

the Tanner (MUQATTAM) | 1
The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. [Simeon the Tanner](#) (MUQATTAM)

IN 1969 THE GOVERNOR OF CAIRO issued a decree that ordered all the trash collectors of Cairo to move to one of the [Mugattam hills](#) behind the Citadel. There they built themselves primitive houses, simple huts of tin that are called in their vernacular the zabbalin (garbage collectors). There are about twenty-five thousand, mostly Copts, who daily collect household trash from the huge city of Cairo, of more than fifteen million inhabitants, and haul it home in enormous green canvas bags, on truck beds, and in donkey carts. On the ground floors of their poor buildings, women and children recycle and sort out the plastics, paper, metal, glass, and textiles, then compress and clean the trash. They feed the organic trash to their pigs and goats.

In the early 1970s, one of the garbage collectors, Qiddis 'Agib 'Abd al-Masih, used to collect trash from the neighborhood of Shubra and regularly met a minister, who spoke with him about the life with Christ and his love and grace. Qiddis invited the minister to visit the Zabbalin area in the Muqattam, repeating his invitation for two years, from 1972 to 1974. Finally, on the morning of the first Friday in February 1974, the minister heard the voice of God confirming that this calling from Qiddis was from God. The minister stood amazed and overwhelmed and asked himself, "What God wanted to do in such an area that was crowded by men, boys, and girls sorting out heaps of trash?" Therefore, he asked the trash collector to take him to a quiet place to pray. He took the minister to the highest place of that cliff in the Muqattam hills, where the latter found a great gap under a huge rock. That huge cave became the nucleus of the monastery of St. [Simeon](#) the Tanner (St. Samaan).

A remarkable development took place in the garbage slums when a regular Sunday school started and youths from several churches began to serve the community. In June 18, 1977, [Pope Shenouda III](#) visited the

The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Simeon the Tanner (MUQATTAM) | 2
church for the first time, and he celebrated the commemoration of St. [Simeon](#) the Tanner annually from 1978 till 1980 at his monastery in Muqattam. Many projects have been installed there during the last thirty years including a hospital, a kindergarten, a school for the deaf and mute, and a number of centers for training boys and girls in the crafts of tailoring, sewing, and carpentry.

The Monastery of St. [Simeon](#) is named after Simeon the Tanner, the medieval miracle worker who moved the Muqattam Mountain. The [History](#) of the Patriarchs tells us that the Fatimid [Caliph](#) al-Mu'izz wished Patriarch Abraham, known Ibn Zur'a (975-987), to prove the accuracy of the claim in the Gospel that faith the size of a mustard seed could move a mountain (Mt. 17:20). Failure to do so would mean the killing of all the Christians for this falsehood. We are told that the Virgin Mary appeared to the patriarch in a dream and directed him to Simeon, a poor tanner, who used to carry water for the poor and who was instrumental in the wonder of moving the mountain. The mountain moved after three days of fasting and prayer among Christians. When the caliph saw that miracle he said to the patriarch, "I have recognized the truth of your faith." He then granted the patriarch the restoration of many Coptic Churches. Pious Copts keep the three-day fast in remembrance of St. Simeon the Tanner and the miracle of moving the Muqattam Mountain.

The garbage slums have now been transformed into one of the most attractive places of worship in the world. The Monastery of St. [Simeon](#) the Tanner comprises the huge Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Simeon the Tanner, and a series of caves, including the two churches of St. Paul and Bishop Abraam. Work took place in the cathedral in the period from 1986 to 1994, during which about a million tons of limestone had to be removed from the Muqattam hills. The cathedral is a huge semi-natural amphitheater that has space for more than four thousand people. The cliffs of the site feature modern sculptures that represent episodes from the New Testament.

