



Prolegomena to the Study of the *Miracles of St Menas*¹

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Abstract: This article aims to outline the key developments in the early history of the *Miracles of St Menas*. It presents arguments supporting the primacy of the Greek text over the Coptic version. The article then examines the time and place of the original composition, locating it at Abū Mīnā in the latter half of the 6th century. The complex process of the collection's development spanned several centuries, with key stages including the formation of the 13-miracle collection after 614; its translation into Coptic before 641; the subsequent expansion of the Coptic collection; and the revision of the Greek original. Finally, the article argues that the original collection had a local character, aimed primarily at the local community.

Keywords: St Menas; Abū Mīnā; miracle collections; hagiography; Late Antiquity

1. Textual tradition

1.1. Manuscripts and redactions in Greek and Coptic

The primary witnesses of the *Miracles of St Menas* are manuscripts in Coptic and Greek. The main collection of the *Miracles* in Coptic is represented by five manuscripts, though none of these has been preserved in its entirety:

- The Morgan Library and Museum M.590 (CLM 221)³, AD 893, from the Monastery of Archangel Michael at Phantoou (Ḥāmūli)

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³ The CLM (Coptic Literary Manuscript) is an identification system for all known literary manuscripts in Coptic. It is utilised within the Archaeological Atlas of Coptic

in the Fayyum. The manuscript includes the prologue and 17 miracles. However, it is severely damaged, rendering parts of the text for some miracles illegible. As this is the only known Coptic manuscript where the number of the last miracle preserved, it cannot be concluded that 17 was a typical number in the Coptic collections. The prologue attributes the *Miracles* to Theophilus, the Alexandrian Patriarch. Parts of M.590 were edited by James Drescher (prologue + miracles 1 to 4 [in part] and 14 [in part] to 17) and Paul Devos (miracles 8 and 10)⁴. None of the Arabic manuscripts studied by Felicitas Jaritz follow the sequence of M.590⁵;

- IFAO copte inv. 315-322 (CLM 1770), 9th-10th c. (PATHs), 11th c. (Devos)⁶, from the White Monastery. These leaves constitute a second quire from a larger, lost codex. The miracles follow a different sequence than in M.590. Most of the leaves were edited by Seÿna Bacot (miracles 2 [in part] to 5), but a single miracle was edited by Paul Devos (miracle 6)⁷. The text diverges from M.590 in numerous instances, preserving significant readings that align with the Greek text but are absent in the other Coptic witnesses;
- London, British Museum, Or. 4919 (4) = *P.Lond.Copt.* I 340 (CLM 1324), undated, provenance unknown. It consists of fragments of

Literature, developed as part of the PATHs project <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/> (accessed 22.11.2024).

⁴ J. Drescher, *Apa Mena: A Selection of Coptic Texts Relating to St. Menas, Edited, with Translation and Commentary*, Cairo 1946, p. 7-34 (text), 108-125 (tr.); P. Devos, *Un récit des miracles de S. Ménas en copte et en éthiopien*, AnBol 77 (1959) p. 454-462; AnBol 78 (1960) p. 156-157; P. Devos, *Le juif et le chrétien: un miracle de saint Ménas*, AnBol 78 (1960) p. 292-301; S. Bacot, *Saint Ménas, soldat et martyr. Sa vie, ses miracles, son sanctuaire*, Bagnole 2020, p. 64-78 translated several miracles into French (1, 10, 15-17 according to the M.590 sequence; in Bacot's numeration they bear the numbers 6-10).

⁵ H.N. Takla recently discovered a manuscript (Ms. Mar. Mena 2) based on the Coptic text preserved in M.590. However, no further details about its content have been provided, see H.N. Takla, *The Arabic Version of the Miracles of Apa Mina Based on Two Unpublished Manuscripts in the Collection of the St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society in Los Angeles*, in: *Christianity and Monasticism in Northern Egypt: Beni Suef, Giza, Cairo, and the Nile Delta*, ed. G. Gabra – H.N. Takla, Cairo – New York 2017, p. 167.

⁶ <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/manuscripts/1770>; Devos, *Le juif et le chrétien*, p. 279.

⁷ S. Bacot, *Quatre miracles de saint Ménas dans un manuscrit copte de l'Ifao (Inv. 315-322)*, "Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale" 111 (2011) p. 35-73; Devos, *Le juif et le chrétien*, p. 285-292. The miracles correspond to nos 6, 2, 3, 4 and 8 in Ms. M.590.

miracles 2 and 3, and was edited by Walter E. Crum and re-published by Seřna Bacot⁸;

- Egypt, Cairo, Egyptian Museum, shelfmark unknown (CLM 6412); 8th-10th c.; found in Qasr Ibrim. At the current state of research, it is known to contain fragments of the prologue and miracle 1. It remains as yet unedited, but an edition by Joost Hagen is anticipated⁹;
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. or. oct. 409, f. 27, 28 (CLM 6255), 11-13th c., from the White Monastery. It contains miracle no. 11¹⁰.

The Greek tradition regarding the *Miracles* has been thoroughly studied by Luigi Silvano and Paolo Varalda, who examined numerous manuscripts, none of which dates back to earlier than the 10th c. This tradition divides into four recensions, with recension α preserving the most reliable text. The Greek collection includes up to 13 miracles, although most manuscripts contain only a selection of them. Some manuscripts attribute authorship to Timotheus of Alexandria. Italian scholars describe the Greek textual tradition of the *Miracles* as “estremamente fluida” (“extremely fluid”)¹¹. Based on their research, Silvano and Varalda have edited four of the miracles, with one additional miracle edited solely by Varalda¹². The only complete edition of the Greek collection remains Ivan Pomialovskiĭ’s, which is based on a single manuscript from Moscow (recension β)¹³. Rein Miedema edited five miracles from one of the α manuscripts (*Vaticanus Gr.* 797) and another

⁸ W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1905, p. 156-157 (see also a corrected shelfmark on p. 520); Bacot, *Quatre miracles*, p. 51, 55, 57.

⁹ Joost Hagen presented a paper on the manuscript at a Workshop on the *Miracles of St Menas* in Katowice in October 2022. Based on Hagen’s preliminary analysis, the version from Qasr Ibrīm contains numerous variant readings compared to Ms. M.590.

¹⁰ P. Piwowarczyk, *A New Fragment of the Coptic Miracles of St Menas* (Berlin Ms. or. oct. 408, Fols. 27-28), “Journal of Coptic Studies” 27 (2025) (forthcoming).

¹¹ L. Silvano – P. Varalda, *Per l’edizione dei Miracula sancti Menae (BHG 1256-1269)*, “Philologia Antiqua” 12 (2019) p. 58.

¹² Silvano – Varalda, *Per l’edizione*, p. 51-85; P. Varalda, *Il ricco Eutropio e i piattini. La versione greca di uno dei Miracula sancti Menae (BHG 1258)*, “Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata” 18 (2021) p. 207-236.

¹³ *Zhitie prepodobnago Paisiia Velikago i Timofeĭa patriarkha Aleksandriiskago poviestvovanie o chudesakh* sv. Velikomuchenika Miny, ed. I. Pomialovskiĭ, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 62-89.

five from a γ manuscript (*Vaticanus Gr.* 866)¹⁴. Paul Devos edited the miracle *The Jew and the Christian* based on an α manuscript (*Laurentianus* XI, 9)¹⁵. Two Arabic manuscripts, consulted by Jaritz, are translations of the Greek 13-miracle collection. These manuscripts, designated as Š and L (both dating to approximately the 13th century and originating from the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai.), represent Felicitas Jaritz's Version 7 of the *Miracles*. The prologue of these manuscripts attributes the miracles to Timotheus¹⁶. The 5-miracle version published by John Duffy and Emmanouel Bourbouhakis is an abridged text from the 12th-century Synaxarium and does not contribute to discussion on the early tradition of the *Miracles*¹⁷.

