

The Monastery of Saint Demiana, Barrary, Egypt

THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN SAINT DEMIANA  
AND THE  
EARLY HISTORY OF HER MONASTERY

Prepared by

The Nuns of the Monastery of St. Demiana

Forwarded by

His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy

Metropolitan of Damiette, Kafr el-Sheikh, and Barrary,  
Abbot of the Monastery of Saint Demiana, Egypt

# **The Life of the Virgin Saint Demiana and the History of Her Monastery**

Prepared by the Nuns of the Monastery of St. Demiana

Forwarded by

**His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy**

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THE CHASTE SAINT DEMIANA  
AND THE FORTY VIRGIN MARTYRS

Early Coptic Icon at the Monastery of Saint Demiana



## HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II

118<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria and  
Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark







**HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN BISHOP**

Metropolitan of Damiette, Kafr-el Sheikh, and Barrary,  
Abbot of the Monastery of Saint Demiana for Nuns, Barrary

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## FOREWORD

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**I**t is indeed wonderful and joyous to publish this comprehensive book on the life story of the virgin and martyr Saint Demiana and the Forty Virgin Martyrs, with the early history of her flourishing monastery.

We thank the Lord for this blessing; and gratitude is due to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, for his prayers, guidance, perseverance, and great care in establishing and resuming the monastic life in this Monastery, on 24 September 1978; and for officially recognizing it as one of the monasteries for nuns in our Coptic Orthodox Church, during the meeting of our Holy Synod presided over by His Holiness on 20 February 1979 A.D.

The Lord has bestowed upon me the honor of being a servant to Saint Demiana – an honor of which I am undeserving – at her monastery wherein rests her chaste body which was buried there after her martyrdom at the end of the third century A.D. The first church for Saint Demiana was consecrated by Pope Alexander, the 19<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria, accompanied by his deacon and brilliant disciple Saint Athanasius the Apostolic who later succeeded him in the papacy in the year 328 A.D.



The fragrance of holiness which emanates from that holy place and the memory of the martyrdom of Saint Demiana has not evaporated into thin air. However, her influence has spanned more than seventeen centuries through the continuous retelling of her aromatic life story, as well as the numerous miracles through which the Lord glorifies his martyr and beloved bride with her friends the Forty Virgins.

The Lord has arranged, for the revival of the sublime monastic life which Saint Demiana had initiated, and which had later ceased with her martyrdom. At present, 147 nuns and 10 novices reside in the monastery. They adhere to the daily praying of the Psalms and the Midnight Praises in addition to attending Divine Liturgies and the prayers of Evening and Morning Offering of Incense. The nuns and novices also engage in handiwork and the reading of holy and spiritual books, as well as books on asceticism. They practice the life of remoteness from the world and have severed their strong ties with friends, family, and social life for complete dedication to the life of monastic perfection.

I thank the nuns of the monastery for publishing this book about the life of the beloved martyr Saint Demiana and the Forty Virgins, which includes numerous photos of her monastery. I ask the Lord to

grant them, and through them, every aspiration for reviving the monastic example of Saint Demiana and its continuation for the glory of God; through the prayers our father His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, who has a special spiritual relation with St. Demiana (His mother of blessed memory is a native of St. Demiana Village). Glory be to God, forever, Amen.

*Metropolitan Bishop*

Metropolitan of Damiette, Kafr el-Sheikh, and Barrary,  
Abbot of the Monastery of the Martyr Saint Demiana

Feast of the Consecration of the Church  
of Saint Demiana and the Forty Virgins

21 January 2018 A.D.

13 Tobi 1734 A.M.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. designates ‘Anno Martyrdum’ which means ‘in the year of martyrs.’ This is what is used to refer to a Coptic Year.

## MANUSCRIPTS OF THE LIFE OF SAINT DEMIANA

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There are in existence many old manuscripts which record the life story Saint Demiana.

Herewith, are included excerpts from various manuscripts extant in her monastery in Barrary, transcribed in Arabic, as:

- MS 726311a; dated 1449 A.M./1732 A.D.
- MS 725551a; dated 1498 A.M./1781 A.D.
- MS 725552a; dated 1607 A.M./ 1891 A.D.

These manuscripts were copied from the main manuscript written by Bishop John, bishop of Burullus. Bishop John transcribed his Coptic manuscript in the 6th century during the papacy of Pope Damian, the 35<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria (563-598 A.D.), from an earlier Coptic manuscript. Bishop John's manuscript recounts the events in the life of Saint Demiana and mentions the consecration of her church during the reign of Emperor Constantine and Caliph Sinan, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the Coptic month of Pashons. Following are excerpts from this manuscript:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For clarity, various phrases in the excerpt have been modified to suit the modern-day reader.

John, called by the grace of God, bishop of the regions of Burullus and Saffron (Zaafaran). This narrative has reached me, I, the poor one; the honorable and holy chronicle of the martyr Saint Demiana:

Now, my faithful and beloved brethren, may God guard you with His mighty right hand from every odd tribulation and hardship of this evil world. I ask you to incline your hearts unto me before you incline your ears, so that I may narrate to you what I have found, I the poor and wretched one, John, called by the grace of God, bishop of the regions of Burullus and Saffron. I shall impart to you what I have received of this marvelous narrative, I the poor one, and this honorable, holy story of Saint Demiana, the chosen and righteous martyr.

When I was enthroned for the bishopric of Burullus, I customarily attended a church at Saffron, observed and offered prayers there. The church was old and dilapidated as an effect of much time which had passed. It was in ruins as a result of neglect. After a period of time, a thought occurred to me, that is, I longed to hear about the narratives of the martyrs whose relics reside in this church, and to know their chronicles. After more time passed, as I was pondering over this matter, I was unable to

savor food, nor sleep by reason of what I had in my heart.

As I was in this condition, a saintly monk, one of the inhabitants of the Monastery of Maymah, south of the aforementioned church, came to visit me. In his possession were worn out (that is, torn) books which had endured many years of use. It seemed as though this monk had been directed by God; for he said to me, "Father, take these books with you for the organizations you make for the church, for you are our father and the overseer of the churches." Immediately, I took them from the monk, and he departed after receiving the blessing from my poor and wretched self. According to the extent of my longing for this good news, I searched through them. I discovered that they pertained to that holy church.

As I continued searching, I found the long-awaited news, that is, the life story of the holy, chaste, and pure Lady Demiana. After many days had passed, I took up an inkwell, pen, and paper and I began to copy it a second time; it had been written by the hand of one of the servants of Julius of Aqfahs, named Christozolou. He wrote...

## Chapter One

### THE EARLY LIFE OF THE MARTYR

---

There was a man named Mark who was governor over the city of Saffron in the valley of Sesbania (Sayssaban). He was extremely wealthy and had an abundance of money, servants, maidservants, livestock, grain, fields, gardens, plantations, gold, silver, and every good thing which is pertinent to this transient world. He had an only daughter but no other children; her name was Demiana and she was very precious to him. He loved her with a very deep love since she was honored in the sight of her family. She was beautiful in appearance, her features were exquisite in the utmost, and her beauty and loveliness surpassed that of others. Out of his great love for her, Mark could not be separated from her or allow her to be away from him even for one hour. When she was one year old, her father took her, took candles, vows, and offerings to the Monastery of Maymah, a short distance south of their city. He baptized the blessed daughter and named her Demiana. It was a glorious night filled with joy and spiritual songs, and then they returned to their city of Saffron. On that day,

and the following two days, a great feast was held for the weak and needy in the name of the Lord Christ. Everyone was joyous because of the baptism of Demiana. This joy gladdened the heart of her father Mark.

Afterwards, Demiana was nurtured with the finest upbringing and taught the reading of books. She continually sat by herself to read and weep [means: praying in tears] in solitude.

When she reached the age of fifteen, her father wished to give her in marriage to one of the nobles of his city. Upon telling her of his intentions, she said, “My father, how can such a thought come to your mind, since I have vowed myself to become a bride of Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth. I am His servant and I will never consent to this.” Her father replied, “My daughter, this does not anger God, but since you have vowed yourself to virginity, I shall not force you.” Demiana said to him, “My beloved father, I request one thing from you which is not difficult for you to carry out.” Her father gladly replied, “Tell me, O joyous and blessed daughter, for I am willing to do for you all that you desire.” She answered, “I have vowed myself to God; and I have vowed to be, in body, a servant to Christ – my God, my lord, and my life. My desire, O beloved father, is that you build me a



pleasant abode, outside of, and to the north of this city in which I may worship my God and Savior Jesus Christ. For, my father, it is our duty to enter into solitude for the purpose of praises and holiness day and night. I should not associate with the dwellers of this world since our Lord Christ, for Whom worship is due, said in the Holy Bible, *‘But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.’*<sup>3</sup> Christ did not say this referring to all those who desire to pray and who go into their private room and shut the door, but He said this referring to the closing of the door of the intellect to all thoughts. If a person fulfills these two commandments, he will become the kinsman of perfection. Particularly me, O my father, since I am a young woman and a poor and weak vessel, I wish for a place to hide in. Now I ask you, O my father, to fulfill my request, that I may be vigilant, waiting for the incoming thief – that is, unexpected death, so that when it comes, it may find me free from the concerns of this vain world. As for you, there will be the greatest recompense and reward before the throne of our God, Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ, the blessed and everlasting unto the ages. Amen.’