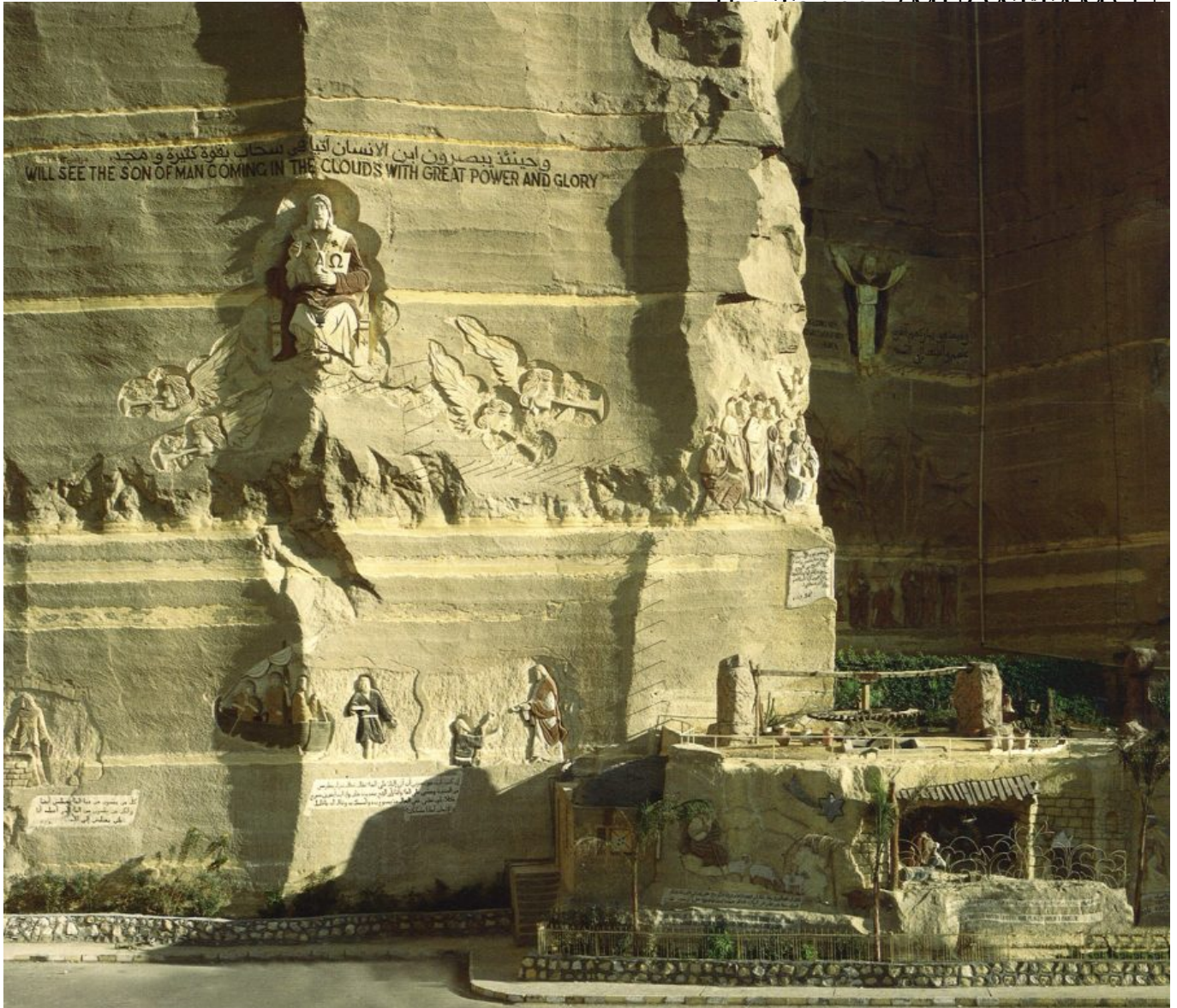
The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Simeon the Tanner (MUQATTAM) | 3



