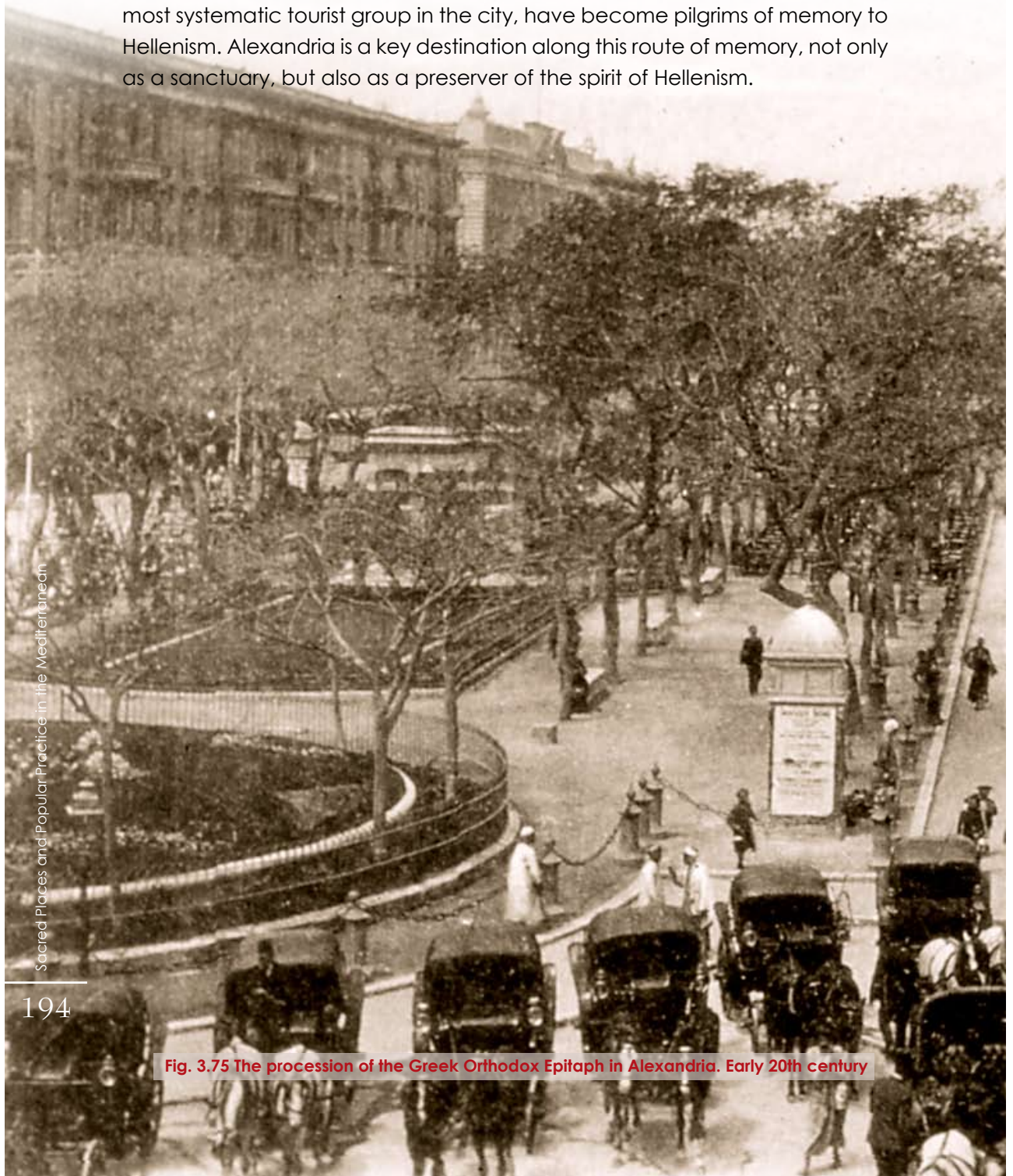


Fig. 3.75 The procession of the Greek Orthodox Epitaph in Alexandria. Early 20th century



Christian and Jewish Holy Places in Alexandria and its Environs



Fig. 3.76 The Greek Orthodox Epitaph ceremony in Evangelismos Cathedral, 2009

JEWISH PILGRIMAGE SITES

Yasmine Hussein

Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue

Until the second half of the twentieth century, between 30,000 and 40,000 Jews lived in Alexandria in a prosperous cosmopolitan community³⁰. They ran a number of the city's successful businesses. Some Jews of Alexandria still feel a nostalgia for the city and perform a "pilgrimage of memory"³¹. The most important place to visit in Alexandria for these nostalgic pilgrims of memory is the Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue, located in Nabi Daniel Street in downtown Alexandria. Where once there were about fifteen synagogues, eminent among which were the Menasce, Zaradel, Eliahou Hazan, Midrash, Green and Sasson Synagogues, only the 150-year-old Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue remains open. The others were closed, sold or demolished. The Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue stands with its vast hall lined with rows of thick Italian marble columns, arched stained glass windows, wrought iron chandeliers and a lofty women's gallery. Inside the synagogue's Sephardic compound there are a number of administrative buildings, a school, gardens and the rabbinical court³². The building, one of the largest synagogues in the Middle East, has room for over 700 worshipers. It still receives occasional small delegations of visitors of Alexandrian origin who have come in search of their family's history recorded in the synagogue's archives. This archive is a source of genealogical information, and also holds documents pertaining to rabbinical court records, rents, deeds, endowment contracts, acknowledgments of debt, marriage contracts and private letters, as well as 50 Torah scrolls, many of them collected from other defunct synagogues³³. The pilgrims come to see where their parents grew up and the sites which still bear the names of their Jewish founders. Some of them go to attend the moulid of Rabbi Abu Hassira³⁴ at Izbat Damtiouh, near Damanhur not far from Alexandria.



Fig. 3.77 The 150-year-old Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue



Moulid Jacob Abu Hassira

Born Yaccov Aharon in Morocco in 1807, Abu Hassira was a son of the chief rabbi of Morocco and is revered by Jews for his renowned piety and reputation for performing miracles. In 1879, the well-respected rabbi began his pilgrimage route from Morocco to the Holy Land via Egypt. According to Jewish belief, Abu Hassira crossed the Mediterranean on a hassira “mat” until he reached Alexandria. He settled in Damtiouh and died there³⁵.

His tomb is administered by the Jewish Community in Alexandria which is responsible for Jewish religious and charitable affairs in Alexandria and the Governorate of Beheira. The tomb is reached by a wide set of stairs. At the top of the stairs lies the tomb of the holy man. The rabbi’s grave is located in the interior facing the northeastern wall. “Here lies a good man who came from Morocco and went back to the dust” is engraved in Hebrew on his gravestone. Outside, the tomb is surrounded on three sides by 89 Jewish graves³⁶.

Popular Egyptian belief gives profound respect to holy men and their sites. Many of the local popular beliefs revolve around this tomb and the figure of Jacob Abu Hassira, considering him a *wali* or holy man. People come to visit the tomb seeking cures and to protect livestock from envy (the evil eye.) Pieces of paper listing the wishes of pilgrims can be found near the memorial as in the tombs of Coptic and Muslim holy men.

On 19 Tevet every year, the date of the rabbi’s death according to the Hebrew calendar, hundreds of Jews assemble to celebrate the festival of the revered rabbi. The pilgrimage lasts for a week. A six-year-old girl in a red dress greets visitors with shouts of “Shalom” on the tomb. At the celebration, most of the Jews—both men and women—cover their heads. The women cover their hair with either a white or dark colored veil, and the men cover their head with the *kibah*. In the area in front of the tomb, a large tent is erected and long tables are arranged inside. Small tents are set up for selling leather products, food, bottled water and paper plates. Some vendors located next to the tent sell different types of Jewish candlesticks while others walk around carrying various pictures of Rabbi Jacob Abu Hassira. In the beginning of the ceremony, there is an auction to decide on the first person to enter the tomb and the first person to light a candle for the holy man. The pilgrims take the water that is placed on the tomb and clean their face with it. Some of the men stand in a corner and pray; some of them read from a prayer book; others light candles for Abu Hassira. Women place biscuits on top of

the tomb before offering them to those present. They also place coins on the tombs before donating to them. After the celebration, the participants leave the tomb, some of the Jews go to the other tombs to obtain a handful of earth. Then the pilgrims begin to queue around the buffet where there are various types of food³⁷.

Endnotes

- 1 The correspondence of Emperor Hadrian refers to Alexandrian worshippers of Sarapis as Bishops of Christ. See the Sarapis Cult.
- 2 Strong, J. S., 1987
- 3 Maraval, P., 2002
- 4 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, in: Maraval, P. 2002
- 5 Origen, *Homily in Levit.*, in: Trocme, E., 1983
- 6 The same term is used in Islamic moulds to design the final evening celebration.
- 7 Ceroke, C.P., 2003, p. 182. and Senior, D.P., 1990, p. 719
- 8 Atiya, A.S., 1991, p. 1530
- 9 Ibid. p. 1533
- 10 Ibid. p. 1531
- 11 Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*
- 12 Gascou, J. 1998
- 13 Atiya, A.S., p. 1532
- 14 Sennoune, O., 2006
- 15 The Great Egyptian and Coptic Martyr, the Miraculous Saint Mena
- 16 The German archeologist, Carl Maria Kaufmann excavated the site in 1905–1907. The searches and restoration were undertaken successively by the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (1925–1929), then by the archeologist, Perkins. In 1951, a team from the Coptic Museum in Cairo discovered the ruins surrounding the ancient church.
- 17 <http://www.zeitun-eg.net/stcyril6.htm>
- 18 It is the highest Episcopal rank in the Eastern Church after the patriarch.
- 19 http://orthodoxwiki.org/Bishop_Kamel
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Watson, J.H., 1979
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Twelfth century. The exact dates are unknown.
- 25 Tillyrides, 1998
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 McKenzie, 2007
- 28 Tillyrides, 1998
- 29 Until the thirteenth century, when the seat was transferred to Cairo (Fustat), in the so-called Fortress of Babylon, (Old Cairo). Nonetheless, it remained officially recognized as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.
- 30 Krämer, G., 1989
- 31 Hassoun, J., 1990
- 32 <http://jewishstudies.psu.edu/>
- 33 Beinin, J., 1998

34 The name Abu Hassira means the owner of a straw mat.

35 Youssef, S., 1997

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SUFI MOULIDS IN MODERN ALEXANDRIA

SUFI MOULIDS IN MODERN ALEXANDRIA

Ayman Al Gohary and Azzura Samataro

Religious practices in the Mediterranean are very often connected with places that are considered sacred. This is why, dealing with the relation between sacred places and popular beliefs, it is important to mention moulids and the cult of saints in the Egyptian Muslim community in Alexandria. The relationship between human beings and holy places (such as shrines) has always had a great importance in the Egyptian religious life since Pharaonic times, when places like Thebes were important pilgrimage sites. Even if it is not completely correct to state that all these practices have one common origin, surprisingly we can find similarities between rituals from different cultures until nowadays.



Fig. 4.1 The shrine of Abu Al-Ikhlās



Fig. 4.2 The shrine of Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi

Moulids: Between Sacred and Profane

What is a moulid?

A moulid is "the term for the time, place or celebration of the birth of a person especially that of the prophet Mohamed or of a saint"¹. In Egypt and Sudan, this term refers to a celebration held on a periodical basis around the shrine of a *wali*². Even if Islam does not have a specific doctrine for sanctity, we can consider a *wali* as saint or a man blessed by God, who, due to his proximity to God possesses special qualities and powers. The *wali*, in fact, is usually thought to have a special relationship with God, and is, hence, blessed with *baraka* (enlightenment). Since the *wali* is a medium of discourse between God and his servant, this *baraka* is emitted and shared amongst the people that do the *ziyara* (visit) of his tomb.

The first celebration of a moulid in Egypt was held during the Fatimid period (from the tenth to the eleventh centuries), when a moulid in honor of the Prophet Mohamed PBUH was established by the Fatimid court³. Being of Shi'ite origin, the Fatimids gave great importance to the cult of the Holy Family or Ahl Al-Bayt celebrating moulids in their honor and spreading the practice of visiting their tombs⁴. This practice then developed in Egypt more than in other countries, due also to the importance of Sufi⁵ doctrine in Egypt.



Fig. 4.3 A pilgrim who celebrates his wali by wearing his picture on his headdress



Fig. 4.4 The shrine of wali Abu Al-ikhlas

The Quran states at more than one point that *awliya* (saints) have a special position among the believers (Qur. 56: 7-29, 39, 40-44), but the concept of saints and sanctity was later developed in detail by Sufism. Sufi theories about the different ways to attain knowledge and through it to reach proximity to God led the most important Sufi scholars to deal with the concept of closeness to God and which are the best ways to attain this. That is why most of the Islamic writings about the concept of sanctity were produced by important Sufi scholars such as Ibn Al-Araby, Al-Tirmidhi, Al-Isfahani, to mention only a few⁶.



Fig. 4.5 Pride of ancestry to the Holy Family and their cult: this certificate of appurtenance to the Holy Family is decorated with three painted figures of Ali, Hassan and Hussein although it is formally forbidden to Sunnites to represent prophets and their family.

The mediaeval and Mamluk period then saw an increasing manifestation and development of Sufism, especially in Syria and Egypt, and a large-scale participation of civil society in Sufi orders⁷. In this period, Sufism was established in Egyptian society so that the cult of saints and its celebration through moulids gained great importance in the spiritual life of Egyptians, to an extent that until nowadays moulids represent one of the most interesting manifestations of Egyptian popular piety.

Despite the spread of moulids all over Egypt until the present⁸, it is worth mentioning that this ritual has been the object of much controversy. Since Islam does not admit any worship except of the one of God (as the roots of the word *Islam* indicate), the celebration in honor of a man and his cult is considered *haram* (forbidden). This is why since medieval times the problem whether to consider a moulid permissible or not, has raised a big debate among Muslim *ulema*. From *Al-Suyuty* to *Ibn Taymyya*, many scripts have been dedicated to this topic, most of them considering a moulid as *bid'a*, an innovation in the worship introduced by men. As we will see, this polemic is still present in the Egyptian religious debate and, especially in recent years, the number of people against the celebration of moulids has increased due to the propaganda of new Islamist movements⁹.



Fig. 4.6 Large numbers of people attend the moulid

The Description of the Ritual of the Moulid

The ritual of the moulid is similar all over Egypt and can be described as follows: crowds gather for one or more days¹⁰; during this period not only religious but also commercial activities take place; a fair of varying size accompanies the religious celebration; *dhikr*, or Quranic readings, take place outside or inside the mosque where the shrine of the saint concerned is located. One or more processions are held in which participate the Sufi orders or descendants of the saint.



Fig. 4.7 Circle of *dhikr* inside the mosque



Fig. 4.8 Reading Quran and *dhikr* in tents outside the mosque



Fig. 4.9 The procession of Al-Brahimiya order



Fig. 4.10 The procession of Al-Bayoumeya order



Fig. 4.11 Children participate in the procession

Even though the *ziyara* is a ritual that can happen any day of the week, it is still the most important part of the *moulid*. The *ziyara* is usually led by a few rituals that are followed when entering the shrine where the tomb is located. The ritual starts with greeting the saint, followed by reading the first *surat* of the Quran, *Al-Fatiha*, following two *raka*'s of Islamic prayer, followed by touching the shrine.



Fig. 4.12 Touching the shrine to receive the *baraka*



Fig. 4.13 Kissing the shrine



Fig. 4.14 Praying in the shrine

After the ritual is completed inside the *maqam* (shrine), the celebration commences in the environs of the mosque that houses the shrine. Inevitably, with every religious celebration other benefits follow, apart from just the spiritual experience. Outside the shrine, the celebrations create an atmosphere similar to birthday celebrations. Lights and decorations are used to embellish the plaza, cafés are packed with visitors and children crowd the amusement installations in the plaza.

The entertainments include game booths, puppeteers and small theaters. Musicians performing *dhikr*, try to carry the sound over the chaos, with melodies that praise the Prophet Mohamed PBUH and the *wali* for whom the moulid is held.



