



# Saint Menas and His Miracles in the Ethiopian Tradition<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The fame of St Menas, the Egyptian martyr, spread far beyond Egypt, extending into historical Ethiopia. This widespread reverence stems from the longstanding unity between the Churches of Alexandria and Ethiopia, alongside the significant translation of Copto-Arabic texts into the classical Ethiopic language. By the fourteenth century, *The Life and Martyrdom of St Menas* was translated into Ge'ez and became part of the *Gadla Samā'etāt* collection of accounts on other prominent saints and martyrs. A concise version of St Menas's acts appears in the hagiographical compilation for liturgical use, the *Synaxarium*. Ethiopia commemorates St Menas on *Hedār* 15 and the construction of his shrine at Maryut on *Sanē* 15. The latter occasion entails reading aloud a comprehensive collection of nineteen miracles, also translated from Arabic. The image of a saint who defends devout pilgrims like a knight, protects his sanctuary, heals the sick, liberates the possessed, punishes sins, repairs damage, and bestows blessings upon worshippers, evoked awe, reverence, and piety, especially in the Horn of Africa. Additional texts, including hymns and antiphons, further underscore the cult's vitality. St Menas's canonical depiction on horseback aligns with the broader tradition of equestrian saints, a frequent motif in Ethiopian iconography.

**Keywords:** St Menas; Ethiopia; acts; synaxaria; miracles; homily; hymns; liturgy

The veneration of saints holds a special place in the Christian tradition of the people living in Ethiopia and Eritrea<sup>3</sup>. Saints receive reverence

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of Christianity in modern Ethiopia and Eritrea date back to the ancient Kingdom of Aksum in the mid-fourth century, continuing uninterrupted despite the changing tides of history. Until the mid-twentieth century, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was under the Patriarchate of Alexandria, but the relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia extended beyond mere administrative issues. In fact, religious and

not only as holy patrons, but also as exemplars, healers, and protectors, interceding on behalf of individuals and their families before God<sup>4</sup>. Their veneration extends well beyond personal devotion, playing a significant role within Christian communities and the broader fabric of society. This practice, a cornerstone of the region for centuries, continues to influence its spiritual and social life.

The presence of saints gains prominence through their representations in churches and their surroundings. Holy images attract throngs of devoted believers of all ages – monks, the clergy, and the laity, men, women, and children alike – who pray before them with great reverence, sometimes for long hours, fall prostrate, seek protection and blessings, call for help in times of misfortune, and ask for intercession before God. People typically identify churches by the names of the latter's patron saints. A notable feature of this tradition is the altar slab, known as the holy *ṭābot*, which draws from the biblical tradition as a symbolic representation of the stone tablets from the Ark of the Covenant, signifying

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dogmatic unity resulted from the influence of the entire culture, shaping both faith and tradition in profound ways. For a detailed history of Christianity in Ethiopia and Eritrea, with an essential bibliography, see S. Munro-Hay – U. Zanetti, *Christianity*, in: *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (E Ae) I 717-728. Additionally, recent works on Christianization in the Horn of Africa include C. Haas, *Mountain Constantines: The Christianization of Aksum and Iberia*, “Journal of Late Antiquity” 1 (2008) p. 101-126; A. Brita, *I racconti tradizionali sulla “seconda cristianizzazione” dell’Etiopia: il ciclo agiografico dei nove santi*, Napoli 2010; G. Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, New York 2013; E. Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahīdo Church*, New Jersey 2013; C. Giostra, *La diffusione del cristianesimo lungo il Mar Rosso alla luce dell’archeologia: la città-porto di Adulis e il regno di Aksum*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” (2017) p. 249-313; J. Binns, *The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia: A History*, New York 2018; P.F. Esler, *Ethiopian Christianity. History, Theology, Practice*, Waco 2019; G. Castiglia, *La cristianizzazione di Adulis (Eritrea) e del regno Aksumita. Nuovi dati dal Corno d’Africa d’età tardo antica*, “Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia” 91 (2020) p. 91-127; V.A. Grasso – M.J. Harrower, *The Basilica of Betā Sāma ‘ti’ in its Aksūmite, Early Christian, and Late Antique Context*, “Journal of Near Eastern Studies” 82 (2023) p. 59-76.

<sup>4</sup> For a more general discussion of the veneration of saints in Ethiopia and Eritrea, see for example S. Kaplan, *Hagiographies and the History of Medieval Ethiopia*, “History in Africa: A Journal of Method” 8 (1981) p. 107-123; S. Kaplan, *The Ethiopian Cult of Saints: A Preliminary Investigation*, “Paideuma” 32 (1986) p. 1-13; *Veneration of Saints in Christian Ethiopia: Proceedings of the International Workshop Saints in Christian Ethiopia: Literary Sources and Veneration, Hamburg, April 28-29, 2012*, ed. D. Nosnitsin, Wiesbaden 2015. Moreover, see Nosnitsin’s encyclopaedic entry *Saints, Christian*, E Ae IV 476b-480b, with a bibliography.

the enduring presence of God among his people. These slabs are generally consecrated in the name of saints venerated within a specific church. It is therefore unsurprising that Christians in Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly those of the Orthodox faith, traditionally bear names derived directly from the Bible, both from the Old and New Testament, or names of other saints, as a sign of their personal commitment, reflecting a profound and lasting connection between their personal identity and the sacred figures they revere.

Naturally, saints who hold particular significance within the local Church – especially those associated with places linked to their lives, ascetic practices, martyrdom, and cult – enjoy considerable veneration. Among the most prominent are figures such as Abuna Takla Hāymānot, founder of the monastery in Shewa province; Saint Gabra Manfas Qedus, associated with Mount Zeqʷālā; the semi-legendary Yārēd, known as Maḥletāy (Melodos); monastic saints such as Garimā, Zamikāʿēl Aragāwi, Paṅtalēwon, Yoḥanni, and Samuʿēl of Waldebba in Tigrāy; ʾIyasus Moʿā of Dabra Ḥayq ʾEstifānos; the saint nun Walatta Pētros; and saint rulers, such as ʿĒzānā, Kālēb, Yemrehānna Krestos, Naʾakkʷeto Laʾab, and Minās, along with many others<sup>5</sup>. However, the saints of the universal Church receive equal reverence and veneration. The Orthodox Church of the Geʿez rite unreservedly recognizes the saints from the time prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451). Additionally, it acknowledges all the saints recognized by the Coptic Church, as well as those commemorated in the Alexandrian *Synaxarium* and other documents of that tradition.

As is common in Eastern Christian communities, the recognition of sanctity does not follow any formal process but rather derives from the spontaneous faith of the people, who naturally acknowledge the holiness of certain individuals. This recognition has roots in the renown of their virtuous lives, as exemplified by holy monks and ascetics, the orthodoxy of their faith, particularly in the case of the great Church Fathers, the fame of their martyrdom, especially those from the era of Diocletian, and, ultimately, the miracles and graces experienced by the faithful who venerate a saint at designated times or visit sites and churches associated with that person.

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<sup>5</sup> For information on Ethiopian local saints, in addition to their entries in *Enciclopedia dei Santi. Le Chiese Orientali* (1998) and in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, see also Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke's *Bibliography of the Ethiopic Hagiographical Traditions*, "Journal of Ethiopian Studies" 13 (1975) p. 57-102.

Unlike the Latin and Byzantine traditions, where the veneration of relics holds particular significance, Ethiopian Christians place greater emphasis on observing the feast days of saints by visiting churches and sanctuaries dedicated to those persons. They engage fervently in communal prayers and liturgies, invoking the benevolence of their patron saints. When possible, they also visit the saints' tombs, expecting special graces and even healings. This may reflect the enduring belief in the sanctity of certain places and spaces. The Ethiopian expression of the cult of saints also manifests through the veneration of images and the reading of texts that recount their lives and virtues.

Among the various saints, martyrs in particular garnered profound veneration and attention from the faithful. Accounts of their unwavering commitment to proclaiming the faith despite intense persecution, the miracles attributed to them during their lifetimes, and, most notably, the excruciating tortures they endured, elevated them to the status of archetypal defenders of the faith and paragons of virtue. This reverence for the martyrs became especially pronounced during periods when Christians in the Ethiopian Highlands faced the imminent threat of persecutions during the Muslim invasions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, endured internal schisms within the Church resulting from theological disputes, and contended with the devastating religious conflicts of the seventeenth century.

Influenced by Byzantine and Oriental iconography, the soldier saints' and martyrs' depictions in Ethiopia presented them as warrior saints on horseback<sup>6</sup>. Beside the inscriptions bearing their names, each saint held distinct attributes that served to differentiate them. Saints such as George of Lydda slaying the dragon, Mercurius bearing two swords, Theodore of Amasea with his spear, Philotheus of Antioch piercing the bull, Victor of Marseille vanquishing his enemies, or Claudius, known in Ethiopia as Galawdēwos, among others, including St Menas, collectively formed a distinct iconographic canon. This visual tradition, particularly when rendered on the walls of Ethiopian churches and accompanied by

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<sup>6</sup> On equestrian saints and their iconographic representations with the Ethiopian tradition, see E. Balicka-Witakowska, *Equestrian Saints*, EAe II 347b-351a. The Ethiopian iconography of St Menas constitutes a distinct topic and requires a separate study. Basic observations appear in the article by E. Balicka-Witakowska, *Menas in Art*, EAe III 919a-920a, along with a comprehensive bibliography. See also C.M. Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie der Menas-Ampullen*, Cairo 1910, p. 145-149; D. Tešić Radovanović – B.M. Gugolj, *Visual Representations of Saint Menas and Saint Thecla: Objects and Sources*, "IKON" 14 (2021) p. 9-20.

hagiographic and liturgical texts, has played a crucial role over the centuries in shaping and cultivating the piety of Christians living at the sources of the Nile<sup>7</sup>.