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<sup>3</sup> Matt. 6:6.

When the Lady Demiana had spoken these words to her father, he was delighted with joy and happiness. From the intensity of his gladness, his eyes welled up with tears and he said to her, “Gladly rejoice with joy and delight, O blessed daughter, henceforth, I will do for you all that you desire, and I will carry out all that you have asked for.”

At that very same time and hour, Mark hastened and sent for a skilled and wise engineer, renowned in these regions for his workmanship, as well as a group of builders. When they had arrived, he said to them, “I want you to make, for my beloved daughter Demiana, a palace in the location which I will show you. Here are my honest stewards to whom I have entrusted my wealth; I have instructed them to give you all that you require – money, possessions, crops, foods – all that you need and in excess. Accomplish your work to the highest standard of workmanship, and according to the best of your ability.” They responded, “We listen and we obey, O governor of the cities.”

Immediately, Mark arose and went with them outside of the city, slightly due north of the city of Saffron, and showed them the place. At once, they organized the tools required for building.

When the builders finished their work, they went to Mark the governor and informed him about

the completion of the palace. Without delay, he arose, came to the site and entered the palace. When he saw it, he was exceedingly glad since it was a magnificent sight to behold. Thus, he bestowed upon the builders the finest gifts and presents; the builders then left in peace.

## **The Solitude of Demiana**

Immediately then, Mark brought his daughter, the chaste Lady Demiana, into the palace. On the same day, forty virgins gathered there with her. They were daughters of the nobles of the city of Saffron, who were beforehand her friends. They were chaste and pure virgins like angels. They had never parted from the pure Lady Demiana and had always lived in unceasing prayer, morning and evening, at the Monastery of Maymah. The father of the Lady Demiana ordered her to shut the palace doors with secure locks from inside and out, and he bid her farewell in peace. From there, he proceeded toward the city.

As for the virgin, the Lady Demiana and her friends the virgins, they practiced unceasing prayer, day and night. Their prayers ascended to the throne of the Holy God, the Strengtheners of weak vessels, until they attain their ranks of Paradise.

## Chapter Two

### A VIOLENT TRIAL

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#### Diocletian and Paganism

**A**t that time, Diocletian was emperor of the Roman hierarchy, the city of Alexandria, the Pentapolis, and their surroundings. In those days he worshipped Christ, and for the Christian people, there was safety and well-being in every country. Diocletian loved Mark the governor, and between them was sublime love and friendship.

When Mark had assumed the position over the province of Farama (Pelusium) he arose swiftly and went to the palace, bid Demiana farewell, and received the blessing of all the virgins. He then proceeded toward Farama in peace and remained governor there for a time.

Afterwards, Satan dominated the heart of Diocletian. He turned away from the Christian religion. He made for himself seventy idols of gold and silver, to which he gave the names of thirty-five gods and thirty-five goddesses. He named the chief male god Apollo, and the chief female goddess Diana (Artemis). He then quickly ordered one-hundred

beautiful, precious, white horses; dressed them in silk, brocade garments, and lutestring; and he placed upon them red gold saddles and saddlecloths embroidered with pure gold. He caused them to walk at a distance in front of him without any riders upon them. He also placed a great number of soldiers before him; they comprised thirty-thousand princes. A trumpet was sounded ten times from the left and ten times from the right. The soldiers (i.e. the princes) were riding, wearing magnificent garments. Besides, one hundred-and-forty idol priests for the seventy idols, one carrying the idol and the other raising incense in front of it. They went about the entire city with the town crier proclaiming with a frightful shout saying, "Citizens of the nations, all the residents of Antioch, and all strangers: All those who obey the Emperor and offer incense to his gods shall be bestowed upon with all abundant gifts. But to him who disobeys, his house shall be plundered and burned, and he will die with the vilest death and suffer the harshest torture."

When they had finished encircling the entire city of Antioch, misery spread amongst all its inhabitants. The city contained very numerous people — approximately two-thousand times ten-thousand, not including women, soldiers, boys, and girls. After this procession, Diocletian laid out

instruments of torture in the place of judgment. He laid out the seventy idols before him on their seats, and quickly arose and bowed to them. Diocletian was first to bow down, followed by his chief minister Romanus the father of Victor, then the eminent council members, of whom some worshipped, but others delayed, those valiant ones of Christ who were men of prominence, including, Saint Theodore the centurion, Saint Theodore the Anatolian, Justus the son of the king, Saint Victor and his uncle's son Claudius, and Lord Ter the centurion. These and many other important men of the empire fell into deep sorrow as a result of this matter. They approached Diocletian and repudiated the idols. Thus, he exiled some to Egypt and some to distant countries, where they were killed. Others, he annihilated with severe torture and lastly, killed them by the sword.

## **Mark and the Betrayal**

Let us now return to the account which has been set before us this day, concerning Saint Mark the governor, the father of Saint Demiana. The Emperor summoned Mark from Farama to Antioch along with several other governors who came from every region. Between Mark and the Emperor, there

was a familiar and old friendship because Mark was a respected elder. The Emperor said to him, “Why are you, Mark, delayed in worshipping the honorable gods who have given us victory and triumph over all kingdoms; while you are the best of my friends and a chief governor. Did you not see what happened to the patriarch when he concealed the son of the king of Persia? Therefore, do not postpone any longer, our beloved, since you are beloved to us.” With these gentle and kind words, Mark the governor was deceived; he immediately offered incense to the idols, bowed down before them, and thus renounced the God of heaven. He continued with the Emperor in this manner for a month, after which he returned to his governorate, the Farama.

## **Facing the Storm**

The news reaching his daughter, the Lady Demiana, she hastily arose, left her palace panicking and went to meet with her father in the Farama. When she entered in his presence, she did not greet him. She said to him, “What is this sorrowful news which I have heard, that you have forsaken the religion of Christ God, obeyed the Emperor, and worshiped the idols?! I wish I would have heard the news of your death as a Christian, living with Christ



forever, than your life as an idol-worshipper, dead in hades. My father, listen to me, accept my words, return, and publicly confess the Christ in the same place where you denied Him. If you did not listen to me, I will become a stranger to you and you to me in this age and the coming age.”

## **Repentance and Tears**

When Saint Demiana’s father heard these words from her, he immediately came back to himself, just as one drunken awakes from wine. At once, he cried loudly in weeping and lamentations, and said, “Woe to me, I the sinner, for that which I have dared to do and commit. For I have made stones my reliance; and worshipped in the dwelling places of Satan. Blessed is the hour in which I saw you, O blessed daughter; you have rescued me from a deep pit. I had been, as though in the depths of the earth in thick darkness. I, in this hour, am as though on the wings of the wind. I have no wish or desire for that in which I was. I am prepared for death in the Name of the Savior; that is, Jesus Christ, my God. In Him I believe, in His Name I am content, upon Him I rely, with Him I die, and with Him I live unto ages.”

He then speedily arose and journeyed towards the city of Antioch. The Lady Demiana returned

home and asked the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Living God, saying thus, “O Lord, my Lord, my God, Who do not desire the death of the sinner, but the life of everyone is existent by You; do not hold him accountable or blame him, my Lord and Master, for the rebellion and disobedience which he dared to commit against You, and for his worship of that which is made by hands. For You, O my Master, know of the deficiency, weakness, and inadequacy of human nature; You know that no person is devoid of error; and that our adversary stands vigilantly like a lion seeking whom he may devour. As you delivered Jonah the Prophet, the son of Amittai, and brought him out safely from the belly of the whale, O Lord, accept my father who had been swallowed by Satan. I ask You, O God, make him steadfast until he sheds his blood in Your Holy Name. For Yours is the glory and the honor, now and at all times, and unto the age of ages.”

## **The Crown of Martyrdom**

As for her father Mark, when he reached the Emperor Diocletian, he entered, stood before him, and shouted saying, “What is this dramatic alteration, O Emperor, to which you have stooped, worshipping idols? You have forsaken the worship of

God the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth, He in Whose hands are the souls of all creatures; and have become a worshipper of idols made of stone and solid wood that are utterly useless, in which the accursed devil dwells. You should not, O Emperor, who sit atop the entire world, replace the essence of faith with the dirt of corruption. The sweet name is Jesus, the blessed name is Jesus, the life-giving name is Jesus.” Mark then made the sign of the Cross over his face as he was standing before the Emperor and in the presence of the ministers, guards, all the soldiers, the dignitaries, the princes, and all of the citizens of the city; I mean, the city of Antioch. He proclaimed saying, “I believed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the One God, Amen!”