Fig. 4.15 The festivities outside the shrine



Fig. 4.16 Shooting is one of the most popular games during *mouliids*

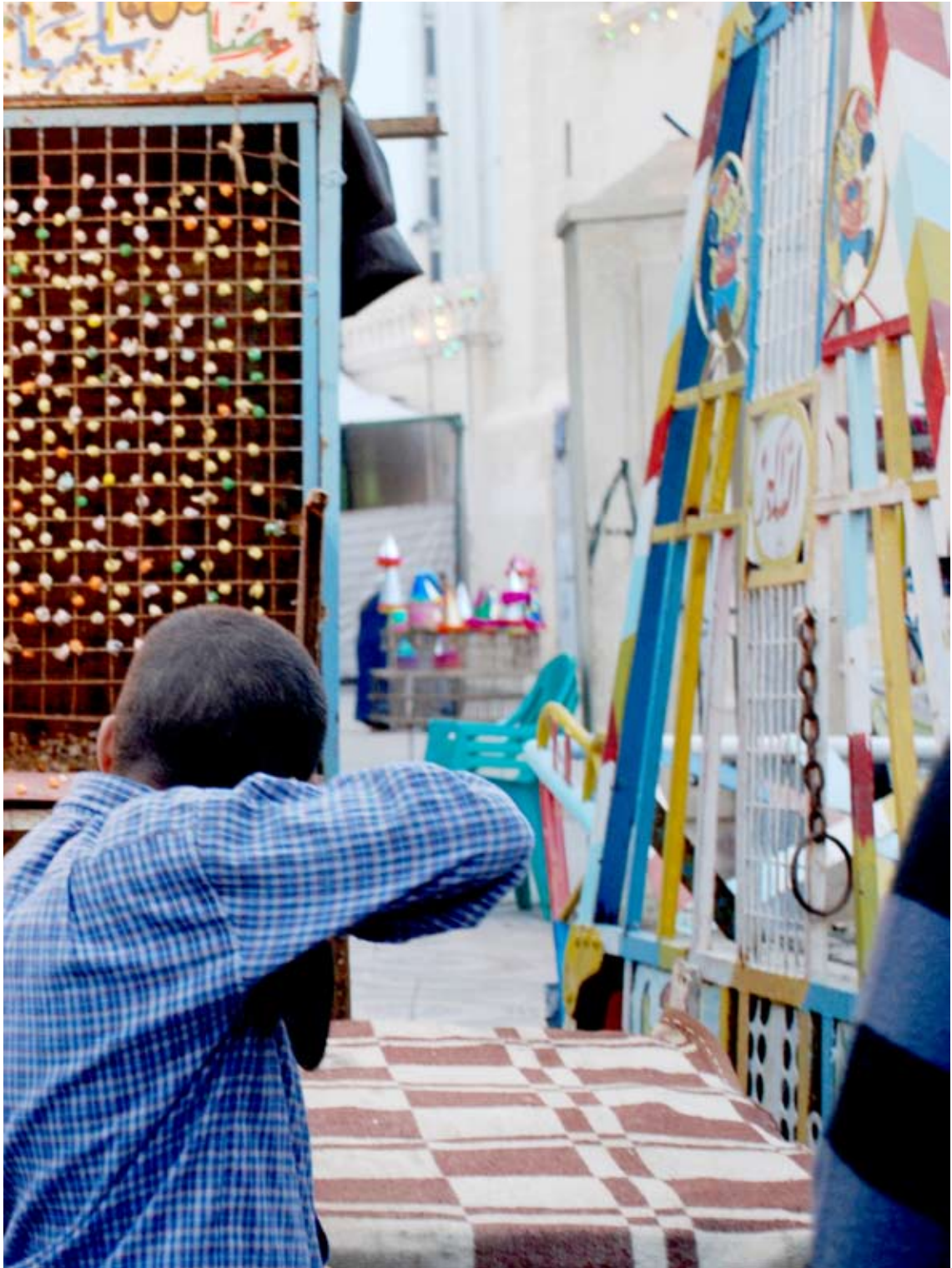




Fig. 4.17 The popular puppet show or aragoz for children





Fig. 4.18 Singers of praise





Fig. 4.19 Sweet vendors



Fig. 4.20 Even the confectionery stand is decorated with the wali's picture



Fig. 4.21 Popular moulid sweets

The festivity is supported by stalls that sell different kind of food to satisfy the large numbers of pilgrims in the plaza. The most eye-catching type of food is sweets. The vendors sit amongst many different small sculptures of sugar, the most significant being the *arooset al moulid* (doll of the moulid), followed by others shaped as ducks, rabbits and dogs. A recurrent scene is that of a vendor behind a pan filled with boiling oil, with *falafel*, *kebabs* and *kifta* for sale. The *tharida*, or more colloquially called *fatta*, is a dish usually distributed amongst the visitors of the shrine after having completed their *ziyara*; it consists of rice soaked in tomato sauce spiced with garlic and local spices, topped with boiled meat cubes.



Fig. 4.22 The distribution of fatta



Fig. 4.23 The distribution of the popular desert *zalabia*

The beverages sold in the moulids are similar to the ones sold in the Muslim feasts and during the holy month of Ramadan. These include mainly *karkadee* (hibiscus), *carob* (juice), *erkesous* (licorice juice), *tamr hendy* (tamarind juice), lemonade, *sharbat* (sorbet), tea, and *helba* (fenugreek) most of which have existed since Pharaonic times. This is not what makes a moulid, but it is its profane popular aspect which is important to understand the role of moulids in Egyptian society. A big part of the celebration is characterized by the expression of popular beliefs. This is evident especially because the public of moulids consists mainly of the lower classes of society, for whom the celebration of a *wali*, or saint, is an occasion to get close to saint, and obtain some *baraka* from the proximity with his tomb, and indirectly by being closer to God but at the same time it is the occasion to enjoy some festivity. What is interesting in the popular aspects of moulids is the use and reinterpretation of the Sufi doctrine for a popular ritual.



Fig. 4.24 The beverage vendor in traditional costume



Fig. 4.25 The guardian of the shrine



Fig. 4.26 The most famous personage in the Alexandrian mould known as the *majzoub*, a term meaning "passionate with God's love"

The Connections between the Cult of Saints and the Popular Aspects of Sufism

It is important to make a distinction between Sufism and the popular aspects of Sufism. *Awliya* (saints) in Islam are most celebrated within Sufism. The saints acquire such status when they live as servants of God, performing rituals in complete denial of themselves channeling their desires and habits to the teachings of the Prophet, and living to please the Lord in love and compassion. This self-denial for the *wali* is not sacrifice, pain or despair, but rather the enjoyment in the being and offering of his complete existence to God.

Sheikh Gaber Qassim, deputy sheikh of Sufi orders in Alexandria and its environs, who speaks of Sufism as the spiritual enlightenment and *ilahy* (godly) approach to Islam, stresses that *walis* do not reveal themselves but that it is the Lord that reveals them to the followers. He gives examples of the *wali* continuously being seen in dreams of pious worshipers who were *mureedin* (disciples of the *wali*). The process of *lzhar* (revelation) constitutes of signs from Allah that the lifestyle of the *wali* granted him a status that led him to be one of the *moqarabeen ila Allah* (close ones to God).

The *awliya* are elevated in the *barzakh* (where the spirit of the dead awaits the resurrection of the body). The *barzakh* is hypothetically where the spirit of the *wali* meets the unknown, usually in his *khilwa* (place of solitude) and he becomes blessed with vision. In fact, being one of the *moqarabeen ila Allah* is not through the servant seeking closeness to God, but due to God choosing him, he consumes him in His essence, so that he sees nothing but his Lord. Therefore, the words of God according to the Prophet are fulfilled: "There is no distinction between Me and him". And in a similar saying: "I become his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he strikes, and his leg with which he walks."¹¹

The servant of God becomes a friend of God, and it becomes only normal that he would be blessed with *karamat* (traits accompanying the *wali*) that would see him, in the natural world, as a supernatural being enlightened by his intimacy with God. *Karamat* become evidence that the servant is well loved by God and holds a special place that presents him as one of His *awliya*. *Sirat Al-Wali* (the chronicles of the saint) are extensively studied and followed by his followers hoping to one day be blessed likewise.

Al-Sayed Burhan Al-Din Abu Al-Ikhlās is known to have been one of the most recent *walis* in Alexandria, blessed with *karamat* that were evident to his

murideen and to everyone else who sought him for enlightenment. He was known to have acquired wisdom and knowledge on every subject, varying from physics to philosophy to medicine. In addition, he was famously known for the ability to converse in any language spoken to him. Crowning all these traits, he knew the names of his visitors, what they were thinking, and the reason of their visit with the help of a single glance. He also knew his *murideen* before seeing them; he knew them all before their birth. Not just that, he was also famous in showing sinners the path back to Allah, after a short visit. He had convincing eyes, strong charisma, and endless wisdom. The *wali*, is now very highly regarded and his *tariqa Al-Ikhlaseya*, is followed by many Egyptians from every region. His *moulid* is usually crowded with followers of his *tariqa* and his *murideen*, some of whom lived during the *wali's* life and were personally chosen by him.



Fig. 4.27 Al-Sayed Burhan Al-Din Abu Al-Ikhlis, one of the most recent *awliya* in Alexandria



Fig. 4.28 Selling the picture of Abu Al-Ikhlis to followers

From the process of *izhar* came five major *aqtab* (poles) of Sufism followed in the Sufi beliefs. The five *walis* that developed the *aqtab* are Sidi Ahmed Al-Jilani, whose shrine and mausoleum are now in Iraq, Sidi Ahmed Al-Rifai also buried in Iraq, Sidi Ahmed Al-Badawi who is buried in Tanta, Egypt, and whose *moulid* is considered to be the major *moulid* in the country, Sidi Ibrahim Al-Dessouki, who was born and buried in Dessouk, Egypt, and is known as *Al-Wali Al-Mahali* (Local Saint), and finally there is Abu Al-Hassan Al-Shazouli who is buried in Humaisera, the Red Sea. With each *wali* there was the birth of a new *qutb* (pole), but it did not stop there since some of the *mureedin* of these *walis* learnt from their teachers what qualified them to eventually become *walis* themselves, for example Sidi Ali Al-Bayoumi who was a *mureed* of Sidi Ahmed Al-Badawi ended up becoming a *wali* himself and the *tariqa* (order)¹² Al-Bayoumeya was formed. Hence, today there exist sixty-seven *tariqas* of Sufism which are registered with the Ministry of Endowments.



Fig. 4.29 The flag of Al-Shazli order



Fig. 4.30 A mureed of Sidi Al-Bayoumi, bearing the red color of the Al-Bayoumeya order

Who are the Saints? Characteristics of Sanctity

The belief that God blesses a saint and that his shrine is a place of enlightenment is shared in folk culture. In fact, it is more probable that prayers are to be answered in the vicinity of a shrine of a *wali* that is believed to have had a particular relation with God. The belief can be dynamic and interlinked between religions. For instance, Muslims in the small village of Damtiouh visit the shrine of the Jewish Saint Jacob Abu Hassira, to ask for favors before the Friday prayers. In Musha, a village very close to Assiut, Christians participate in the moulid of the Sheikh Abd Al-Fattah, who was, a Muslim. Sheikh Abd Al-Ghaffar, a Muslim saint, who also used to be the mayor of the village of Badraman, in the governorate of Al-Minya, was known for his generosity and is visited during his moulid by the Christians of the village. Until this day, the Christians usually take part in all the activities

the *dhikr*. In Bayyadaya, a district of Mallawi, the majority of the 25,000 inhabitants are Copts, mostly Orthodox with a minority of Catholics. During the moulid of the Virgin on 21 August, everyone in the village, including Muslims, takes part in the celebration, which includes a procession through the village carrying the statue of the Virgin. Incidents of peoples of different faiths interacting spiritually during moulids occur occasionally within certain Egyptian communities. Amongst the different popular cults practiced in Egypt at different epochs, they all share similar concepts in what makes a saint, his impact on the community and the kinds of miracles that granted him his status. In contemporary Egyptian society, Islam is the most common religion in practice, and Sufism is the branch that holds the most frequent celebrations of saints¹³.



Fig. 4.31 Most of the pilgrims are farmers who believe in the sanctity of Muslim or Christian saints

The Main Moulids in Alexandria¹⁴

Alexandria acting as Egypt's gateway to other Mediterranean cities, hosted travelers coming from across the sea, mainly from Spain and Morocco. Consequently, Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi, who traveled from Murcia, Spain found himself settling in the city of Alexandria. His knowledge and humility led to his becoming a saint, for whom a shrine was eventually built. The shrine then became the focus of Alexandria's biggest moulid, and the main attraction to pilgrims from different Arab countries and South East Asia.



Other moulids in Alexandria include four major ones: Sidi Bishr, Sidi Kamal, Sidi Mohamed Al-Rahal and Sidi Jabir. Many citizens residing in Upper Egypt travel to Alexandria escaping the heat to profit from the coolness of the Mediterranean summer. This has created a good opportunity to revive the economical status of the city. Hence, these moulids are held in the summer, one commencing after the other. Ironically, the moulids are not celebrated on their proper dates of the Islamic calendar, but rather according to the Gregorian calendar. The dynamics of the moulids starting in sequence made the culture of the celebration an interesting one where the same caravans shift from one shrine to the next.



Fig. 4.33 Peddlers selling toys move from one moulid to the next

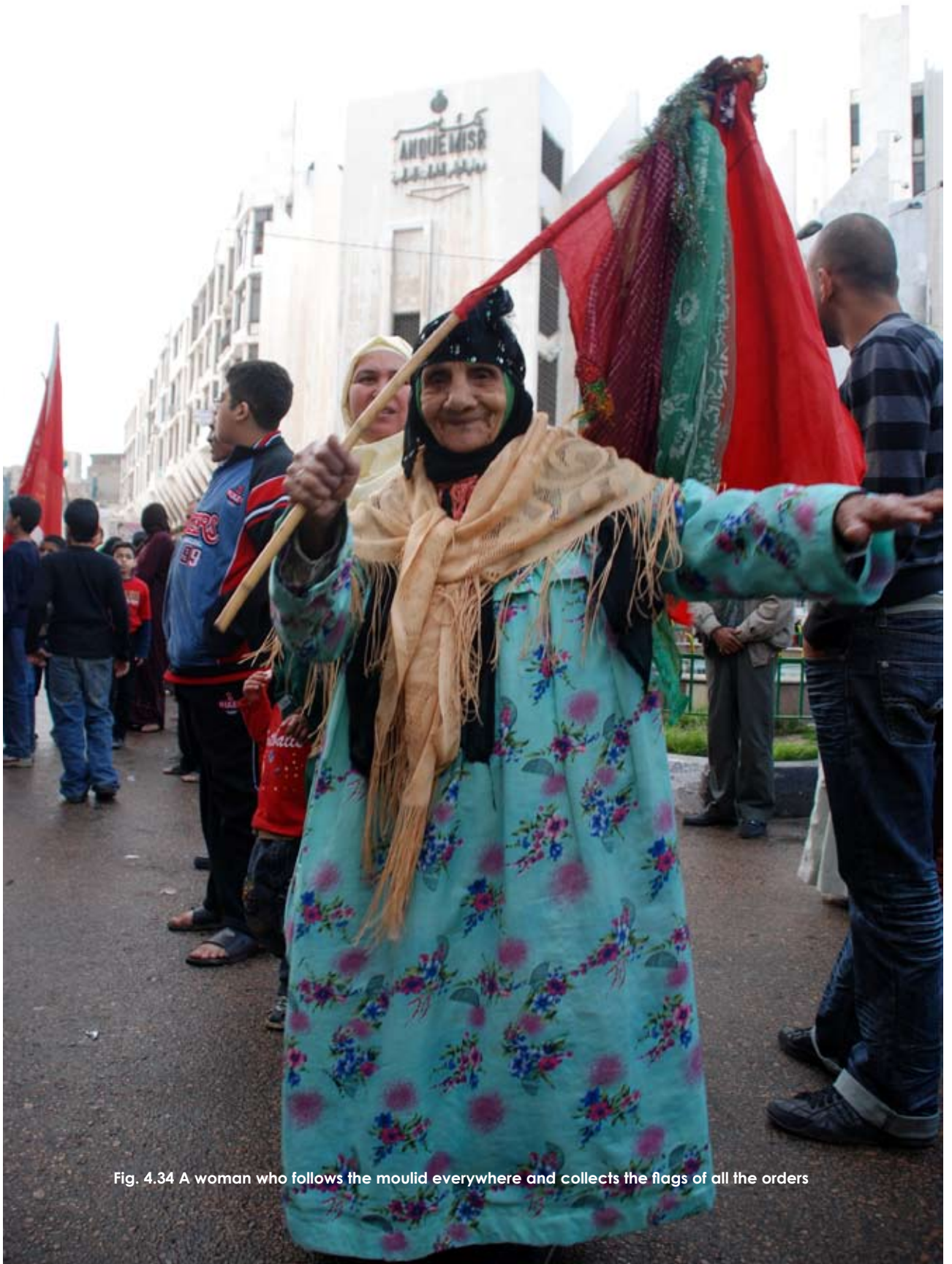


Fig. 4.34 A woman who follows the moulid everywhere and collects the flags of all the orders

Sidi Bishr

Bishr Ibn Al-Hussein Abdallah Ibn Al-Hussein Ibn Bishr Al-Gohari, descended from the line of the Bishrs who had a special standing as preachers. He came to Alexandria at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century according to the Islamic Calendar (twelfth century CE), along with the *ulama* who came from the Maghreb and Andalusia during that period. Sidi Bishr Al-Gohari was a hermit devoted to worship and prayer. He gave up the material world and lived in a distant, lonely spot. When he died in 528 H / 1133 CE, a shrine was set up for him there, and as the city expanded eastwards, a new mosque was built for him at the end of the nineteenth century. The mosque was renovated during the reign of Khedive Abbas II and a railway line was laid to the mosque, so that the khedive could pray there when he was in Alexandria. The mosque was renovated once more in 1945 CE so that it became four times its original size¹⁵.



Fig. 4.35 The mosque of Sidi Bishr

Sidi Jabir

He was called Jabir ibn Ishak ibn Ibrahim ibn Ahmed ibn Mohamed Al-Ansari¹⁶ and his lineage goes back to Sa'd ibn 'Ibada, a close friend of the Prophet Mohamed PBUH. He was born and raised in Andalusia at the beginning of the thirteenth century, then went to Fez in Morocco, then to Tripoli, Libya and from there to Cairo where he sojourned for a while with his relative, who was known to be a devoted Sufi, from whom Sidi Jabir learned Islamic jurisprudence. When his relative died, Sidi Jabir moved to Alexandria and lived there. He built a zawiya (little mosque) in the area now known as Sidi Jabir and which was then uninhabited land. He taught many followers what he had learned, till he died in Alexandria in 697 H / 1298 CE at the age of 90. He wrote many books on the language and miracles of the Quran¹⁷.