1.2. Appendix I. The sequence of miracles in main collections

Convention- al title of the miracle	Greek col- lection (ac- cording to BHG = Po- mialovskii)	Coptic collection according to Ms. M.590 (standard sequence in Coptic)	Coptic collection accord- ing to the IFAO Ms.	Arabic collections accord- ing to Jaritz's sigla		
				M. (standard sequence in Arabic)	F	Š
<i>The Isaurian Pilgrim</i>	1	2 (ed. Dre- scher)	3	5	1	1
<i>Eutropius and the Silver Plates</i>	2	3 (ed. Dre- scher)	4	7	2	2
<i>The Female Pilgrim (So- phia)</i>	3	4 (ed. Dre- scher, in part)	5	9	3	3
<i>The Jew and the Christian</i>	4	8 (ed. De- vos)	6 (in part)	10	4	4
<i>The Paralytic and the Mute Woman</i>	5	9		11	5	5

¹⁴ R. Miedema, *De Wonderverhalen van den Heiligen Menas*, "Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis" 14 (1918) p. 212-221, 231-236.

¹⁵ Devos, *Le juif et le chrétien*, p. 282-285. The second Ms. used by Devos, *Athon. Lavr.* 450, was not consulted by Italian scholars.

¹⁶ F. Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen zum Heiligen Menas*, Heidelberg 1993, p. 58, 60, 150, 183.

¹⁷ J. Duffy – E. Bourbouhakis, *Five Miracles of St. Menas*, in: *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations. Texts and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides*, ed. J.W. Nesbitt, Leiden – Boston 2003, p. 65-81.

<i>The Samaritan Woman</i>	6	16 (ed. Drescher)		23	19	6
<i>Three Brothers, the Pigs, and the Crocodile</i>	7	10 (ed. Devos)		12	6	7
<i>The Poor Woman's Sheep</i>	8	14 (ed. Drescher, in part)		15	10	8
<i>The Barren Camel</i>	9	1 (ed. Drescher)		17	12	9
<i>The Foal with Three Legs</i>	10	6	2 (in part)	19	14	10
<i>The Wood Offering</i>	11	11		13	7	11
<i>The Possessed Man</i>	12	15 (ed. Drescher)			18	12
<i>The Pig Thief</i>	13	5		18	13	13
<i>The Pig Killed by the Deamon</i>		7		20	15	
<i>The Soldier and The Pig</i>		12		14	8	
<i>The Abused Female Pilgrim</i>		13		4	9	
<i>The Water Miracle</i>		17 (ed. Drescher)		16	11	
<i>The Resurrected Worker</i>				1		
<i>The Falsely Accused</i>				2		
<i>The Possessed Jew</i>				3	21	
<i>The Unjust Merchant</i>				6	23	
<i>The Snake in the Vessel</i>				8	22	
<i>The Pig Offering</i>				21	16	
<i>The Stolen Horse</i>				22	17	

2. History of the Collection

2.1. Discussion with proponents of Coptic priority

Most modern scholars recognise a Coptic origin for these miracles¹⁸, generally dating them to the late 5th or early 6th c.¹⁹ If proven, the *Miracles* would represent an exceptionally rare, if not unique, instance of translation from Coptic into Greek²⁰. However, for several reasons, I find such a direction of translation highly improbable. Since my proposition challenges this mainstream view, I begin by discussing the arguments put forward by proponents of a Coptic origin for the miracles.

James Drescher, who had only limited access to the Greek text, considered the Coptic readings to be superior. He supported this assessment with two examples of toponyms as evidence²¹.

One example is Λοζονῆτα (which Drescher knew only through Pomialovskii's edition as transmitted by Delehayé)²² versus the more accurate Coptic φιλοζανιτη. Drescher suggested that the initial φι was mistaken for the Bohairic definite article and was left in the translation. However, the edition by Silvano and Varalda demonstrated that various Greek

¹⁸ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 105; P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance. Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine*, Subsidia Hagiographica 26, Brussels 1950, p. 37; Devos, *Le juif*, p. 275-277; Á. Narro, *Tipología de los milagros griegos de San Minás (BHG 1256-1269)*, in: *Mite i miracle a les literatures antigues i medievals*, ed. L. Movellán Luis – J.J. Pomer Monferrer, Reus 2018, p. 104; Silvano – Varalda, *Per l'edizione*, p. 55; indirectly also S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit. Eine Sammlung christlicher Stätten in Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, v. 4, Wiesbaden 1988, p. 1599.

¹⁹ Peeters, *Orient et Byzance*, p. 36 (not earlier than the end of the 5th c.); S. Efthymiadis, *Greek Byzantine Collections of Miracles: A Chronological and Bibliographical Survey*, "Symbolae Osloenses" 74 (1999) p. 196-197; after him Silvano – Varalda, *Per l'edizione*, p. 55.

²⁰ The most well-argued example of such a translation is the *Sermo asceticus* by Stephen of Thebes, see A. Suciu, *The Sermo asceticus of Stephen the Theban in Sahidic Coptic*, JTS 69 (2018) s. 628-673.

²¹ Two additional examples are provided in the footnotes (Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 113, 122). The substitution of Coptic 'comes' for Greek 'king' and Coptic 'ass' for Greek 'horse' illustrates that the Greek text, as it exists today, has lost some of its original Egyptian flavour. This observation aligns with our argument for the loss of the Greek original.

²² H. Delehayé, *L'invention des reliques de saint Ménas à Constantinople*, AnBol 29 (1910) p. 127-135.

manuscripts contain distorted readings, although some still preserve the initial Φ²³. These distortions are unsurprising, as the Greek text was reworked at a time when the toponym ‘Philoxenite’ would have held little meaning for Byzantine Christians.

The second example is the toponyme Πανηφαιάτ, cited in Greek as the birthplace of Menas in *The Barren Camel*. Drescher interpreted this as a misreading of the Coptic ΠΑΝΗΠΑΙΑΤ meaning “one belonging to Nepaiat” (or “the man of Nêphaiait” in Drescher’s translation), a construction typical in Coptic, where a possessive article is followed by a place name.

However, Drescher also entertained an alternative explanation for this place name in Greek: “If the Greek priority is to be maintained, it would appear the extant Greek text is merely a late debased version of a Greek original now lost”²⁴. The evidence strongly supports this alternative option. In the Coptic version, the phrase is absent and the toponyme Nepaiat does not occur at all in this miracle. The form which Drescher quotes occurs only in the prologue to the miracles in wording ΝΕΠΑΕΙΑΤ. ΠΑΝΗΠΑΙΑΤ does not appear in the Coptic text at all. The meaning “a man of Nepaeiat” occurs in the *Encomium*, but in the form ΟΥΡΕΜΝΕΠΑΕΙΑΤ²⁵. The Greek Mss. of recension α that I was able to check have the readings: πόλεως Πανφαιτῶν²⁶; the Old Church Slavonic translation has отъ града Панифаіата. However, the proper Coptic name of the region begins with πα-/φα- in the northern dialects²⁷. In the Coptic *Martyrium of St Menas* we can find only one instance of a similar form – τπαειατ²⁸. This toponym is attested in Greek papyri in many forms²⁹.

Timm argues for a Coptic text behind the phrase ἀπὸ πόλεως Πανηφαιάτ as well, but his reasoning differs from that of Drescher. According to Timm, the whole phrase is a result of a mistranslation of the Coptic нте нефает³⁰. Unfortunately, he does not discuss this idea in

²³ Silvano – Varalda, *Per l'edizione* p. 62, e.g. Φαινοζεντῶν in Mss A1 and V2.

²⁴ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 105.

²⁵ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 36, c. 2, l. 28-29.

²⁶ Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, plut. XI 9, f. 97v, col. II, l. 28, in: <https://tecabml.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/plutei/id/1446182> (accessed 10.11.2024); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 1468, f. 276v, col. II, l. 10, in: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107218498> (accessed 10.11.2024).

²⁷ V. Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven 1983, p. 159.

²⁸ *Passio S. Menae*, ed. Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 2, c. 1, l. 14. The form παιατ is also attested in *Passio Shenufe* (f. 109v II), ed. Reymond – Barns, p. 91.

²⁹ Vycichl, *Dictionnaire*, p. 159.

³⁰ Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, v. 4, p. 1599.

detail. He might have in mind Coptic ⲧⲙⲉ (variants ⲧⲓ, ⲧⲙⲉ) rendered as πόλις, but πολίς is a loanword frequently found in Coptic, and the word ⲧⲙⲉ means a ‘village’.

