

The Church of St. Menas (FUMMAL-KHALIG)

THE CHURCH OF ST. MENAS (MARI MINA) is significant in that it provides evidence for the expansion of churches north of Babylon and [al-Fustat](#) long before the foundation of Fatimid Cairo. It is located between Old Cairo and Historic or Fatimid Cairo, north of the medieval aqueduct, off al-Sadd al-Barrani. It bears the name of its patron, St. Menas, whose relics had been transferred from Mareotis to this church during the patriarchate of Benjamin II (1327-1339). In the early thirteenth century the church historian Abu al-Makarim / Abu Salih stated that the church was destroyed in 725 during the reign of Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik. According to the historian al-Maqrizi (1364-1442), the church was restored almost immediately, in 735. In medieval times, probably in the Fatimid period (eleventh and twelfth centuries), the northern part of the church was ceded to the Armenians, who returned it to the Copts in 1926 after accepting compensation. The church was partly destroyed again in 1164 and then restored during the pontificate of Patriarch [John VI](#) (1189-1216). It was pillaged in 1321 by a Muslim mob. In the twentieth century, the Committee for the Preservation of [Monuments](#) of Arab Art has restored the church more than once.

Six pillars separate the nave from the northern and southern aisles. The principal sanctuary has an apse and two side chambers. Each chamber is connected with the sanctuary by a long passage through the partition wall. The wooden screen of the sanctuary is inlaid with ivory cross designs and surmounted by the icon of the Virgin and Child flanked by three icons on each side, each with a [pair](#) of apostles. Over the altar is a wooden ciborium (baldachin), supported by four graceful pillars. Its dome is ornamented with the usual scene of [Christ](#) Pantocrator. The paintings of the ciborium are [stylistically](#) assigned to the two artists Ibrahim al-Nasikh and Yuhanna al-Armani, who were active in the eighteenth century.

The apse features a depiction of [Christ](#) Pantocrator. The sanctuary's right wall shows the [seraphim](#) and cherubim (above); St. Basil, the prophet Isaiah, [Simeon](#) bearing a child (below). On the left wall are seraphim and cherubim (above); Aaron the priest, Samuel anointing David as king, St. Gregory (below). The shrine of St. Menas, which houses the relics of the saint, lies to the north of the sanctuary.

Upper Church: Sanctuary of St. George (known as the Sanctuary of the Nativity)

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Sanctuary of St. Menas, wooden screen surmounted by icons, and altar
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Upper Church: Sanctuary of St. George: Pantocrator. Note the [seraphim](#) at each corner of the ciborium.

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Icon of the martyrs Behnam and his sister Sarah, painted by Yuhanna al-Armani in 1782.

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Exterior, modern Coptic art.

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Church of St. Menas: door in the enclosure wall.
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