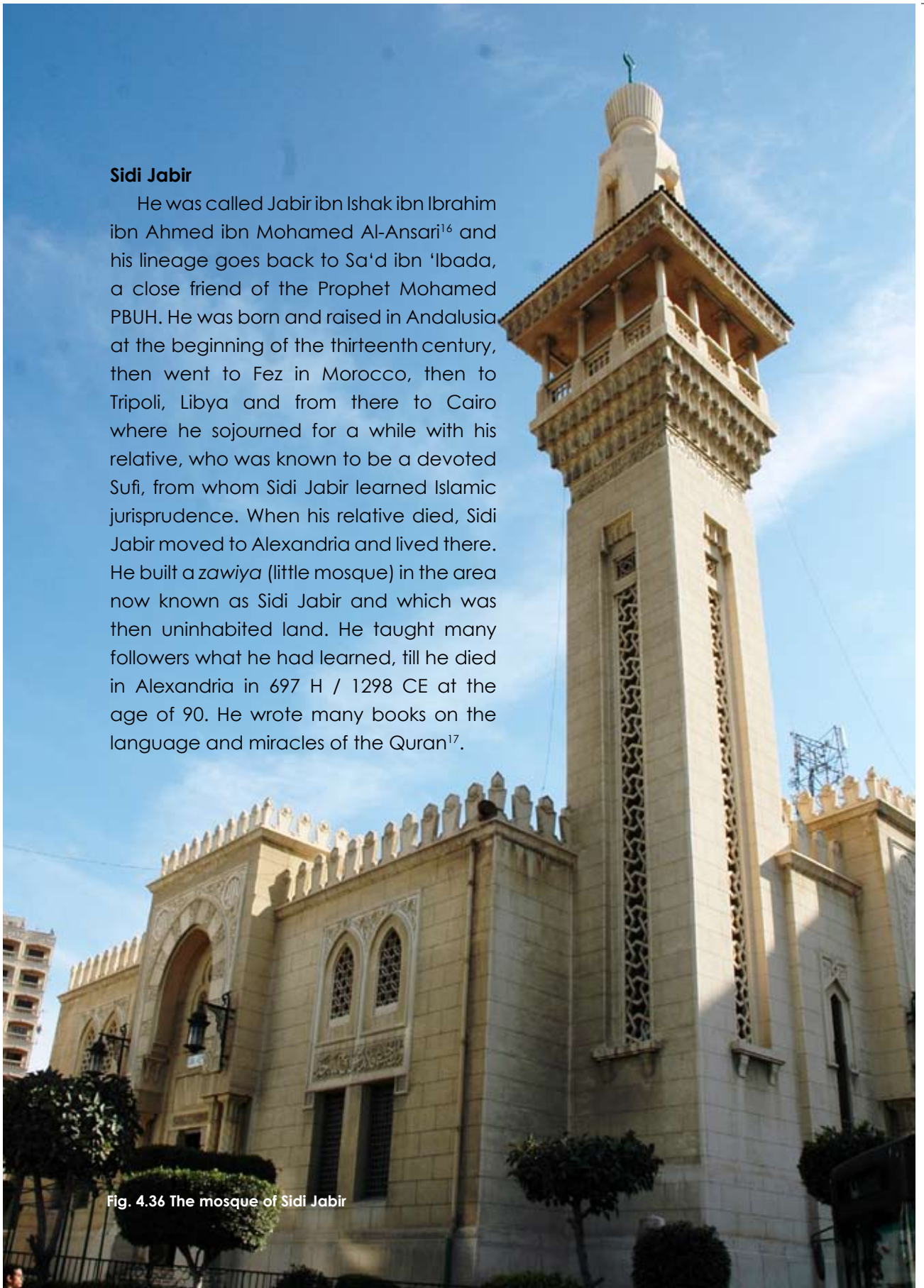


Fig. 4.36 The mosque of Sidi Jabir



Fig. 4.37 The entrance of the shrine of Sidi Jabir

Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi

The lineage of Shihab Al-din Abu Al-Abbas Ahmed Al-Mursi Al Ansari Al Iskandari has been traced back to Sa'd ibn 'Ibada¹⁸, the companion of the Prophet Mohamed PBUH. Sidi Abu Al-Abbas was born in 616 H / 1219 CE in Murcia in Andalusia, where he spent his childhood and received his early Islamic education. Like most Andalusians, he followed the sect of Imam Malek¹⁹. Abu Al-Abbas and his older brother, Abu Abdallah Gamal Aldin, worked with their father Omar ibn Ali, a merchant of Murcia. In 640 H / 1242 CE, when Abu Al-Abbas was twenty-four, his family decided to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, the family boarded a Mediterranean ship which ran into a storm near Bouna along the Tunisian Coast, leaving both of Abu Al- Abbas' parents drowned. The two sons survived and made their way to Tunisia. There, Abu Al-Abbas met Sheikh Abu Al Hasan Al Shazli, the founder of one of the five major Sufi orders. Abu Al-Abbas became Abu Al -Hasan's favorite disciple frequently visiting him in his zawiya at the bottom of Mount Zaghwan in Tunisia. Abu Al-Hasan was very fond of his follower, Abu Al-'Abbas, and married him to his own daughter, Bahga²⁰.

When Abu Al-Hasan Al-Shazli left Tunisia for Egypt, his students and followers went with him, among them his faithful student, Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi. They arrived at the city walls of Alexandria entering through the city gate of Bab Sidra, facing Pompey's Pillar, where they pitched camp. Then Abu Al-Hasan found a house near Kom Al-Dimas (now known as Kom Al-Dikka), where he lived with his friends, amongst them Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi. In the year 646 H / 1248 CE, when Sheikh Abu Al-Hasan Al-Shazli lost his eyesight due to advancing age, he appointed Abu Al-Abbas as his successor in educating his disciples and students. Thus, Abu Al-Abbas spent 34 years in Alexandria educating minds and souls²¹, until his death in 686 H / 1287 CE. He was buried in Bab Al-Bahr cemetery, later known as the cemetery of Sidi Al-Mursi, in the Eastern Harbor. Nothing was constructed on top of it, until the year 706 H / 1307 CE, when one of the greatest merchants of Alexandria, Sheikh Zin Al-Din ibn Al-Qatan, decided to build a shrine surmounted by a dome on the tomb. He then built a mosque with four minarets to enclose the shrine, and appointed an imam and ushers to take care of it. In 1189 H / 1775 CE Sheikh Abu Al-Hasan Ali ibn 'Abdallah Al-Mağrabi visited Alexandria and found that the mosque was dilapidated and unfit for prayers, so he renovated most of it and expanded parts of it. Once again, the mosque was neglected and fell to ruin, until Ahmed Bey Al-Dakhkhani, sheikh of

بروز نصر العارفين بالله،
أبي العباس المرسي رضي الله عنه

٢٦ محرم ١٢٤٠ هـ

بروز أبي العباس والعارفين المرسي
أحبك حباً في الحبيب محمد
وقد وفدت شوقاً إلى روضه نفسي
أنت أبا العباس والشوق جاذبي
إليك فلاح النور من أفق الشمس
وأنوار عام الله بالحب لا الحدس
ترأى ضياء الوجه منك مشاهداً
شهدت جمال الله في العرش والكرسي
أيا نجوم أهل الحب علماً وحكمة
سقاك طهور الحب من غير ما كس
صحت أبا الحسن المسمى بشاذلي
ورثت من الأحوال والعام والهدى
وخضت بحار العارفين مجاهداً
فشاهدت غيب الأي بالعين في الراس
وربيت أفراداً كراماً أئمة
رسيت على بحر الحقيقة يا مرسي
قتلت بسيف الحب أحياء ربنا
على منهج القرآن بالماخذ القدسي
أحب ألقى المرسي لله راجياً
حياة يقين بانمحاء الريب واللبس
وحبك يا مرسي في الله بحجة
جوار رسول الله في روض فردوس
أحب محب الله في الله راغباً
بها نيل ما ترجوه من ربها نفسي
جوار رسول الله في حظوة الأئمة
أفوز بنيل الاتصال بلا باس
أهني بطيبة بالوصال مؤيداً
بروح رسول الله من قبس الشمس
الجزء يسير من مرضى البرهانم .. سليل آل البيت .. خرمجة بناع مخلص الشعب بالقاهرة
سنة د بكون ضياء القلوب به فضل علام يقينيه .. الجزء الثاني .. ليلو ام

Fig. 4.38 A poem of praise to Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi

the masons of Alexandria, renovated it once more in 1280 H / 1863 CE, and bestowed many endowments upon it. His followers continued the process of renovation and expansion²². In 1927 CE, the Ministry of Endowments took charge of constructing the present mosque, with its lofty minaret overlooking the Eastern Harbor at Anfoushi. It was built in the Andalusian style that was prevalent in the Ayoubid period Abu Al-Abbas lived in. The mosque included prayer sections for men and women. Its distinguishing mark is its Arabesque and Andalusian decorations, with its marble and octagonal columns. The western dome rises above the shrines of Abu Al-Abbas and his two sons, while the coastal dome rises above the shrines of several other pious worshipers and scholars including Ibn Abi Sama, Ibn Al-Hajib, and Al-Fakahani.



Fig. 4.39 The shrine of Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi



Fig. 4.40 The moulid of Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi



Fig. 4.41 Followers of all ages of Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi

Sheikh Yaqut Al-Arsh

Sheikh Yaqut ibn Abdallah Al-Shazli was a student of Sheikh Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi. The renowned historian, Jalal Al Din Al-Seyuti, said that Yaqut ibn Abdallah was righteous and blessed, dignified and reverent, and that he had taken the same footsteps as Sheikh Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi. Yaqut Al-Arsh was born and raised in Abyssinia, he was then kidnapped and sold, and exchanged from one owner to another before finally arriving in Egypt. When he heard of Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi he decided to meet him, and was from then onwards so greatly influenced by him that he decided to follow and serve him. Abu Al-Abbas loved him and brought him closer to him, marrying him to his daughter Bahgah, who was the granddaughter of Sheikh Abu Al-Hasan Al Shazli. He died at the age of 80, in the evening of the 18 Jumadi Al-Akhira 732 H / 1331 CE in Alexandria where he was buried. A mosque was built on his grave, close to that of Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi. His mosque collapsed and was also renewed by the sheikh of the masons in Alexandria, Ahmed Bey Al-Dakhkhni, in 1280 H / 1863 CE, who endowed its renovation.

The epithet *Al-Arsh* meaning “the throne”, here referring to God's throne, was given to him after his death by Sufi followers who believed that he had such an extreme love for God that his heart was tied to Him and to his throne. Sheikh Yaqut Al-Arsh was a famous performer of the call for prayers, and it is also said that he only performed the call for prayers when he had heard it being performed from above the throne (presumably by the angels). This legend is circulated more commonly now, yet neither the epithet nor the miracle seem to have been written down by any contemporary Islamic historians such as Al-Suyuti, who lived during lifetime of Sheikh Yaqut.

The calendar of the main moulids in Alexandria²³

Celebration	Address	Date
Sidi Abu Al-Ikhlās	Gheit Al-Enab	31 March–6 April
Sidi Abd Al-Salam Radwan	Manshieh	12–14 June
Sidi Mohamed Al-Ajami	Gate 8 behind Al-Qoweiri Mosque	15–18 June
Sidi Mohamed Al-Maghrabi	Karmouz	19–25 June
Sidi Ibrahim Abd Al-Ba'ith	Ghorbal, Moharrem Bey	26 June–2 July
Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi	Gumruk	3–9 July
Sidi Jabir	Sidi Jabir	10–16 July
Sidi Bishr	Sidi Bishr	17–23 July
Sidi Kamal	Mandara	24–30 July
Sidi Mohamed Al-Rahal	Mamoura Al-Balad	31 July–6 August
Sidi Mohamed Al-Qabbari	Mina Al-Basal	14–20 August



Fig. 4.42 Map of the soufi pilgrimage sites in Alexandria, courtesy of Alex Med

- 1. Sidi Abd Al-Salam Radwan 2. Sidi Mohamed Al-Maghrabi 3. Sidi Ibrahim Abd Al-Ba'ith 4. Sidi Jabir
- 5. Sidi Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mursi 6. Sidi Kamal 7. Sidi Mohamed Al-Rahal 8. Sidi Mohamed Al-Qabbari

Conclusion

The cult of saints is familiar to Egyptian Copts and Muslims. The belief in eternal life and that the dead affect the living by interceding for them has existed throughout Egyptian history. Coptic and Muslim moulids have many identical features such as the propagation of vendors' stands, the gathering of families and friends, the wearing of tattoos and attractions for children. But the point is that Muslims and Copts in Egypt are the same population, they did not copy from one another, and they evolved together influencing each other.

Endnotes

- 1 De Jong, F., in: Encyclopedia of Islam, 2002
- 2 In other Arab countries different terms are used to express the same thing such as "mawasim" in the Maghreb.
- 3 Boaz S., 2002
- 4 Sanders P., 1994
- 5 Islamic mysticism
- 6 Radtke B., in: Encyclopedia of Islam, 2002
- 7 McGregor R., and Sabra, A., 2006
- 8 In Egypt every year about 300 moulids are celebrated.
- 9 Schielke J. S., 2006
- 10 A moulid can last from four to seven days.
- 11 Hoffman V. J., 1995, p.1
- 12 Tariqa is the singular term used for Turuq in Arabic.
- 13 Elhamy, O., 2008
- 14 Al Gohary, A., 2008
- 15 Yusef, N., 2001, p.179-180
- 16 He is also referred to locally in Alexandria as Sidi Gaber.
- 17 Yusef, N., 2001, p. 180-181
- 18 Bardi, Ibn Tagr 2008, p. 381
- 19 There are four main schools that have been mostly popular throughout the history of Islam. They only differ in the application of the Sharia, and then only slightly. The differences depend on the period and place when the schools' founders lived, due to their respective attempts to apply the theory of Islam on their society. The four schools are Al Shafaei, Al Hanbali, Al Hanafi and Al Malaki.
- 20 Yusef, N., 2001, p.162

- 21 Al Seyuti, J., 1967, p. 523
- 22 Mubarak, A., 1987 p.188
- 23 Elhamy, O., 2008



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CHAPTER FIVE

HOLY CAVES AND SANCTUARY CAVES OF THE MIDDLE
AND MODERN AGES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE
EASTERN SIDE OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

HOLY CAVES AND SANCTUARY CAVES OF THE MIDDLE AND MODERN AGES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Virginia Barciela González

In the interior area of the East Central Iberian Peninsula there are many underground cavities named holy caves, in Spanish *cuevas santas* or *santas cuevas*. They are located in a precise geographical zone, mostly in a rural environment, and their creation as holy areas took place in a certain temporal space, related to very specific historical and religious processes, such as the Islamic presence in the Iberian Peninsula, the Christian reconquest of this territory and Marian worship.

Despite the acknowledgement of the existence of these places, their current role in research does not include all the abundant information that can be found about them. Consequently, the aim of this project is the global study from diverse perspectives of a set of caves, which allows collecting mostly unprecedented and unknown written and archeological documentation. The objective is to define the characteristics of a process which started in the Middle Ages and changed during the Modern Ages during which in some cases the caves still remain places of worship or pilgrimage.

Caves as Sacred Spaces: Conceptual Aspects

The caves regarded as sacred are underground spaces where cults related to a certain divinity take place. They are mainly dark caves of diverse morphology, with formations and natural spaces — such as the presence of water in springs and lakes — provided with a ritual meaning, which makes them become places for devotion. Research projects conducted in this regard do not always allow us to know the precise reasons which lead to the conversion of the cavity into a cult place. Moreover, these reasons vary depending on the historical context, as well as their general consideration.

In the historiography of this topic, three different concepts have been used for these underground spaces, such as sacred or holy cave, ritual cave and sanctuary cave¹.

In some projects, these terms are used indistinctly to mention the cavities, whereas in others this denomination seems to have functional implications, even though the considered variables are not always defined. However, theological and etymological analyses, as well as the archeological and historical studies conducted, point out important details that must be taken into account. Ritual caves could be places to perform certain rites linked to traditions and customs, without necessarily being sacred spaces or sanctuaries. Consequently, their function could be not directly related to a deity, even though there is a subjacent religious feeling.

Holy or sacred caves, on the other hand, directly refer to something belonging to the field of the divine. Such places can be explained thanks to the presence of a divinity or because there is a chance to get in touch with this deity by participating in some actions such as cult or healing. The holy is not a religious, but a cultural category. As a result, many of these places can be considered as sacred by people belonging to different religions. These rites usually have both a character and a value of individual nature, since the conversion of this space to a particular religion depends on the faith professed by the believer². Thus, the cave is neither sacred nor inviolable in itself; it became sacred since the moment it was related to a specific divinity³.

Finally, the sanctuary cave means the institutionalization of a cult linked to a specific religion and community. These are places where you can get in touch with a particular venerated divinity. Pious people not only go to sanctuaries as individuals but also as members of a collective, which, by means of pilgrimage, strengthen social and religious bonds.

The information available about each of the studied caves does not always allow us to ascribe them to an exact denomination. On the contrary, generally, it is difficult to know if the denomination of sacred or sanctuary cave concerns the totality of the cavity or just the space used for cult or rites. For this reason, the use of two other terms should be used to refer some of those aforementioned spaces: the in-cave sanctuary and the sacred in-cave space, depending on the case.

The Origin and Evolution of Cult in caves in the Mediterranean Context

Sacred caves are related to cultures all over the Mediterranean, during a long chronological period. One of the first and more complete projects about this kind of caves concerns the Phoenician-Punic world, with numerous examples in both eastern countries and diverse places along the Western Mediterranean Basin. Among them, some can be highlighted: the cave in Wasta (Lebanon), the sanctuary-cave in Sid-Tanit in Carthage (Tunisia), Ras Il-Wardija (Gozo, Malta), Grotta Regina (Palermo, Sicily), Grotta del Papa (Tavolara, Sardinia), Gorham's Cave (Gibraltar) and Es Cuieram (Ibiza), one of the most well-known caves. Inside this one, devoted to the cult of the goddess Tanit — the Phoenician Tanit — Astarte — many terracotta figurines in the shape of the goddess were found. These offerings were purchased by pious persons in order to perform an act of cult. Many of them were broken or even burnt during the ritual and, were finally placed with the remains of the sacrifices in the deepest site of the cave⁴. The origin of these rites is possibly the cult of the Sumerian fertility goddess, Inanna and her Acadian equivalent, Ishtar, who were related to sacred caves and springs⁵.