I find it likely that the native Coptic toponym was already present in the original Greek collection, and there is no reason to reconstruct a supposedly misinterpreted Coptic phrase here. The spelling of the name in ancient Greek and Coptic texts – both in papyri and literary sources – is so varied that it is impossible to determine whether Πανηφαιάτ represents a form included in the original Greek core collection or if it reflects scribal errors.

Paul Devos presents a more complex linguistic argument, which requires a detailed analysis³¹. In *The Jew and the Christian*, the latter loses a personal item after falling from a horse. In the Coptic text, the object is referred to as a ⲭⲟϣⲣ ⲛⲛⲟϣⲃ, which falls from the Christian’s finger. In the Greek version, it is described as a δακτυλοκλείδιον τοῦ σκεβρίου falling ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου³² αὐτοῦ. According to Devos, it is difficult to explain how δακτυλοκλείδιον τοῦ σκεβρίου could have been translated into ⲭⲟϣⲣ, but he argues that the reverse change is easier to reconstruct. Devos suggests that the word ⲭⲟϣⲣ was part of the original Coptic text. Referring to Crum’s dictionary, he notes that ⲭⲟϣⲣ has a dual meaning: ‘key’ and ‘ring’³³. Noteworthy, Crum bases a secondary meaning ‘as key’ primarily on δακτυλοκλείδιον in Greek text of St Menas’ miracles³⁴. The translator into Greek, choosing the first meaning, was logically led to introduce a money box (σκεβρίον), which the key would presumably open, Devos argues.

³¹ Devos, *Le juif et le chrétien*, p. 276.

³² Devos translates this as ‘sein’, but we may also understand it as ‘fold of a garment’, ‘pocket’ (H.G. Liddell – R. Scott – H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996, p. 974, s.v. κόλπος).

³³ Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, p. 121.

³⁴ Additionally, Crum brings three pieces of papyrological evidence for ⲭⲟϣⲣ meaning a ‘key’. Two of them are relevant: *BKU* 299 and *P.Mon.Epiph.* 397 (W.E. Crum – H.G. Evelyn White, *The Monastery of Epiphanius*, v. 2, New York 1926, p. 257 contains interpretation of both pieces). Both pieces are ostraca from Western Thebes, which might suggest that this meaning of the word was of local character. The third piece *CO* 459 remain inconclusive. It is a list of books and other items (it does not seem to be a list of church property) among them ⲱⲙⲟϣⲓ ⲛⲭⲟϣⲣ ⲉϣⲱⲟⲟⲥⲉ ⲁⲉϣⲓⲣⲧⲟϥ what Crum translates as “beaten, wrought (iron) keys”. Interestingly, in an original publication (*Coptic Ostraca from the Collections of the Egypt Exploration Fund, the Cairo Museum and Others*, ed. W.E. Crum, London 1902, p. 42), he translates “8 damaged rings which have been taken away”.

However, I see no reason to dismiss the possibility of the reverse process. Assuming a Greek original, a Coptic translator, uncertain of the meaning of δακτυλοκλείδιον, may have selected the term ζογρ, a general word for ‘ring’³⁵ that also refers to a signet ring used for sealing³⁶. This choice aligns well with the context, as a signet ring would serve as a means of identifying the owner. Arabic translations follow an unambiguous interpretation of the Coptic ζογρ as a signet ring. Mss. F and M have: ‘a golden ring (*hātām*)’³⁷. The Arabic term *hātām* means ‘seal’ or ‘signet ring’. What is most important for us is that the Arabic Ms. Š, translated from Greek, also denotes the item expressly as “his ring” (*hātīmuh*), and “a ring by which he sealed”³⁸. It appears that ‘ring’ – more precisely, a ‘signet ring’ – rather than ‘key’, was the primary meaning of δακτυλοκλείδιον. A “ring to the box” would therefore refer not to a locking mechanism but to a signet used to stamp a seal on the money box³⁹. Notably, in the story, δακτυλοκλείδιον is used to identify its owner (γνωρίζεις αὐτό; – ‘Do you recognise it?’), rather than to open anything⁴⁰.

The term has no attestation in the TLG corpus. However, it does appear in papyri, specifically in *P.Fuad Univ.* 8, dated to the second c. AD⁴¹. The papyrus contains a list of items for sale, including a silver δακτυλοκλιδιν (interpreted as δακτυλοκλείδιον). The papyrus editor, David S. Crawford, references only an entry previously discussed in Crum’s Coptic dictionary⁴².

³⁵ James 2:2: “ἐρεξενζογρ ἡνογβ ρῆ νεφτηηβε” (Greek ἀνήρ χρυσοδακτύλιος).

³⁶ Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, p. 121.

³⁷ Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 399, l. 16; 420, l. 7.

³⁸ Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 150, 220.

³⁹ The term σκευβίον (‘money-box’) is also quite rare in Greek, with only three attestations in the TLG corpus. It is a spelling variant of the more common σκευρίον (see Devos, *Le juif*, p. 276, n. 3). It is possible that modern editors have favoured the reading σκευρίον, meaning the term might be more frequently represented in the manuscripts than in the published editions. The earliest attestation appears in the *Life of St Theodore of Syceon*, written in the 7th c. by George of Syceon – a work contemporary with the 13-miracle collection of St Menas. Other attestations are found in the Byzantine *Basilica* (9th to 13th c.) and in the *Canonarium* by Nikon of the Black Mountain (11th to 12th c.).

⁴⁰ Devos, *Le juif*, p. 284, l. 15.

⁴¹ *Fuad I University Papyri*, ed. D.S. Crawford, Alexandria 1949, p. 10-15.

⁴² *Fuad I University Papyri*, p. 13.

It is difficult to imagine a functional key made of silver, as silver is a soft and malleable metal, but a silver signet ring would be more plausible. However, caution is still necessary. From a late medieval source, we know of a silver key (not part of a ring) used for a reliquary in Constantinople⁴³. Additionally, at least one example exists of a Byzantine gold signet ring with an actual key attached, dated to the 9th c. and currently housed in Dumbarton Oaks. Similar objects, often made of iron, are also known, though their shape would have prevented them from being worn on the finger for a long time⁴⁴.

Now we can easily imagine that the original Greek already had δακτυλοκλείδιον and aptly described how it was worn. It was the later Coptic translator who, finding the word and object unfamiliar, decided to describe the situation in a more straightforward way.

Paul Peteers offered yet another argument in favour of Coptic precedence. His assessment is based solely on personal linguistic preferences and reveals explicit Eurocentric biases against Coptic literature:

Le fait qui seul nous intéresse en ce moment, c'est que ces récits, fond et forme, sont d'inspiration copte. L'hellénisme aurait doublement tort de revendiquer ces pauvretés, d'une langue plus qu'à demi barbare et que, par endroits, il faut remettre en copte pour y trouver un sens acceptable. Elles sont le produit d'un terroir où il continua d'en pousser, après que les Grecs eurent cessé d'y prendre intérêt⁴⁵.

Such a subjective valuation requires no in-depth refutation.

⁴³ G. Vikan – J. Nesbitt, *Security in Byzantium: Locking, Sealing and Weighing*, Dumbarton Oaks 1980, p. 4. It is a report by Spanish envoy Gonzalez de Clavijo.

⁴⁴ On such objects, Vikan – Nesbitt, *Security in Byzantium*, p. 4-5; Crawford, in: *Fuad I*, p. 13. Vikan and Nesbitt (*Security in Byzantium*, p. 4) note that “the hoop and swivel joint suggest that Byzantine keys were carried about the house on the hand – the hoop fit over the finger like a ring, and the short barrel and bit folded neatly on the palm”. While I find this solution plausible in certain situations (e.g., in cases of particular danger), holding a metal element in the hand would inevitably form a fist, making it difficult to use that hand effectively.

⁴⁵ Peteers, *Orient et Byzance*, p. 37.