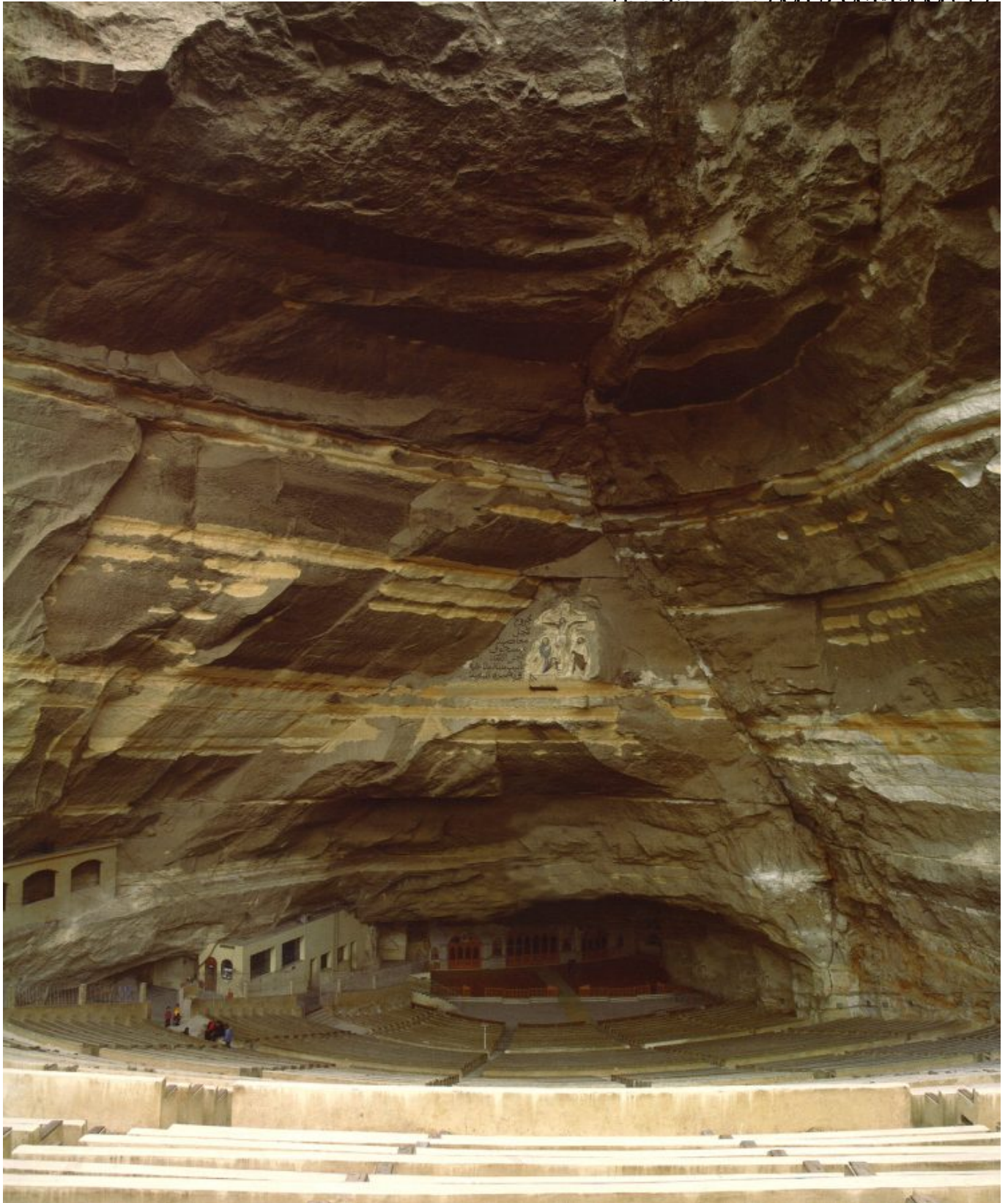
The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. [Simeon](#) the Tanner: interior view toward the entrance.



Entrance to the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Simeon.
Mosaic: moving the Muqattam Mountain, the Virgin Mary, Patriarch Abraham, and St. Simeon.