The practice of these rites in different proto-historical cultures, such as for instance Etruscan culture in the Italic Peninsula, is widely documented⁶. With regard to Iberian culture⁷, certain cavities must be pointed out, such as the Cueva Santa del Cabriel in Cuenca⁸, the Cueva Dones in Valencia, La Sima de l'Aigua in Valencia⁹ and the Cueva de la Murcielaguina in Córdoba¹⁰, among others. In the Iberian Peninsula, there are many examples of sanctuary caves, and they have been documented in an extensive bibliography. They can be found spread all over the territory, sometimes located in areas which are difficult to reach. Inside them, the presence of stalagmitic formation and pools — mostly, little lakes named gours — is very common. It is in those formations where the offerings, pieces of pottery and other materials considered as offerings, are often found. The rites performed in the caves have been linked to purification, the transition from one age to another, the initiation of young warriors or even to agricultural and shepherding concepts such as fertility¹¹. In addition, they might be connected to the funerary cult of heroized ancestors of the monarch —the so-called oriental *Rephaïm* — who would provide not only the human group but also the lands and animals with health and fertility¹².



Fig. 5.1 Cueva Dones, Iberian Sanctuary Cave, Millares, Valencia

In Mediterranean classical cultures, natural caves were also places of veneration and were often mentioned in Greek and Roman mythology and religion. In these caves, offering rites related to the cavern as a birthplace of deities or regeneration took place. For instance, traditions about the birth of Zeus in the cave in Mount Ida (Crete), or the cult of the goddess Demeter in the cave in Mount Elaio in Elide, Greece¹³. Moreover, they are also linked to other mystery religions, possibly from the East, such as Mithraism which was very popular in the Roman Empire, and which was developed in caves or temples shaped like caves¹⁴. Furthermore, in all the classical cultures, caves are identified with the womb, the afterlife, and the dwelling of underground deities. Consequently, they are related to fertility and birth, and to initiation, death and rebirth¹⁵.

Cult in caves continued to be performed along with the development of the main monotheist religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in different areas in the Mediterranean territories. In the beginning of Christianity, caves were related to three mystical ideas: birth, death and resurrection, unifying the classic symbolism of birth, death and regeneration. This idea is shown perfectly in the work by A. Molina (2006), which offers an extensive documentation of this. As in the case of the apocryphal text, *Protoevangelium Iacobi* — accepted in the East, but not in the West — in which a cave is regarded

as the place where Christ was born. In a letter attributed to Bernabe, contained in the text of *Isaias 33, 16-17*, the cave where the birth took place is also mentioned, together with a spring inside the cavity, identified with the water of baptism, which has been interpreted as the incorporation of symbolism of caves in Christian thought¹⁶. On the other hand, the cave-sepulcher of Christ, related to his expiration and resurrection alludes again to the concepts of initiation, death and renovation linked to the sanctuary caves of the classical epoch. This idea is repeated in the evangelic episode of the resurrection of Lazarus, both belonging to the New Testament¹⁷.



Fig. 5.2 Mural in the Church of John the Baptist by the River Jordan, representing the birth of Christ in a cave

In the primitive anchoretic movement, caves also had an important role, since they appear in the oriental monastic sources as places to dwell in and in which to retreat. This is shown for instance, in the first monastic biography, the *Vita Antonii*, written in the first half of the fourth century, by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria¹⁸, as well as in other hagiographic sources about saints like Saint Hilarion, who lived his last years in a cave in Crete, or Saint Chariton, who dwelled in a cave in Pharan, where cult to this saint is still alive. The influence of this movement in the West is noticeable not only in spiritual but also in material questions, such as in the use of the cavities¹⁹. However, the phenomenon which originates in the classical symbolism of the cave and is its best expression, is Mariology. Mary is identified with the land, the same way the cave is identified with her womb. Therefore, she is a fertility, regeneration, purity and salvation symbol for humankind²⁰. This is not only obvious in western

Christianity but also in the Orthodox Church, which accepts the birth of Jesus in a cave, and has thus strengthened a rich Marian tradition in certain areas in the Western Mediterranean.

In Islamic countries, caves are also endowed with a mystical meaning. It is essential to remember that the prophet Mohamed had his first revelation in a cave, the cave of Hira. Nevertheless, the performance of rites in caves is commonly linked to pre-Islamic customs and popular beliefs that have remained up to the present in some zones in the Maghreb, particularly in Berber communities. These rites are performed by women and dedicated to the *djennoun*, genies or spirits, and their aim is to ask for a benefit related to health, agriculture or fertility, among others. In this respect, the relation of the cult to water and the donatives and votive offerings (*ex-votos*) must be pointed out. With regard to this, there is a highly interesting text published in 1951, written by a Spanish officer stationed in Morocco, which describes in detail the cult taking place in the caves of Ait Ba Aamrán, in the territory of Ifni²¹. Another kind of religious cult, prior to Islam and typical of the Maghreb is Maraboutism. According to this cult, Marabouts, pious persons or saints, give the blessing of God (*baraka*) to the towns under their protection and to all, usually sick, people or infertile women who go on a pilgrimage to their tombs or places where they live. These places are mostly caves, even though they can also be constructions in the open air. Although both cases are about anti-Islamic and naturist beliefs, Islam dominated the individual behavior of believers, who were converted to the Muslim faith, but combined it with pagan rites. We must bear in mind that during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, people from the Maghreb controlled part of some western Mediterranean countries, particularly Spain²².

The diachronic analysis of the use of caves as cult places allows us to observe how the dominant legacy of classical cultures in the development of the Mediterranean area in its socio-cultural and religious aspects favors certain analogy in rites and in the meaning of these spaces. Nevertheless, it must be considered that this is not a continuous or homogeneous time phenomenon, and, during all that period, it is not always due to the same reasons, nor even in the core of each culture or religion. Probably, the physical features of the caves — dark, silent, underground and close to water sources — have also brought about the apparition of certain practices related to the concepts of purity, healing, rebirth and fertility in different contexts.

Sacred Caves and Sanctuary Caves in the Eastern Iberian Peninsula Features and Historical Evolution:

In the eastern Iberian Peninsula, there are around twenty sacred caves and sanctuary caves from the Middle and Modern Ages. Most of them are practically unknown, but a lot of information has been gathered about some others, a fact that allows us to outline the features of these spaces and their evolution.

The identification of these places as holy areas is according to the features of these cavities and the diverse archeological, written and ethnographic sources analyzed. Archeological sources consist in the votive deposits or offerings found inside the cavities, related to the idea of spaces close to water, and in the engravings with religious symbols on the walls of some of the caves, according to records. All this data allows us to establish a rough chronological sequence, which, occasionally, is complemented by information resulting from some written sources. Historical texts refer not only to the performance of cults in certain cavities, but to the coexistence of Christian, *Mudejar* and Moorish pious persons in some of them. They also report on the meaning of this cult related to water and the concept of healing, which must also include the concept of fertility. In this view, and particularly regarding the Islamic cult, ethnographic sources reveal the existence of holy caves for the Berber population that settled down in a sizeable area in the eastern side of the Iberian Peninsula during the Islamic conquest. These comparisons refer to the rites performed inside the caves, linked to healing or fertility in women.

Next, the most significant places are described in order to explain the different kinds of holy caves or sanctuary caves existing in this territory. These enclaves are essential to explain the evolution of this phenomenon, from its origin to the present.

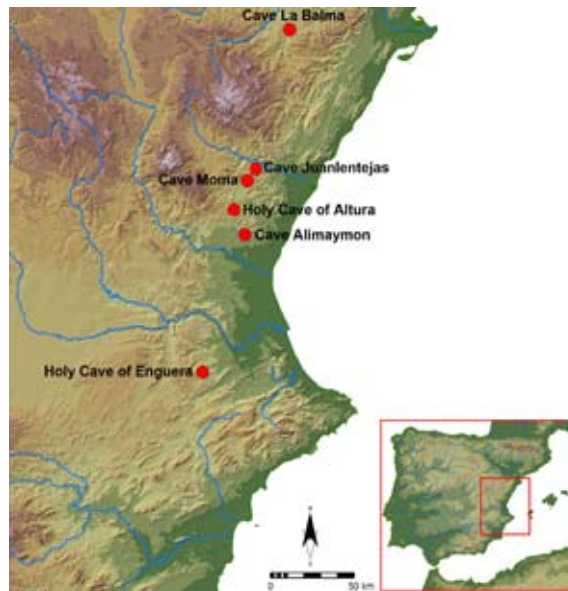


Fig. 5.3 Map with the locations of the caves studied

Caves of Islamic Origin with Mudejar and Moorish Tradition

Most of the originally Islamic sacred caves kept on being used during the Christian period and some of them were venerated both by the Christian population and Mudejar and Moorish people. Mudejar people were Muslims who inhabited the Iberian Peninsula and kept on living in the territories conquered by Christians. They were allowed to keep their religion, language and customs. Upon the conquest of Granada by the Catholic monarchs in 1492, the Mudejar population was forced to be converted to Christianity²³, being consequently called Moorish or Moriscos. This population secretly kept their customs, habits and religious beliefs, so they were considered as people "of little faith". Participation in rites by Christians, along with Mudejar and Moorish people, made the ecclesiastic authorities suspicious of them. Their interests led them, in some cases, to the total Christianization of these spaces and, in other cases, to shut down the caves and suppress the cult.

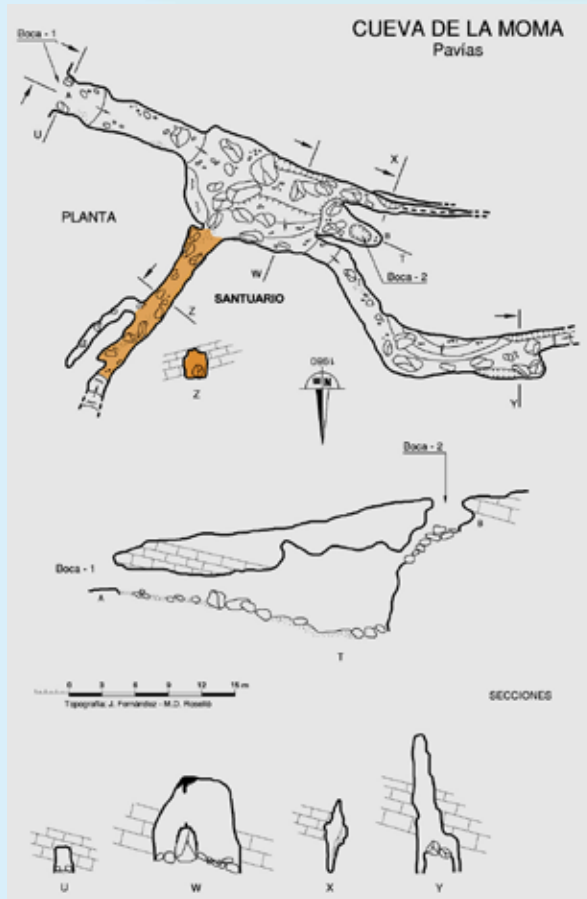


Fig. 5.4 Topography of the Cave of the Moma (J. Fernández and M. D. Roselló). The area where the sanctuary is located is shown in orange.

The Cave of Jualentejas: Fuentes de Ayodar, Castille: eighth to ninth centuries

This cave is located in a rough area in the north of Mount Espadán, in the metropolitan area of Fuentes de Ayodar and at approximately 745 meters above the sea level. There is no evidence of architectural elements related to the cave, even though, there are remains of probably Mudejar or Moorish corrals nearby.

The access to the cavity is through a small narrow entrance, similar to a cat flap, which leads to a room 17 meters long, 8 meters wide and 1.5 meters high. At the back of the room, there is an area of 9 m² with many stalagmitic formations and water filtrations. The cavity was prospected and excavated by only rough investigations in the 1980s by A. Bazzana, working with R. Elhraiki and Y. Montmesin, together with G. Morote for the prospecting works²⁴. In both interventions, important sets of fragments of pottery, most of them intentionally broken, were found. The most significant pieces were jugs, tankards, pots and casseroles, all closed-shaped, whereas the lack of open-shaped recipients such as plates or bowls, oil lamps, portable hearths or luxury crockery was noticeable. They were mostly homemade productions. The remains of those pieces of pottery were generally found in the deepest and most humid area of the cavity. Thousands of fragments were placed together next to the walls, where they were apparently thrown. Together with this pottery material, a fragment of bone spatula decorated with incisions was also found.

After having analyzed the archeological remains, the use of the cave as a dumping site, as a dwelling or as an eremitical place was ruled out. On the contrary, the existence of non-used recipients and the traces of calcinations inside some pieces of pottery might hint at ritual deposits and offerings with incandescent carbon. The accepted interpretation for this place is that it is a sacred cave — not a sanctuary — linking the cult to water, and probably to health and fertility. This cave must have received intermittent visitors from an agricultural and shepherding Islamic local population, in an Almohad context, but with important Berber roots. The Berber towns in the Maghreb are where the closest similarities have been documented. The chronology of the materials indicates a brief use of the cave, lasting up to a century. The cult started in the mid eighth century and disappeared around the mid ninth century for reasons unknown to us²⁵.

The Cave of Alimaymon: Olocau, Valencia: ninth to fifteenth centuries

The cave of Alimaymon, also known as the cave of *Cavall*, *Maimona* or *Maimón* is located in Mount Calderona, on the top of a prominent hill, situated near the town of Olocau, which gives the place an exceptional visual control over the entire Valencian central plain.

The cavity has a small entrance, 2 meters high and 2 meters wide, which leads to a slight slope and a 40 meter long corridor, which gives access to a complex system of ramps, caves and corridors, rich in stalagmitic formations and water leaks.

The information available about the cave has been produced thanks to speleological visits or geographical descriptions of the territory²⁶, though in 1918, F. Almarche, refers to the cavity as an Iberian archeological site. Subsequently in 1920, the archeologist N. Primitiu Gómez visited the cave with González Martí, the first director of the National Pottery Museum. The results of their observations and the classification of materials collected on the surface were published in several articles and in the specialized press²⁷. In other more recent publications, about the sanctuary caves in Castile and Valencia, J. Aparicio (1997) and J. González (2002-2003) describe the features of this activity, barely emphasizing the archeological data.

Inside the cave, there is a stalagmitic formation, called "the horse" due to its equine shape, which has probably aroused many legends and speculations about the existence of an Iberian sculpture in the cave. In the area around the formation, an important set of fragments of pieces of pottery can be observed, which were thrown into little caves and lateral creeks as offerings. The chronology and origin of these recipients vary, since Islamic ceramics from the eleventh to thirteenth century have been found, as well as Christian pottery from thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth century, mainly of metallic reflection from Paterna-Manises workshops²⁸. Therefore, the estimated chronology of the site would range from the eleventh century, approximately until its closure in 1455. There is no evidence of metallic elements as offerings, or of any other non-ceramic elements or religious *graffiti*, but a simple cross which Christianizes the stalagmitic formation named "the horse".

The archeological data and written sources give us information about the presence of a sacred place in this location. Christian ecclesiastic authorities justified the closure and suppression of the cult in this cave by the affirmation and propaganda of the existence of a "stone horse" — pagan idol — cult and offering object for both the Mudéjar and Christian populations. The Valencian

Pope Calixtus III closed down the sanctuary after having promulgated a bull on the 23 August 1455²⁹. Dr. G.J. Escolano (1610-1611), the kingdom's chronicler, narrated this relevant historical fact³⁰:

"Nearby, there is a cave, the so-called Alimanyon cave, in which entry, up to the period of our Valencian Pope Calixtus III, there was a stone horse. No one knows who placed it there and why. In that period, pilgrims from all countries and beliefs used to come to this cave, as well as Christians and Moorish people in order to obtain health and other petitions, who kneeled down towards the horse. The regents of Valencia started to distrust every horse not being the Trojan one, and certain relics of blind paganism, caused by superstition ruining the souls, and pretext of the religion. And, moreover, they realized that both Moors and pious people were enemies of our holy faith, and thus full of vehement superstition, made them report it to the Holy Father, who, as their shepherd, regarding the bull promulgated in Rome, in the first year of his pontificate, ordered them to close down the cave, after tearing the horse into pieces, in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding."

The cave must have received visitors from local and regional towns: firstly, Muslim and then, Christian and Mudejar people. According to Escolano, pious persons used to go on processions to venerate the image of the horse. If he is right, we might consider this cave as a multi-ethnic sanctuary cave, since it was linked to a precise divinity, even though its origin is pagan — the horse — and that it was a consistent element for population, even beyond the borders of the region. However, it is still uncertain whether the narrative is very truthful and is not exaggerated in order to close down the sanctuary. Perhaps in the source documented by Escolano, the term "procession" is used to refer a big number of visitors, not necessarily at the same time. It cannot be ruled out that the horse was not venerated as a pagan idol, but was chosen as a symbol of the presence of divinity in the cave, depending on the faith professed by the believer³¹. In this case, the cavity must be defined as a multi-ethnic sacred cave, equally related to the cult of water and the concepts of fertility and healing.

Regardless of the adscription of the cave to one or another category, it is important to highlight that it probably was a place with a strong Mudejar tradition, considering the important presence of this population in the area, and, finally, due to the closure of the cave itself, probably due of the participation of Christians and since the very moment it was not controlled by the Church anymore.