Ethiopian hagiographic literature encompasses various categories of texts, including acts of saints, known as *gamlāt*, which describe the life and the martyrdom of a saint; miracles attributed to specific saints (*ta'ammerāt*), occurring both during the saint's lifetime and after their death, often linked to the graces experienced in locations associated with the saint's cult; hagiographical notes designated for commemorative days according to the Ethiopian calendar (*senkessār*); shorter or longer poetic texts, such as *salāmtā* and *malke'āt*; and liturgical texts, such as antiphons and acclamations (*mawāše'ī*). The hagiographical *dossier* for a saint may be complete or consist only of selected texts, depending on the saint's significance for individual piety and the communal life of the Church. These texts do not necessarily circulate together in a single manuscript, although such cases also exist.

Additionally, hagiographical works, particularly those recounting the miracles of saints, often exist in multiple recensions, thereby enriching the corpus with supplementary texts. This phenomenon pertains to both translated texts and those of indigenous composition. The existence of multiple versions may result from alterations introduced during the manuscript transmission process, which can lead to modifications in

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<sup>7</sup> The body of work on Ethiopian iconography is extensive, with significant contributions from scholars such as S. Chojnacki (see *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting*, Wiesbaden 1983), M.E. Heldman, D. McEwan, M. Gervers, and particularly E. Balicka-Witakowska. A comprehensive entry, along with an extensive bibliography, appears in the joint article by A. Marx – E. Balicka-Witakowska – M.E. Heldman, *Painting*, EAe IV 90b-101a. In addition, several recent publications have further enriched the field, such as C. Bosc-Tiessé, *Spirit and Materials of Ethiopian Icons*, Addis Ababa 2010; H. Rubinkowska-Anioł, *The Paintings in St. George Church in Addis Ababa as a Method of Conveying Information about History and Power in 20th-century Ethiopia*, "Studies in African Languages and Cultures" 49 (2015) p. 115-141; C. Chaillot, *The Role of Images and the Veneration of Icons in the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Syrian Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian Traditions*, Zürich 2018; J. Gnisci, *A Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Icon of the Virgin and Child by the Master of the Amber-Spotted Tunic*, "Rassegna di Studi Etiopici" 3 (2019) p. 87-100; S.A. de Ménonville, *Making the Tasteless World Sweet: An Ethnography of Image Practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as Lived Theology*, Paris 2022; V.Z. Kuvatova, *Eastern and Western Influence in Wall Paintings of Abuna Yemata Guh Church (Ethiopia)*, "Oriental Courier" 3 (2023) p. 262-272.

content and structure. Such variations are often influenced by the distinct traditions and interpretative frameworks prevalent within the specific cultural and historical context of a text's composition, translation, or reproduction.

## 1. Life and martyrdom

The primary and most comprehensive account of St Menas's unexpected birth, virtuous life, glorious martyrdom, and the miraculous discovery of his relics in the classical Ethiopic language appears in *The Life and Martyrdom of St Menas* (*Gadla Minās*, CAe 3165)<sup>8</sup>, to which we refer below as *The Acts* or *The Life*. This text survives in approximately twenty Ethiopic manuscripts, with the oldest, including BL Or. 691, EMMML 1833, and EMMML 6965, dating to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century<sup>9</sup>, a period of translating the text from its Arabic model<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly to the hagiographies of many other saints, the original sources for Oriental versions of *The Life* originate from the Greek

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<sup>8</sup> In classical Ethiopic (Ge'ez), the term *gdlāt* refers to the lives of saints and martyrs. It derives from the root verb *gadala*, which signifies struggling or fighting, both in the physical and spiritual sense. As such, we can translate *gdl* as "conflict, combat, spiritual contending or struggle", similar to the Greek *ἀγών*; see W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge'ez-English/English-Ge'ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots*, Wiesbaden 1987, p. 182; W. Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 211b; cf. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopicae cum indice latino*, Lipsiae 1865, c. 1201; S. Kaplan, *Gädl*, EAe II 642a-644b. *Clavis Aethiopica* (CAe) is a comprehensive index of Ethiopian literary heritage, including both individual texts and larger collections, encompassing original works as well as translations. Access is possible via the project's website, *Beta maṣāḥaft: Manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, at the University of Hamburg, under the direction of A. Bausi (<https://betamasaheft.eu/clavis-list.html>).

<sup>9</sup> A comprehensive list of manuscripts containing *The Acts of St Menas*, along with codicological analysis and commentary, will appear separately in a forthcoming article. In this study, we consider only select individual manuscripts that exhibit textual variations from the version presented by Budge.

<sup>10</sup> The Ethiopic *Passio Menae* (BHO 746) was edited with an English translation by E.A.W. Budge, *Texts Relating to Saint Mēna of Egypt and Canons of Nicaea in a Nubian Dialect with Facsimile*, Oxford 1909, p. 62-73 (ed.), 44-58 (tr.), based on ms BL Or. 689, fols 73va-78vb, with emendations from two other manuscripts in the British Library. A French translation based on ms BnF d'Abb. 92 (Conti Rossini 129), fols 123va-130ra, appears in M. Chaîne in Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 33-45.



tradition<sup>11</sup>. However, the Ethiopic text exhibits significant divergence from the Greek acts as presently known<sup>12</sup>; instead, it aligns more closely with the Coptic and Arabic sources<sup>13</sup>.

The Ethiopic version of *The Life* begins with a narrative detailing St Menas's family origins. His father allegedly came from Egypt, specifically from a place called *Qēṭewā* or *Qēṭebā*<sup>14</sup>. According to *The Acts*, this "city was called after the name of a certain governor, who built therein a tower and made strong the walls thereof", implying an artificial etymology for the name. In contrast, the Greek version of *The Acts* locates

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<sup>11</sup> Another question regards the Greek text that served as the model for the Coptic, Arabic, and, consequently, Ethiopic version of *The Life*; see P. Piwowarczyk, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Miracles of St Menas*, VoxP 94 (2025) p. 35-64. See also the hagiographical entry on St Menas by J.M. Sauget – M.C. Celetti, *Menna (Menas)*, in: *Biblioteca Sanctorum*, v. 9, p. 324-343. For more information on St Menas the Martyr in the Ethiopian tradition, see also W. Witakowski, *Menas*, EAe III 918-919; M. Krause, *Menas the Miracle Maker, Saint*, in: *The Coptic Encyclopedia* V 1589-1590. For other Oriental saints with this name, see Wadi Abuliff in *Enciclopedia dei Santi. Le Chiese Orientali*, v. 2, c. 485-488.

<sup>12</sup> Sources attest three recensions of the Greek *Passio Menae*: the text by Symeon the Metaphrast (BHG 1250), edited and translated into Latin by G. van Hooft, *Acta sancti Menae martyris Aegyptii*, AnBol 3 (1884) p. 258-270; another recension (BHG 1251) in the *Passio Menae, Victoris et Vincentii*, edited by T. Ioannou, *Μνημεία αγιολογικά*, Venice 1884, p. 284-324 (Menas, § 1-15, p. 284-298); and the third recension (BHG 1254), edited by K. Krumbacher, *Miscellen zu Romanos (II)*, München 1907, p. 31-43.

<sup>13</sup> For the Coptic *Passio Menae* (CCo 287) from ms M.590, in J. Drescher, *Apa Mena. A Selection of Coptic Texts Relating to St. Menas. Edited, with translation and commentary*, Le Caire 1946, p. 1-6 (ed.), 100-104 (tr.); see also P. Piwowarczyk, *Greckie i koptyjskie Męczeństwo św. Menasa. Wstęp i przekład z komentarzem*, "Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne" 51/2 (2018) p. 371-374, which includes a Polish translation of the text. Another fragmentary Coptic *passio* attributed to Cyril of Alexandria appears in BHO 747. For the Arabic text based on ms H, see F. Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen zum Heiligen Menas*, Heidelberg 1993, p. 351-365 (ed.), 86-105 (tr.). However, the Ethiopic version aligns more closely with "Version 2" in Arabic mss D, N, F, and Ī; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 106; for Arabic fragments and their German translation, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 5, 2), p. 372-373 (ed.), 117-119 (tr.). For a concordance of the Arabic version of *The Life* in various manuscripts, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II, 3-7), p. 105-144.

<sup>14</sup> Eth. *wa-zentu qeddus samā'et beḏu' Minās za-beḥēra Gebṣ 'enta semā Qēṭewā*; see Budge, *Texts*, p. 62. The form *Qēṭebā* appears in several early manuscripts, such as EMMI 1833, fol. 129va; BL Or. 691, fol. 170rb; BnF éth. 57, fol. 1rb.

his origin in Κοτυαέων in Phrygia<sup>15</sup>, while the Coptic version situates his family in Maryut, in a place called Τραειατ (Τραειατ), which appears to be a corrupted form of Nepaeiat (Νεπαειατ)<sup>16</sup>. The Arabic sources likewise maintain that St Menas's family came from Maryūt<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, the Ethiopian *Synaxarium*, drawing on its Arabic model, asserts that the martyr's father was the governor of Nikiou in Lower Egypt.

According to the Ethiopic *Acts*, the father of St Menas was Eudoxius (Eth. 'Awdaksis)<sup>18</sup>, while his mother's name was Euphemia ('Awfomyā)<sup>19</sup>. When Eudoxius faced accusations by his own brother, Anatolius<sup>20</sup>, the king named 'Abrayos appointed the former to 'Afrīqyā<sup>21</sup>. Clearly, these names derive from Arabic words, which, in turn, are translations of Greek terms. However, there exists a clear distinction between Greek *Phrygia* (Φρυγία), located in Asia Minor, and Arabic 'Ifriqiya. The latter term derives from the name of the Roman province *Africa*<sup>22</sup>, specifically referring to the territories along the Mediterranean coast that now

<sup>15</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 44, with note 2, which cites Krumbacher's edition, *Miscellen*, p. 31. See also G. van Hooft, *Acta*, p. 260. In fact, Greek Κοτυαέων, or Latin *Cotiaeum*, on the Roman road from Dorylaeum to Philadelphia in Phrygia Epictetus, has mentions in Strabo, *Geogr.* 12, 8, 12, and Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 5, 32, cf. W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, v. 1, London 1856, p. 697-698. For more on the original place of St Menas, see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. i-iv.