2.2. Arguments for the Greek priority of the *Miracles*

Having refuted the arguments of other scholars, I strongly advocate for a Greek origin of the *Miracles*, as the geographical and historical context makes a Coptic original highly improbable. The fifth and sixth centuries witnessed the emergence of the earliest miracle collections in Greek, the most significant of which are associated with St Thecla and Sts Cosmas and Damian. Thecla was venerated in Mareotis⁴⁶, while Cosmas and Damian were honoured in Alexandria⁴⁷. Although it remains unclear whether these miracle collections reached Egypt immediately, it is quite possible that they inspired the composition of similar collections at pilgrimage shrines near Alexandria – specifically, of Sts Cyrus and John at Menouthis, and that of St Menas at Abū Mīnā. In the following, I will focus on the latter shrine.

The written evidence from Abū Mīnā, including inscriptions and ostraca, is exclusively in Greek, and Philoxenite also yields only Greek texts⁴⁸. To the best of my knowledge, not a single St Menas' flask bears a Coptic inscription⁴⁹. The flasks are generally rare in Egypt, reinforcing the view that the sanctuary did not enjoy widespread popularity among Egyptians⁵⁰. The earliest known visual representation of St Menas also originates from a Greek-speaking region west of Alexandria (The Ennaton Monastery,

⁴⁶ E. Wipszycka, *Sainte Thècle dans la Maréotide*, in: *Unending Variety: Papyrological Texts and Studies in Honour of Peter van Minnen*, ed. A.J. Connor – J.H.F. Dijkstra – F.A.J. Hoogendijk, *Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava* 42, Leiden 2024, p. 207-211.

⁴⁷ J. Gascoü, *Églises et chapelles d'Alexandrie byzantine: recherches de topographie culturelle*, *Studia Papyrologica et Aegyptiaca Parisina* 1, Paris 2020, p. 21-22.

⁴⁸ With the possible exception of one word at ostrakon inv. M200249, ed. T. Derda – M. Gwiazda – J. Burdajewicz, *A Private House in 'Marea'/Philoxenite Transformed into a Monastic Institution and Other Christian Hybrid Buildings in the Mareotis Region*, "Journal of Coptic Studies" 25 (2003) p. 116, 121. From the entire area of the so-called Western Coast, including Abū Mīnā, the Trismegistos database yields only a single text in Coptic: a funerary stele from Taposiris Magna (*SB Kopt.* 2.1237 = TM 102051).

⁴⁹ The literature on St. Menas' flasks is extensive, but for a comprehensive survey of inscriptions, see A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes*, Paris 2001, p. 148.

⁵⁰ E. Wipszycka, *Philoxenite: Pilgrims on the Road to Abu Mina*, in: *Philoxenite on Lake Mareotis: A Town and Pilgrimage Station on the Way to the Sanctuary of Saint Menas (Abu Mena)*, v. 1: *History and Topography*, ed. T. Derda – M. Gwiazda, Leuven 2025 (forthcoming).

modern Dēr az-Zaggāg)⁵¹. This depiction, carved on a 5th-century stele, originates from a site that also yielded Greek inscriptions⁵². The cult clearly first flourished locally within the Greek-speaking area between Abū Mīnā and Alexandria, with the earliest confirmed representations in the Nile Valley appearing only in the 6th c.

Furthermore, if the sanctuary had been more popular among Egyptians, we would expect to see a noticeable presence of the local Bohairic dialect in the text of the *Miracles*. However, the Coptic *Miracles* are primarily written in standard Sahidic and display no features specific to Bohairic. Instead, most of the peculiarities in the IFAO manuscript are shared with the Fayyumic dialect⁵³, which also influenced Sahidic in both the New York and Berlin manuscripts.

It is rarely acknowledged that, from AD 539 onward, Mareotis and Abū Mīnā did not administratively belong to Egypt. At that time, Mareotis was detached from Egypt and annexed to Libya⁵⁴. In the second decade of the 7th c., Sophronius refers to Abū Mīnā as “the pride of all Libya”⁵⁵. The miracle in manuscript Ms. M.585 similarly refers to Abū Mīnā as Libya (ΛΙΒΗ)⁵⁶. Additionally, the Coptic *Martyrdom of St Menas* identifies Nepaeiat (the Coptic equivalent of Mareotis)⁵⁷ as part of Libya⁵⁸. Finally,

⁵¹ S. Hodak, *Coptic Literature as a Source for Coptic Art, Part Two, Second Fascicule: Martyrs (and Other Saints)*, in: *Pharaonen, Mönche und Gelehrte. Auf dem Pilgerweg durch 5000 Jahre ägyptische Geschichte über drei Kontinente Heike Behlmer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. D. Atanassova – F. Feder – H. Sternberg el-Hotabi, Texte und Studien zur Koptischen Bibel 4, Wiesbaden 2023, p. 375; *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, ed. K. Weitzmann, New York 1979, p. 573-574.

⁵² A. Łajtar – E. Wipszycka, *L'építaphe de Duḥēla SB III 6249: moines gaïanites dans les monastères alexandrins*, “The Journal of Juristic Papyrology” 28 (1998) 55-57.

⁵³ Bacot, *Quatre miracles*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Iustinianus, *Edictum* 13, 18, in: *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation*, v. 2, tr. D.J.D. Miller – P. Sarris, Cambridge 2018, p. 1094.

⁵⁵ Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Miracula SS. Cyri at Iohannis* 46, 1, ed. Fernández Marcos, p. 351: “πάσης Λιβύης καθέστηκεν φύραγμα”.

⁵⁶ *Miracula S. Menae* ex Codice M.585, ed. Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 96 (text), 159 (tr.).

⁵⁷ The equivalency is clear from medieval Arabic *scala* dictionaries, see Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, v. 4, p. 1601; see also Abū al-Barakāt, *Scala magna*, ed. Macomber, p. 164.

⁵⁸ *Passio S. Menae* Coptice, ed. Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 5 (text), 103 (tr.): “ΤΛΙΒΗ ΝΝΕΠΑΙΕΑΤ”.

Mareotis is regarded as part of Libya not only in hagiographic literature but also in other sources⁵⁹.

However, the distinction between Egypt and Mareotis is not merely administrative but, above all, ethnic. The presence of Libyans in the region is noteworthy. Historically, the Egyptian name *Paiet* denotes a Libyan/Berber tribe native to this area⁶⁰, which was clearly regarded as inhabited by non-Egyptian people.

Among the vineyard workers recorded in the ostraca from the winery at Abū Mīnā, three individuals are identified as Libyans and two as Egyptians. Additionally, one worker is noted as originating from the Libyan/Mareotic village of Kobio. Other individuals from the Egyptian towns Terenuthis and Naucratis are also mentioned⁶¹. The ethnonyms and places of origin recorded likely indicate that these individuals came from outside the town. The ratio of outsiders identified as Libyans and Egyptians appears to be roughly equal. Although a relatively small number of individuals in the ostraca bear native Egyptian names, it is important to recognise that this does not rule out the possibility that workers with Christian or traditional Greek names could also have been of Egyptian (or Libyan) origin⁶².

The literary tradition reveals strong connections between Mareotis and Libya with Abū Mīnā, yet shows almost no links to Egypt. In the recorded miracles, no pilgrims from Egypt are mentioned, though there is one from Libya (Marmarica) in *The Poor Woman's Sheep*. Another Libyan is noted as a wealthy benefactor to the poor⁶³. The *Encomium* further describes the route of the saint's relics passing through Mareotic and Libyan settlements: "And, leaving Alexandria, they put the saint on a ship of Lake Marea. They came westward on that day to the Taposiriac Taenia. They put him on a camel and brought him first to Kobio, a village of Mariotes. And when, by the grace of God and His holy martyr, they

⁵⁹ Dionysius Alexandrinus, apud Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7, 11, 14, ed. Bar-
dy, Sch 41, p. 182: "καὶ λιβυκωτέρους ἡμᾶς μεταστῆσαι τόπους ἐβουλήθη, καὶ τοὺς
πανταχόσε εἰς τὸν Μαρεώτην ἐκέλευσεν συρρεῖν" – It is noteworthy that both Diony-
sius and Eusebius wrote long before Justinian's edict. See also Iohannes Ephesinus, *His-
toria ecclesiastica*, ed. E.W. Brooks, CSCO 105, p. 190 (text), CSCO 106, p. 142 (tr.).