The Cave of the Moma: Paviás, Castellon: eleventh to sixteenth centuries

This cavity is located in the middle of Mount Espadán, on the top of a hill situated between the towns of Matet and Paviás. The place can be entered through a little hole, 2 meters long and 2 meters wide, and through a corridor 13 meters long, which leads to a big room 13 meters long, 7 meters wide and 6 meters high. On its north east side, there is another narrow corridor only 15 meters long, 1.5 meters wide and 1.5 meters high, which constitutes the holy area. It also has stalagmitic formations and areas with water leaks.

A. Pérez, J. Pérez y J. Rosas studied the cave and, later, in 1983, the results of their field research were published. There is other data available, by means of pictures and articles provided by J. Fernández and Dolores Roselló authors of the topography in the year 1980. In both kinds of sources, the numerous ceramics found on the floor of the corridor are mentioned. The typology of those recipients is very diverse: common Islamic ceramics, plain and painted, from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries some fragments of dry-rope technique ceramics, *cuerda seca* , probably subsequent, Teruel-Paterna workshop ceramics from the thirteenth and fourteenth century, Paterna-Manises workshop ceramics of metallic reflection from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, scant and diverse glazed ceramics from the seventeenth century and other votive metallic objects such as needles, buckles, rings, and an extraordinary amount of pins.

It is a very complicated issue to establish the use of the cave as a cult place, since no specialized analysis of materials has been made. Therefore, the estimated chronology ranges from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries and the abundance of a certain kind of pottery may suggest a higher intensity of use during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The end of the cult in the cave might coincide with the expulsion of the Moorish people in 1609³².

The information available about this cave is very little, even though the existing data suggests that it is a multi-ethnic sacred cave, related, as the previous one, to the cult of water, fertility and particularly, healing. This cave would be visited, firstly, by the Islamic population from the local and regional towns of Mount Espadán, and later on, by Mudejar, Moorish and perhaps Christian populations. Nonetheless, this cave was probably Mudejar and Moorish, given the strong settlement of this population in the area, its abandonment upon the expulsion of the Moorish population and the inexistence of Christianization evidence.

Caves of Christian Tradition

The first cavities linked to Christianity are related to the process of the Christian conquest and its reinforcement in the territory during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During that period, the sacred caves were probably not as important as the caves of Islamic origin or Mudejar tradition were. Muslims populated the rural and inland areas, where caves were more abundant, whereas the coastal and urban areas were rapidly inhabited and controlled by Christians. Moreover, the ecclesiastic authorities did not always favor the Christianization of spaces where other cults had previously been performed, which meant a progressive separation or an important transformation of these places.

In the Valencian territory, there are three cavities with different chronologies that may help us to explain this process: the holy cave of Enguera, the holy cave of Altura and La Balma de Zorita del Maestrazgo. The first one of them, despite its Islamic origin, has been included among the Christian ones, due to the strong and early incidence of this cult.

The Holy Cave of Enguera, Valencia: eleventh, twelfth and seventeenth centuries

The holy cave of Enguera is located in the mountainous foothills that delimit, on the west, the Canal of Montesa and the Valley of Cànyoles River, one of the main communication routes between the central Mediterranean area and the inland peninsula. This cave, situated very close to the castle of Montesa, was probably used in the pre-Christian period by the devout people from the valley and from the nearest towns in the Massif of Caroig, until the fall of the important fortress in Christian hands in 1277.

It is a cavity open to the outdoors, due to the collapse of the vault. The entrance is small and narrow and gives access, through a short corridor, to a large crooked room 18 meters long, 17 meters wide and about an average height of 2 meters. In the back of the room, there is a space delimited by stalagmitic formations which constitutes the most humid zone of the cave, and where a higher quantity of archeological materials and engravings can be found. This was probably the main place to perform ceremonies and rites.

The cave was explored in 1968 by J. Aparicio who refers to the extraordinary concentration of archeological materials.



Fig. 5.5 Access to the Holy Cave of Enguera

Most of these materials were stolen from the cave and, currently, are missing in private collections or have been placed in the Archeological Museum of Enguera. The majority of them are fragments of pottery from diverse periods: dry-rope technique ceramics, Almohad or Almoravid sgraffito ceramics (*cerámica esgrafiada*) and Christian ceramics, particularly Valencian blue gothic crockery and ceramics of metallic reflection (fourteenth to seventeenth

century). Some medieval Christian coins from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are documented. On the walls and ceiling are plenty of engravings with Christian religious symbols — the cross, calvaries, stars — and some texts and signatures similar to the gothic style³³.



Fig. 5.6 Five-pointed star, engraving in the Holy Cave of Enguera.

The chronology of these archeological remains indicates an early origin of the cult in this cave, in an uncertain period between the caliphal and the Almohad period, which could be ascertained by means of deep analysis of the materials. The Christian population probably visited this sanctuary since the very first moment of the conquest, and during the following years, it went through a Christianization process, judging by the great amount of luxury ceramics from Manises-Paterna workshops and the inclusion of an extraordinary set of engravings with Christian symbols on its walls and ceilings. It is hardly surprising that this strong incidence of the cult is related to the importance achieved by the nearly fortress the Convent of Montesa in the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Nonetheless, starting in the sixteenth century, the cult disappeared due to unknown reasons. Either it was transferred to another location or it just died out archeologically. The fact is that this place never became a place for the Marian cult.



Fig. 5.7 Calvary representations. Engraving in the Holy Cave of Enguera

The holy cave of Enguera must be considered as a multi-ethnic — but not simultaneously sacred cave. Since this territory has an important strategic value as a road link, the initial Islamic cult could have introduced an eventual Mudejar and Christian cult after the conquest, which led to a rapid and complete Christianization of the cave. Like other caves, this cavity was probably linked to water, related to health and fertility.



Fig. 5.8 Concentration of archeological materials in the Holy Cave of Enguera



Fig. 5.9 The Holy Cave of Altura and a group of pilgrims, 1928

The Holy Cave of Altura, Castellón: sixteenth to twenty-first centuries

The holy cave in Altura or Cueva del Latonero is located in the rough inner area of the Calderona mountain range, 12 km away from the Carthusian monastery in Valdecris. Currently, the cave is deeply transformed, due to the numerous buildings which make up the sanctuary of the Virgin of the Holy Cave.

The cave can be entered through an open door in one of the walls which seal the hole. This entry takes you through some stairs reaching a large underground room 30 meters long, 23 meters wide and 17 meters high where the current sanctuary with chapel and image is located. Both inside and nearby, there are other constructions such as the hospice, the Chapel of the Communion and the belfry, mainly built in the seventeenth century. All these buildings make up a complex system of corridors and underground rooms which were probably part of the holy cave in the beginning.



Fig. 5.10 The Holy Cave of Altura today

The history of the holy cave in Altura is closely linked to the history of the Carthusian monastery in Valldecris (Altura), founded in 1385. The apparition of the Virgin to a shepherd and the finding of an image of her inside the so-called cave of *Latonero*, between 1501 and 1508, has historically been related to the Carthusian habit of providing shepherds with images made of plaster, as the casts found in the monastery show³⁴. The details about the origin of this sanctuary are properly documented thanks to the work of the Jesuit Father Iosef de la Iusticia³⁵, whereas its most recent evolution has been covered by the comprehensive research carried out by E. Corredera in 1970. Both documents describe the appearance of the cave in its very first moments: a large room with a great natural vault and a lake in the middle, together with a set of numerous narrow corridors.



Fig. 5.11 The Virgin Chapel inside the Holy Cave of Altura

During the first quarter of the sixteenth century, a budding *ex novo* cult was established in the cavity, which changed it into holy cave. Written sources reveal how at that moment some people acted as caretakers of the sanctuary, thanks to the divine or interceding protection of the Virgin, and they performed salutary practices by using water. Some litanies engraved in rock from that period, such as *Sancta Deus Misererenobis* (Holy God, have mercy

on us) together with the date 1516, confirm this. However, a more frequent and majority cult took place, only in the last third of that century because of the first miraculous fact which happened in the cave: the healing of a leper after having a bath in the lake for nine days³⁶. From that moment, the religious fervor of the people increased, and some ecclesiastic authorities of the town of Altura watched over the conservation of the cave and the cult³⁷. In this respect, the recent finding of an ancient room in the cave blocked by the building works in 1640 and named the Room of the Vicars, has been extraordinarily interesting. On its walls, abundant engravings and paintings with Christological symbols were found. Numerous calvaries, crosses or stars cover the stone, as well as signatures and dates, and allow us to ascribe the complex to the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century. The identification of several names of Perpetual Vicars of the town of Altura has just brought about this recent denomination³⁸.



Fig. 5.12 Actual access to the Room of Vicars in the Holy Cave of Altura.

The cavity became a place frequented by many Moorish people, too³⁹. Probably, because this group identified itself with the rites performed there, linked to the water and its salutary power. Nevertheless, the major devotion of nearby towns and the coexistence of Moorish and Christian people in the

same cult, made the ecclesiastic authorities distrust them. Consequently, in 1589, the Bishop of Segorbe ordered to close down the entries to the deepest part of the cave and reorganize the cult by setting up a protocol for masses and pious donations⁴⁰.

During last decade of the sixteenth century, the holy cave was probably at its height, socially and economically speaking. This situation boosted the



Fig. 5.13 Engravings and charcoal inscriptions in the Room of Vicars in the Holy Cave of Altura. The date 1626 along with the letters VP (Perpetual Vicar) can be seen.

strong rivalry regarding the ownership of the place, held by the bishop until then. Carthusian monks in Valldecrist asserted their ownership of the cave and made several alterations, giving rise to a jurisdictional lawsuit, which made them return the place to the bishop in 1606⁴¹.

The historical peak of the cave was probably reached in the seventeenth century, when this place became a proper sanctuary, with all the subsequent implications. The clergy in Altura managed it⁴². It was at that moment when all the building works, which have shaped the current appearance of the sanctuary, took place. From that precise moment, the cult was probably regularized too. At the end of the seventeenth century, the image of Our Lady of the Holy Cave was venerated throughout

the entire peninsula, as well as in the colonies in South America⁴³. Since the seventeenth century, the sanctuary has experienced the consequences of diverse historical happenings, such as the Spanish War of Independence or the Spanish Civil War, which did not prevent the cult from continuing to the present.

The features of the cult in its first moments made the cave be considered as a multi-ethnic sacred cave, where mostly individual rites were performed with a possible intervention by the caretaker of the sanctuary. The Moorish cult in the sixteenth century was based on personal rites and ceremonies by which pious persons took a bath using the water from the cave or drank the water itself, depending on if they had an external or internal illness or pain. They were only looking for healing and treatment for their diseases and they gave away hats, jewels, necklaces or clothes as donations or votive offerings⁴⁴. On the other hand, Christians performed cleaning rites by using the water flowing from the ceiling and anointed their bodies with oil from the lamps in order to achieve "great cases and rare healings", that is to say, miracles⁴⁵. They also left as offerings rosaries, crosses, locketts, necklaces, earrings, silver spoons and many clothes.

Since the seventeenth century, and after the Moorish expulsion, the cult in the holy cave became institutionalized, together with the rites performed inside. From that moment on, the cave can be considered as a proper sanctuary cave dedicated to the Virgin, where the collective cult, as seen in processions and pleas, became more and more important. The individual cult became gradually separated from the concept of water as a sacred element. However, it is still particularly related to healing of diseases and the request of other personal benefits in return for donations and votive offerings. Currently, some of these processions are still celebrated in nearby towns such as Altura, Alcuébar, Geldo, Jérica and Segorbe. However, the most important one is the Procession of Altura on 8 September⁴⁶. Individual rites linked to healing have gradually died out, which has even led to the disappearance of the traditional offering room as a place for donations. Currently, pilgrims usually light candles or leave pictures, illustrations or requests in the crevices of the rocks, as a souvenir of their pleas and gratitude.



Fig. 5.14 Print of the Virgin of the Holy Cave and of the Holy Cave of Altura, Iusticia, 1664

**The Sanctuary of Our Lady of La Balma, Zorita del Maestrazgo, Castellón:
fourteenth to twenty-first century**

The sanctuary of Our Lady of La Balma is located in Mount Tossa, on the left bank of the River Bergantes, a historical path of great strategic importance. This not very deep cave consists of a long corridor, 180 meters long, separated from the outside by a continuous wall. On the inside, there are lots of constructions and rooms. The place can be entered on the north side, leading to a first room or hospice 50 meters long, 5 meters wide and 4 meters high, next to a spring. The second and most narrow area consists of a slightly ascending corridor, 70 meters long, leading to three short passageways going deeper, which is connected to a second room, consisting of the church and the belfry. Inside the church, there is a chapel where the Virgin of La Balma is worshiped, together with another space full of votive offerings to show gratitude for any favor or benefit granted. Some meters after reaching the entrance of the sanctuary, there is the so-called Covered Cross under a shrine from the end of the seventeenth century.



Fig. 5.15 Sanctuary of La Balma



Fig. 5.16 An ancient illustration sold as a souvenir of the Sanctuary of La Balma

According to traditions, the origin of the sanctuary dates back to the beginning of the fourteenth century, when a miraculous apparition of the Virgin to a shepherd is supposed to have taken place there. In commemoration of this event, a little chapel was built, dedicated at first to Saint Mary Magdalene. The first written documents that mention this cave are two wills dating from the end of the fourteenth century, whereby part of the assets are bequeathed in order to equip the place. Several decades later, in 1437, this place is referred as the Church of La Balma, provided with diverse possessions for its maintenance⁴⁷. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the cult to the image was on the increase,

and, according to historical sources, there were more and more donations⁴⁸. The increase of these and of wax votive offerings representing the healed parts of the body, show an important popular fervor regarding the healing of pain and illnesses. The first procession documented dates exactly from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was carried out by a brotherhood from the nearby village of Castellote for having been given rainfall after the pilgrimage to La Balma.

The following centuries make up a period of magnificence and growth of the sanctuary. In fact, most of the constructions that can be observed nowadays were built during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period, the sanctuary became well-known, as a center of

pilgrimage which worked well for healing patients and possessed people. The first one who mentions these beliefs is Gaspar de la Figuera in 1685, who refers to the power of the Virgin of La Balma against the devil and satanic persuasion⁴⁹. In other sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the performance of exorcisms is not mentioned, but during the nineteenth century, some documents show how rites and cults include atavistic practices of popular religiosity the best example of which is the connection between illnesses and the presence of the devil inside the human body: possessed people. In 1873, Bernardo Mundina refers to exorcisms performed on the 8 September in the sanctuary. According to the document, this is a usual practice during the great celebration of the Nativity of the Virgin, when exorcisms were performed by the priest under church rules⁵⁰.



Fig. 5.17 Medals of the Virgin of the Holy Cave

In the beginning of the twentieth century, other sources show a quite different situation, according to which during three days, 6, 7 and 8 September, the Procession of Zorita del Maestrazgo was preceded by superstitious practices allowed by the Church. The most explicit source was the work by Alardo Prats, a journalist who, in 1929, published the book *Tres días con los endemoniados. La España desconocida y tenebrosa*, (*Three days with the possessed. The unknown and dark side of Spain*). Not only in his work, but also in other authors' books, horrifying episodes of exorcisms of possessed people — most of them women and children — coming from diverse places are described. Those rites were performed by sinister specialist women, and they probably yielded large profits for the sanctuary, since, regardless of the subsequent donations, during the performance people traditionally used to throw coins to the Virgin⁵¹. However, those practices probably caused great inconvenience to some institutions of the Church, and, according to Alardo's writings, to at least a part of the town of Zorita. Starting in 1931, upon the establishment of the second Spanish Republic, the processions and exorcisms in La Balma ceased. Later on, in 1939, they would reemerge after the Spanish Civil War. The last ceremonies were celebrated at the end of the 1940, upon the intervention by the ecclesiastic and civil authorities, who restored this sacred place to Christian devotion.



Fig. 5.18 Offering room in La Balma

Since that time, celebrations have focused on processions or pilgrimages coming from a range of towns in the area. Currently, only a few of them have remained: in Zorita del Maestrazgo, one celebration in May; and another, the most important one, on 8 September, when the apparition of the Virgin in La Balma is commemorated and people show gratitude to her in appreciation of all the favors received during the year. It is said that if you take a bath using the water from the spring, that will help you to treat different illnesses, which has attracted pilgrims⁵².

The features of the cult in this cave allow us to think of this place as a holy cave which became, in a short period of time, a real Christian sanctuary cave. There is no evidence in the written sources of participation by Mudejar or Moorish populations in the processions or ceremonies. There is every likelihood that this fact is due to the concepts of healing, which were becoming separated from the rites linked to water and were becoming linked to the image and intercession of the Virgin. In addition, another cause might be that the Christian penance processions and collective pilgrimage were firmly established early on.



Fig. 5.19 Commemorative ceramic plaques in the Holy Cave of Altura

The Origin and Historical Evolution of the Holy Caves and Sanctuary Caves from the Middle Ages to the Present

The caves of Juanlentejas, Alimaymon and Moma constitute the best examples of holy caves or sanctuary caves from the Middle Ages, linked to a mainly Islamic, Mudejar and Moorish cultural context. The meaning of the names of two of them has also been revealed as Moma, Maimona and Maymon. Those terms can be interpreted in two different ways: as Arab names, resulting from the contraction of Mahoma, knowledge and divine grace; or, perhaps the more likely, as *fer moma*, which means, "to give a splendid present to someone, to give someone a great gift"⁵³.