When the Emperor Diocletian, saw Mark the governor doing thus, his features changed, he became perplexed, his thoughts raged, and said to those around him, “Who has fooled the chief governor Mark our friend, so that he has despised the benevolence and gifts that we have generously bestowed upon him; more than all of the governors. He has rent asunder the shield of our pride; and our authority would no longer persists before the soldiers and the army who have heard these words. Now all of them will imitate him and they will oppose us.” The Emperor then spun toward Mark

and said, "How, O friend, could you turn away from our amity and abandon the worship of our gods; those who have given us triumph and victory over our enemies. You have despised us and all the charity and generosity that we have shown to you; and you have spoken these senseless words. Hasten now; return to your mind, come forth to worship the great god Apollo and the mother of goddesses Diana." At this, Saint Mark was enflamed with the Holy Spirit, and cried out in the face of the Emperor with a tremendous shout saying, "Be filled with shame, O Emperor, with your idols; for there is no god in heaven or upon earth except Jesus Christ, His Good Father and the Holy Spirit; a Holy Trinity; One God. In Him I believed, in His Name I die, and with Him I live. Henceforth, O Emperor, you shall not hear any other words from me."

The Emperor was grieved with deep sadness and said to Romanus his minister, "What course of action shall we take concerning this person? For he was the best of friends to us, but now he has become our enemy." Romanus replied to him saying, "Concerning the friendship, he has annulled, and enmity has been confirmed in him. What is evident to me, is that he shall never return to our belief, O Emperor. It is best, and most appropriate, to cut him with the sword immediately, so that your

friends do not become greedy toward you because of him or imitate him, and your labor become invalid.”

At once his judgment was written out, and his beheading with the edge of the sword was ordered. They escorted him to the place of beheading in the city of Antioch. Immediately, he prayed a long prayer, and after his prayer, he commanded the soldiers saying, “Accomplish what you have been ordered by the Emperor.” Without delay, an evil and wicked soldier, cut off his head with the edge of the sword and cast it away. Hence, his pure spirit ascended to Paradise by the hand of the Eternal Creator, whom he loved. He received the crown of martyrdom on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the blessed month of Epip and became an intercessor for sinners. May his holy blessings protect us all forever. Amen.

Now, O beloved brethren, let us return to informing you about reason of mentioning Saint Demiana before the Emperor Diocletian, the resistant. She was a resident of Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania, with her sisters the virgins. They were vigilant in offering prayers day and night; and they were not brought into the remembrance of anyone.

## Chapter Three

### PAINS AND GLORIES

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#### Confusion and Advice

**O**n the second day, after the martyrdom of Mark the governor, Demiana's father, the heathen Emperor [Diocletian] sat with Romanus his minister next to him, sorry about the slaying of Mark the governor. Romanus said to him, "Long live, O Emperor! An acquaintance of mine has informed me that Mark the governor did not turn away from our amity, hated and rejected our gods, abandoned our form of worship, except for his daughter whose name is Demiana. She dwells at Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania, where her father has built her and her friends – forty young virgins – a lofty high palace. For when she heard that her father obeyed us, she went to him at Farama and caused him to deviate from our ways. For this reason, he has shown ingratitude toward your benevolence, O Emperor."

Upon hearing these words, the heathen emperor became angry with an exceedingly deep rage and Satan filled him with extreme wrath.

Immediately he commanded one of his soldiers saying, "Take one hundred soldiers with you and go to the governor; to the city of Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania. Investigate the news of this young lady Demiana, the daughter of Governor Mark, of whom I have heard, she lives in a lofty palace. She has influenced the entire area; especially since she turned her father away from our friendship and misled him until he obeyed her words and ceased performing our manner of worship. Now, go to her to deceive her (that is, to make a bargain), and tell her, 'The Emperor, the ruler of the entire world who assumes authority over all Roman ranks and the Egyptian nation, the proprietor of all countries of the world, Diocletian, says unto you, 'Worship the idols and offer incense to them, for they have given us victory over all kingdoms;' and say, 'You Apollo is the true god.' Your words to her should be uttered in gentleness, with lenience, and in craftiness. If she obeys, build her another palace more magnificent than the first, and give her all the money that she desires. However, if she refuses and will not obey, inflict upon her the severest of tortures; leave not any of the greatest torments unused against her. In the end, behead her and the virgins who are with her. On your journey from here and during your return, leave not any torture



unutilized against this sect; that is, the Christian sect, the worshippers of the Crucified. For, I am prepared to eradicate them from all my countries.”

When the prince received his order from the tyrannical emperor, he kissed his hands, took with him one hundred soldiers, and rode out toward the city of Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania. To every Nazarene<sup>4</sup> whom he met along his way, he demanded the worship of the idols. Thus, he killed many martyrs on his journey until he reached Saffron; so many, in fact, that they could not be numbered. He pitched his tents north, nearby the palace of Demiana and the Virgins. It was the end of the day.

## **Resoluteness and Determination**

When Saint Demiana looked out of the arched windows of her palace and saw the erected tents, the army, and their assistants, she turned to the Virgins and said, “My sisters, come and look.” They came to her quickly, peered through the windows of the palace, and said, “What is this, our Lady?” “They are soldiers” replied Demiana, “They are the army of Diocletian. Their aim is to torture Christians, and I

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<sup>4</sup> i.e. ‘Christian.’ For the sake of clarity, we have used the word ‘Christian’ instead of ‘Nazarene’ wherever it appears in the MS.

suspect that they have come here because of us.” “Now, O sisters, arise that we may pray to the Lord Christ our God, asking Him to strengthen us during torture and in receiving the crown of martyrdom in His Holy Name.” They all arose and prayed. After their prayer they sat; and the chaste Lady Demiana said to them, “O blessed sisters, the Lord Jesus Christ – glory be to Him – said in the Holy Bible, *‘For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’*<sup>5</sup> At this time, I wish you to know that if any one of you longs to receive the crown of martyrdom in the Name of Christ, let her remain here. However, she among you who cannot endure torture, may go down secretly, escape, and go her own way.” When the Virgins heard this from the Lady Demiana, they cried out loudly with lamentations and intense weeping saying, “Our Lady, how could you think of such an idea; that we part from you, leave you, and go back to this passing world when you are the reason for our life. This will not come to be from us. And now, the death by which you will die, we shall also die by it with you.”

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 16:25.

## Offer and Refusal

As they were speaking thus, there was a knock at the palace door. The chaste Lady Demiana asked one of the Virgins to go down and see who it was who knocked. One of the virgins went down and said, “Who knocks at the palace door?” The prince replied, “Tell the chaste and perfect lady Demiana, ‘Your servant, Prince so-and-so, who has been entrusted with authority on behalf of Diocletian the Emperor – of dominion over the Roman ranks, and ruler of the entire world – has sent me to you, conveying words from the Emperor.’” Immediately, the Virgin went up and informed the Lady Demiana of the prince’s words. She requested her to open the door; the prince entered, went up into the palace, went to her inside the palace, and found her sitting, glittering in light. The prince said to her, “Peace to you, O Demiana, in whose remembrance and beauty kings take pride; whose eminence has radiated, who is renowned, and exalted in all kingdoms and countries. I declare to you my Lady that the Emperor is asking you to worship his dignified gods and offer incense to them, so that he may bestow upon you whatever you ask; even if it is half of his kingdom. And now, I have come to you with these joyous words from him.”

When Saint Demiana heard these words from the prince, she leaped to her feet saying, “Are you not ashamed to call those stones, gold, silver, and wood, in which Satan dwells, gods? Do you not have a reasoning mind? How can an idol which does not move and is carried by priests from place to place be called ‘god’? There is no god in heaven or upon earth except Jesus Christ, the Creator, with His Good Father, and the Holy Spirit. The Eternal and the Mighty, the Omnipresent King; Who is uncircumcised; Who is concealed from the eyes; Who knows mysteries before they are thought of; He Who overcomes you, you worshippers of idols, with the cup of bitter death, and after your death. As for me now, I am a servant of my Lord and my Savior Jesus Christ and His Good Father and the Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity. Him I confess, on Him I depend, in His Name I die, and with Him I live forever. Amen.”

When the prince heard such a speech from her, he became extremely furious, his eyes ignited as flames of fire, his entire being raged, and he gritted his teeth at the Saint. He seized her, went down from the palace to the outside, and ordered for her torture.

## 1) Lifting Her Up on the Pressing Wheel

He lifted her up onto the pressing wheel and commanded that she be squeezed by four strong men, two opposite the other two. Lady Demiana felt the extent of the pain and all the Virgins were present, standing beside her crying.

She lifted her eyes up toward heaven and cried out saying, “O Only-Begotten Son, the Eternal Jesus Christ, Whom the Jews lifted up upon the Holy Cross and nailed between two thieves, through Your own will, lift up my mind, O my God, away from bodily concerns which disturb the mind, unto the remembrance of Your heavenly economy. Accept from me this little suffering; which is in the foremost for Your Holy Name, for Yours is glory, exaltation, and reverence, now, at all times, and unto the age of ages. Amen.” The assistants were also working laboriously and became exhausted from pressing. The blood of the Lady Saint Demiana was running across the ground as water; and the Lord confirmed her soul within her as she was speaking.