⁶⁰ Vycichl, *Dictionnaire*, p. 159.

⁶¹ *Greek Ostraca from Abu Mina (O.AbuMina)*, ed. N. Litinas, Archiv für Papyrus-
forschung und verwandte Gebiete Beiheft 25, Berlin – New York 2008, p. 45-46.

⁶² *Greek Ostraca from Abu Mina*, p. 44.

⁶³ *Miracula S. Menae* Coptice ex Codice M.585, ed. J. Drescher, *Apa Mena*,
p. 91 (text), 157 (tr.).

had defeated the barbarians, they brought his holy remains to the village of Este”⁶⁴.

Notably, according to the tradition preserved in the *Martyrium*, St Menas was descended from a local Mareotic family⁶⁵. The term ‘Paeat’ is explicitly used here as an equivalent for Mareotis⁶⁶. However, the same *Martyrium* refers to him as “Egyptian according to his family”⁶⁷. The latter notion appears to be an interpolation intended to reconcile local and translocal traditions. In the 8th c., the *Encomium* criticises a presumably local tradition asserting that St Menas was from Nepaeat (οὐρεμνεπαεiat) or Mareotis (παπμαριωτης πε), thereby distinguishing between the two locations⁶⁸. The *Encomium* sought to establish St Menas as an Egyptian by claiming he was born in Nikiu in the Delta. However, this appears to be a later invention, likely introduced by the *Encomium*’s author.

Given the complex and cohesive linguistic and historical context, it seems improbable that the miracles were originally composed in Coptic, as this language would have neither resonated with the local population nor attracted pilgrims. St Menas and his cult originally has only weak connections to Egypt. Greek was the principal language of the sanctuary, the surrounding region, and patriarchs of Alexandria, to whose episcopal domain Mareotis belonged. It was also the language in which the miracles were first composed. Unfortunately, the original Greek text has since been lost.

2.3. A hypothetical reconstruction of the collection’s history

The *Miracles of St Menas* passed through a lengthy and multistage redactional process. I propose the existence of a core set of miracles that dates to the latter half of the 6th c. While the precise number of miracles

⁶⁴ Iohannes (IV) Alexandrinus, *Encomium in S. Menam*, tr. Drescher, p. 141.

⁶⁵ *Passio S. Menae* Coptice, ed. Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 2, c. 1, l. 10-14 (περγενος [Δε] νεφνι ετεχ[ωρ]α ννεμαριωτης τετογμογτε ερος δε τπαεiat); *Miracula S. Menae* Graece, ed. Pomialovskii, *Zhitie*, p. 84 (Πανηφαιάτ). In the Coptic miracle it is only said that he handed his camels to a man from Nepaeiat (Drescher, p. 10, col. 1, l.5: “νεπαεiat”).

⁶⁶ For this equation, see Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, v. 4, p. 1598, 1601.

⁶⁷ *Passio S. Menae* Coptice, ed. Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 6, c. 1, l. 6-8: “νεογρμνηκημε πε κατα περγενος”.

⁶⁸ Iohannes (IV) Alexandrinus, *Encomium in S. Menam*, ed. Drescher, p. 36-37.

within this core remains uncertain, three specific miracles appear consecutively in both the Greek collection and two Coptic manuscripts: *The Isaurian Pilgrim*, *Eutropius and the Silver Plates*, and *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*. This pattern suggests that these three miracles originally formed a cluster at the time of their composition. Although it is not possible to definitively confirm or refute the inclusion of additional miracles within this core, many of them share significant terms and phrases with these core miracles, lending further support to their association⁶⁹. At the same time, it remains possible that some of the miracles later included in the 13-miracle collection may predate this core set⁷⁰.

A reference point for the *terminus post quem* is the toponym ‘Philoxenite’, which is mentioned by name in four miracles and described in the Coptic *Encomium* as having been founded “in the time of Anastasius, the king”⁷¹. Emperor Anastasius ruled from 491 to 518. If Philoxenite is indeed the same as the site known as ‘Marea’⁷², archaeologists generally date the beginnings of the settlement to the late 5th or early 6th c. However, the foundation of the planned town is attributed to the mid-6th c., under Justinian. The miracles refer to this phase, as it is stated that the town had an agora⁷³.

In the IFAO Ms., the events of two miracles – *Eutropius and the Silver Plates* and *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)* – are noted to have taken place during construction activities at the sanctuary. Based on the chronology of the site established by Peter Grossmann, this likely refers to construction

⁶⁹ The toponyme Philoxenite appears in *The Isaurian Pilgrim*, *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*, *The Jew and the Christian* and *The Samaritan Pilgrim*; terminus technicus ‘spatharios’ in: *The Isaurian Pilgrim* (in Greek only), *The Barren Camel*, *The Samaritan Pilgrim*, *The Pig Killed by the Deamon*.

⁷⁰ Perhaps *The Barren Camel* could be taken from an earlier narrative, as it is the only miracle with a main character directly linked to St Menas’ lifetime (see p. 53).

⁷¹ For a comprehensive survey of all occurrences of the toponym in the hagiographic dossier of St Menas and the Greek *Life of St Apolinaria*, see P. Piwowarczyk, *Literary Sources on Philoxenite: A Survey*, in: *Philoxenite on Lake Mareotis: A Town and Pilgrimage Station on the Way to the Sanctuary of Saint Menas (Abu Mena)*, v. 1: *History and Topography*, ed. T. Derda – M. Gwiazda, Leuven 2025 (forthcoming).

⁷² This is actually a prevalent idea among scholars working on this site; see the monographic volume: *Philoxenite on Lake Mareotis: A Town and Pilgrimage Station on the Way to the Sanctuary of Saint Menas (Abu Mena)*, v. 1: *History and Topography*, ed. T. Derda – M. Gwiazda, Leuven 2025 (forthcoming).

⁷³ Wipszycka, *Philoxenite: Pilgrims on the Road*; for ‘agora’, see *The Jew and the Christian*; Devos, *Le juif*, p. 289, c. 2, l. 7; p. 296, c. 2, l. 14–15.

work undertaken during the reign of Justinian or slightly afterwards, placing these events in the mid to late 6th c.⁷⁴ Interestingly, these details are absent from manuscript M.590 and the Greek text.

Some terminological evidence aligns well with this dating. For example, in the description of mooring in the miracle *Eutropius and the Silver Plates* (IFAO Ms.), the term μονοβολος appears⁷⁵, which seems to be a local Egyptian term for an anchor used on riverboats. The term is attested in papyri dated between the third and sixth centuries⁷⁶.

In *The Barren Camel*, *The Pig Killed by the Deamon*, and *The Samaritan Pilgrim*, St Menas is referred to as spatharios⁷⁷. Spatharios was first a court military title. *Chronicon Paschale* (around 630) under year 450 mentions that “Chrysaphius the spatharius was slain at the gate of Melen-tias”⁷⁸. As far as we know, Chrysaphius was the first to hold this position which he assumed in 443⁷⁹. However, *spatharioi* are attested as soldiers in inscriptions and papyri only later, between the second half of the sixth and the beginning of the 7th c.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ P. Grossmann, *The Pilgrimage Center of Abu Mina*, in: *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. D. Frankfurter, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 134, Leiden 1998, p. 284-286; L. Lavan, *Public Space in the Late Antique City*, v. 2: *Sites, Buildings, Dates*, Leuven 2020, p. 147, argues for a wider timeframe of the monumental rebuilding, up to 619.

⁷⁵ Bacot, *Quatre miracles* 2011, p. 56 (p. 24, c. 2, l. 20-21). Greek has τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ σχοινίου ‘end of rope’; *variae lectiones*: ‘σχοινίου’ (Varalda, *Il riccio Eutropio*, p. 221). Against IFAO Ms. and Greek, Ms. M.590 does not mention any object being thrown. *Lectio difficilior potior* criterion suggests a primacy of *monobolos* in a lost Greek original.

⁷⁶ H. Zilliacus, *The Stolen Anchor*, “Arctos. Acta Philologica Fennica. Nova Series” 1 (1954) p. 205.