<sup>16</sup> See Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 2a, l. 15 (ed.), and 101 (tr.), with note 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 382 (ed.), 133 (tr.); E. Amélineau, *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte*, Paris 1893, p. 241-243.

<sup>18</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 66 (ed.), 44 (tr.). This name can appear in various forms across the Ethiopic manuscripts, such as 'Adoksyos and 'Awdoksis in EMMML 1833, fol. 132vab (14th cent.), or 'Awdosis in the late fifteenth-century ms EMMML 1479, fol. 122ra. In the Arabic version (ms H), the name appears as 'Awdūksīwos or 'Awdūksīs; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II, 2), p. 351-352 (ed.), 88-89 (tr.). However, another Arabic recension of the story (ms T) mentions the name as *Tawris*; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 7, 2), p. 133, note 584.

<sup>19</sup> Eth. 'Āfomyā in EMMML 1833, fol. 132vb, and EMMML 1479, fol. 122ra.

<sup>20</sup> Eth. 'Aṭālyos in BL Or. 689, or 'Anṭāliwos in EMMML 1833, fol. 132vb. In the Arabic version (ms H), his name appears as *Abṭālis*, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 352 (ed.), 88 (tr.).

<sup>21</sup> Eth. 'Abrāqēyā or 'Abrakiyā according to the text of Budge, but 'Afrīqyā in EMMML 1833, fol. 132vb and some other manuscripts.

<sup>22</sup> For more about the history and organization of the Roman province in North Africa, see D. Fishwick, *On the Origins of Africa Proconsularis, I: The Amalgamation of Africa Vetus and Africa Nova*, "Antiquités africaines" 29 (1993) p. 53-62.



encompass Tunisia, Libya, and parts of Egypt<sup>23</sup>. In the Ethiopic texts, this distinction appears overlooked or misunderstood. As a medieval translation from Arabic, the Ethiopic texts often disregard distant geographical realities and historical facts, which results in the distortion of personal names and the creation of new toponyms. Consequently, the Ethiopic *'Afrīqyā* becomes an ambiguous term, blending Latin *Africa*, Greek *Phrygia*, and Arabic *'Ifriqiya*<sup>24</sup>.

As recounted in the Ethiopic *Gadl*, Euphemia was sterile, and thus Christians regard the birth of Menas as a genuine miracle. On the feast day of the Holy Virgin, Euphemia went to church, engaging in fervent prayer and weeping as she pleaded for God's mercy. There, she heard a voice saying "Amen". Subsequently, Euphemia conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Menas. In this way, the Greek name Μηνῶς and the Coptic ⲙⲏⲛⲁ evolved into *Minā* in Arabic, and subsequently *Minā(s)* in Ethiopic. This transformation has an intrinsic link with the response (Gr. ἀμήν, Ar. *amīn*, Eth. *'amin* or *'amēn*) that Euphemia heard in the church<sup>25</sup>. As a result, both manuscripts and printed editions of texts pertaining to Menas in the Ethiopic language almost equally attest various forms of the saint's name – *Minā*, *Minās*, and *Mēnās*. This narrative remains absent from the text of the Greek *Acts*, though it undoubtedly draws from the Coptic *Encomium* and its Arabic elaborations.

The Ethiopic account of the early years of St Menas highlights his strong faith, which he inherited from his father, and his youthful devotion, demonstrated through fasting and prayer. He lost his father at the age of eleven and became an orphan when his mother died three years later. Renouncing material wealth to aid the poor and support the Church, Menas enlisted in the army at the age of fifteen. In response to an edict issued

<sup>23</sup> For these issues, see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 103-104, with note 1.

<sup>24</sup> The potential association of two different saints named Menas, one from Phrygia and the other from the Libyan Desert (see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. iii-iv), holds no significance from the Ethiopian perspective. Therefore, please see above the discussion already addressed in this issue: E. Wipszycka, *The Birth of the Cult of St Menas*, VoxP 94 (2025) p. 15-19.

<sup>25</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 45 (ed.) and 63 (tr.). For details on the Ethiopic terminology derived from the Semitic root *'mn*, see Leslau, *Comparative*, p. 24; cf. Dillmann, *Lexicon*, c. 735-739; H. Wildberger, "Glauben". *Erwägungen zu* מִן, in *Hebräische Wortforschung*, ed. B. Hartmann et al., Leiden 1967, p. 372-386. For further discussion of the origins of the name of St Menas, see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. iv-v; see Wipszycka, *The Birth of the Cult of St Menas*, p. 15.

by Emperor Gaius Valerius<sup>26</sup>, he deserted the army to avoid idolatry and fled to the desert, where he became an eremite. After some time, however, and by God's inspiration, he returned to the city to openly profess his faith in Christ. As a result, Menas was arrested and subjected to cruel and prolonged tortures, and then beheaded with a sword on *Hedār* 15 in the Ethiopian calendar, which corresponds to November 11 in the Julian calendar. His body, initially intended for burning, resisted the fire, so soldiers buried him with respect in a private property. The Ethiopic text describing the martyrdom of St Menas generally aligns with other traditions, except for the inclusion of the saint's prolonged dialogues with his persecutors, his orations, and more detailed descriptions of his torments.

The following section of *Gadla Minās* recounts the discovery of the saint's body and the construction of his shrine, a narrative absent from the Greek *passio*<sup>27</sup>. Instead, this account primarily derives from Coptic and Arabic sources<sup>28</sup>. This portion of the text is particularly significant, as it provides the context for the miracles that later formed a collection, whose translation we present below, in the next part of this work.

According to the Ethiopic text, a governor of 'Afriqyā (Ar. 'Ifriqiya) named Athanasius ('*Atenāsīs*) took the saint's body with the hope that it might help in the fight against the people of the Five Cities<sup>29</sup>. Thus, the soldiers

<sup>26</sup> Eth. *Gāyeyos wa-Felesāyos*, cf. Budge, *Texts*, p. 63. Caius Galerius Valerius Maximianus, commonly known as Galerius, was Roman emperor from AD 305 to 311. The Greek text refers to emperors Diocletian (Διοκλητιανός) and Maximian (Μαξιμιανός), see van Hooff, *Acta*, p. 258, or *Dīqlādiyānūs wa-Maksīmiyānūs* in the Arabic version (ms H), see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 2), pp. 353 (ed.), 91 (tr.).

<sup>27</sup> For the Greek text on the discovery of the relics of St Menas, which, however, recounts the story of a different saint named Menas, who was martyred at Alexandria along with Hermogenes and Eugephius and is associated with the church in Constantinople, where tradition gives him the title of καλλικέλαδος, see H. Delehay, *L'invention des reliques de Saint Ménas a Constantinople*, AnBol 29 (1910) p. 117-150; D.N. Wilber, *The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu*, "The Art Bulletin" 22/2 (1940) p. 87, with note 3. For more on the process of the conflating different saints with the same name Menas, see C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, London – New York 2003, p. 181-190.

<sup>28</sup> The Coptic text on the *translatio* and the detailed description of the shrine's construction, along with the French translation, in Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 59-72 (ed.), 140-149 (tr.). For the Arabic text from ms A, with the German translation and notes, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 5), p. 368-372 (ed.), 110-125 (tr.).

<sup>29</sup> Eth. *ḥammestu 'ahgur*, see EMM 1833, fol. 137va. The name Pentapolis, referring to the historical region of Cyrenaica, denoted the five main cities of the area: Apollonia, Cyrene, Ptolemais, Teucheira, and Berenice.

travelled across the sea from *'Afrīqyā*, which means a journey from the Libyan desert to Alexandria. As the saint's body was already aboard the ship, two camel-headed beasts emerged from the sea, clearly intent on causing harm. However, a fire emanating from the saint's body drove the beasts away. When this event occurred again, with a similar outcome, the beasts recognized their defeat, bowed to the saint's relics, and then departed. Upon arriving in Alexandria, the power of the relics helped the soldiers to defeat the Berbers. Later, the relics were deposited in a place called *Mēstēn*, near the shore of Lake Maryut<sup>30</sup>. As we see, this part of the Ethiopic text fully aligns with other Oriental versions, which have been freely compiled<sup>31</sup>.

A brief narrative follows regarding an attempt to transport the saint's body, which fails due to the resistance of the camels. This provoked interpretation as another miracle, signifying the saint's will to remain in the same place, within a strong wooden coffin<sup>32</sup>. In response, the faithful created an image showing the saint dressed as a soldier, with two monsters resembling camels bowing in homage to him. The image, placed on the saint's body and carried away by soldiers, became a sign of protection and aid during maritime travel and warfare<sup>33</sup>. Without question, this motif alludes to the image of St Menas depicted on clay ampoules, which were widely popular in the late antique Christian world<sup>34</sup>. However, this reflects Egyptian realities and the Copto-Ara-

<sup>30</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 71 (ed.), 55 (tr.); cf. EMMML 1833, fol. 139vb. The Coptic *encomium* refers to the same place as a "village of Esti (Ἐστὶ)", located about fifteen kilometres above the shrine, near the tower built for protection against barbarians; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 61b, l. 22 (ed.), 141 (tr.), with note 3; see also M. Chaïne in Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 42, note 2, with a reference to the Libyan population Mastieni or Mastita. However, the toponym *Mēstēn* seems absent from the Arabic dossier of St Menas in this exact form. In the *translatio* according to ms H, the place where the soldiers brought the saint's body is called *Buḥayrat Bayāḍ*, which perhaps corresponds to "Libya of Nepaeiat" in the Coptic ms M.590, a Libyan name for Mareotis; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 104, with note 463.