When the Virgin Lady Demiana saw the Virgins standing around her weeping she said to them, “Do not cry over me my sisters, for our Lord Christ — glory be to Him — endured pain on our behalf for

our salvation, and He died in the flesh for us while there was no sin in Him deserving of death. His passion in the flesh was to save Adam and all his offspring from Hades. If God, the Pantocrator, accepted death and crucifixion by His own will, whilst being sinless, how much more should I, His servant, act in obedience to Him? I ask for death and accept it in sweetness; for the blessed Apostle Paul said in his epistle, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*<sup>6</sup>

As the assistants became weary of turning the pressing wheel, the saint’s bones and flesh were like dough, while her spirit was steadfast and speaking. All those present were astonished. The prince then ordered that she be committed to a dungeon, so they pull her down from the pressing wheel and threw her into prison whilst she was in great affliction from the severity of the torture.

O the many sufferings that martyrs and saints receive from the worshippers of idols! However, the joy, glory, and Kingdom of the heavens cannot be described!

When they shut her in prison, the Virgins were with her crying and the prince did not speak to them. From grief, the Virgins dozed off and the

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<sup>6</sup> Rom. 8:18.

Lady Demiana was in acute pain. Suddenly, the angel of the Lord, Michael, came down to her so that light shone in the prison. He saluted her and touched her body with his luminous wings. Immediately, she was healed from all pains, and not even one wound remained on her. The angel saluted her [again] and ascended to heaven in great glory.

When it was morning on the second day, the prince commanded that Lady Demiana be brought into the place of judgment. When she appeared before him, he found her safe and well and found not any wound or scratch on her body. He said, “Truly, O Demiana, your magic skill is exceptional; now I will bring to naught your sorceries.” Those who were present, when they saw her, they cried out with one voice saying, “...You oppressor! You and your heathen emperor! We are all openly Christians and we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of this chaste saint, Lady Demiana; and we will die the same death as this saint and young virgin, bride of Christ.”

When he heard these words from them, he commanded that they all be beheaded with the edge of the sword, and they received the crowns of martyrdom, thus, they all became martyrs and intercessors for the people. No one dared take their



bodies, so they were left near the palace. May their blessings be with us until the last breath. Amen.

## **2) Scraping Her Body with Sharp Razors and Rubbing it with Lime and Vinegar**

Subsequently, the prince demanded that the chaste Lady Demiana be brought before him. He commanded that her flesh be scraped with sharp razors. The assistants did this to her, while she forbore by the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ in Whose Holy Name she chose to be tortured and die. The prince decreed that her skin be rubbed with pieces of boar hair drenched in unslaked lime and vinegar. Her members burned from the intensity of the pain.

O the many sufferings which the saints and the pure martyrs received! But the joy and the glory of the Kingdom of the heavens are ineffable!

The assistants took her and threw her into a dark prison. Only a small breath was left in her. The Virgins also surrounded her weeping secretly in extreme sorrow. When she entered the prison, in severe torment and pain, she opened her holy mouth saying, “O my Lord and God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all things therein; Whose nature is mercy and compassion; Who, in the multitude of

His mercy, hears the supplications of the poor who call upon Him with a pure heart, fulfills their needs, and arranges for their salvation; now O my Lord, I, your weak and poor servant, strengthen me that I may endure all torture and give me the strength to overcome the assistants – those who have forsaken Your knowledge, O God of truth, and have obeyed the obstinate enemy. Save me by Your Name and give me a portion with Your pure, chaste saints who completed [their strife] ahead of me. For You are a Good God; the Lover of mankind. All glory and majesty befit You unto the age of ages. Amen.”

When the Lady Saint Demiana completed her prayer, the exalted Archangel Michael descended and spread his luminous wings over her. The entire place glowed like bright lightning. The Virgins fainted from the splendor of the light and were as the dead. The angel said to her, “Peace of my Lord Jesus Christ and His Good Father and the Holy Spirit be with you, O young, chaste, and perfect virgin Demiana.” He touched her with his luminous wings, and she was healed as though she had not experienced any pain at all. He ascended into heaven and vanished from her sight.

She woke up the Virgins saying to them, “Arise my sisters, the Lord has sent to me His angel and healed me from all my afflictions. From me unto

Him thanksgiving is due, I His weak servant. For He has manifested His strength in me as Paul the Apostle, the teacher of the Church, the eloquent tongue, said, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*”<sup>7</sup> The weakness which comes from God is mightier than strength of the strong. Unto Him is thanksgiving, glory, praise and honor unto the age of ages, forever. Amen.”

When she was concluding her words, the prince told the assistants, “Go to the prison and bring Demiana to me if she still remains alive. If she has died, throw her to be eaten by the dogs. Return back to me quickly and inform me, that I may immediately travel back to the Emperor, that we may find repose from this overwhelming distress, great conflict and exhaustion. I have remained here for a long time; since I departed from Antioch, [we must go] lest the Emperor become anxious over the length of our absence.” When the assistants set out to bring her from the prison, they found her seated, glimmering and glowing in exceedingly immense light, just as the light of the sun when it shines.

The assistants seized her and presented her to the prince at the place of judgment. She was crying out saying, “I have come to you! I have come to you, you are with your Apollo of stone, I am, with my

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 12:9.

Lord Jesus Christ. There is no God in heaven or upon earth except the God of the Christians – Jesus Christ, God, the Creator of all creation. He Who has healed me from your tortures! To all of you who are present: Did you yesterday see my condition and the extreme pain and exhaustion which I was in? Now, here I am, healthy in body. My Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has healed me.”

At once, all those present exclaimed saying, “There is no God in heaven or upon earth but the God of the Lady Saint Demiana; the God of the Christians. Henceforward, we are believers in the God of this pure saint, the Lady Demiana.” The prince ordered for the beheading of them all. They were a great multitude from every neighboring country; and no person dared to take their bodies, but they were left with the remains of those who had first been martyred on account of the saint. Their spirits ascended to Paradise, and they became intercessors for sinners. May their blessings be with us all. Amen.

The prince then said to Saint Demiana, “Is this not enough for you, O headstrong (meaning stubborn) girl? These creatures have shed their blood because of you. Their blood shall be required of you; they have all perished by the sword. Arise now and consent; prostrate before Apollo, the

greatest of gods. Behold his beauty and consider how well adorned he is.”

The Lady Saint Demiana answered him, “Rightly has David the Prophet, the king of Israel, prophesied about you and those like you, when he said, *‘God looks down from heaven upon the children of men...There is none who does good, No, not one.’*<sup>8</sup> *‘For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; Their inward part is destruction; Their throat is an open tomb; They flatter with their tongue.’*<sup>9</sup> *‘They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips.’*<sup>10</sup> *‘Sin directs the heart of the wicked; their eyes are closed to the fear of God.’*<sup>11</sup> Of your idols, he also said, *‘Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.’*<sup>12</sup> He speaks of worshippers of idols.”

On hearing these words, from that same hour, the prince’s countenance was altered, since he had

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<sup>8</sup> Ps. 53:2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 5:9.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 140:3.

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 36:1 (NAB).

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 115:4-8.

been greatly disgraced. He spoke with a deep sigh saying, “This headstrong (meaning stubborn) girl has triumphed over me, and I have not seen such striving even amongst any heroic men. She will undergo agonizing punishments and the most excruciating tortures by us. I will show her what she has spoken before us, putting us to shame, and diminishing our honor!”

### **3) Striking Her with Iron Rods**

He commanded the assistants to strike her with rods of iron from her feet to her head. Then they placed her in a large cauldron and put on her the fat of pigs, oil, asphalt, and gum. They kindled a fire under her and the flames rose approximately ten arms in length above the mouth of the cauldron. However, she did not die because the Lord confirmed her soul within her. She was glorifying with exceeding praises. Her flesh and bones were on fire in increasing pain and burning.

Immediately, Archangel Michael, descended and spread out his luminous wings over the boiling cauldron; so the blaze and flame subsided. He lifted up Lady Demiana, and she stood whole. There was no trace of fire on her body, neither was the scent of

it on her garments. He then ascended to heaven in great glory.

The Lady Demiana arose, went to the prince, and cried out saying, “I have come to you! You, with your deaf Apollo of stone, and I, with my Lord Jesus Christ.” The prince turned and said to his accomplice, “Who is this young woman? We have indeed seen many people, but we have never seen anyone endure such severe tortures like this young woman. Now my mind is bewildered because of this virgin.” All the people in attendance cried out in one voice saying, “We are all openly Christians and we believe in the God of this lady, Saint Demiana.” They were a great multitude. The tyrant ordered the beheading of them all, and their bodies were thrown upon the other corpses near the palace.

The prince turned to the chaste lady Saint Demiana and said, “What have you achieved, O strong headed (meaning stubborn) young woman, by killing those multitudes? Their blood will be demanded of you, for because of you, they have all died. How can you endure [the guilt of] their blood?