The importance and extension of this phenomenon is unknown, despite the substantial amount of archeological data recorded that includes more than 150 caves with medieval signs throughout the region. The materials registered are mainly ceramics. Two thirds of these correspond to the Islamic style. However, the prospecting and excavation works, which were not especially methodical, have been partially performed and mostly consisted of a mere collection of surface materials. This fact prevents us from specifying the functionality of each of them, since, throughout history, the caves have been used not only as sanctuaries but also as temporary dwellings, shelters, places full of water resources, among other functions. In the view of the features of many of the caves, a realist approach would indicate the existence of several dozens holy caves or sanctuary caves, a number not as high as the number of towns existing in the area the caves were situated in.

The beginning of the cult in caves in the eastern area of the Iberian Peninsula is to be established in the beginning of the eighth century, according to the results of the research conducted in the Cave of Juanlentejas. The apparition of this kind of cave is probably linked to the extensive settlement in this territory of Islamic populations of Berber tradition, whose culture, as Bazzana (1996) stated, allows us to outline certain similarities in these cave rites, regarded as feminine. In one of the previously mentioned texts by officer Doménech about the caves of Ait Ba Aamrán in the territory of Ifni (Morocco), the author mentions the cults related to agriculture and healing of Berber Islamic populations. The importance of water for rites is also pointed out, particularly in the performance of ablutions and in the cure of illnesses, as well as the appearance of some of the cavities where those rites took place⁵⁴:

"Inside the caves, the variety of offerings arouses curiosity to know the petitions and to be able to relate them to the illnesses. There still remain:

blue fabric strips, hanging out from chalky concretions, or tied up on the projections and protuberances of the rock; fragments of combs, mirrors and pieces of pottery; parts of dishes with small amounts of henna or kohl; some shells of mussels containing the same sort of products. Those kinds of offerings reveal that the petitioners are weak women."

The cult in the cave of Juanlentejas disappeared in the mid-ninth century, whereas the first materials documented in the cavities of Alimaymon and Moma could belong to ninth to thirteenth century. If there was a disappearance or decadence regarding cults in that period of time, which is not probable considering the number of caves under research, it was not remarkable, and it is still unknown. However, what we do know is that if that decadence existed, the cult reappeared during the Islamic period, and would gain special prominence during the Christian period, particularly between the second half of the fourteenth century and the sixteenth century. Materials are not domestic with regards to shape or typology, but are luxury productions, besides a series of much more sumptuary offerings, such as metal objects, including the most noble materials.

The evolution of cult and rites, still mainly unknown, provides us with some dates which indicate a change in those sacred places. Firstly, the rites had a local, familiar or individual nature at Juanlentejas, but, later, they showed a collective perspective with a clear concern for health or fortune. The intensification of cult in these caves upon the Christian conquest might be due to the situation of uncertainty experienced by the so-called Mudejar people. Likewise, "religious competence" entailed an acculturation process in two different aspects. Firstly, some of these caves were Christianized, particularly in territories with an extensive settlement of Christian population, such as the holy cave of Enguera. Secondly, the Christians themselves visited the caves of Mudejar tradition. Anyway, both situations favor the expansion of the holy cavities, which are the origin of a popular and common feeling that would originate in the first Christian sanctuary *ex novo*.

Considerations about the Caves of Christian Tradition

According to historical data, the fact that part of the ecclesiastic hierarchy regarded some caves as sacred places is closely related to the presence and miraculous apparition of the Virgin. Her apparition takes place through a mediator, who is usually a shepherd, a villager or a peasant finding the holy image.

Caves of Christian tradition are linked to a Marian cult process, the main goal of which is to create new devotions in order to protect the conquered land and boost the rural evangelization⁵⁵. This process did not only take place on the conquered land⁵⁶, causing the Christianization of the holy cave of Enguera, but, also, subsequently, in the incorporation to the new religion of new symbolic elements of Islamic tradition, which during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are kept in the Christian and Muslim populations, as shown in the caves of Alimaymon and Moma.

In my opinion, the first sanctuary caves of Christian origin tried to break with this tradition: first of all, by closing mostly Mudejar holy caves which were popular among the Christian population, like the cave of Alimaymon; and secondly, by justifying a different origin for the new holy caves, either alien to any kind of previous cult, or famous for apparitions of the Virgin. Nevertheless, the sort of cult performed inside still had a very popular nature. Therefore, during that period, the most common cult was an individual and familiar one, where, unofficial characters (caretakers of the sanctuary or folk healers) participated in the treatment of diseases by using miraculous water and invoking the Virgin, and were in charge of the propagation of the miracles and of the maintenance of the place, thanks to offerings and donations. These similarities between Christian and Islamic cults, particularly in the relation between water and healing, probably lured the Moorish population, which visited some of these caves to perform their own rites, as, for instance, in the holy cave of Altura. In other caves, where the Christian cult was institutionalized early, such as in La Balma, the coexistence of populations did not take place.

This might be why, starting in the end of the sixteenth century, the holy caves quickly moved away from this popular cult. Their ceremonies became institutionalized and were controlled by religious authorities and attained a collective spirit, such as in processions. Places were consecrated and constructions were built in them according to a certain liturgy and canonic rite. Economical aspects, such as donation and alms collection became formalized. Consequently, under the relevant jurisdiction, caves were provided with staff which protected the spiritual salvation and physical health of the faithful, performed salutary and healing rites by using holy water, and asked for alms for the sanctuary. The holy cave of Enguera is an interesting example. Its destiny was cut short, since it never became a Marian cave. This might be due to its early Christianization and to the fact that it was never a

problem for the religious authorities, despite the fact that its rite was strongly related to popular habits.



Fig. 5.20 Procession to the Holy Cave of Altura around 1920. Postcard

In the seventeenth century, the Marian cult was at its height in those sanctuaries, but it went into decline starting in the eighteenth century. In the following centuries, devotion in those caves continued, despite certain historical events. In most of them, Marian festivities still take place, even though the homogeneity of the current cult has nothing to do with the details of the religious rites previous to the twentieth century. Nowadays, the most popular tradition is to visit the caves on the major festivity day, which is different in each town. There are processions to give the Virgin offerings and donations to show gratitude or ask for favors.

Cult and Religiosity in Holy Caves and Sanctuary Caves: In Touch with the Holy Rites of Healing and Fertility

Holy caves or sanctuary caves have originally been places to visit in order to ask for a favor or health, as well as places to show gratitude for favors. This entails the performance of several rites the most important element of which is, doubtless, the water flowing from inside the cavity in different ways. Water has an intense prophylactic and healing nature, typical of rites aimed

at renaissance. Therefore, and considering the symbolism in the cave, this place is linked to the concepts of healing and fertility, present in cults from the beginning. This universal conception of the sacred value of caves and water was, without a doubt, key in the initial coexistence of cults in caves for Christian and Mudejar-Moorish populations.



Fig. 5.21 Procession to La Balma in 1929

With the emergence of Christian holy caves, the healing power of water is identified with the sacred image of the Virgin, as expressed in documents and records from that period: *"It was the Virgin who worked wonders in the holy cave, by using the water coming from the mountains"*⁵⁷. This close relation between the divine symbol and the healing power of water created many curative and purifying rites, like bathing and the washing of patients. As the Christian sanctuary caves evolved, rites became simpler and the habit of bathing and making the sign of the cross with water before starting the official cult in the cave was created. In some caves, like the holy cave of Cabriel (Cuenca), children and women were submerged into the lakes to treat their common diseases, hernias, sprains, or, for women, to improve fertility⁵⁸. Father Mares, author of the work *La Fénix Troyana*, in 1680, also provides us with a magic vision of water in the holy cave of Calles (Valencia):

"Inside this cave, going to the right of the crag, there is a column created and roughly twisted by nature itself, ... and over it, there is an admirable

spring, the only one which the stories talk about, because it grows or diminishes proportionally depending of the days of the Moon ... But, if they take water from there, the spring becomes completely full again, and when the Moon is on the wane, it diminishes again until reaching its usual mark, never going beyond"⁵⁹.

Rites linked to water were present in Christian caves, as well as in Islamic caves with Mudejar and Moorish traditions. Archeological sources and written historical sources prove this. Father Iosef de la Iusticia states that regarding the holy cave of Altura, "Moorish people very often visited the holy cave and received miraculous favors from the Virgin"⁶⁰. He also describes how they "went down to the deepest part of the cave, and, humbly kneeling down before the holy image, drank the water if they had any disease, or had a bath if they had external injuries..."⁶¹. Regarding the Christian population, Iusticia cites: "Great cases and weird healing only by having a bath with the water flowing from the ceiling of the cave and rubbing oil from the lamp on your body"⁶².

This curative and fertile nature of the Virgin and her relation with water is also proved in collective rites that became more important in time, such as processions, pleas, prayers or requests, usually linked to water and agricultural rites, as proved by relocation of the image from one place to other and the processions to some caves to alleviate droughts, or visits to the caves to show gratitude for rain.

Pleas, Votive Offerings, Ex-Votos and Donations

Curative rites or prayers performed in the holy caves or sanctuary caves always entail the performance of a donation or votive offerings. The donation is a voluntary gift given to God in exchange for a favor. However, this is not like a payment, but an act of gratitude and plea for present or future happiness. Donations were very diverse, such as money, animals, jewellery, agricultural products, among others. Some of them were given by prosperous people and had an important historical or artistic value. They were auctioned for the payment of the maintenance cost of the sanctuary or they just became part of the Virgin's treasure. On the other hand, votive offerings or ex-votos were given away, especially as signs or souvenirs of a past granted favor. Objects used as offerings could be personal (clothes, hair) and figurative items (pictures, drawings) which represented the person who was helped by God. One of the most usual practices was to hang some clothes, even the clothes

worn during the offering period, in the sanctuary. Other offerings consisted of testimony objects, which have been very popular from the Middle Ages to the present. Therefore, a person who had escaped from the gallows used to give his rope; a lame person used to give away his crutch; and the bride, after the wedding, her dress. Those elements were gradually replaced by figurative and anthropomorphic offerings made with wax, which basically represent the healed part such as an arm or a leg.

Information about donations and votive offerings from the Middle and Modern Ages comes from archeological and written sources. Archeology shows how people used to leave jewellery, coins and other objects, such as pieces of pottery also used in rites, as well as the practice of engravings with Christian symbols, which also constitutes a testimony. Written sources, for instance some references by Father Iosef de la Iusticia or Father Mares, are even more explicit, since they refer to objects not preserved nowadays.

"acknowledging favors, they left on the walls of the cave thankful testimonies. Someone that left their coat; at others, clothes, hats, vests⁶³ and luxury jewellery: the Moorish women, left necklaces, caps⁶⁴, jupons⁶⁵, skirts and other typically feminine objects, which were sold for the sanctuary or kept as a testimony of its wonders."⁶⁶ "This administrator used to get gifts or alms given by pious persons to show gratitude for the arrangements of the devotion or for the testimony of favors.⁶⁷ There are inventories of these objects, where you can clearly observe the variety of donations: agnus, rosaries, crosses, locketts, rings, string of pearls and maroons, necklaces, earrings, mugs and silver spoons, caps, jupons, blouses, veils, covers, ruffs, skirts, coats, vests and other more plebeian objects. It was everything abundant that was admirable. Only the silver locketts were more than fifty in the inventory made in 1584."⁶⁸

"I was able to see some clothes hanging out from the rocks, and, when I questioned the old people about that mystery, they told me that each person that experienced any kind of favor in that prodigious cave, to show gratitude, left an offering: if they were old, they left their cloaks, smocks⁶⁹ or jewellery to celebrate age, as a testimony; not only Christians experienced those wonders, but also the Moorish population, usually contrary to devotion rites; when they were upset for any great grief, their only remedy was to visit the cave and make some promises to keep, which were inviolable, and they left several souvenirs pending. For that reason, the cave ended up full of these kinds of trophies."⁷⁰

In Christian caves, the votive offering habit caused the creation of rooms for this specific usage, such as the currently preserved offering room in the cave of La Balma, or, the disappeared offering room in the holy cave of Altura. In this last cave, the act of offering has been replaced by the act of leaving pictures, papers or illustrations in the cracks of the cave. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the walls are empty now, there are some commemorative plaques left by pious people as offerings in the entrance of the room. In most places, this habit has also entailed the use of candles, which are related to the purifying symbolism of fire.

Processions, Pilgrimage and Rogativas

The most important expressions of popular and collective fervor linked to holy caves are pilgrimages and processions. Overall, these types of celebrations have ancient roots, even though in the beginning they were more or less spontaneous events not related to any particular dates. They were generally linked to pleas or requests for rain, or acts of gratitude, for example, after the end of a war.

Although the terms pilgrimage or procession could be considered synonyms, in religious practice this is not so. Pilgrimage means to go to a sacred place or sanctuary for devotion or to make a vow, with or without a procession, and usually on no particular date. On the other hand, processions are usually linked to a town or a particular community, and to a sanctuary. They also suppose a cyclical date because religious ceremonies and popular local festivities are kept as traditions. Besides, *rogativas*, or pleas, are solemn requests to ask God for the products of the earth and other needs, such as water especially. They lost their original importance during the ceremonial and devotion process of holy caves. There used to be two sorts of pleas: major and minor litanies. Their rites consisted in a penance procession with the Virgin, proceeding along the road to a town that had previously asked to host the litanies, and, after singing them, there was an emotive mass. They were very common to protect from bad weather conditions, public calamities, epidemics or threats of catastrophe. Initially, they were not celebrated on any specific date, but later some official days for their celebration were established: 25 April, Saint Mark's Day and 20 May, three days before the Ascension of Jesus. Processions did not take place in the first holy caves, but some individuals or small groups made pilgrimages to the holy place to perform certain rites of necessity. However, the appearance of Christian

sanctuary caves involved the emergence of collective processions, which were gradually established on precise dates. The main day of celebration of processions in the sanctuary caves is 8 September, the Day of the Nativity of Mary. However, there are also agricultural or fertility processions in spring. Originally, they are due to requests or pleas made in periods of drought or to show gratitude for rain. In those cases, towns sharing sanctuaries usually celebrate on different days.



Fig. 5.22 Procession in the Holy Cave of Altura today

Processions acquired a stronger entity from the seventeenth century. Some days before the celebration, pilgrims traveled in a convoy, riding horses and carts, to the sanctuary. After having said a pray to the Virgin, diverse rites took place, washing with water from the cave, exorcism of possessed people and offerings, that always ended with celebrating a mass and a procession, or singing verses to the Virgin, depending on the case. Then, they organized a popular festivity, eating products from the land and dancing, which meant the return to the profane world, the desacralization

after having been in touch with the holy in the sanctuary. Another common element was the purchase of medals, images and postcards that were taken home as objects of protection. This practice was probably due to the habit of taking stalagmitic formations from the caves as protectors elements against storms, as evidenced in the holy cave of Cabriel⁷¹, or in the holy cave of Altura. Father Iosef de la Justicia describes this: *"Many of the people who visited the cave used to take some little stones from the deepest areas of the caves...He complied with his devotion, and before leaving, took along with him some stones, ..., with them, he surrounded a great country house, where he could harvest lots of wheat, fearing that some of those storms that stoned that country could dash his hope."*⁷²

Processions to many of these sanctuary caves have been transformed, while continuing to the present time. They are a clear example of the institutionalization undergone by different sorts of cult. Representative caves include the holy cave of Altura, the holy cave of Cabriel and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of La Balma.

Concerning the holy cave of Altura, nearby towns hold separate processions between April and June, each one with its own features. The origin lies in old pleas made to ask for rain during drought, which were not linked to any specific day of the year. This assignment did not happen until the twentieth century. Only one of the processions seems to be separate from the concept of pleas, the one celebrated on 8 September, to commemorate the Day of the Nativity of the Virgin. The 7 September, the day's eve, the celebration starts by singing the rosary and people attending take along candles in order to light the gathering.

Civil and religious authorities head processions. Before they begin or finish, they usually sing some verses to the Virgin of the holy cave. For instance, one of these verses is as follows:

"Blind, one-armed people, cripple,
feverish, broken,
incurable, hopeless,
upset for every pain,
for you, if they are sorrowful,
recovery comes early.
Be our merciful mother,
Virgin of the holy cave".

As soon as they arrive at the sanctuary, they celebrate a mass inside the cave. Currently, pilgrims wear a scarf around the neck and a cane used as a walking stick. They also usually take any kind of collective floral offering. There is a general religious feeling, but not as strict as in the old days. Some pilgrims take that opportunity to say a prayer to the Virgin individually, or to thank her for favors granted. People from other territories come not only for devotion but for their interest in a traditional festivity, often taking part in these kinds of events.

The origin of processions of the holy cave of Cabriel also lies in pleas. Currently, only the town of Fuenterrobles has kept its procession on 15 May. Some decades ago, neighbors came in carts adorned with strawberries, rosemary branches or other local plants, or on horseback, where young boys used to carry their girlfriends. Once there, a mass was celebrated inside, and, afterwards, the image of the Virgin was taken outside in order to sing some verses called *Mayos*, which were popular compositions with chorus and music whereby people praised the Virgin asking for health and protection or rain for the fields. After the *Mayos*, pilgrims ate picnics and went back to the village⁷³. This procession is a clear example of cyclical festivities in spring and summer linked to the use of vegetables, water, offerings, performance of ritual dances in rites, which constitute practices of a strong pre-Christian nature, related to health and fertility.