<sup>31</sup> See Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 111-112 (tr.).

<sup>32</sup> The Arabic version of this episode (ms H) is available at the end of the acts in Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 363-364 (ed.), 104 (tr.).

<sup>33</sup> For the Arabic accounts of the miracles associated with the transport of the saint's body by sea, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 5, 3), p. 120-125, with the text on ms T, p. 373-375 (ed.), 120-123 (tr.).

<sup>34</sup> The ceramic pilgrim flasks featuring images of the saint and words of blessing (*eulogia*) became some of the most recognizable elements of the cult of St Menas. The earliest examples date back to the late fifth century and were most popular during the reigns of Justinian and Heraclius. Their production in Maryut ceased with the Arab

bic model of the Ethiopic narrative, as both the orant-style image and the ampoules themselves remained practically unknown in ancient and medieval Ethiopia<sup>35</sup>.

The following section of the *Gadl* describes the interring of St Menas's body in a robust wooden coffin, buried at a designated location. The text then recounts the story of a crippled boy who, desiring to see the lamp suspended above the saint's grave, approaches the structure and experiences miraculous healing. This narration also compiles various versions of the discovery of the saint's relics, as presented in the Arabic sources<sup>36</sup>.

As the site gained renown, numerous other healings and deliverances of the possessed followed<sup>37</sup>. According to the Ethiopic *Acts*, the tenure of Archbishop Athanasius of Alexandria (328-373) saw the erection of the first church dedicated to St Menas, then solemnly consecrated during the reign of Emperor Theodosius (379-395) and the tenure of Archbishop Theophilus (385-412)<sup>38</sup>. The shrine underwent a significant expansion under Emperor Zeno (474-475 and 476-491), who established a garrison with 123,000 soldiers to protect the pilgrims and further developed the city, including the port on Lake Maryut<sup>39</sup>. Additionally, a new special

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invasion. The iconographic motif was adapted from pre-Christian representations of Horus – Harpocrates, shown in military dress and taming hostile beasts held in his left and right hands; see Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 93-120; Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 185-186, with notes 34 and 35.

<sup>35</sup> The only evidence of St Menas's cult in the former Kingdom of Aksum is an ampoule bearing his image in the orant posture, discovered during excavations at Adulis in present-day Eritrea; see R. Paribeni, *Ricerche nel luogo dell'antica Adulis*, "Monumenti antichi" 18 (1907) c. 537-538, fig. 54; cf. C. Giostra, *La diffusione del cristianesimo lungo il Mar Rosso alla luce dell'archeologia*, *RACr* 93 (2017) p. 284-286. Later Ethiopian iconography almost entirely neglects this type of representation in favour of the image of a horseback rider, a trend that persists into modern times, possibly changing today only under the influence of popular publications and images.

<sup>36</sup> The episode appears in the Coptic *encomium*; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 64-65 (ed.), 143-144 (tr.). We find the same story attested in the Arabic text "Version 2"; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 372 (ed.), 118 (tr.); for the same in ms A, see *ibid*, p. 107.

<sup>37</sup> The Coptic *encomium* once again refers to this site as Esti (Ἑστὶ); see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 64a, l. 19 (ed.), 143 (tr.). See footnote 29.

<sup>38</sup> For the Arabic source text of this tradition, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 371-372 (ed.), 115-117 (tr.), according to the Arabic ms A.

<sup>39</sup> This information relies on the edition by Budge, *Texts*, p. 72. However, other early Ethiopic manuscripts record the number of soldiers as 1,200; see EMMML 1833, fol. 139ra, BnF éth. 135, fol. 19ra; see also the translation by M. Chaîne in Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 44. The Coptic text informs us that Zeno established a garrison of

tax supported the church. The narrative concludes by noting that people visited the shrine even after the Muslims took control of Egypt during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610-641)<sup>40</sup>. These pilgrims, coming from distant regions, experienced numerous miracles and healings; they offered sacrifices and returned to their homes in joy, disseminating the veneration of St Menas across the known world<sup>41</sup>.

Although this entire narrative has roots deeply in the Egyptian context, it likely resonated also with Christians in Ethiopia, where the Church established similar sanctuaries dedicated to local saints. A notable example is Dabra Libānos monastery, originally known as Dabra 'Asbo, located in the Ethiopian province of Shewa, where St Takla Hāymānot, a key figure in the thirteenth-century renewal of Christian life in Ethiopia, lived and was buried<sup>42</sup>. His tomb later became a prominent pilgrimage site, renowned for numerous healings and exorcisms that took place there, as attested by the miracles recorded in an extensive collection read to this day<sup>43</sup>.

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12,000 warriors; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 69 (ed.), 147 (tr.). The Arabic ms A states that the garrison consisted of 16,000 soldiers; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> See also Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 117. For the late history of the shrine in Copto-Arabic sources, see *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, III: Agathon to Michael I (766)*, ed. and tr. B. Evetts, PO 5, Paris 1910, chapters 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> The same Ethiopic text regarding the construction and renovation of the shrine in Maryut is also transmitted separately as two miracles in ms SSB, fol. 34va-35va (ed. Budge, *Texts*, p. 71, l. 16-72, l. 12), and fols 35vb-36vb (ed. Budge, *Texts*, p. 72, l. 12-73, l. 9).

<sup>42</sup> For more about St Takla Hāymānot and his shrine, with an extensive bibliography, see E.A.W. Budge, *The Life and Miracles of Tāklā Hāymānot in the Version of Dabra Libānōs*, London 1906; Taddasse Tamrat, *Church and the State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, Oxford 1972, p. 160-169; I. Campbell, *The Church of Saint Takla Haymanot at Dābrā Libanos*, "The Sociology Ethnology Bulletin of Addis Abeba University" 1/3 (1994) p. 4-11; A. Pankhurst, *Dābrā Libanos Pilgrimages Past and Present, the Mystery of the Bones and the Legend of Saint Tāklā Haymanot*, "The Sociology Ethnology Bulletin of Addis Abeba University" 1/3 (1994) p. 14-26; I. Ormos, *The Life of Tāklā Haymanot as a Source for the Study of Popular Religious Practices in Ethiopia*, "The Arabist" 9-10 (1994) p. 305-332; D. Nosnitsin, *The Ethiopic Synaxarion: Text-Critical Observations on Tāklā Haymanot's Commemoration (24 Nāhase)*, OCP 73 (2007) p. 141-183; D. Nosnitsin, *Tāklā Haymanot*, EAe IV 831a-834b; M.L. Derat, *Dābrā Libanos*, EAe II 25b-28a.

<sup>43</sup> The miracles attributed to St Takla Hāymānot often appear alongside his life (*Gadl*) in Ethiopic manuscripts. These narratives detail the healings and other divine graces attributed to the saint's intervention. Budge edited them, with an English translation, in *The Life and Miracles of Tāklā Hāymānot*, v. 2, p. 267-344. For further information on the manuscripts, see R. Zarzeczny, *Catalogo dei manoscritti etiopici di due*

## 2. Ethiopian *Synaxaria*

The reception of *Gadla Minās* was likely very limited among Ethiopians, as it exists in only a relatively small number of manuscripts. However, an alternative version of the story is much more popular, as it appears in the Ethiopian *Synaxarium*, the book of saints for the entire year, publicly read in connection with the daily liturgy<sup>44</sup>.

St Menas the Martyr receives commemoration twice during the Ethiopian liturgical year<sup>45</sup> and, as a result, enjoys two separate entries in the *Synaxarium*. The primary observance takes place on *Hedār* 15<sup>46</sup>.

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*collezioni private (Tomasi – Luc-chesi), con repertorio dei testi*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 309, Roma 2020, p. 301-304.

<sup>44</sup> The Ethiopian *Book of Saints* (Eth. *Senkessār*) was translated from its Copto-Arabic model in the fourteenth century and later revised and expanded to include local saints' lives. For an overview of the current research, see G. Colin, *Le synaxaire éthiopien. État actuel de la question*, AnBol 106/3-4 (1988) p. 273-317. For further details, see G. Colin – A. Bausi, *Sənkəssar*, EAe IV 621a-623a, with an extensive bibliography; cf. Zarzeczny, *Catalogo*, p. 369-370. A critical edition of the texts for the entire year, with a French translation, is available in several volumes of the *Patrologia Orientalis* series; for specifics, see the index in PO 48, 3, Turnhout 1999. The complete English translation by E.A.W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A Translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium መጽሐፈ ስንኃሳር : Made from the Manuscript Oriental 660 and 661 in the British Museum*, v. 1-4, Cambridge 1928.

<sup>45</sup> The Ethiopian Christian calendar rests on the Alexandrian system used in the Coptic Church, which follows the solar cycle. The year consists of twelve months, each with thirty days, and a thirteenth month (*Pāgʷamēn*) lasting five or six days. The Ethiopian year begins on *Maskaram* 1, which corresponds to September 11 in the Gregorian calendar. The names of the months originated in Egyptian, with modifications influenced by Greek and Arabic. An alternative system of calculating years, resulting in a gap of seven or eight years, also characterizes the Ethiopian calendar system. For more details, see E. Fritsch – U. Zanetti, *Calendar*, EAe I 668a-672b. For the organization of the liturgical year, see especially E. Fritsch, *The Liturgical Year of the Ethiopian Church: The Temporal, Seasons and Sundays*, Addis Ababa 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Several editions of the Ethiopian *Synaxarium*'s entry for *Hedār* 15 are available. For a critical edition, accompanied by a French translation, see *Le synaxaire éthiopien. Mois de hedār*, ed. G. Colin, PO 44, 3, Turnhout 1988, p. 308-313 (76-81). Another French translation, based on ms BnF éth. 126 (*olim* éth. 113), fol. 75-76, was provided by M. Chaîne in Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 45-48. The Ethiopic text, along with an English translation from ms BL Or. 660, fols 66va-67rb, appears in Budge, *Texts*, p. 59-61 (ed.), 39-43 (tr.). The same English translation appears in Budge, *The Book of the Saints* 1, p. 246-249. Moreover, we find the Ethiopic text of the entry copied separately in ms SSB-010, fols 17vb-21rb.