The saint replied saying, “If you wish to enter before your king, the idol worshiper, you are preceded with gifts so that your presence will be accepted by him, how much more should I present speaking gifts, acceptable sacrifices raising them up

to heaven. Now they are before the throne of Christ our God, the Creator, waiting for me to succeed them in goodness and grace. I ask my Holy God, the Living, Almighty, and Victorious, to perfect me like them, so that I may be blessed to meet them in the coming age.”

The prince and those with him were astonished at the wisdom of the chaste young Lady Demiana, at the grace which was upon her, the eloquence of her tongue, her sensible words, and her fine character. Immediately, he commanded that she be shut up in prison until he decides how to deal with her. Two days later, the prince sent for her and when she stood before him, he said to her, “Welcome to the chaste Lady Demiana, of noble and honorable descent; whose virtues have been spoken of by people. My Lady, has your heart not yet consented to worshipping the gods to save yourself from all these pains? When she heard these words, she said to him, “O persecutor! The wise do not accept praise, or vain and empty glorification. Our Lord Christ, glory be to Him, said in His Holy Bible, being the most truthful of those who spoke, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you;*”<sup>13</sup> know that you have received your wages. Now, I will not obey your advice, for its end is the poison of death; for sin sees

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<sup>13</sup> Lk. 6:26.



pleasure and sweetness for a short time, while its consequence is utmost hell. I ask my God to save me from the love of it. Isn't that enough for you; did you not tremble at the mighty wonders which my God performed? Where is the power of your god who is unable to move from his place? How can he assist another? My God is the Governor of all countries of the world; He lifts up the firmament of the heavens without pillars; His Wisdom cannot be contained; to Him is the glory and the exaltation from me unto the end of the age of ages."

When Lady Demiana completed her words, the prince became extremely anxious and sighed from the depths of his heart.

#### **4) Picking out Her Head and Plucking Out Her Eyes**

Quickly then, the prince commanded his assistants to pick out her head with a carpentry adz. They concocted a mixture of lead; melted oil, asphalt, and gum with fire, and placed it in the hollow area which had been gouged. Next, they plucked out her eyes and scalped the remaining skin off her head down to her shoulders, and they poured from the mixture of asphalt, oil, and boiling gum over her. Lady Demiana felt the intensity of the pain.

The Lord confirmed her soul within her and she cried out saying, “Jesus is my God; Jesus is my hope; Jesus is the strength of my hope and my Salvation; Jesus is my King. O full of grace and glory, the Mother of the Divine Light, Mary, my Lady the Saint, intercede for all your people.” Having said this, her spirit departed from her body.

At once, a white dove descended from the heavens and began to flutter above her head and eyes with his wings. Immediately, she arose and stood whole without pain. She stood with her eyes unharmed, her head and body uninjured, with no pain at all. The dove flew away into the air and vanished from the sight of those who were present. When all the people who were standing by saw these great miracles, they proclaimed saying, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men! The Eternal God, Who manifests wonders in His saints, is He Who has saved this virgin, Saint Demiana, from torture and death.” Then they cried out toward Lady Demiana saying, “Help us and ask the Lord Christ your God to strengthen us so that we may receive martyrdom in His Holy Name.” Lady Demiana replied to them, “I ask my God to give you strength to be saved from the afflictions of the disobedient ones, and that I may attain company with you in that place of

exalted rank and everlasting majesty.” They kissed her hands and feet, approached the court, and shouted saying, “You worshipper of idols and your king, your idols are not gods, they have no power to act. We now hasten publicly believing in our Lord Jesus Christ.” The prince immediately commanded that they all be beheaded with the edge of the sword. They were very many and they received the crowns of martyrdom in the Kingdom of the heavens. They celebrated with Christ Whom they loved and shed their blood for His Holy Name on the first day of the month of Tubi. They became intercessors for sinners; may their blessings be with us forever. Amen.

Afterwards, the prince said to his assistant, “Take this young strong-headed woman, who has desolated all these cities and conducted all those people to the faith of the Crucified – and so we killed them; they were renowned men and women. Confine her in a dark prison and lock her in with sturdy locks, without food or drink, and imprison her friends, those virgins, with her.

The prince then turned to the Virgins and said, “Tell your friend Demiana to obey us, for it would be better than this discord. If not, painful punishments and the severest of tortures will befall her, and she will suffer horrific harms.” The prison

guardian apprehended them, took them into a dark prison, and locked the doors. When they came in, they all arose to pray; then suddenly a light shone in the place and it became like the light of the sun.

Ten days later, the prince said to his assistants, “Bring that young girl Demiana [to me]; perhaps she has turned away from her ill opinion and will worship our gods, so that we may find relief from this conflict and distress. All those hold fast to her; she is the reason for the rebellion of these cities against us.”

They went to bring her, and when they opened the door the light shone in their faces, so they fell at the feet of Lady Demiana and said, “Our Lady, the prince has summoned you.” She then stood whilst reciting the psalm, “*Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth...*”<sup>14</sup> When she appeared before the prince, in the presence of all the soldiers and the assistants, he said to her, “O chaste Lady Demiana, obey me and worship the emperor’s gods, and I will bestow upon you countless honors.” The Saint, the pure Lady Demiana replied saying, “My mind is utterly perplexed by your ignorance, since one word is adequate for the discerning. Yet I have been telling you for a good while that I will not worship

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<sup>14</sup> Psalm 129:1-8.

your gods, and you have inflicted upon me severe torture; but my God has healed me.”

## **5) Dismembering Her Limbs and Throwing Her to the Beasts**

When the prince heard such words, he immediately commanded that her body be pulled by four long cords and that her limbs be dismembered. At that moment, she stood toward the east<sup>15</sup> with the Virgins and prayed saying, “O God of Powers, Christ our God, strengthen me O my Lord, that I may endure this torture for the sake of Your Holy Name. For You are the God of truth; a blessed God. Unto You befit the glory and honor, now and at all times, and unto ages. Amen.”

Upon completing her prayer, she turned to the Virgins and said to them, “My sisters, remember me in your prayers, that Christ my God may strengthen me, that I may endure this torture.”

She approached the assistants and said, “Why do you stand idle? Fulfill the orders of your lord.” Then they pulled her body with cords and chains between metal bars, and they cut off her limbs piece by piece, as one would slice fish.

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<sup>15</sup> This indicates that prayer toward the east is an old Christian tradition.

The prince demanded that she be thrown to the beasts; and she remained exposed to beasts and ferocious vultures for one day and one night. Yet the beasts did not draw near to her, but they surrounded her while the birds hovered above. They made a great noise and caused an enormous uproar in their deep lamentation; just as one mourns over an only-beloved. The Virgins and all those present were standing at a distance weeping.

## **The Appearance of the Savior to Her and His Raising Her Up from the Dead**

Suddenly, the Lord thundered from the heavens — a strong crash of thunder and an earthquake — until those who stood there fell as dead. God, the Lord Christ, the Lord of glory, descended on a chariot of the Cherubim<sup>16</sup> with the Lady, the Virgin seated on His right,<sup>17</sup> and the angels were singing inexpressible praises. The Savior, to Him is due glory, cried out toward the members and flesh of the pure Saint Demiana and said, “I say to you, O blessed daughter Demiana, arise without

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<sup>16</sup> This is a type of appearance, but it is not the coming of the Lord, for He has entered the Holies only one time, and will not do so again until He comes in His Second Coming on the Last Day.

<sup>17</sup> This also is an appearance of the Lady, the Virgin in spirit only, since her body is preserved until the Last Day and the resurrection of the dead.

corruption!”<sup>18</sup> Immediately she arose, as one awakes from sleep, and prostrated before the Savior. The Savior said to her, “Be strengthened, O chosen one, Demiana, for I have prepared three crowns for your heavenly betrothal at My eternal feast. There remains for you a little suffering one more time. Then you will receive the crown of joy and full wages for the shedding of your blood. At the place in which you are, I will give you a renowned name by the wonders and powers. A church shall be built there in your name, and all people will crowd from every place to visit your church. In it, there will be forgiveness of sins in My Name, in the name of My Mother the Virgin, and in your name. Remembrance of you shall be widespread until the end of time. My blessing and the blessing of My Mother the Virgin will come upon this place forever.”

When the Savior completed these words to the chaste Lady Demiana, He strengthened her, gave her peace, and ascended to heaven in great glory. The Saint prostrated on the ground before the Savior.

She awoke the Virgins and the rest of those who were present, went forth hurriedly to the prince before the council of judgment. All the citizens of

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<sup>18</sup> He means, “uninjured”.

the country, the city of Burullus, and the neighboring cities of Saffron were present. She proclaimed with a great cry in the midst of the crowd, “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*”<sup>19</sup> O prince, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ raised me after you had cut off my limbs as slices of fish and crushed my bones with axes. Now, here I am, standing whole, sound in my mind, and unharmed in body.”

## **The Martyrdom of the Chaste Saint Demiana**

When all the present people saw her, they all cried out in one voice saying, “Shame and disgrace upon you!”<sup>20</sup> We are Christians and we believe in the God of this lady, Saint Demiana.” His associate said to him, “How? For a long time, we have resisted and opposed this young woman, yet we were unable to compel her to obey us. Nor were we able to kill her although we did not relent even for one hour. We struggled against her, but she remained firm. I know that those people, I mean the Christians, are strong in withstanding torture. Now, O prince, I suggest the following advice so that you may find relief: listen to me and behead her with the edge of

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<sup>19</sup> Lk. 2:14.