Finally, the procession of La Balma might be the one that has kept certain traditions and habits the best. During the year, processions and pleas used to take place, some of which have now extinguished, and, in the end, they established certain dates for their performance. However, the most important one is the procession taking place on 8 September in Zorita del Maestrazgo. The festivity starts on the eve, with a nocturnal procession. Young boys take the image of the Virgin to the village, and after a welcome by the shepherd, diverse dances are performed. Then, the procession takes the Virgin to the church of the village. Afterwards, another shepherd reads praises in its doorway, before entering. In the morning of 8 September, after the reveille and the praises read by a child dressed up like an angel, the procession to La Balma starts. This procession used to be on foot and is now made by car. By the covered cross preceding the sanctuary, an ancient religious play is performed, which represents the fight between an angel and the devil. This "Devil of La Balma" blocks the procession's path, wearing a traditional suit with snakes hanging. The angel, represented by a child, and the inhabitants,

face him and this battle finishes with music, dances and a mass in the sanctuary. Inside, pilgrims can buy verses, medals and rosaries that are worn for protection and as souvenirs of the visit. These acts are complemented by other festive activities in the village, such as music played by an orchestra, dances, appetizers and meals. In the past, when the procession was on foot, most of these celebrations took place in the surroundings of the sanctuary, where the pilgrims used to camp with their carts⁷⁴.



Fig. 5.23 Representation of the Devil of La Balma

In the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the festivity was preceded on 6 and 7 September by exorcisms performed outside the town of Zorita by pilgrims coming from other towns. In those days, laden with more than a religious feeling, exorcism rites alternated with nocturnal parties, which led the visitors to the most mundane pleasures. The research by Alardo Prats constitutes evidence of the permissiveness of that moment and describes it as a true *coven*⁷⁵.

Cultural Routes on the Eastern Side of the Iberian Peninsula and in the Mediterranean Area

The main aim of this project is to put a value on these sacred places and boost both cultural and religious tourism. It is possible to go hiking through very diverse routes that cover different spots where the Marian cult has been established more or less recently, not only in the Iberian Peninsula but all along the Mediterranean coast. Moreover, the phenomenon of sanctuary caves is universal in the history of humankind, as well as most of the rites performed in those spaces, yet fostered, in each case, by different religious reasons.

Past and present coexist in this research, which allows the reader or visitor to find out the history of many places, and, simultaneously, discover religious feelings of people who have inhabited them in depth. The religious, cultural and leisure reasons that lead each person to start the path, lie at the end of it.



Fig. 5.24 Map of routes 1 and 2

The three cultural routes proposed here enhance the main patrimonial and religious values related to holy caves or sanctuary caves. Some of the previously mentioned cavities are not included, since, currently, due to a lack of a suitable infrastructure, they cannot be visited⁷⁶.

Route 1: From Morella to the Sanctuary of La Balma

The city of Morella is the capital of the region Els Ports/ Los Puertos, located in Castellón, the Valencian community. This is a typically rough and mountainous area with several main examples of natural and historical patrimony. By visiting it, you can not only immerse yourself in the history of this territory, but also easily understand the context where the sanctuary cave of Our Lady of La Balma was created and evolved. The mere fact of drifting through some of its streets constitutes a real journey back in time.

The origin of this city is due to the building of a fortress during the Islamic period, even though archeological evidence reveals an important settlement in the area since prehistory. This very fortified cavity is located in the side of a mountain, on whose peak there a new castle was built to replace the former one after the Christian conquest of those lands. Its fourteen towers and seven doors are still visible, standing since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The entrance to the castle can be made through one of these doors, the so-called door of Saint Matthew. Inside the building some constructive remains are good examples of its evolution from the origin until the last alterations made during the Carlist Wars in the nineteenth century. For instance, the Plaza de Armas, the main square of the castle, the Governor's Palace, the cistern, the Tower of the Pardala, the Dungeon of Cacho, some remains of the royal palace, the Tower of Hommage and some official pavilions.

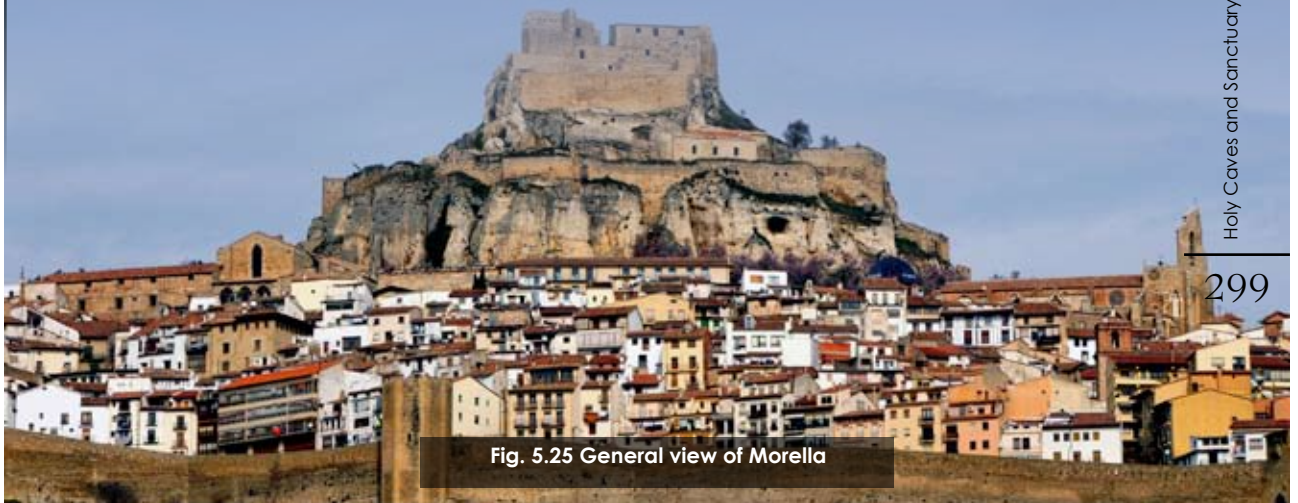


Fig. 5.25 General view of Morella

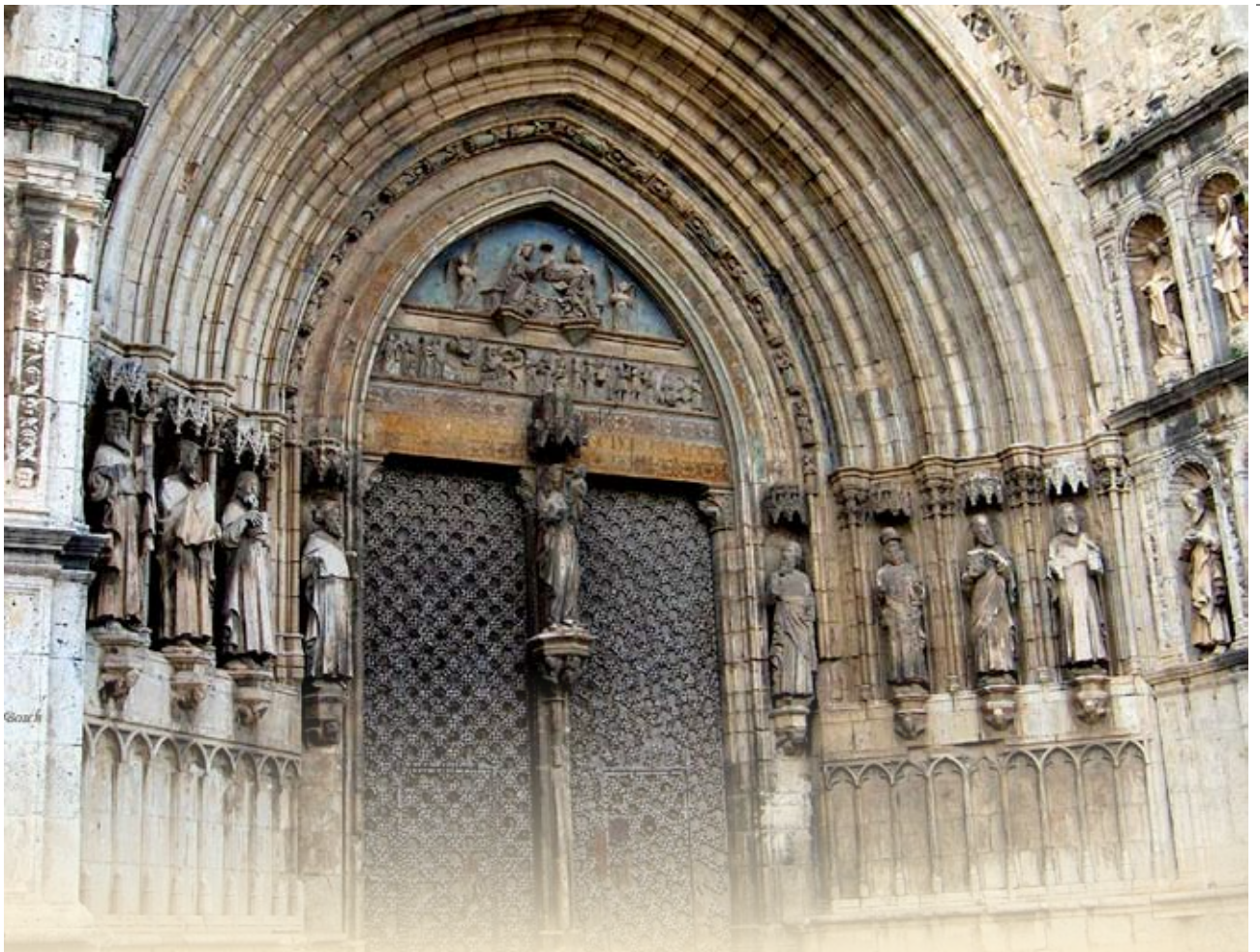


Fig. 5.26 The Church of Saint Mary in Morella

At the foot of the castle there are some remains of the Convent of San Francisco, whose most relevant buildings belong to thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The cloister, the church and the chapter house, still keeping gothic murals from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, stand out among all of those constructions. This convent is being transformed to build the state-run hotel of Morella.

Very close to the convent, is the Archpriestal Church of Saint Mary the Great, an exceptional gothic work dating from a period ranging from the second half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century. The façade has two adjacent doors, the Apostles' door and the Virgin's door. Inside, behind the choir, you can notice that the sculpted Porch of Glory has been kept as a frieze. It is worth mentioning the presence of a spiral staircase which reaches the choir, three original rose windows made by the Valencian School in the fourteenth century and the baroque main altar.

The Aqueduct of Saint Lucy is worth visiting, since it is a brilliant example of gothic civil engineering from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is made of masonry and gothic arches, made up of ashlar voussoirs. Due to this aqueduct, the city was provided with water coming from diverse springs. Other outstanding monuments or buildings are the late romanesque Church of Saint Nicholas, the numerous stately mansions and the gothic town hall.

The sanctuary of the Virgin of La Balma, built between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, is located twenty-three kilometers away from Morella, in the town of Zorita del Maestrazgo. The view of this complex of religious buildings, made up of the hospice, the church and the belfry, in the middle of the wild, is impressive. Its façade has balconies and round arches in the second floor, where the so-called "Room of Dances" is located. The tour starts in the staircase leading the hospice, from where you can enter the church, through a long and narrow corridor with an open wall facing outdoors. There, you find the chapel with the image of the Virgin and the offering room. The façade of the church is made of ashlar and in its extension you can find the belfry made up of two parts with pinnacles on the top. To enter it, you must go through a simple door with fluted pilasters.

In addition to this visit, the region has other towns well worth visiting, such as Zorita del Maestrazgo itself, Forcall, Vallibona, Olocau del Rey, Castellfort or Todolella, all of them with interesting castles, palaces, churches or examples of popular architecture⁷⁷. There are also beautiful natural spots, where you can enjoy thick forests of pines and kermes oaks, rivers and springs with crystalline waters, and, short or long-distance biking and hiking routes.

Route 2: Segorbe, the Monastery of Valdecris and the Sanctuary of the Holy Cave of Altura

Segorbe is the capital of the region of Alto Palancia, in the region of Castellón. This town has many relevant examples of religious and civil architecture from the Middle and Modern Ages, showing its rich and long history. The city walls and the castle are the main civil buildings of the city. There are still some parts built before the thirteenth century, even though most of it dates from the fourteenth century and there are later alterations. In addition to the city walls, there are two excellent cylindrical towers from the fourteenth century: the Tower of Botxí and the Tower of the Jail, both containing groin vaults. Part of the aqueduct which provided the city with water, and dates from the same century, has also been preserved. The Arch



Fig. 5.27 The Monastery-Charterhouse of Valdecríst

of the Veronica is one of the ancient entrances to the town and is a simple and beautiful round arch.

Another marvelous civil building is the city hall, the former ducal palace built in the first half of the sixteenth century. Inside, there are splendid Renaissance coffered ceilings and three façades made of marble and jasper, from the charterhouse of Valdecríst of the near town of Altura.

Among all the examples of religious architecture, the most important one is, doubtless, the gothic Cathedral of Saint Mary, built between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The church has only one nave, without transept or dome, with the chapels laid out between the buttresses and a gothic cloister. Inside, many interesting pictures and sculptures have been kept, most of them, in the museum of the cathedral. Segorbe is the bishop see. Consequently, churches are extraordinarily abundant. The oldest one is Saint Peter's Church, from the thirteenth century, which is however very altered.



Fig. 5.28 Map of route 3

Two kilometers away from Segorbe, you can find the town of Altura with the Monastery-Charterhouse of Valldecrist, one of the richest and most powerful of the Carthusian Order in Spain. Prince Martin of Aragon built it in the end of fourteenth century, over the foundations of a modest former charterhouse. The charterhouse became an important economical, cultural, religious and political center until its ultimate expropriation in 1835. Nowadays, this monumental complex is in ruins, although major alterations to restore and consolidate it have been carried out. One can still appreciate the façade of the great church and its large gothic cloister, as well as the Church of Saint Martin and its underground rooms.

Twelve kilometers away from Altura and the Charterhouse of Valldecrist, you can find the holy cave of Altura. The sanctuary is located in an altered large underground room, which can be entered through a door with a round arch situated in a lateral wall of the patio. Crossing that door, there is a staircase leading to small chapel, the Chapel of Saint Christ of Communion,

built in the seventeenth century, with alterations in the beginning of the twentieth century. Downstairs, there is the offering room, currently empty and very dilapidated. However, the adaptation of the building to the natural morphology of the cave can be noticed. Finally, the staircase, after going through the vaulted niche representing the apparition of the Virgin to the shepherd, leads to the main room of the sanctuary, where no constructions covering the walls or the ceiling of the cave have been made. In the middle of the room, you can find the neoclassical chapel and the main altar, where masses were celebrated. Behind this area, in the deepest zone, there are still some water leaks, and it is common to see visitors collect it. Outside, there is a great hospice from the seventeenth century, which, currently, has fallen into disuse.

The region of Alto Palancia also offers the visitor the opportunity to visit the Calderona and Espadán mountain ranges, two very environmentally important areas full of short or long-distance biking and hiking routes. In those zones, there are also many little charming villages, such as Bejís, Pina de Montalgrao, Jérica, Pavías or Caudiel, among many others. In the southern area of the Calderona mountain range, in the region of Campo de Turia, you can approach the charterhouse of Portacoeli, whose origin dates from the thirteenth century. However, since Carthusian monks inhabit it, access to the public is forbidden.

Route 3: From the Castle-Convent of Montesa to the Holy Cave of Enguera

The Castle of Montesa is an impressive Islamic fortress conquered by the Christian population in 1277. In the fourteenth century, it became the see of the religious and military order of Montesa. The election of this place as the main bastion of this new institution is due to its strategic position on the south border of the kingdom and on the natural communication route to Castile. During the fourteenth century, the fortress was rebuilt and enlarged, becoming a castle-convent, which was described as one of the strongest ones in the Kingdom of Valencia.

The fortress has a polygon floor plan, with two main towers and a third one, on the east side. You can enter it through a ramp with a round arch in its doorway, behind which there is the inner ward, with a well and remains of rooms. The religious area is separated from the military zone by a corridor going through the fortress from north to south.

In the convent area, there is the church next to the city walls and the cloister, the chapter house and other noble rooms. In 1748, an earthquake destroyed most of the castle and the adjoining monastery.

Currently, the castle is in ruins, although some buildings and its monumental entrance have been restored since 1997. The tour along the external perimeter is very interesting, since the city walls are built on natural rock, vertically cut, which gives an impressive feeling of height. Even though its appearance is very decrepit, this castle is still one of the most remarkable ones throughout the whole territory.

From Montesa, you can walk to the holy cave of Enguera through a mountain path, eight kilometers long. However, currently, the cave is not open to public. Anyway, you can drive to the beautiful town of Enguera and visit its museum, where materials from the cavity are exhibited. From this town, it is worthy going to the Caroig Massif, a rough area of plentiful of rivers with a high landscaping and environmental value. Among the towns or spots to be visited are Bicorp, with prehistorical cave paintings, Millares, Tous reservoir and the impressive Muela de Cortes, a natural precipice over the Jucar River that can be reached along a Moorish path.



Fig. 5.29 The Castle-Convent of Montesa

Cultural Routes in the Mediterranean Area

Christian holy caves in the Mediterranean area are mainly related to the expansion of the Marian cult. In the Iberian Peninsula, they are linked to the Christian conquest and their importance goes beyond the territory of the region itself. In Spain, the most outstanding places are the holy cave of Covadonga in Asturias (Cangas de Onís) and the holy cave of Montserrat in Catalonia (Monistrol de Montserrat, Barcelona). Both originally became places of spiritual reference in the budding Christian medieval kingdoms. The holy cave of Covadonga is a cavity located in the foothills of Mount Auseva and its place name comes from Latin, *Cova Dominica*, which is to say, Cave of the Lady, since this place is dedicated to cult of the Virgin Mary. According to chronicles about the Christian conquest, some troops of Pelayo, the first king of Asturias, took shelter in this cave, and the miraculous intervention by the Virgin, venerated in the cave by a hermit, was crucial in the victory. During his reign in the thirteenth century, Alfonso I the Catholic ordered to build a chapel dedicated to the Virgin inside the cave, in commemoration of the victory by Pelayo. His mortal remains were moved to this chapel in the thirteenth century by order of Alfonso X the Wise⁷⁸. After visiting the sanctuary, you can also go to the town of Cangas de Onís and the beautiful enclaves of the Spanish National Park of Picos de Europa.