The Ethiopic text generally agrees with its Arabic model<sup>47</sup>, although several differences appear, especially when compared to *The Acts*. First, the father's name is Eudoxius ('*Awdokyos*)<sup>48</sup>, as in *The Acts*, but the mother's name remains absent. Second, Eudoxius comes from Nikiou (*Nāqiyos*), which corresponds to *Niqiyūs* in Lower Egypt, as also indicated in the *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*<sup>49</sup>. The Ethiopic entry briefly narrates the story of the saint's miraculous birth, his early years, and military service, echoing *The Acts*, though the description of his passion under Diocletian (*Dīyōkletyānūs*) is much shorter.

Subsequently, the *Synaxarium* recounts the episodes involving the relics transported by sea, the camels that refused to move, and the concealment of the body in the desert. The discovery of the relics by a shepherd introduces a new element to the story: one of the shepherd's sheep, suffering from scab, immersed itself in the water flowing from the spring at that site and was healed. The miraculous event spread far and wide, even reaching Constantinople (*Q<sup>w</sup>astētenyā*). When the king – whose name remains unknown, though the author likely meant Emperor Constantine<sup>50</sup> – heard of the event, he sent his only daughter, who also suffered from a skin disease to the site in the desert. The girl took dust from the place, mixed it with water from the spring, and rubbed it all over her body. That night, St Menas appeared to her, instructing her to dig at the site to find his body. The following morning, the girl proved completely healed, and the saint's body was discovered as foretold. In gratitude, the king built the first church to honour the saint at that site. Under Emperors Arcadius ('*Arqādēwos*; 395-408) and Honorius ('*Onorēwos*; 393-423), the sons of

<sup>47</sup> See *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* for *Hātūr* 15, ed. I. Forget (CSCO 47/Ar. 3), Beryt – Parisiis 1905, p. 107-109; Lat. tr. (CSCO 78/Ar. 12), Romae 1921, p. 124-126. The discovery of St Menas's body by the shepherd, in its Arabic recension, also appears in manuscripts separate from the *Synaxarium*; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 7, 2), p. 388-389 (ed.), 143-144 (tr.).

<sup>48</sup> The manuscripts also attest variants such as '*Awdākyos*, '*Awdokiyos*, or '*Awdokiwos*.

<sup>49</sup> See ed. I. Forget (CSCO 47), p. 107, l. 16. This is, in fact, the Coptic *Pšati* (Πωα†), or Νικιοϥ derived from the Greek name Νίκιος; see Amélineau, *La géographie de l'Égypte*, p. 277-283; R. Stewart, *Nikiou*, CE 6, p. 1793b-1794a.

<sup>50</sup> The Coptic and Arabic versions of the prologue to the *Miracles* mention Emperor Constantine as a just king who succeeded the lawless Diocletian, granted liberty to Christians, strengthened the true faith, and ordered the construction of St Menas's shrine; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 7-8 (ed.), 108 (tr.); Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (mss N, F, and Š), p. 181-183 (tr.).

Emperor Theodosius I, authorities beautifully expanded the church and established a great city. The narrative concludes with the statement that great crowds of pilgrims visited the church, many of whom were healed, and other miracles and signs took place. In response, Satan incited wicked people to destroy the church and steal St Menas's body. However, a new church was later built, to the glory of God.

The basic outline of the story aligns with the final chapters of *The Life* in both the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. Nevertheless, a notable difference occurs, particularly in the new account of the discovery of the saint's relics, which now involves the Emperor of Constantinople, who orders the construction of the shrine. Additionally, the *Synaxarium* attributes the renovation of the shrine to the imperial brothers Arcadius and Honorius, with no mention of the Bishop of Alexandria<sup>51</sup>. This stands in contrast to the *Gadl*, which explicitly states the names of Emperor Theodosius and Bishop Theophilus, as well as Emperor Zeno and Bishop Timothy<sup>52</sup>. In this context, Ethiopian literature has absorbed all the elements of the dichotomous Copto-Arabic tradition concerning the rise and decline of the shrine in Maryut. For the same reason, we should seek the identification of the "evil people stirred by Satan" from the Ethiopian *Synaxarium* in the Arabic sources<sup>53</sup>. Still, all these texts place equally strong emphasis on the miracles and signs associated with the sanctuary, which certainly reflects the significant role the shrine has played over the centuries.

In the *Synaxarium* for *Sanē* 15<sup>54</sup>, which commemorates the consecration of the church in Maryut, the episode of the sick sheep that drank water from the cistern in the desert and was healed reappears in the same

<sup>51</sup> Similarly in the Arabic *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, see ed. Forget (CSCO 47), p. 109, l. 12; tr. (CSCO 78), p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Similarly in the Arabic version in ms A; cf. Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 371 (ed.), 116 (tr.). For more on the authorities involved in the construction of the shrine in the Arabic sources, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 5), p. 110-125.

<sup>53</sup> According to Budge, they refer to Bishop Theophilus and his companions; see Budge, *Texts*, p. 43. The *Gadl* mentions the invasion of Muslims without any dramatic emphasis; see Budge, *Texts*, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> The Ethiopic text was edited with a French translation in I. Guidi, *Le Synaxaire éthiopien. Les mois de sanē, hamlē et nahasē*, PO 1, 5, Paris 1907, p. 611-613 (93-95); see also Budge, *The Book of the Saints* 4, p. 1001-1002. The Ethiopic version corresponds to the Arabic text found in the *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* for *Ba'ūnah* 15, ed. Forget, CSCO 67/Ar. 11, Beryti – Parisiis 1912, p. 170-171; Lat. tr. CSCO 90/Ar. 13, Lovanii 1926, p. 169-170.

manner as the account for *Hedār* 15. Similarly, the miraculous healing of the king's daughter and the discovery of the saint's body receive a brief description, along with general information about the church's construction, although the text mentions no specific names.

Furthermore, the succinct account of the life of St Menas, briefly outlining his miraculous birth following his mother's prayer to the Holy Virgin, his youth, the military service, and the martyrdom under Diocletian, is an almost mechanical transcription from the first part of the *Synaxarium*, incorporated into the Ethiopic collection *The Miracles of Mary* (CAe 3645). This miracle appears in two distinct recensions: a shorter version preserved in a limited number of manuscripts, and a longer, more widespread one<sup>55</sup>.

### 3. Other Ethiopian sources

Before discussing the collection of miracles, it is important to mention some secondary texts regarding St Menas in the Ethiopic language. The first is a homily attributed to Archbishop Dorotheus (CAe 1616)<sup>56</sup>. This brief speech, likely intended for the liturgical commemoration of the martyrdom of St Menas, encourages perseverance in faith despite adversities and suffering. It opens with a paraphrased passage from the Let-

<sup>55</sup> For the *rec. brevior*, see BnF éth. 60 (*olim* éth. 144/60, fols 114ra-115ra, cf. Zotenberg, *Catalogue*, p. 65; MY-005, fol. 98rc-vb. The *rec. longior* appears, for example, in the ms of Veroli, BG-01, fols 101 (*olim* 99) va-102 (*olim* 100) ra (16th cent.); EMM 3872, fols 26va-27ra; Paris, BnF éth. 62 (*olim* éth. 43) (26), fols 39va-41ra, cf. Zotenberg, *Catalogue*, p. 68, n. 26; Lucchesi 3, fol. 180ra-vb, cf. Zarzeczny, *Catalogo*, p. 364, which includes an extended list of codices. For the Ethiopic collection of *The Miracles of Mary* (*Ta'ammera Māryām*), along with a bibliography, see E. Balicka-Witakowska – A. Bausi, *Tā'ammārā Maryam*, EAe IV 788a-793b.

<sup>56</sup> The Ethiopic name *Dorotēwos*, *Derāteyos* or *Derotēwos*, likely refers to Timothy (*Timotēwos*, also as *Damatēwos*, *Damaytēyos* or *Damātreyos*) of Alexandria; see W. Witakowski, *Timothy of Alexandria*, EAe IV 962. The text is clearly a translation from Arabic, although the presumed model remains unspecified. Three manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries attest the Ethiopic version: EMM 1763, fols 57vb-60rb, EMM 8509, fols 19rb-21rb, and YC-001, fols 30ra-31vb. Additionally, a modern copy of the text, directly derived from HMM 1763, is available in EMM 9185, fols 42va-44rb. Its modified version also appears in the book by Sāmu'el Darsē, *Gadla qeddus Minās ba-ge'ez-nā amāreññā. Targwāmi azagāgenā asātāmi mamher Sāmu'el Darsē*, [Addis Ababa 2013 A.M. (= 2020/21 A.D.)], p. 59-64.

ter to the Hebrews: “Blessed Apostle Paul spoke and said that those who believe, hope for future goods that are not yet seen (cf. Heb 11:1). Truly, glorious is God in His saints (cf. Ps 67:36 LXX), for the Holy Spirit speaks through them”. In this homily, St Menas exemplifies those who forsake temporary pleasures in exchange for the eternal treasures stored in heaven. He renounced his earthly life to become a soldier of Christ, a servant, and a witness to the Lord, who values neither gold nor silver in this world, but rewards those who shed blood for his name with eternal life. The name of Menas, which means “the one who believes”, became the guiding principle of his life, especially when, in the face of persecution, he confirmed his willingness to lay down his life for Christ. He embraced the crown of martyrdom, anticipating the future glory promised by the Saviour to his friends. St Menas fought a victorious battle, his blood flowing like water. After his death, his body – worn by fasting, renunciations, and torture – became a sign of hope for those who visit his shrine. The mention of water and the body as signs of hope for worshippers suggests that the homily may have been intended for proclamation at the church in Maryut.