<sup>20</sup> that is, the prince.



the sword. Then we may depart at once from this place to the emperor for the sake of your service; lest your absence from the emperor for this period of time be the cause of insult to you from him.”

The prince was pleased with this advice, and he immediately recorded a verdict against her, the Forty Virgins, and all those who believed. They were very many. The assistants led them out north of the city of Saffron and beheaded them all with the edge of the sword. The number of those who received martyrdom because of Saint Demiana, from the beginning of her trial until the completion of her strife, were four-hundred souls. Their spirits ascended to the Paradise of Joy and they became intercessors for sinners<sup>21</sup> before God on whose name they shed their blood.

The martyrdom of this Saint Lady Demiana, bride of Christ, was on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the blessed month Tobi. She won three crowns of light: one for her virginity, one for her endurance of torture and one for the shedding of her pure blood. May her blessing come upon all of us till the last breath. Amen.

On the same day, the prince and his soldiers returned to Antioch. People of surrounding villages who heard of her martyrdom came and gathered all

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<sup>21</sup> This indicates that faith in the intercessions and the entreaties of the saints is a doctrine established since the first centuries.

the bodies of the martyrs and placed them in rows like honeycombs, one on top of the other, and kept them until the end of era of persecution.

## Chapter Four

### THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY

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#### Introduction:

In the past, the northern Delta region thrived with ancient monasteries. Churches were many and prevalent in all places. One such monastery, is the Monastery of Saint Demiana at Barrary. The area where the monastery now stands, was formerly part of the Egyptian district known as the region of Burullus and Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania. This region was called ‘Saffron’ since it was popular for growing rare varieties of saffron plants<sup>22</sup> and fragrant grasses, expensive in price.

Today, Burullus still belongs to the northern Delta region. The Monastery of Saint Demiana follows the region of Belkas. Geographically, it is positioned west the Nile branch of Damiette, in the governorate of Dakahlia. Twelve kilometers away, is the village named after Saint Demiana in a region referred to as ‘Barrary Belkas’, and recently named Belkas Fifth.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Saffron’ is the English translation of the word ‘Zaafarana.’

The area was called Barrary<sup>23</sup> due to the large areas of wild land, devoid of cultivation. Some of this land is below sea level, therefore, for certain times it used to be occupied by water and enveloped in water plants; particularly the more you draw near to Lake Burullus.

During the visit of the Holy Family to our beloved homeland, Egypt, the Holy Family passed through the Burullus district on their way from Samannud, where the region of Barrary is situated and where Saint Demiana and the Forty Virgins later shed their blood. Therefore, the area was previously hallowed and blessed by the Holy Family's visit.

In the fourth century AD (three centuries after the blessed visit of the Holy Family), the monastery was built north of the city of Saffron, the capital of the region of Burullus. It included a bishopric. The parents of the Saint lived there, and her father Mark was governor over the region. It was there that he built the palace for Saint Demiana to worship in, just outside the city called Saffron, north of the city. After the martyrdom of Saint Demiana and the Virgins, their bodies were buried in the place where they worshipped until the Empress Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, built a special tomb for them; and erected a church above the

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<sup>23</sup> The Arabic word 'Barrary' in English means 'wilderness.'

tomb. The buildings were completed during the time when she erected the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. The Empress asked Saint Alexander, 19<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria (AD 313-326), to consecrate this church. He consecrated it and ordained a bishop for the area since its bishop had been martyred with Saint Demiana.

In the sixth century, during the episcopacy of Bishop John of Burullus and the papacy of Pope Damian, 35<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria (563-598 A.D.), Bishop John copied a manuscript comprising the events in the life of Saint Demiana and details of the consecration of her church on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Pashons during the reign of the Emperor Constantine. The church was rebuilt during the days of Caliph Sinan during the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In the Monastery of Saint of Demiana are extant manuscripts which are copies of this original manuscript as previously mentioned.

### **The Early History of the Monastery from Ancient Manuscripts:**

Following are some extracts from the manuscripts regarding the history of the monastery:

Diocletian perished, and the Emperor Constantine reigned. He ordered for the building of churches and the demolition of pagan temples in all

places; and commanded that the bodies and relics of the martyrs be placed in the churches. This was undertaken at the expense of the empire, with funds and wages set aside for this purpose. At a certain time, the story of Saint Demiana spread throughout the emperor's court. He was informed how she endured severe and violent tortures for many years until she received the crown of martyrdom in Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania. He was also told of the many signs and wonders wrought by her. Hence, he prepared his blessed mother Helen and said to her, "Arise, take costly shrouds and expensive ceremonies, and travel until you reach Saffron in the Valley of Sesbania. There, build a church for the chaste Lady Demiana and the Virgins martyrs who were with her."

At once, he prepared soldiers [to escort] her, and she journeyed until she arrived at the palace. She found the bodies one upon the other, as a beehive would be arranged; but they had not been harmed by beast or bird. The empress entered and received their blessings.

When She reached to the stairs, went up into the palace, and found the body of Saint Demiana. She kissed her, asked for her intercessions and the supplications of the Forty Virgins, whose bodies surrounded the body of Saint Demiana in the palace.

Their bodies were set apart from the bodies of the rest of martyrs. The empress wrapped them all in fine shrouds, and she covered Saint Demiana with a very costly and valuable shroud.

She gathered together workmen and engineers and built a strong and magnificent underground burial chamber. She placed them all [i.e. the bodies of the Forty Virgins] in a tomb and laid them down in the manner in which they had been arranged under the palace in the first place. For Saint Demiana, she made a beautiful platform in the tomb and rested her body upon it; and she covered her with a silk veil embroidered with red gold. Above the burial chamber, she built a nice church with one small dome. Pope Alexander, the 19<sup>th</sup> pope of Alexandria, consecrated it on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Pashons.

## **Appointing a Bishop for the Monastery**

Pope Alexander appointed a saintly bishop, since the bishop of the city had received martyrdom with Lady Demiana and the rest of the martyrs who were martyred in that place. He organized for priests, deacons, and servants to pray there day and night.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> When Pope Alexander appointed the bishop, he appointed monks with him and arranged cells for them to dwell in.

## The Magician and the Destruction of the Church

After a long period of time, we discovered a second narrative, and so we chose to append it here so that it may reach your ears:

As time passed, the offering of oblations, liturgies, and prayers continued to be made at that place, in the church mentioned above. The visits of the people increased, and so did the vows, candles, and incense; and its fame grew. People from all the surrounding cities constantly went there to visit and celebrate, because of the signs and wonders that occurred there. This continued until the Arab rulers came into the cities of Egypt and reigned over.

In the 120<sup>th</sup> year of the Arab arrival into Egypt, the ruler at that time was called ‘Caliph Sinan of Egypt.’ There was an extremely wicked man who came from his country, who had learned witchcraft. He surpassed all others of his day in Satanism; his name was Youness. One particular day, as he was passing through Saffron, he came upon this pleasant church and wished to remain there. On that day, in that hour, he called for builders and demolished the church. In its place, he built a high palace.<sup>25</sup> He was unaware of the tomb beneath it containing the

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<sup>25</sup> This was the first time that the church which Empress Helena built was destroyed.



bodies of the martyrs, for God had concealed the knowledge of it from him; as King David the prophet, the king of Israel, said in the Psalm, “*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.*”<sup>26</sup>

Later, the rain waters poured down heavily and destroyed all those cities, and tore down the palace in which the magician dwelt. He was drowned, buried in the rubble, died an evilest death, and his soul descended to the depths of Hades with the Devil who carried out his bidding.

The waters devastated all places, regions, and cities, and the floods were as severe as those in the days of the righteous Noah.<sup>27</sup> The waters reached the edge of the walls of the church in Samannud, named after the Lady called ‘Zion’, and which is located on the western side of the old fortress. The saltwater sloped into the Nile River from Samannud, consequently, the river became salty.

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<sup>26</sup> Ps. 34:7.

<sup>27</sup> In modern times, a similar flood, known as a tsunami, occurred in Southeast Asia due to an earthquake in the ocean. It wiped out countless numbers of buildings, the waters swept over large areas of land, and caused the death of thousands of people. In the sixth century also, the Monastery was destroyed by a similar flood, after which it was rebuilt.

## The Jew and the Slander

When the news reached Caliph Sinan that all of the cities adjacent to the collapsed bridge had been destroyed, he was exceedingly sorrowful and deeply grieved over the wealth and riches which he used to profit from those cities. For that region produced saffron and various fragrant grasses, expensive in value, from which he reaped abundant wealth for his Sultan. As he was pondering over the situation, being perplexed about the matter, one of the renowned Jews – who frequently visited the Caliph at the fortress for the organization of the sultanate’s funds – said to him, “O king, let not worry enter your heart because of this, O king of this age, send for the Coptic Christian patriarch<sup>28</sup> and compel him to return everything to its former state.”<sup>29</sup>

King Sinan said to his viziers, “Go at once, and bring the patriarch to me.” When the patriarch arrived, Caliph Sinan said to him, “Patriarch, I want you to send back the waters which have destroyed the cities and to return the bridge to its previous condition, for some people have informed me that you are able to do this.” Then the Caliph said to the father the patriarch, “Hasten to this tomorrow.” The

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Khail I, 46<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria (AD 744-767).