⁷⁷ For unedited *The Pig Killed by the Deamon*, see M.590, fol. 29v. c. 1, l. 25-26. I refer to a scan of the facsimile edition by H. Hyvernât. *Codices coptici photographice expressi*, tomus XXI: *Codex M 590. Passio S. Menae, Iohannis Alex. Sermo in laudem S. Menae Sahidice*, Romae 1922, in: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.38250270> (accessed 11.04.2025). The term spatharios appears also in a miracle from M.585, see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 80, c. 2, l. 25-26.

⁷⁸ *Chronicon paschale*, tr. M Whitby – M. Whitby, p. 80.

⁷⁹ J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, v. 2: *A.D. 395-527*, Cambridge 1980, p. 295-297; A.P. Kazhdan, *Spatharios*, in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, v. 3, ed. A.P. Kazhdan, Oxford 1991, p. 1936; N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris 1972, p. 297-298.

⁸⁰ M. San Nicolò, Σπαθάριος, in: *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Series 2, v. 3/6, Stuttgart 1929, c. 1545-1546. The last attestation from

In the IFAO Ms., in the miracle *The Jew and the Christian*, a very accurate phrase describes the portico exonarthex between the Great Basilica and the Martyr Church: τέσσερα μνητοῖς ἐκτὸς τοῦ ναοῦ (“external portico of the shrine”)⁸¹, which fits Justinian’s rebuilding of the Great Basilica⁸².

The core collection appears to have been expanded prior to its translation into Coptic. The most secure addition is the miracle of *The Paralytic and the Mute Woman*. Only the Greek version is easily accessible, as manuscript M.590 is partially damaged and remains unedited in this section. This miracle likely originates from an external source, as it focuses on the practice of incubation – a ritual poorly attested by other sources concerning Abū Mīnā⁸³. Moreover, the Greek narrative does not mention St Menas throughout the story, referring instead to an anonymous ‘saint’. The name ‘Menas’ appears solely in the doxology-like conclusion.

Most importantly, a similar story appears in two other collections of miracles from Late Antiquity⁸⁴. A closely related account is included in the anonymous collection of miracles attributed to Sts Cosmas and Damian and is also mentioned in Sophronius’ *Miracles of Sts Cyrus and John* (Miracle no. 30)⁸⁵, composed in the early 7th c., most likely between

Egypt is *P.Oxy. 16.2045 (The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, v. 16, ed. B.P. Grenfell – A.S. Hunt – H.I. Bell, London 1924, p. 265)*. A slightly later one might be *P. Ness. 3.89 (Excavations at Nessana, v. 3: Non-Literary Papyri, ed. C.J. Kraemer Jr., Princeton 1958, p. 251-260)* from Nessana in Palestine.

⁸¹ Devos, *Le juif*, p. 288, c. 2, l. 20-21. M.590 says only that the Jew kept a distance. In the Greek, there is *νάρθηξ* in this place. IFAO Ms. and Greek tradition against M.590 proves that there was a mention of the narthex in the original composition.

⁸² Grossmann, *The Pilgrimage Center*, p. 285-286.

⁸³ Abū Mīnā is often described as an incubation shrine – most recently by I. Csepregi, *Incubation in Early Byzantium: The Formation of Christian Incubation Cults and Miracle Collections*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 41, Turnhout 2024, p. 100-101. However, except for *The Paralytic and the Mute Woman*, which is, as we have said, of external origin, only *The Samaritan Pilgrim* miracle contains an incubation motif. Some other miracles include a dream vision of St Menas, but these did not occur at his shrine and do not involve healing prescriptions. We may then assume that incubation practices appeared, but they did not form a typical way of healing.

⁸⁴ The story has also been incorporated into the Coptic miracle of St. Mercurius. However, as the only manuscript dates to the 10th or 11th century, its reliance on earlier sources cannot be conclusively established, see W.C. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrlegenden*, v. 1, Rome 1935, p. 40-41.

⁸⁵ Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Miracula SS. Cyri at Iohannis* 30, 14, ed. Fernández Marcos, p. 305-306 (Note that a new edition of the *Miracula* by Marina Detoraki is

610 and 614⁸⁶. Sophronius was aware that the story he encountered at the Menuthis shrine was already associated with Sts Cosmas and Damian. However, he does not mention the shrine of St Menas in this context, even though he references it elsewhere. He was likely well-informed about Abū Mīnā, possibly through his Alexandrian patron, Patriarch John the Almsgiver, who is documented to have visited the site⁸⁷. It is also quite plausible that Sophronius himself visited Abū Mīnā. Given his familiarity with the miracles of Sts Cosmas and Damian, it is reasonable to assume that he was acquainted with this type of miracle literature. However, his silence regarding the association of *The Paralytic and the Mute Woman* with the St Menas sanctuary suggests that this miracle was added to St Menas' collection after the second decade of the 7th c. The presence of this story in both the Greek and Coptic traditions suggests that the two versions diverged at a later point in time. We may, therefore, assume that redaction of 13 miracles was made after 614 but before the Coptic translation was made. The inclusion of the *The Paralytic and the Mute Woman* miracle, alien to local traditions but very attractive as an amusing piece of literature, had to be done at this period and probably took place outside Abū Mīnā – perhaps in Alexandria.

The exact timing of when the Anti-Chalcedonians took control of Abū Mīnā remains uncertain. It may have occurred shortly after the Arab conquest⁸⁸. However, for over a century, both the Coptic and Melkite factions held influence there, with each side experiencing periods of dominance. Even if the Anti-Chalcedonians reclaimed the shrine of St Menas shortly

currently in press, to be published in the *Corpus Christianorum – Series Graeca*). This miracle seemingly appears in full within the Arabic collection of the Miracles of Sts Cyrus and John, which only partially overlaps with Sophronius' text and was translated from a now-lost Coptic original. Our knowledge of this version is limited to a brief reference in R. Boutros, *Le culte des saints Cyr et Jean chez les Coptes à la lumière des sources hagiographiques arabes*, in: *Alexandrie médiévale*, v. 3, ed. J.Y. Empereur – C. Décobert, *Alexandrie médiévale* 3, Cairo 2008, p. 139.

⁸⁶ The proposed dates span between the beginning of the patriarchate of John the Almsgiver (610-619) and the conquest of Jerusalem by Persians, see Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Miracula SS. Cyri et Iohannis*, ed. Fernández Marcos, p. 9.

⁸⁷ *Vita S. Iohannis Eleemosynarii*, ed. Delehay, p. 24.

⁸⁸ A snippet from a Melkite report on the ownership of Abū Mīnā, prepared for a trial before Arab authorities during the time of Patriarch Michael I, is quoted in the *History of the Patriarchs*: "The Muslims, after their conquest of Egypt, handed them [the churches] over to the Copts" (*Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, ed. and tr. Evetts, PO 5, p. 123 [377]).

after 641, later in the 7th c. the Melkite Theophanes became the governor of Mareotis⁸⁹. During the patriarchate of Michael I (743-767), the Melkites engaged in a legal dispute with the Copts before the court of the Arab governor, as recorded in the *History of the Patriarchs*⁹⁰. Both sides presented evidence to support their respective claims to Abū Mīnā. It is likely that, within the context of such disputes in the first century following the Arab conquest, the Anti-Chalcedonians developed a narrative portraying Patriarch Damian as a benefactor of the Abū Mīnā shrine. This tradition is preserved in a collection of two miracles found in a single manuscript from Ḥāmūli, held at the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum (Ms. M.585). However, these miracles were not included in the main collection of St Menas' miracles, although later Arabic collections merge miracles from both traditions.

As has already been said, M.590 is the only Coptic manuscript of the *Miracles of St Menas* of which we have both the beginning and end, so we know that it numbers 17 miracles – although some remain barely legible and have been left unedited. The Coptic redactor developed a prologue at the beginning containing a shortened version of the martyrdom. He shifted miracle no. 9 (according to the sequence in Greek) to the beginning of the text and makes its protagonist a contemporary of St Menas, to whom the Saint personally handed over his camels before his martyrdom – an episode introduced in the prologue. It links the miracle with the prologue summarising the saint's life and martyrdom but does not fit the rest of the miracles, which are clearly distanced in time from St Menas' supposed lifetime and from when the sanctuary thrived. In Greek, the protagonist is the son of a friend of St Menas, thus temporally detached from the days of the Saint.