Another category of literature dedicated to St Menas, which contributes to his wide recognition within Ethiopian tradition, consists of hymns or poetic salutations known as *salāmtā*<sup>57</sup>. These texts, typically brief, usually accompany the entries of saints in the Ethiopian *Synaxarium*, although they also appear independently across various manuscripts. One such salutation to St Menas, beginning with the words “Salutation to you, soldier chief, martyr of the Saviour”, appears in *Synaxaria* codices dating from no earlier than the sixteenth or seventeenth century<sup>58</sup>. Another hymn of this kind starts with “Salutation to you, Menas, chosen from the multitude of hosts”<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> For more on this literature, see D. Nosnitsin, *Sālam*, EAe IV 484. A comprehensive list of such Ethiopic hymns appears in M. Chaîne, *Répertoire des salam et malke’e contenus dans les manuscrits éthiopiens des bibliothèques d’Europe*, ROC 18 (1913) p. 183-203, 337-357.

<sup>58</sup> Eth. *Salām la-ka ḥarāwī masfen semā’eta madḥen*; see, for example, ms Lucchesi 100, fol. 65vb. The same salutation, even with secondary variants, appears in ms SSB-010, fol. 21rb. In Budge’s translation, the martyr’s entry for *Hedār* 15 concludes with the words: “Salutation to thee, O Minas, officer and nobleman, for whom thy other prayed to the image of the Virgin Mary”; see Budge, *The Book of the Saints* 1, p. 249.

<sup>59</sup> Eth. *Salām la-ka Minās ḥeruy ’emenna ’a’elāf ḥarā*; see EMMML 2810, fol. 90r-v, or EMIP 480, fol. 151rb-vb.

Additionally, more elaborate and extended hymns, known as *malke'āt* or “images” of the saints, poetically depict and glorify various parts of the saint’s body, thereby emphasizing his spiritual virtues<sup>60</sup>. Some of these hymns are included in larger anthologies known as the *Collection of Images* (*Malke'a gubā'e*, CAe 1850)<sup>61</sup>. One such composition, glorifying St Menas in seventy-five strophes, begins with the words “Salutation to the remembrance of your name, which has the taste of milk and the fruit of the bee” (CAe 247)<sup>62</sup>. Another *malke'* hymn to St Menas, beginning with “O Mary daughter of Judah and Levi” (CAe 3087), comprises twenty-five strophes<sup>63</sup>. In some manuscripts, however, the same hymn begins with what in other manuscripts is the second strophe, “Salutation to the remembrance of your name that was inscribed by God in the Tablet of the Law”<sup>64</sup>. This list of hymns, without a doubt, is far from complete<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> For more on such hymns, along with a bibliography, see Habtemichael Kidane, *Mälkä'*, EAe III 700b-702b.

<sup>61</sup> For more about the *Collection of Images*, see Gezahegn Getachew, *The Mälkä': Its Major Features and Sources*, Addis Ababa 2000; Gezahegn Getachew, *Is Latin the Origin of the Mälki'?*, in: *Ethiopian Studies at the End of the Second Millennium: Proceedings of the XVIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, November 6-11, 2000, Addis Ababa*, v. 3, ed. B. Yimam *et al.*, Addis Ababa 2002, p. 1936-1962; Habtemichael Kidane, *Mälkä'a gubā'a*, EAe III 704a-705a; Habtemichael Kidane, *Celebrating the Holy Saints: The Origin, Evolution, and Liturgical Use of the Mälkä'*, Piscataway 2024. A doctoral dissertation by A. Dickinson, currently in preparation at the University of Hamburg, offers a comprehensive study of the entire *Malke'a gubā'e* manuscript tradition. He also curates the website <https://malkeagubae.com>, which provides access to several *malke'* texts and an extensive bibliography.

<sup>62</sup> Eth. *'Aqadm 'a'ekkwitoto 'enza 'ebl (...)* *Salām la-zekra semka za-yeḥ'em 'em-ḥalib wa-'em-ferēhā la-nehb*. This hymn appears in the *Malke'a gubā'e* collection, included in an early sixteenth-century manuscript presently held at the National Archives and Library Agency in Addis Ababa, ms NALA 73 (= EMIP 2878), fols 73rb-80ra.

<sup>63</sup> Eth. *O Māryām walatta Yehudā wa-Lēwi*; see, for example, mss BL Or. 577, fol. 182r-, EMMML 659, fols 124rb-126ra, EMMML 2706, fols 143va-144va, or EMIP 480, fols 148ra-151rb; see Chaîne, *Répertoire*, no 367. The same text was edited by Sāmu'el Darsē, *Gadla qeddus Minās*, p. 183-190.

<sup>64</sup> Eth. *Salām la-zekra semka ba-salēdā ḥeggu za-talakk'ā la-'egzi'abeḥēr*; see ms SSB-010, fols 37ra-40.

<sup>65</sup> In his *Répertoire*, Marius Chaîne identifies at least two additional hymns with incipits that, however, differ from those of the aforementioned texts; nevertheless, we could not consult them directly for the present study. Hymn no 224, which begins with *Salām ebl la-Minās dengel*, is attested in ms Aeth. 22 in the Vienna collection; see Rhodokanakis, *Die äthiopischen Handschriften*, p. 55, no 13. Another hymn, no 286, with the incipit *Ba-qedma zāti bēta krestiyān yamāna faṭāri za-šārārā* “Before this church that

Furthermore, several prominent liturgical texts are also associated with St Menas. They include a collection of antiphons (*Mawāše'et*, CAe 1990) for the commemoration of St Menas, edited by Budge, where the acclamation “This Menas was just indeed, rejecting his glory became a soldier of heaven” (CAe 4441) reappears several times<sup>66</sup>. A more detailed analysis of these texts would require a separate study and publication.

Finally, a few more words are needed regarding the thematic anthologies in some individual manuscripts. In the Ethiopian literary tradition, it is common for entire handwritten books to be dedicated to a single argument or saint. This is also true for St Menas, as demonstrated by the late fifteenth-century manuscript of Paris, BnF éth. 135 (*olim* éth. 57), which provides *The Life*, alongside a collection of the *Miracles*, as well as a *salām* hymn added later.

Another nineteenth-century codex from the Bēta Hawāryāt church near Addigrat in Tigrāy, northern Ethiopia, underwent digitization in recent years by the Ethio-SPaRe project of the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies at the Hamburg University. The manuscript has been assigned the shelf-mark SSB-010<sup>67</sup>. Comprising forty-three folios, this modern codex presents a rich anthology of texts dedicated entirely to St Menas. The included works are as follows:

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the Creator’s right founded” (CAe 3006), appears in ms Paris BnF d’Abb. 170 (CR 89); Conti Rossini, in his catalogue, mistakenly links this hymn with St Victor, see no 21. He instead associates hymn no 22, *Salām la-zekra semka za-la’ālāwīyān ’ikaśattekā*, “Salutation to the remembrance of your name that is not uncovered to the apostates”, with St Menas, see Conti Rossini, *Notice sur les manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection d’Abbadie* [III], “Journal Asiatique” 20 (1912) p. 471. Moreover, several manuscripts that include the *malke’* collection — such as GG-144 (17th cent.) and EML 6993 (19th/20th cent.) — list a hymn dedicated to St Menas (*Malke’a qeddus Minās*) in their tables of contents, although the hymn itself is missing from the main body of the text.

<sup>66</sup> Eth. *Zentu-sa Minās šedeq we’etu mannino kebro konu ḥārā samāy*; cf. Budge, *Texts*, p. 74–75. This antiphon also appears in ancient codices such as ms Parma Bibl. Palat. ms 3845, fols 41r–42v (14th/15th cent.). Additionally, see the book of antiphons and hymns for the entire year, known as *Deggwa* (CAe 3178) for example ms EML 4667, fol. 31rb–vb. For more information on the Ethiopian antiphonaries, see Habtemichael Kidane, *Māwaśə’ət*, EAe III 877a–878a.

<sup>67</sup> For a comprehensive account of the church’s location and the materials documented on site, see D. Nosnitsin, *Churches and Monasteries of Təgray: A Survey of Manuscript Collections*, Wiesbaden 2013, p. 136–139. I express my gratitude to Dr. Denis Nosnitsin of the HLCEES for granting me access to this manuscript for the purposes of the present study.



- *The Narration of the Greatness of St Menas*, which presents another recension of his *Life and Martyrium* (fols 6ra-18vb)<sup>68</sup>;
- The *Synaxarium* entry for *Ḥedār* 15 (fols 18vb-21rb), followed by the short salutation “Salutation to you, soldier chief, the martyr of the Saviour” (fol. 21rb);
- *The Life and Martyrium*, meaning the *Gadla Minās* (CAe 3156) in its most common recension (fols 21va-31vb);
- *The Covenant (of the Miracle) of St Menas*, which primarily reflects the final section of the *Gadl* (CAe 3165). After a paraenetic introduction that outlines the promises granted to those who venerate St Menas (fol. 32ra-b), the narrative continues with an account of the gathering and translation of the saint’s relics (fol. 32rb-vb)<sup>69</sup>, followed by their discovery. This story unfolds through a series of distinct miracles, including the episode involving the sea monsters (fols 32vb-34rb)<sup>70</sup>; the miracle of healing the crippled boy (fols 34va-35va)<sup>71</sup>; and the miracle concerning the construction and renovation of the shrine in Maryut, carried out in accordance with the emperors’ orders (fols 35vb-36vb)<sup>72</sup>;
- The *malke*’ hymn “Salutation to the remembrance of your name that was inscribed by God in the Tablet of the Law” (CAe 3087), added posteriorly by another scribe, which completes the anthology of texts compiled in this codex (fols 37ra-38rb, 39ra-40vb).