<sup>29</sup> That is, the Jew used these words as a pretext to disprove the Bible which speaks of moving mountains by faith (Mat. 17:20).

father the patriarch replied to him in sorrow saying, “Grant unto me time, your majesty, the Caliph.” The Caliph responded saying, “I grant you three days.” The father the patriarch kissed the ground and descended from the fortress. A deep sorrow overshadowed him and all the people because of this matter.

## Prayer and Response

The father, the saint, the good shepherd, our father the patriarch entered the church of the Lady the Virgin in Cairo and spoke to the servants saying, “Shut me in and let not any one of you visit me until the completion of three days.” He stood there praying in the Hanging Church<sup>30</sup> before the icon of the Lady, the Mother of Life, three days and three nights. At the end of each prayer, he cried before the strong one saying, “O intercessor and helper to those who take refuge in her; O servant of the Mystery and the beholder of God the Word, His Mother according to the flesh, for the sake of our salvation, O compassionate Mother of Light; O pure virgin save your people from this great tribulation and confirm your church. Let not our foes rejoice over us, so that our adversaries may not say, ‘Where

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<sup>30</sup> i.e. ‘The Moalaka Church’ in the district named Old Cairo.

is their God?” He continued in this manner until the end of three days and nights. At the close of the third night, the pure Virgin spoke to him from her holy icon saying, “Do not be afraid, O good shepherd, rejoice for I am with you. At daybreak, the ruler’s messengers will come to you, and they shall take you to him. Be not disturbed or anxious, and let not sorrow overtake you, for my beloved Son has accepted your petitions and the tears of all the people. On your way, you will find an apple-seller, a virtuous man; upon his head is a basket. He is an honest and chosen saint who has pleased my beloved Son in all his deeds. Take him with you forcibly and I shall cause the waters to return to their former state. The peace of my beloved Son, and the strength of His Good Father, and the Holy Spirit, be with you. Amen.” When she said, “Amen” the voice ceased.

In the morning, the ruler’s messengers came and took the patriarch. As he was travelling with them, he found the apple-seller of whom the compassionate Lady, the Mother of Life, spoke. He laid hold of him by his collar. The man turned, and when he saw the father, the patriarch, he fell down and prostrated before him to the ground. The master, the father, the patriarch lifted him up and said to him, “Arise my son.” He blessed him and

held him by the hand and walked. The apple-seller asked, "Where are you going my father?" The father, the patriarch replied to him, "Where I go, you shall be with me." The man said to him, "What is my job with you my father, since I am the most sinful man in the entire world. Allow me to go and sell what I have with me and pray for me." The father, the patriarch said to him, "My son, do not depart from here; from before my eyes." The apple-seller attempted to escape, but the father, the patriarch prevented him. The apple-seller left his basket at a store owned by one of his acquaintances and walked with the patriarch. When they arrived at the fortress, the father, the patriarch went up to the Caliph and said to him courteously and humbly, "Peace to you." The Caliph said, "What do you say, Patriarch, about heading northward to send back the waters that destroyed the people and demolished the cities? For ever since this occurred I have not enjoyed any food or sleep because the profit which that land yielded was more than all the other regions. What do you have to say?" The father, the patriarch said to him, "I listen and I obey, your majesty the Caliph. By the power of God we shall go, and whatever He does shall be." Caliph Sinan said to him, "I also will ride with you." At once,

they made ready the horses, and Caliph Sinan rode and his soldiers with him.

As for the apple-seller and most of the Christians of Egypt, they followed the father, the patriarch. Each time they passed a city wherein lived Christians, the Christians came out and joined the father, the patriarch, until they became a great multitude. They passed by *Banha al-Assal* to the west coast. They descended and pitched tents for the Caliph, and remained there until morning.

When they awoke, they journeyed until they arrived at Samannud. The Caliph pitched his tents there on seashore beside the church called 'Zion.' When the Caliph lifted up his eyes and saw the flood waters he was exceedingly grieved. That night, the father, the patriarch entered the church and began to offer prayers with the priests and all the people. They prayed all evening until the first rays of light, celebrated the liturgy, and partook of the Holy Sacraments – the Body of the Lord Jesus and His precious Blood. The father dismissed all the people, went out and stood outside the church where the Caliph was sitting on his horse. The patriarch stood and prayed with the priests with all the people behind. The people lifted up their voice in prayer, and the father, the patriarch lifted up his hand with

the Holy Cross; they all cried out in one voice, “Kyrie eleison.”<sup>31</sup>

## **A Miracle Occurs**

The apple-seller, of whom we spoke earlier, was standing behind the father, the patriarch. Immediately the waters rose up forty cubits in height. The waters fled and were driven away before the people heading due north. The father, the patriarch, with the apple-seller behind him, a group of priests, all the people, and the Caliph and his soldiers followed the waters until they came to Damiraten.<sup>32</sup> By this time, it was nightfall, so they descended to an island and pitched tents for the Caliph. Therefore, it was named the ‘Island of Sinan’ till the present day.

From there, they rode as they had done earlier, and the waters escaped before them until they reached Saffron in the Valley of Sesbenia. They erected tents for the Caliph alongside the demolished palace<sup>33</sup> under which rested the body of

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<sup>31</sup> Lord, have mercy.

<sup>32</sup> Damira has been noted as one of the places which the Holy Family passed through, and where the Lord Christ said to His Mother, Saint Mary the Virgin, “The waters shall flood these lands.”

<sup>33</sup> i.e. the palace which the magician had built after he demolished the church.

Saint Demiana and all the martyrs. The Caliph sat in his tent.

Our father, the patriarch prayed in that place, prostrated on the ground, and lifted up his hand with the Cross, so the waters retreated to their former place; the father and the priests followed for a long distance. The waters were driven away before them as clouds would glide in strong winds; God knows how great a distance they fled.

Then the father, the patriarch turned around, and he saw no other than the apple-seller and no more than five priests, for the rest of the people were exhaustion. The father, the patriarch spoke to those with him saying, "Enough until here my sons." He stood with them and prayed saying, "O God; the Pantocrator; the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; the Creator of heaven, earth, the sea and all therein; He Who knows what is in the depths; He Who sits in the place of the honor of His Holiness; He Who binds and encompasses the waves and surrounds them with the sands so that the world may not drown; now, O our Master, accept unto Yourself our supplications, we the poor. Bring these waters to a halt and fence them in as before, so that this wonder may be manifest through Your Name, O Holy and Eternal One. That they may become a bridge which prevents strong waters. For You are



He Whom all creation and Powers fear, Whom all the nature obey, and to Whom all the Powers submit. To You befits all glory and honor, now and at all times, and unto all ages. Amen.”

When the father, the patriarch completed his prayer, he and those with him prostrated on the ground. At that hour, an extraordinary wonder and great miracle occurred about which we should not remain silent; it overwhelmed the minds of those who beheld it. God the Eternal; Who hears the prayers of the righteous; and the Savior of many sinners through the supplications of a few virtuous, at that hour stirred up strong winds in the salty sea, so that the waves surged exceedingly and spewed large quantities of sand in piles and mounds. By the power of God, praise be to Him, the sands formed a bridge surpassing the first. The winds subsided as if they had never been. Hence, the father, the patriarch returned whilst glorifying God, and giving thanks unto His Holy Name.

## **The King Rebuilds the Church**

As the Patriarch proceeded along, he approached the Caliph. When the Caliph heard of his arrival, he arose quickly and prostrated on the ground before the father, the patriarch. The father, the patriarch lifted him up and disallowed him to

bow down before him; saying, “To God we all bow.” The Caliph replied, “I am now convinced that Christianity is true in authenticity and uprightness. Now, ask something of me which I may grant to you.” The father, the patriarch said, “What I wish from you our Lord is that you care for us, and take interest and joy in building a pleasant church in this place. For here we have the bodies of martyrs<sup>34</sup> from the days of the worshippers of idols. They killed them because they refused to bow down to the golden and silver idols.”