The Coptic translation of the miracles was likely prepared in the 7th c., based on the original Greek text. The striking absence of monastic themes in these miracles suggests that a monastery was an unlikely setting for the translation. Regarding the time and place of its origin, we must rely on circumstantial evidence. The Coptic version includes all

⁸⁹ Little is known about Theodosius, also referred to as Theodore. He is mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (*Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, ed. Evetts, PO 5, p. 259-260 [5-6]) and in the *Synaxary* (*Synaxarium Copticum*, ed. Basset, PO 1, p. 341-342 [127-128]) as an opponent of Patriarch Agathon (662-680). The *History of the Patriarchs* emphasizes that he did not have the support of the local Chalcedonian community. It remains unknown whether he was involved in any clerical affairs at Abū Mīnā.

⁹⁰ *Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, ed. and tr. Evetts, PO 5, p. 119-126 [373-380].

13 miracles known from the Greek text, which suggests it postdates AD 614. However, because there is no indication of the Arab conquest or of conflicts between the Copts and Melkites over the shrine, we can assume it predates AD 641, although this argument from silence remains inconclusive. The language of the miracles (though not their narrative content) resembles that of other Coptic collections, implying they were likely translated or newly composed during a similar period⁹¹. The manuscripts containing these miracles are generally dated no earlier than the 7th c.⁹², leading me to attribute the Coptic miracles of St Menas to this time. At some point in this century, the 13-miracle Greek collection was translated into Coptic and combined with material of varied origins to create a more comprehensive collection, potentially intended for liturgical purposes. Abū Mīnā is an unlikely origin place for this work, considering the recycling of already existing and inclusion of non-local stories. Alexandria also seems improbable, as it remained predominantly Greek-speaking for a considerable time following the Arab conquest. More plausible centres for Coptic literary activity include the Fayyum (especially considering that the oldest manuscript, M.590, originates from the Fayyum and shows linguistic features from this region) and the Nile Valley.

Of the four miracles absent from the Greek version but listed in Drescher's register of the Pierpont Morgan codex, only *The Water Miracle* remains legible and has been published. This account is distinctive in several ways. First, it lacks a single protagonist. Instead, a collective group of thirsty people gathered at the shrine assumes the role of the collective hero. Second, St Menas does not appear or intervene. Rather, it is Archangel Michael who strikes the rock with his rod. Historically, the issue of water supply likely reflects the period of Abū Mīnā's decline, when the earlier cistern system had ceased to function. A similar water miracle is also recorded at Abū Mīnā in the *History of the Patriarchs* during the patriarchate of Shenouda (859-880)⁹³. However, this story could not have directly inspired *The Water Miracle*, as the latter does not involve

⁹¹ The only introduction to the miracle collections in Coptic is G. Schenke, *Das koptisch hagiographische Dossier des Heiligen Kolluthos, Arzt, Märtyrer und Wunderheiler*, CSCO 650, Subsidia 132, Leuven 2013, p. 193-204.

⁹² Ms. Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 9036, dated between 601 and 800, in: <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/manuscripts/737> (*Miracula Colluthi*).

⁹³ *Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, tr. 'Abd al-Masīḥ – Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, v. 2/1, p. 50-52; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 123-124.

a patriarch and describes water gushing from a spring, in contrast to Shenouda's account, where rain provides the water. Nevertheless, both episodes reflect the persistent issue of water shortages during the shrine's final days.

The story of *The Pig Killed by the Deamon*⁹⁴ survives as whole only in Arabic translations, which differ across various manuscripts. Although the Coptic text in M.590 remains unpublished, the first half is largely legible in the manuscript. This narrative includes elements typical of the core collection: St Menas appears as a *spatharios*, mounted on a "spiritual horse". The plot does not recycle motifs from other miracles but is original – a pig offered to the sanctuary is killed by a daemon (referred to as Satan in Arabic translations) and then resurrected by St Menas, who brings it back to life with a kick. I postulate the existence of a Greek original for this tale. First of all, the Coptic text preserves a lengthy greeting phrase in Greek, which is not typical of original Coptic compositions⁹⁵. The story's entertaining and slightly irreverent tone may have contributed to its exclusion when the Greek collection of 13 miracles was standardised.

Two further miracles are known only through translations into Arabic, as the Coptic text in Ms. M.590 remains illegible. *The Soldier and the Pig* contains numerous features typical of other miracles in the main collection⁹⁶. A transgression against the shrine's herd as in *The Pig Thief*, a soldier as a bad character as in the *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)* and *The Wood-Offering*, hanging the perpetrator in the middle of the church as in *The Possessed Man* and lifelong service in the sanctuary like in a few other miracles. As a whole it looks like a compilation of motives from preexisting miracles. The miracle *The Abused Female Pilgrim*, a reworking of *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*, is devoid of certain details present in the latter esp. those associated with the local context: Philoxenite or the Martyrion of St Thecla do not appear⁹⁷. It seems that *The Soldier and the Pig* and *The Abused Female Pilgrim* were composed outside of Abū Mīnā, drawing on preexisting material. Their inclusion in the collection

⁹⁴ M.590, fol. 29r-30v; Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 178, 205, 233-234.

⁹⁵ M.590, fol. 29v, c. 2, l. 4-6: "κύρι χαῖρε καλημέρα σου κύριε σπαθάριε (κύριε χαῖρε καλημέρα σου κύριε σπαθάριε)".

⁹⁶ Ms. M.590, f. 37v-38r (barely legible); Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 173, 197-198, 226-227.

⁹⁷ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 107; Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 164-165, 183-184, 213-214.

likely occurred after the translation of the Greek into Coptic, suggesting a period after the mid-7th c.

The Greek version of the text underwent substantial revision, likely within the Byzantine Empire and in a monastic milieu, and is unlikely to have been reworked in Arab-controlled Egypt. Ángel Narro identifies a quotation from John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi* within the Greek text of *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*⁹⁸. Since John Climacus was active in the first half of the 7th c., the miracle, as it appears in this Greek version, could not date earlier than the mid-7th c. Notably, this quotation is absent from the Coptic version.

Among the primary editorial changes in the reworked Greek text are the inclusion of passages that highlight the monastic status of the repentant sinner. The murderer of the Isaurian pilgrim vows to "take the habit" (λαμβάνων καὶ τὸ σχῆμα), the parents of the healed demoniac have him tonsured (ἀπεκούρευσαν αὐτὸν), and the Samaritan pilgrim shaves her head (a practice also found in the Coptic version). The latter act is rendered by the Greek word ἀποκείρω, which, in the Byzantine context, signifies a monastic dedication⁹⁹.

The revised Greek text incorporates biblical and ascetic quotations and allusions¹⁰⁰, titles for individual miracles, and exhortations that enhance the coherence of the collection, presenting it as a unified whole. This final objective was achieved primarily by including brief addresses to the readers at the beginning of certain miracles, thereby creating a sense of continuity throughout the series, as in the following examples: "Ἐτερον θαῦμα βούλομαι διηγῆσασθαι τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ πανολβίου μάρτυρος Μηνᾶ γενόμενον"¹⁰¹, and: "Ἐτερον θαῦμα βούλομαι διηγῆσασθαι ἀδελφοί"¹⁰².

⁹⁸ The exact text of John Climacus goes ἀλλοτρίᾳ μερίδι μὴ προσεγγίσητε (*Scala Paradisi*, PG 88, 640). The parallel in St Menas' miracle is not exact: καὶ μνήσθητι τοῦ εἰρηκότος· ἀλλοτρίας μερίδος μὴ προσεγγίσης; see Narro, *Tipología*, p. 103. Silvano and Varalda (*Per l'edizione*, p. 61) see the only analogy to this phrase in late-Byzantine author Nicetas Myrsiniotes (14th-15th).

⁹⁹ *Miracula S. Menae* Graece, ed. Pomialovskii, *Zhitie*, p. 65, 78, 88.