The origin of the holy cave of Montserrat traditionally dates from the year 880, when some shepherd children saw a great beam of light coming from the sky, and found the image of the Virgin inside the cave. Then, the building of the chapel of the holy cave, the origin of the current monastery, was ordered. The building observed today dates from the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The chapel is located inside the cavity, slightly emerging. It has a Latin cross floor plan and a little cloister where the vestry, the offering room, the pilgrim's room and the cells of the monks are located. You can travel from Barcelona, arrive at the town of Monistrol of Montserrat, and reach the monastery by car or by taking the funicular. There, you can take a wonderful path through pleasant spots to arrive at the holy cave⁷⁹. Other minor sanctuary caves dedicated to the Virgin and which are culturally interesting are Saint Mary of Salgar (Montsonís, Cataluña) and the Virgin of the Cave (Piloña, Asturias).

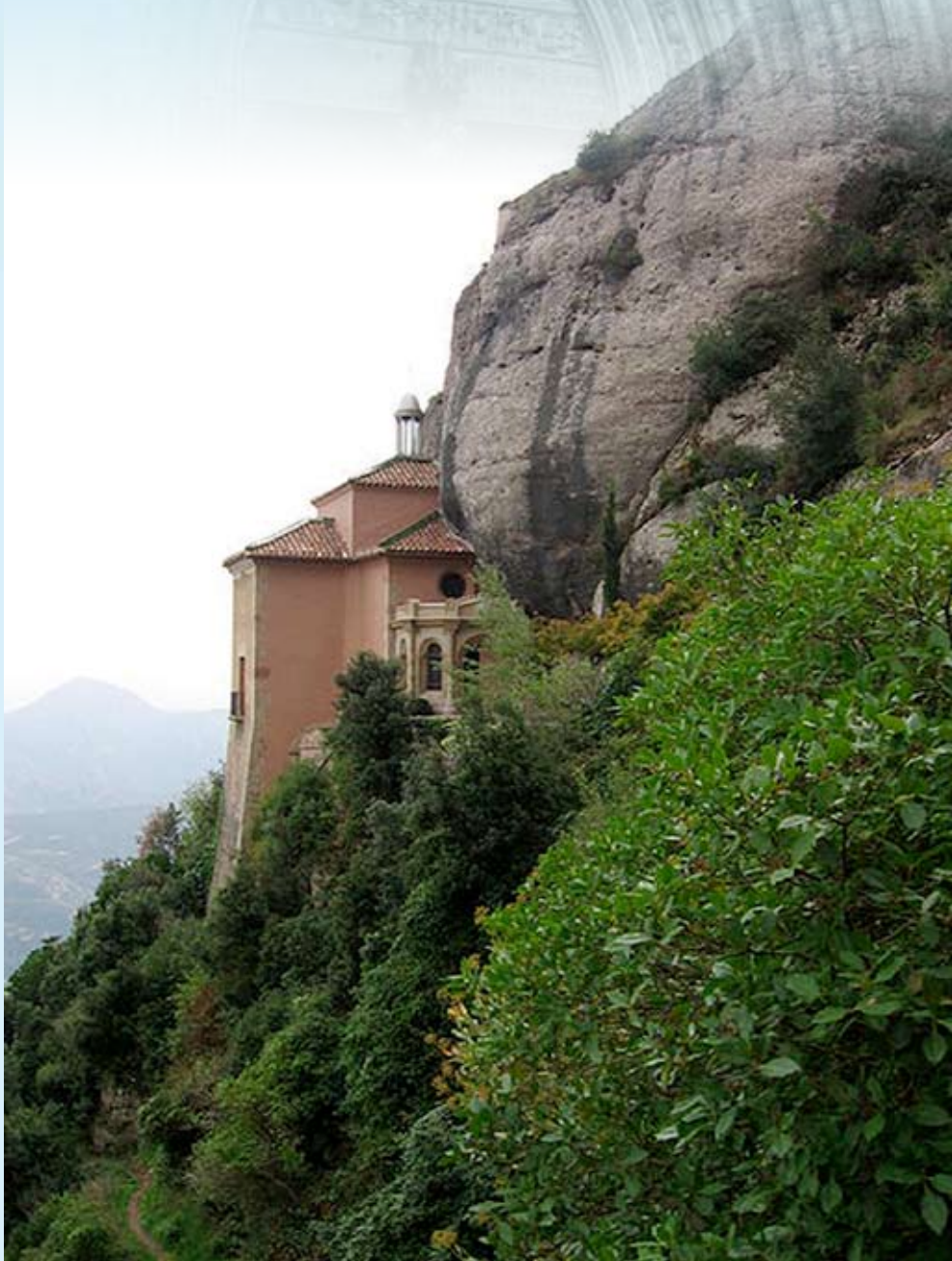


Fig. 5.30 The Holy Cave of Montserrat near Barcelona

Marian devotion has not only caused the creation of sanctuary caves in the current Spanish territory, but in other countries both in western and eastern areas of the Mediterranean, for instance the sanctuaries of Lourdes (Hautes Pyrénées, France) and the cave of Iria (Fátima, Portugal)⁸⁰. Both sanctuaries share the same features, with miraculous apparitions of the Virgin and they are related to requests, pleas and healing by using miraculous water. Nowadays, they have great importance in religious tourism. Consequently, they might not be the best places if you are looking for spirituality and retreat.

Other excellent sanctuary caves dedicated to the Virgin are Panaghia Spiliani, (Samos, Greece), Panaghia Spiliani (Nissiros, Greece) or the Mokattam Cave Church (Cairo, Egypt). The two first are orthodox sanctuaries whose origins are very similar to the western Christian caves. According to tradition, the images were venerated or found inside the caves and, their will to remain there was expressed by human intervention or by miraculous apparitions in the caves. Currently, in both cavities, there are two little churches related to the cult of sacred water. The third cavity, Mokattam Cave Church, is a Coptic orthodox sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin. Dating from the tenth century, its origin is due to a miraculous event by which the Virgin appeared and the miracle of Mokattam Mount took place. Surprisingly, the Virgin is related to the caves, regardless of her apparition in such places. Although this complex was mainly built in the twentieth century, it is still notable, since it has a church and enormous stands, which host an audience of 20,000 people during the religious services. The sanctuary caves existing in the Mediterranean area are not always linked to the Marian cult. They are also related to other religious phenomena or events, which, occasionally, are adored by one or more confessions. For instance, some caves linked to biblical texts, such as the Cave of Saint Paul (Rabat, Morocco), the Cave of Apocalypses (Patmos, Greece), Elijah's Cave (Haifa, Israel) and the Cave of Nativity (Bethlehem, Israel). There are also others linked to Christian monks and hermits, such as the Cave of Saint Peter (Antioch, Turkey), Göreme Cave Churches (Cappadocia, Turkey), the Monastery of Maalula (Syria)⁸¹, San Juan de la Peña (Huesca, Spain)⁸² or San Benedetto (Rome, Italy)⁸³. All of them are not only good examples of the deep religious symbolism linked to the cavities but they also become, thanks to their location, unique works of art perfectly integrated into extraordinary and spectacular natural spots.



Fig. 5.31 The Virgin with votive offerings in Panaghia Spiliani, Samos, Greece



Fig. 5.32 The Monastery of San Juan de la Peña, Huesca, Spain



Fig. 5.33 The Monastery of San Benedetto, Rome, Italy

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Endnotes

- 1 Tarradell, 1974; Gil-Mascarell, 1975; 1977; Gómez, 1924, 1931; Blázquez 1975; Aparicio, 1976, 1997; González 1993, 2003; Moneo, 2003; Llorio *et alii*, 2006; among others
- 2 González Blanco, 2003: 28
- 3 Guerra, 1973: 618
- 4 Aubet, 1982; Ramón, 1982, 1985; Almagro and Fortuny, 1970
- 5 Olmos, 1992; Bonnet, 1996
- 6 Edlund, 1987
- 7 Moneo, 2003
- 8 Llorio *et alii*, 2006
- 9 Aparicio, 1997; González, 2002-2003
- 10 Vaquerizo, 1985
- 11 Moneo, 2001 & 2003
- 12 Llorio *et alii*, 2006
- 13 Arjona, 2007: 61
- 14 Cumont, 1913; Alvar, 2001
- 15 Dacosta, 1991, Monreal, 1992: 54
- 16 Molina, 2006
- 17 Monreal, 1992:55
- 18 Munich, 1996; Alexandre, 1996
- 19 Monreal, 1991: 57
- 20 Molina, 2006: 863 and subsequent
- 21 Doménech, 1951: 48 and subsequent
- 22 Filali, 2004
- 23 This fact took place at different dates depending on the territories. Starting in 1525, Mudejar people in the Kingdom of Valencia were forced to be converted to Christianity.
- 24 Bazzana 1992, 1996
- 25 *Ibid.*, 1996

- 26 Sarthou, 1913; Donat, 1960; Fernández et alii, 1980
- 27 Gómez, 1924, 1931
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Kept in the City Historical Archives in Valencia
- 30 The translation of the original text, written in old Spanish language, has been made adapting some sentences in order to make them understandable for the reader. The original text is as follows: "*Muy cerca del hay vna cueua que llaman de Alimaymō en cuya entrada, hafta el tiepo de nueffro Valenciano, el Papa Calixto tercero, fe encontraua cō vn cavallo de piedra, fin tenerle fabiduria ninguna de quien le pufo, ni porque. A effa cueua en aquel siglo fe venian en romeria de todas naciones y creencias, afsi Chriffianos, como Moros, a vifitarla para cobrar falud, y cofas q fe perdian: y se postrauan de rodillas azia el cavallo. Començaron a recelar los Regidores de Valencia, de que aquel no fueffe el de Troya, y alguna reliquia dela ciega getiliidad, ocafiionada de alguna superfticion para ruyna de las almas, focapa de la religion; y mas de que vieron que los Moros enemigos de nueffra fanta fe yguualmente eran de los deuotos: y por effar conuencida de vehementi la fuperfticion, dieron cuenta della al fanto Padre: el qual como prouido paffor, con Bula dada en Roma, el año primero de fu Pontificado, les embio a mandar, que defpedaçado el cavallo, cerraffen de cal y cãto la boca de la cueua, por quitar todo genero de eftropieço*".
- 31 Regarding the Christian population, this hypothesis could be backed up by the existence of engraved crosses on the stalagmite, which means a Christianization of this formation. Nevertheless, this fact must be considered with caution, since this is only a little set of simple crosses whose chronology cannot be established.
- 32 Pérez et alii, 1983:39
- 33 These engravings are in the process of being analysed as a part of the research.
- 34 Iusticia, 1664: 10; Corredera, 1970: 36
- 35 1655, reprinted in 1664
- 36 Iusticia, 1664: 38 and subsequent
- 37 Escolano, 1610-1611 en Corredera, 1970: 54
- 38 Prospecting works have been carried out by the Valencian speleologist group La Senyera. The engravings are currently being analyzed by V. Barciela y J. Fernández.
- 39 As described by Corredera (1970:41), some sources reveal the presence of Moorish populations in this cave since 1550.
- 40 Corredera, 1970: 59
- 41 Iusticia, 1664: 44
- 42 Morro, 1904 in Corredera, 1970:80
- 43 Agramunt, 1754

- 44 Iusticia, 1664
- 45 Badía, 1962
- 46 Father Iosef de la Iusticia reported about the first procession to the holy cave on 8 September 1550, after the War of Germanies and to show gratitude (Iusticia, 1655:14)
- 47 Millán, 1987
- 48 Monferrer, 1997: 39
- 49 Ibid., 1997:65
- 50 Mundina, 1873 in Monferrer, 1997: 65
- 51 Arazo, 1980
- 52 Castelló, 1783
- 53 Alcover y Borja, 1930-1963, Asín 1944
- 54 Doménech, 1951:49
- 55 Gil, 1986
- 56 This spatial planning is mainly focused on coastal and maritime route control, as well as communication network in the inner territories, by means of the creation of castles and monasteries built in the fourteenth century. Of instance Santa Maria de la Valldigna, Monasterio de Corpus Christi, Santa M^a de la Murta, Cartuja de Valldecrist, Cartuja de Portacoeli, Monasterio cisterciense San Miguel de los Reyes and San Jerónimo de Cotalba.
- 57 Alfaura, 1658
- 58 Moya, 1998: 62
- 59 Mares, 1680
- 60 Iusticia, 1664: 37
- 61 Ibid., 1664: 38
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Tight clothing made of leather, usually suede, sleeveless or long-sleeved, from shoulders to waist.
- 64 Silk or thread net for the head, consisting on a tight ribbon through a casing, to tie up women and men's hair.
- 65 Very tight clothing from shoulders to waist.
- 66 Reference to the gifts made by the Moorish population.
- 67 Iusticia, 1955: 43
- 68 Reference to the gifts made by the Christian population.
- 69 Smock used by women outdoors.
- 70 Mares, 1680
- 71 Moya, 1998: 61
- 72 Iusticia, 1664: 187-188

73 Lorrio *et alii*, 2006: 61 and subsequent

74 Gamundi, 1994; Monferrer, 1997

75 Prats, 1929: 187

76 In order to get more practical information of the proposal of routes, please check the Official Website of Tourism of the Valencian Community, www.comunitatvalenciana.com

77 Gusi *et alii*, 2008

78 For further information, check www.santuariodecovadonga.com

79 For further information, check the website www.abadiamontserrat.net or the section Rutas Turísticas on the website www.gencat.cat/palaurobert, region of Bages. For more information available contact turismo@ccbages.org

80 For further information, check www.lourdes-france.org and www.santuariofatima.pt

81 There is more information available about these sacred places on the website www.sacred-destinations.com

82 For further information see www.monasteriosanjuan.com

83 For further information see www.benedittini-subiacco.it

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Chapter one

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Figure 1.3 La chapelle de la Vierge et les ruines du Téléstèrion (salle des cérémonies) en 1890–1895, published in K. Papaggeli and O. Miliari Varvitsioti (Cord.), *Ελευσίνα. Το βλέμμα του περιηγητή*, Éleusis, *Le regard du visiteur*, Catalogue d'Exposition, Municipalité d'Éleusis, 2008

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Figure 1.7 La chapelle de la Vierge au sommet de la colline au milieu du village, dessein de W. Gell, gravure published in *Society of Dilettanti, the Unedited Antiquities of Attica*, London, 1817

Figure 1.19 Dessin de l'église de Saint André, et l'entrée de la crypte où se trouve l'agiasma (eau bénite); published in Bibliothèque Internationale de l'Alliance Universelle, II2, Patras, 1896

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Figure 1.30 Devant le temple de Héphaïstos, transformée en église depuis le VII^e siècle jusqu' à la fin de la période de l'occupation Ottomane, déroulement d'une fête chrétienne orthodoxe. Panègyri avec un acrobate près de Theseion, Dessin de Sebastinao Iltar, 1800, published in M-F.,Tsigakou, *La Grèce retrouvée. Artistes et voyageurs des années romantiques*, Thames & Hudson, Ed. Ekdotiki Athinon, Athens 1984

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Figure 1.64 Vase antique, Ve siècle av. J.-C., représentant des athlètes pendant une course à pied, Metropolitan Museum, New York

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Figure 1.77 Relief antique représentant des athlètes en lutte, V^e siècle av J.-C., Musée Archéologique d' Athènes, published in K., Louskou and E., Nikolidakis, *Ο Αφέντης Αἱ Γιώργης της Αράχωβας και το Πανηγυράκι. Ιστορία και Παράδοση της Αράχωβας*, Le patron Saint George de Arachova et le Panigyraiki, Histoire et Tradition, Arachova, Saint Georges Church, 1997

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Figure 2.17 Plate 38 from the *Description de l'Égypte*, Antiquités V, Section and plan of the Attarine Mosque, drawn by the scholars of the Napoleonic expedition, 1798

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Figure 2.29 Bust of Sarapis, Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

Figure 2.30 Coin showing Sarapis with the Atef crown, published in J.N. Svoronos, *Ta Nomismata ton Ptolemaion*, Athens, 1904

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Figure 2.36 Ruins of the Temple of Sarapis in Rome, at the foot of the Quirinal Hill, public domain

Figure 2.37 Coin showing Isis Pharia holding the inflated sail in both hands, minted in Alexandria by Hadrian, published in G. Dattari, *Monete Imperiali Greche Numi Augg Alexandrini. Catalogo della Collezione Compilato dal Proprietario*, Cairo, 1901

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Figure 2.44 Statue of Isis found in Messene, courtesy of Petros Themelis

Figure 2.45 Letters patent granted to the city of Paris by Napoleon on 29 January 1811, on which the coat-of-arms has three golden bees on a red background. It shows a silver star above the nave, and the goddess Isis on the prow of the ship, public domain

Figure 2.46 Engraving of *The Fountain of Regeneration in the Debris of the Bastille commemorating the French Revolution*, engraved after a series of drawings exhibited at the Salon de Paris. It depicts the Festival of Unity held in 1793, four years after the Revolution. A crowd gathers around a statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis which has been erected on the site of the infamous Bastille prison to signify the regeneration of the French people, postcard

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Figure 3.74 The main hall of the Patriarchal Library of Alexandria, courtesy of M. Awad collection

Figure 3.75 The procession of the Greek Orthodox Epitaph in Alexandria. Early 20th century, courtesy of M. Awad collection

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Figure 5.31 The Virgin with votive offerings in Panaghia Spiliani, Samos, Greece, courtesy of Ioli Vingopoulou

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