At once, king Sinan the Caliph ordered that the place be cleaned well. He quickly gave a command, and they built in that place a nice church with a dome in his presence. The father, the patriarch consecrated it on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month of Pashons. On that day, occurred numerous miracles, amazing wonders, healings, and great marvels. The news of Saint Demiana’s Church spread in all regions and people crowded there to offer vows, candles, and

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<sup>34</sup> In the manuscript which is in the Church of Saint Mary – the Hanging Church – in Old Cairo, is mentioned that His Holiness the Pope and Patriarch transferred the body of Saint Demiana temporarily to the Hanging Church until the rebuilding of the church in the Barrary. At the Hanging Church, he began to celebrate the feast of the consecration of her church on 12 Pashons (20 May) until the completion of the building of the church in the Barrary. Therefore, the Hanging Church was called ‘the Church of the Lady the Virgin and the Martyr Demiana,’ and the icon of the Martyr Demiana was placed in the center of eastern wall facing the entrance of the church. There were also other icons of Saint Demiana inside the Hanging Church as well as a reliquary.

incense in the name of Lady Demiana and all of the righteous martyrs... The consecration of the Church was on that same day on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Pashons; Firstly, in the days of Emperor Constantine; and Secondly, also on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Pashons, in the days of Pope Khail I, the 46<sup>th</sup> Patriarch, (743-767 A.D.).<sup>35</sup> As for the Caliph, he was greatly astounded by the many powers and wonders that took place in that church.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Youhanna, Manasseh, Fr. The Book of the History of the Coptic Church, 2nd printing, 1979, p. 367.



ANCIENT ANTIQUE SITES  
IN THE  
MONASTERY OF ST. DEMIANA





An ancient water chamber (4th century) built beneath the ancient cells.



An ancient discovered iconostasis (8th Century) being gathered and restored by specialists.





An ancient church (8th Century) discovered on 1974, (east).



An ancient church (8th Century) discovered on 1974, (west).



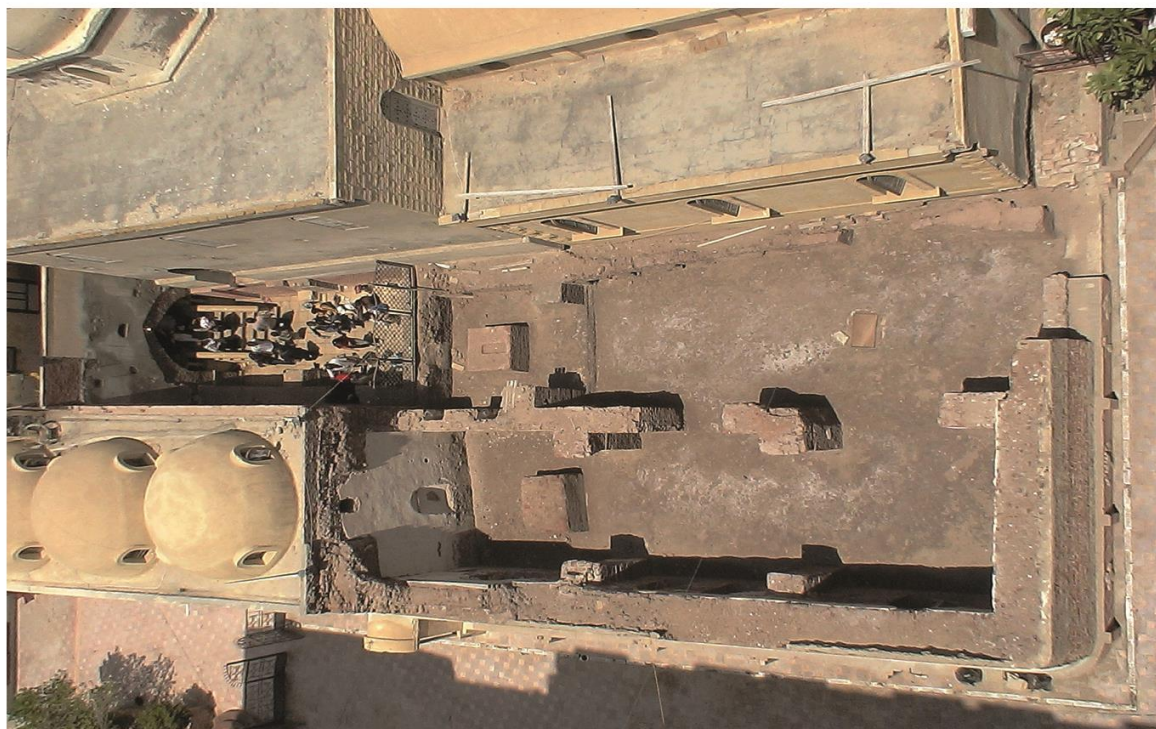


A section of the walls and pews(8th Century)  
of the church discovered on 1999



An ancient church (8th Century) discovered on September 2005.



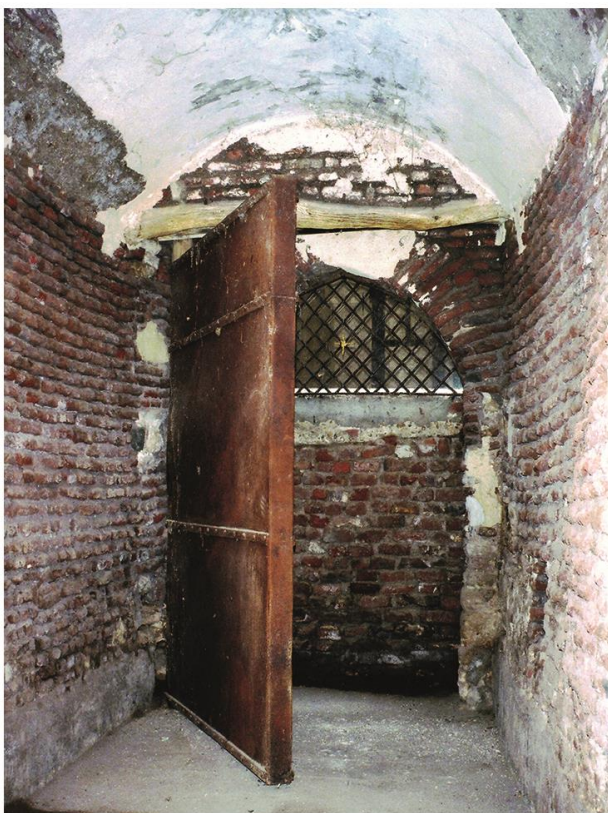


An upper view for the two ancient churches (8th Century)  
discovered on 1999 and 2005.



The two ancient churches (8th Century)  
discovered on 1999 and 2005 after restoration.





The ancient entrance  
of the monastery (8th Century).



The ancient cells (8th Century).





A panoramic view of the Monastery in 1973

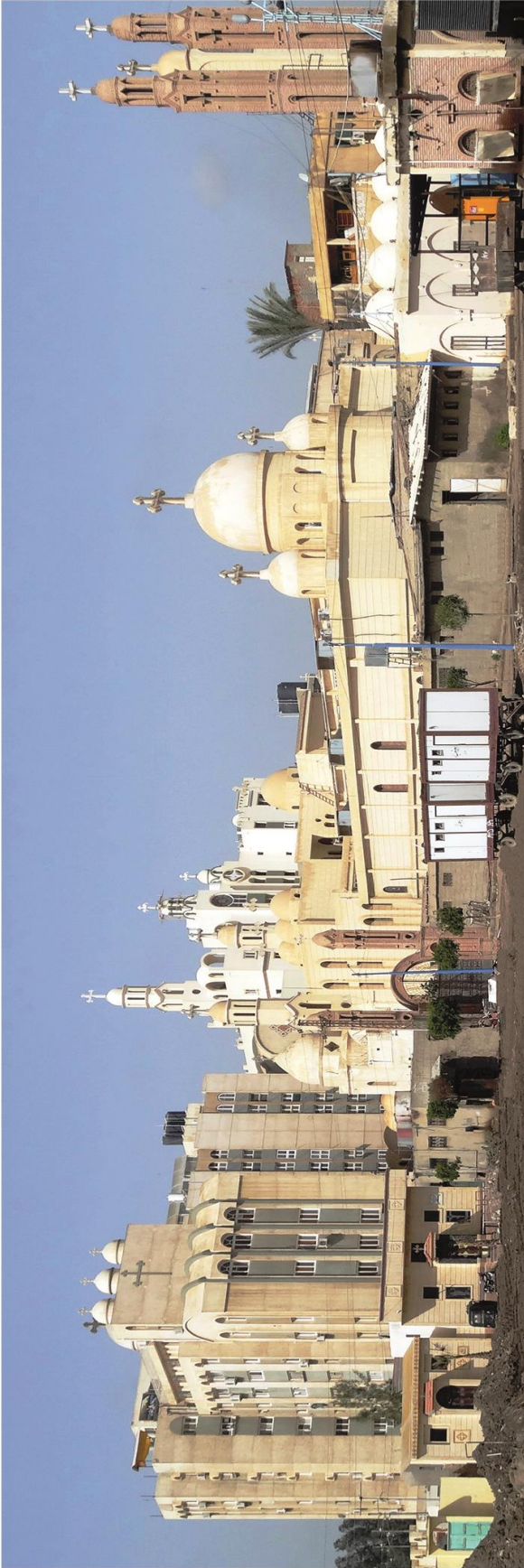


A panoramic view of the Monastery 1980.



A recent photograph of the Tomb of Saint Demiana (4th C)  
after several renovations





A recent panoramic view of the monastery





An old icon for Saint Demiana





An old icon for Saint Demiana