The book edited by *Mamher Sāmu’ēl Darsē* presents a distinct subject for study<sup>73</sup>. This comprehensive collection of texts, primarily dedicated to Menas, also features stories about Abuna Ḥarā Dengel, an Ethiopian monk involved in the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century. Whereas an Amharic translation accompanies the Ge‘ez texts, the source manuscript for the original texts remains unknown, making the work impossible to verify.

<sup>68</sup> Eth. *Zēna ’ebaya gadlu la-beḍu’e wa-la-qeddus Minās*. A similar text also appears in the printed edition by Sāmu’ēl Darsē, *Gadla qeddus Minās*, p. 13-53, where it is divided into readings assigned to various months of the liturgical year. This text likely corresponds to the Arabic version preserved in ms A; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 107: “Version 4”.

<sup>69</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 70, l. 1-71, l. 9 (ed.), 54-55 (tr).

<sup>70</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 71, l. 10-16 (ed.), 55-56 (tr.).

<sup>71</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 71, l. 16-72, l. 11 (ed.), 56-57 (tr.).

<sup>72</sup> See Budge, *Texts*, p. 72, l. 14-73 (ed.), 57-58 (tr.).

<sup>73</sup> See *Gadla qeddus Minās ba-ge’ez-nā amāreññā. Targwāmi azagāgenā asātāmi mamher Sāmu’ēl Darsē*, [Addis Ababa 2013 A.M. (2020/21 A.D.)].

#### 4. Ethiopic miracles

The miracles attributed to St Menas in the Ethiopic version form three groups:

- miracles embedded in the narrative of *The Acts*: this category includes the answered prayer of the saint's mother and the vision in the desert that led St Menas to martyrdom. The miraculous birth of the saint, as recorded in the Ethiopic recension of *The Acts*, appears as a distinct miracle first in the *Synaxarium* entry, in *The Miracles of Mary* collection, and in ms SSB-010, fols 6rb-7vb;
- *post mortem* miracles, including the translation of the saint's body, its discovery, and the construction of the shrine in Maryut. Such episodes, aside from supplementing the saint's acts in the Ethiopic version, can also constitute separate miracles, as evidenced in ms SSB-010, fols 32ra-36vb;
- miracles that occurred at the shrine in Maryut: these miracles form a distinct tradition, entirely independent from *The Acts* (*Gadl*) or the *Synaxarium* entry. They fall under the category of narratives beneficial to the soul and primarily focus on the experiences of pilgrims arriving at the sanctuary of St Menas in Maryut during late antiquity. For the remainder of this study, we will concentrate exclusively on this final category.

The extensive collection of miracles of St Menas in Maryut in their Ethiopic recension consists of nineteen narratives, undoubtedly translated from an Arabic model, although these episodes also spread through other Oriental versions.

A short introduction to the miracles, which slightly varies across the manuscripts, designates the fifteenth day of the Ethiopian month *Sanē* – corresponding to June 21 in the Gregorian calendar – as the feast of St Menas. Both the Copto-Arabic and the Ethiopian *Synaxaria* observe the same day to commemorate the consecration of the church dedicated to St Menas in Maryut. The foundation of his shrine links here to the miracles supposed to feature in a homily attributed to Theophilus (*Tēwoflos*), Archbishop of Alexandria<sup>74</sup>. This attribution reappears

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<sup>74</sup> Several writings attributed to Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412) appear in the Ethiopic tradition. These include his *21st Festal Letter* (CPG 2589) in the *Hāymānota Abaw* collection (CAe 1586); the *Homily on the Departure of the Soul* (CAe 1645); the *Homily for the Lenten Fast* (CAe 1615); the *Homily for the Midpoint of the Easter Season* (CAe 6741); the *Homily on the Three Youth in the Furnace of Babylonia* (CPG 2626, CAe 1664);

in the epilogue of the Ethiopic collection. However, this statement requires further clarification.

An introductory narrative (δύγησις) in the Greek collection of miracles attributed to Timothy of Alexandria is primarily rhetorical in nature and does not reference the saint's wonders<sup>75</sup>. In contrast, the prologue to the Coptic *translatio*, recounting "miracles and wonders wrought by the holy Apa Mena after his martyrdom", is attributed to Theophilus of Alexandria<sup>76</sup>. The Coptic narrative begins with the rhetorical formula "Listen also to the wonders and miracles", and specifically honours the elevation of the shrine by Emperor Constantine and the manifestation of miracles. It briefly recounts the life of St Menas, including the desertion of his regiment and his vision of the angel that led him to martyrdom for the sake of Christ's name. A similar introduction, in the form of a homily (*maymar*), which provides a short version of the saint's life and martyrdom, appears in the Arabic manuscript N, attributed to Archbishop Theophilus (*Tā'ōflos*)<sup>77</sup>. However, manuscript Š once again ascribes a modified version of the same narrative to Timotheus (*Ṭimōṭāwōs*), followed by the miracle of the Syrian man (Ar. 5, Eth. 7)<sup>78</sup>. It seems plausible that one of these or similar narrations in the Arabic version was intended in

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the *Homily on Saint John* (CAe 1277); the *Homily on the Virgin Mary on Mount Qusqām* (CPG 2628, CAe 2487). This latter work also has an abbreviated version, known as the *Vision of Theophilus*, often associated with *The Miracles of Mary* collection; see Zarieczny, *Catalogo*, p. 104-105, 286; cf. W. Witakowski, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, EAe IV 947b-948b.

<sup>75</sup> See I. Pomialovskiĭ, *Zhitie prepodobnago Paisiia Velikago i Timofeia patriarkha Aleksandriiskago poviestvovanie o chudesakh" sv. Velikomuchenika Miny*, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 62, cf. Delehay, *L'invention*, p. 127-128. In fact, Oriental traditions sometimes confuse Timothy of Alexandria (381-284) with his successor, Patriarch Theophilus; see Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 104, note 1. Furthermore, several writings by Timothy Aelurus (457-460, 475-477), authentic or spurious, have been translated into Ethiopic, including the *Refutation of the Synod of Chalcedonia* (CPG 5482), the *Homily on the Church of the Rock* (CAe 5492), and the *Homily on the Archangel Mikael* (CAe 1637), a text also known from its Coptic recension; see Layton, *Catalogue*, p. 197, no 163; Zarieczny, *Catalogo*, p. 86; cf. W. Witakowski, *Timothy of Alexandria*, EAe IV 961a-963a.

<sup>76</sup> See Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 7a (ed.), 108 (tr.); cf. 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. 40. Scholars attribute other Coptic *encomia* in honour of St Menas to John of Alexandria (CCop 181) or to St Athanasius; cf. H. Delehay, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, London 1907, p. 72; Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 55, n. 250.

<sup>77</sup> See Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (III 5, 1, 1), p. 410-411 (ed.), 181-182 (tr.).

<sup>78</sup> See Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (III 5, 1, 4), p. 411-412 (ed.), 183 (tr.).

the prologue to Ethiopic miracles, without replicating the content found in the *Gadl*<sup>79</sup>. This may suggest that both the miracles and this short prologue are not merely an Ethiopic liturgical addition but rather refer to an Arabic model.

The content of the nineteen miracles collection in the Ethiopic recension is as follows<sup>80</sup>.

Miracle 1: A man fails to fulfil his vow to offer a camel and its offspring to the church of St Menas. The saint himself appears to admonish the man, transporting the animals through the air to his church, where the man finds them later. He repents and offers the camels in service to the shrine.

Miracle 2: A man named Astamon steals pigs belonging to the shrine of St Menas. As a consequence, he receives punishment from the saint, who causes his petrification.

Miracle 3: A wealthy Alexandrian vows to bring an offering to the church of St Menas and his idol if his horse bears foals. When the mare gives birth to a three-legged foal, the saint appears and, in an ironic twist, instructs the man either to divide the animal or to ask the idol to create the missing leg.

Miracle 4: Eight men embark on a journey from Alexandria to the church of St Menas, bringing pigs to offer. When the devil kills one of the pigs, the saint appears and restores it to life, demonstrating his power and inspiring admiration and faith among the travellers.

Miracle 5: A wicked Christian and his wife betray a Jewish merchant. After swearing a false oath in the shrine of St Menas, the Christian loses his ring. Later, St Menas appears in the form of a messenger from the Christian's wife and returns the ring. The perjurer acknowledges his transgression and performs penance, while the Jewish merchant converts and requests baptism.

Miracle 6: A paralytic man and a mute woman, having come to the shrine of St Menas in search of healing, receive their cures in a most unexpected manner. Alarmed by what she perceives as an act of aggression

<sup>79</sup> Another recension of the same Arabic prologue is the homily (*maymar*) attributed to Anbā Mazdāriyūs Archimandrite of Wādī al-Naṭrūn; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (III 4, 1), p. 160-161. For anonymous prologues to the life and martyrdom of St Menas in the Arabic version, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen* (II 4), p. 108-110.

<sup>80</sup> Several authors briefly outline the Ethiopic miracles: M. Chaîne in Kaufmann, *Zur Ikonographie*, p. 48-49, D.N. Wilber, *The Coptic Frescoes*, p. 102-103 (Appendix 2), and W.F. Macomber and Getatchew Haile in HMML (V, p. 281-282).

on the man's part, the mute woman suddenly cries out for help, while the paralytic man, fearing an accusation of impropriety, rises to his feet and flees.

Miracle 7: A wicked merchant murders a Syrian Orthodox pilgrim traveling to St Menas in the city port and cuts his body into pieces. The saint appears in glory, forces the wrongdoer to confess his crime, and restores the pilgrim to life. The two men then proceed together to the shrine to offer sacrifices.

Miracle 8: Eutropius, a wealthy man from Alexandria, commissions two silver plates, promising one of them to the shrine. When his careless servant accidentally drops the more beautiful plate into the sea while aboard the ship and subsequently drowns, Eutropius vows to give all his possessions to the sanctuary if he can recover his servant. Upon reaching the port near the sanctuary, he finds the boy with the plate in hand, who then recounts how St Menas saved him from the sea.