¹⁰⁰ The edited part of the Coptic collection contains only two direct biblical quotations: Mt 6:18 (*The Isaurian Pilgrim*), 1John 2:17 (*The Female Pilgrim [Sophia]*). There are also echoes of Luke 3:4 (*The Isaurian Pilgrim*), Eph 15:14 (*Eutropius and the Silver Plates*); Ex 12:37; 17:6; John 17:42 (*The Water Miracle*), and Luke 18:30, 22:42 (*The Female Pilgrim [Sophia]*).

¹⁰¹ Varalda, *Il ricco Eutropio*, p. 218 (*Eutropius and Silver Plates*), tr: "I wish to relate another miracle of the holy and most-blessed martyr Menas that occurred".

¹⁰² *Miracula S. Menae* Graece, ed. Pomialovskii, *Zhitie*, p. 84 (*The Barren Camel*), tr: "I wish to relate another miracle, brothers".

There are also introduced intertextual connections between specific miracles. For instance, the Samaritan pilgrim references a barren woman rescued in the desert, clearly referring to *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*: οὐχὶ σὺ ἐλυτρώσω τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν στεῖραν ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ στρατιώτου ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ¹⁰³. A similar reference appears in *The Eutropius and Silver Plates*, where the protagonist recalls a dismembered merchant resurrected by St Menas, as in the immediately preceding miracle, *The Isaurian Pilgrim*: Ἐλπίζω εἰς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ εἰς τὰς πρεσβείας τοῦ ἁγίου Μηνᾶ, τοῦ τὸν μεμελισμένον ἐγείραντος σῶον¹⁰⁴. Notably, neither of these phrases appears in the Coptic versions.

2.4. Appendix II: The *Miracles of St Menas* and the *Syriac Life of Symeon the Stylite*

Paul Peeters, dating the miracles no earlier than the late 5th c., references the previously discussed episode from the *Miracles of Cyrus and John*, as well as possible connections to stories found in the *Syriac Life of Symeon the Stylite*, composed in 473¹⁰⁵. While he does not provide specific passages, he asserts that such parallels would be easy to identify¹⁰⁶. I attempted to locate these connections but found none. Although some thematic similarities appear across three episodes, they differ significantly in key aspects from St Menas' miracles, making any direct influence unlikely. Another important point would be to examine the channels through which Syriac material might have influenced the clergy of Abū Mīnā – an analysis Peeters does not undertake. The three episodes in question are briefly discussed below¹⁰⁷.

In *Vita Simeonis Stylitae* (Syriace) 35, the story recounts the healing of a possessed soldier who had raped a maiden on a road. While this may

¹⁰³ *Miracula S. Menae* Graece, ed. Pomialovskii, *Zhitie*, p. 77, tr. “Did you not redeem the barren woman from the hand of the soldier in the desert?”.

¹⁰⁴ Varalda, *Il ricco Eutropio*, p. 221, tr. “I place my hope in God and in the intercessions of St Menas, who raised the dismembered man back to life”.

¹⁰⁵ Peeters, *Orient et Byzance*, p. 36. The date 473 is given in the colophon of the Ms. *Vaticanus Syriacus* 160.

¹⁰⁶ In Peeters's own words (*Orient et Byzance*, p. 36): “Je n'en puis faire la preuve ici; mais elle serait faite depuis longtemps si la Vie de ce S. Syméon, dont nous aurons à reparler, avait trouvé des lecteurs plus attentifs”.

¹⁰⁷ I make use of the commented translation in: R. Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Cistercian Studies Series 112, Kalamazoo 1992.

seem reminiscent of the story of *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*, the structure is markedly different. In Symeon's *Life*, the emphasis is placed on the soldier, with the rape (which was committed, not merely attempted as in the miracle of St Menas) presented as a past event, and no information is provided about the woman's fate afterward. By contrast, in *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)*, the woman occupies a central role, serving as an active agent who initiates the saint's miraculous intervention.

In *Vita Simeonis Stylitae* (Syriace) 71, St Symeon rescues a ship caught in a storm caused by an evil spirit, seizing the demon – who appears in the form of an Indian – by its hair. A similar motif, where a possessed person is lifted into the air, appears in the story of *The Possessed Man*, though in a very different context. Notably, in St Menas' miracle, it is the possessed individual rather than the demon itself who is seized. Additionally, the motif of lifting a person by the hair appears in *The Wood Offering*, though here it involves a sinner, not a possessed person. While this motif would be a valuable subject for comparative study, it does not suggest a direct link between the *Life of St Symeon* and the *Miracles of St Menas*.

In *Vita Simeonis Stylitae* (Syriace) 75, the story describes how St Symeon brings rain during a severe drought. A similar miracle occurs in *The Water Miracle* of St Menas, but under quite different circumstances. Notably, in St Menas' miracle, it is the Archangel Michael who brings forth water from a rock, creating a new spring that quenches the crowd's thirst, rather than through rainfall.

In summary, the *Miracles of St Menas* are not only independent of the Syriac *Life of St Symeon the Stylite*, but they also share no common narratives.

3. Agenda behind the Miracle Collection

The Coptic *Martyrium* presents St Menas primarily as a healing saint: "And the Saviour fulfilled all that he had said to the holy Apa Mena and all that he had promised him. And all who suffer from any kind of illness, and the blind and the lame and those possessed with devils, when they come and do reverence before his holy body, receive healing forthwith"¹⁰⁸. In the *Miracles of Sts Cyrus and John*, Sophronius, seeking to

¹⁰⁸ *Passio S. Menae* Coptice, tr. Drescher, p. 103.

elevate his chosen saints over St Menas, subtly depicts the latter as an ineffective healer¹⁰⁹. There is no doubt that the healing fame of St Menas was the primary reason pilgrims from across the Mediterranean world were drawn to Abū Mīnā.

However, healing activity is conspicuously absent in the *Miracles*, a phenomenon most striking in the cases of *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)* and *The Samaritan Woman*.

The Coptic story of *The Female Pilgrim (Sophia)* begins by mentioning that Sophia was barren. She decides to journey to the shrine and offer her fortune there. The narrative centers on a miraculous rescue by a soldier in the desert, but after that, there is no happy resolution involving pregnancy. It seems that the story lacks the conclusion that the reader might have expected. In the extant Greek version, sterility does not trigger pilgrimage and is only mentioned briefly as the reason for Sophia's decision to donate her fortune to the shrine. As a result, the plot is more coherent. In contrast, the Arabic manuscript (miracle no. 9) resolves the issue with the miraculous birth of a child, who is named Menas.

In *The Samaritan Woman*, the protagonist is introduced as suffering from a severe headache, which is given as the reason for her visit to Abū Mīnā. This illness is referenced multiple times throughout the story, and even St Menas, when he appears, promises her recovery. However, by the end of the story, no such healing occurs. The same is true for the Greek version, where the focus shifts to her rescue from a rapist and her service at the shrine. In contrast, in the Arabic manuscript (miracle no. 23), she is ultimately shown to have been healed.

The only episode, aside from the secondarily added *The Paralytic and the Mute Woman*, that highlights a form of healing is the exorcism of a demon from a possessed young man in *The Possessed Man*.

The miracles appear to have little interest in promoting St Menas' fame as a healer on a broad scale. Supposedly, they primary audience likely consisted of locals whose actions could pose threats to the safety of pilgrims and the property of the shrine. Initially, these miracle accounts were probably shared within the immediate local community, perhaps performed during liturgical gatherings on Sundays as part of homilies.

Committed to writing as a collection, the miracles secondarily addressed those who already recognised St Menas' healing powers but

¹⁰⁹ See esp. Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Miracula Cyri et Johannis* 45 and 46, tr. Gascou, p. 15.

hesitated to undertake the pilgrimage due to fears of the dangers along the journey – suggesting that rumours of peril were widespread, potentially circulating in Alexandria, a translocal pilgrimage hub. From this perspective, the original purpose of the collection was to reassure pilgrims and encourage their offerings, thereby sustaining and increasing the shrine's wealth. Over time, however, the miracles reached a broader audience, gradually detaching from their local context.

When translated into Coptic, they became part of a tripartite dossier typical of martyr literature in Coptic, consisting of a martyrdom, an encomium, and miracles. The peculiar local collection was likely chosen due to the absence of any alternative compilation focused on more universal accounts of the saint's miraculous interventions.

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