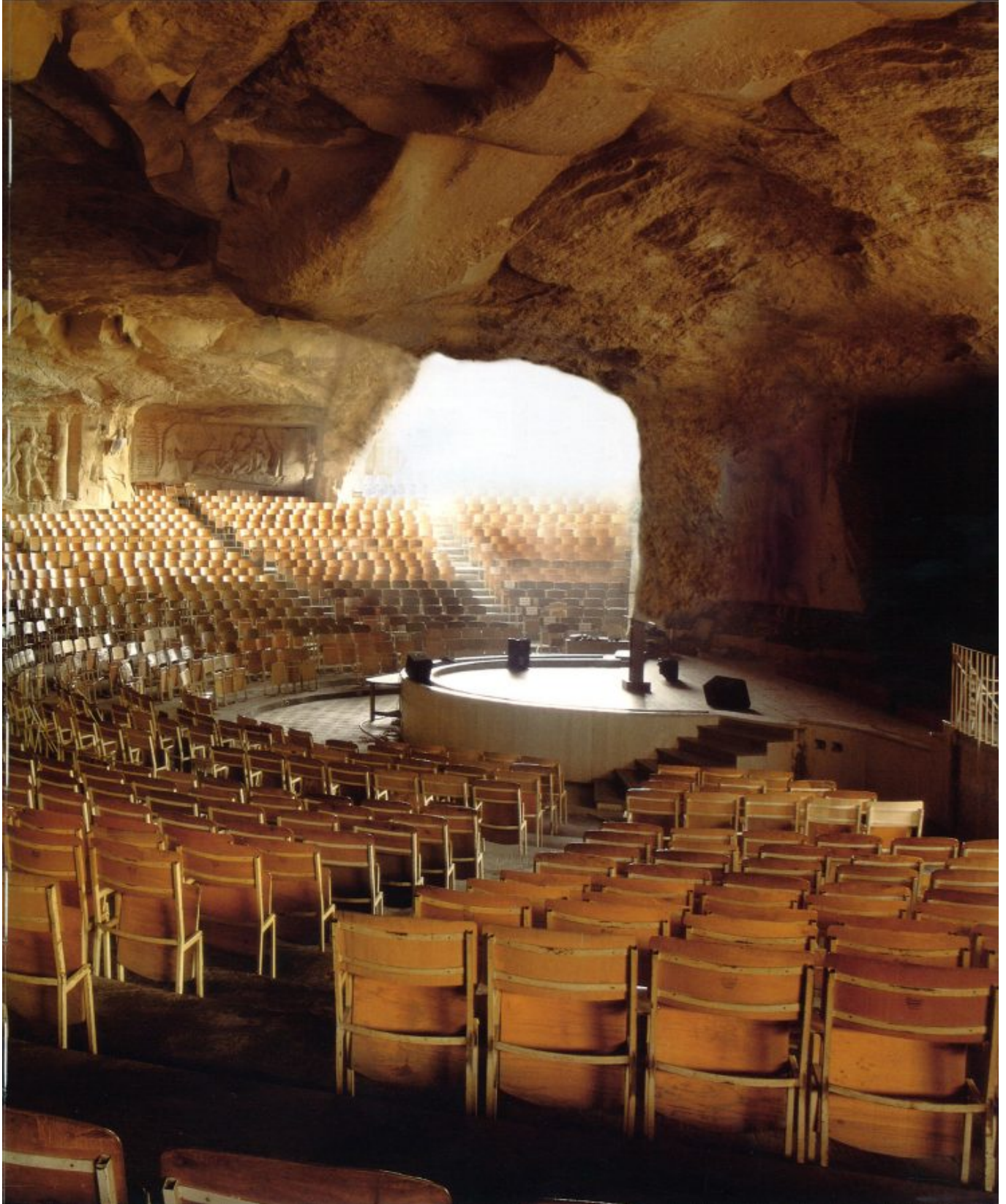


Sculpture of the Lord in his second coming from [heaven](#) flanked by four angels. Arabic and English texts: Mark 13:26.



Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. [Simeon](#) the Tanner: interior view toward the sanctuaries.





St. Mark's hall in one of the Muqattam caves.



Tags: [Places](#)

The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Simeon the Tanner (MUQATTAM) | 9