Miracle 9: Three pilgrims are on their way to the shrine of St Menas to offer their gifts. A crocodile attacks one of them and pulls him into a lake, but the saint saves the man and places him in the sanctuary. Later, the temple servants learn about the event by listening to the testimony of the other pilgrims.

Miracle 10: A man who swore to bring wood for the construction of the church of St Menas witnesses the punishment of a wicked guard, carried through the air to the shrine.

Miracle 11: A pig belonging to the shrine of St Menas attacks a soldier riding toward the church. The soldier kills the pig in anger and then receives punishment from the saint in his shrine.

Miracle 12: A man fails to fulfil his oath to give a pig to the church of St Menas. Having killed the animal and kept it for himself, he finds the flesh petrified. He repents and offers an equivalent sacrifice to the shrine.

Miracle 13: A man made an oath to donate a horse to the church of St Menas every year. When he neglects his promise, the saint appears in the form of a guard and offers a small payment in gold instead. The man repents for his neglect and eventually fulfils his vow, donating the horse to the shrine.

Miracle 14: An impious soldier attacks a widow bringing an offering (*q<sup>w</sup>erbān*) to the church of St Menas. The saint appears to punish the man, whose horse carries him off directly to the church.

Miracle 15: A wealthy judge from Constantinople, who stole the only sheep from a poor elderly woman, receives a severe punishment after

swearing a false oath in the shrine of St Menas: he becomes partially petrified and publicly displayed in the church until his death.

Miracle 16: A pagan from Alexandria, possessed by a demon since childhood, is brought to the church of St Menas, where the saint exorcizes him over several days.

Miracle 17: A Samaritan woman from Alexandria, suffering from a headache for three years, intends to visit the church of St Menas. However, a guard molests her at the port near the church until the saint appears in his glory, causing the wicked man's hand to wither. The healed woman, along with her companions, proceeds to the shrine, where she remains, as does the impious man, whom the saint carried there.

Miracle 18: Sofia, a childless wealthy woman from Maryut, meets a soldier while on her way to the shrine. The soldier attacks her, but the saint appears in his glory, punishes the man, and carries Sofia to the church.

Miracle 19: Many people run out of water while on their way to the shrine of St Menas. When the priests of the shrine, together with the faithful, ask for the intercession of St Menas, the Archangel Michael himself descends from heaven and opens a spring from the rock.

The collection of miracles in the Ethiopic recension concludes with an epilogue in which Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria speaks in the first person, asserting that he compiled and recorded these wonders in reference to the Orthodox faith<sup>81</sup>. He affirms that God "allowed the soul of this saint martyr to once dwell within his body, speaking through his face, mouth to mouth, as if he were still alive". This homiletic discourse enumerates the graces bestowed upon the protagonists of the miracles, alongside promises for those who will visit the saint's shrine, observe his feasts, take oaths, and make offerings to the church. God will reward each person thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold (cf. Mark 4:20) and inscribe their names in the Book of Life. We find a similar epilogue attested in a much shorter recension in the Coptic ms M.590<sup>82</sup>; however, in this form, it is absent from the Arabic manuscripts collected by Jaritz<sup>83</sup>.

The attribution to Archbishop Theophilus, as presented in both the prologue and epilogue, is not an original Ethiopic assertion but rather a reiteration of earlier Oriental sources. Both Coptic and Arabic traditions commonly invoke the names of prominent bishops and patriarchs

<sup>81</sup> See in ms A, fols 110rb-111rb; ms B, fols 79rb-81rb; ms C, fol. 152ra-c.

<sup>82</sup> See Drescher, *Apa Mena*, p. 34 (ed.), 125 (tr.); cf. Bacot, *Saint Ménas*, p. 77 (tr.).

<sup>83</sup> For a brief epilogue in Arabic ms A, see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 213.



of Alexandria, a practice that does not necessarily signify their authentic authorship. In this instance, the attribution likely reflects the perceived influential role played by the Alexandrian archbishops of the fourth and fifth centuries in the establishment and development of the shrine of St Menas in Maryut, as documented in the *Synaxarium* and other historical records. At its core, the collection of miracles functions as a panegyric, celebrating the sanctuary itself, with the ascription primarily serving to reinforce its authority within the broader context of late antique Christendom. However, for medieval Ethiopian Christians, both the attribution and the associated historical facts bear little significance. For them, the true importance lies in the manifestation of God's power through his saint, who acts in God's name as the authentic miracle worker. Thus, St Menas becomes the conduit of divine grace, the protector of sanctity, the mediator of blessings, the avenger of apostates, the healer of diseases, and the expeller of demons.

Naturally, the collected miracles of St Menas are not an original Ethiopian composition, but rather a translation – or possibly a compilation – of a corresponding Arabic corpus, which in turn depended on Greek and Coptic texts. A comparative analysis of the content and structure of the Ethiopian collection, in relation to other extant anthologies, leads to the following observations.

First, Ethiopic miracles number 4, 11, 14, and 19 are absent from the Greek collection in its currently known form. Second, there is no evidence to suggest that the Greek text directly influenced the Ethiopic version<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Generally speaking, translations from Greek into Ethiopic likely took place only during the classical Aksumite period of Ethiopian Christian civilization, between the fourth and eighth centuries. From this period date the translation of many biblical books, particularly from the New Testament, alongside apocryphal works such as the *Book of Enoch*, the *Book of Jubilees*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Other translated texts include the lives of certain saints, such as St Antony, and some patristic texts, such as the collection of dogmatic writings by Cyril of Alexandria and his followers (*Qērellos*). However, the vast majority of Ethiopic translations were made from Arabic originals, starting from the late thirteenth century. This later period saw the production of a significant number of translations of homiletic, monastic, and hagiographical literature, including the acts of saints and martyrs, along with their miracles. For more on the Classical Ethiopic literature, see especially E. Cerulli, *La letteratura etiopica. L'Oriente cristiano nell'unità delle sue tradizioni*, Firenze 1968; G. Lusini, *Appunti sulla patristica greca di tradizione etiopica*, "Studi Classici e Orientali" 38 (1988) p. 469-493; Getatchew Haile, *Gə'əz Literature*, EAe II 736a-741a, with a bibliography; A. Bausi, *Ethiopic Literature Production Related to the Christian Egyptian Culture*, in: *Coptic*

Still, miracles 12 and 13 lack attestation in the Coptic tradition. Third, we cannot directly compare the Ethiopic episodes 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 14 with the Coptic manuscripts due to their poor condition. Nevertheless, the presence of the corresponding miracles in M.590 remains unquestionable<sup>85</sup>.

With regard to the Arabic recension, all the Ethiopic stories, with the exception of miracle 16, have counterparts in the Arabic text<sup>86</sup>. The question of whether the sequence of episodes reflects the decision of the Ethiopian translator or compiler, or whether it follows the structure of an Arabic model, remains a complex issue. Indeed, none of the extant Arabic manuscripts preserves the same collection or the same sequence of texts as found in the Ethiopic version. Nevertheless, we can make some considerations, particularly in reference to the Arabic codex M<sup>87</sup>. It appears that the sequence of Arabic miracles numbered 17-20 corresponds to Ethiopic miracles 1-4, while Arabic miracles 12-14 align with Ethiopic miracles 9-11. Moreover, Arabic miracles 10-11 and 21-22 correspond to Ethiopic episodes 5-6 and 12-13, respectively. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the first miracle in the Ethiopic collection mirrors the first miracle in the Coptic manuscript M.590, while Ethiopic episodes 2-6 follow the same sequence as Coptic narratives 5-9. We cannot attribute this

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*Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. P. Busi – A. Camplani – F. Contardi, Leuven – Paris – Bristol 2016, p. 503-571; A. Bausi *et al.*, *The Axumite Collection or Codex Σ (Sinodos of Qəfrəyā, MS C3-IV-71/C3-IV-73, Ethio-SPaRe UM-039): Codicological and Palaeographical Observations. With a Note on Material Analysis of Inks*, “COMSt Bulletin” 6/2 (2020) p. 127-171.

<sup>85</sup> Drescher references the list of the seventeen Coptic miracles based on M.590 in *Apa Mena*, p. 107.

<sup>86</sup> The Arabic texts of the St Menas tradition were the subject of study and publication by F. Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen zum Heiligen Menas*, Heidelberg 1993. The German scholar collected and analysed 25 manuscripts transmitting *The Acts*, a collection of St Menas's *Miracles*, and some other texts such as *Legend* found in Cairo and the *Encomium* attributed to Anba Mazdāriyūs. A detailed description of these manuscripts appears in Part I of her book; see Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen (I)*, p. 49-82. Part II concerns *The Acts of St Menas*, Part III discusses the miracles attributed to St Menas, and Part IV focuses on the Cairo legend text. Part V addresses various issues related to the St Menas tradition. Finally, Jaritz also edits the Arabic texts.

<sup>87</sup> A detailed list of miracles in the Arabic manuscripts, indicating their sequence in the individual codices, is provided by Jaritz, *Die arabischen Quellen*, p. 154-160. From the perspective of textual recension, the Ethiopic version generally aligns with manuscripts belonging to the same group as the Arabic manuscripts F, R, and Š. For specific episodes, see the concordance and notes in the English translation in this issue (VoxP 94 [2024] p. 273-348).

alignment solely to coincidence. While there is considerable freedom in the selection of individual episodes in the Oriental hagiographic compilations, it is only natural that certain texts may have been transcribed in the same order across recensions and manuscripts. This suggests a nuanced, organic relationship between the Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic collections, one that goes beyond the mere mechanical copying of texts and points to a shared tradition of textual transmission.

Further information on the Ethiopic text and the manuscripts transmitting the entire collection of the miracles of St Menas appears in the introduction to the complete English translation of these miracles, presented later in this issue<sup>88</sup>.

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