

Minas Travel P.O.BOX 1210

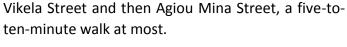
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Saint Minas, protector of Heraklion

aint Minas (Agios Minas in Greek) is the patron saint of Heraklion and his feast-day, on 11 November, is a public holiday. To go to the Cathedral of Saint Minas, walk along





In front of the Cathedral of Saint Minas is a large paved square. To the right is the Archiepiscopate of Crete, while to the left is the original little church of Saint Minas. The original church of Saint Minas, little Saint Minas as the local call it ("mikros Agios Minas" in Greek), was built in 1735 and housed the Metropolis of Crete for the first time after the Turkish occupation.

Next to Saint Minas is the church of Agia Ekaterini (St Catherine of Sinai) and Saint Catherine Square.

Saint Minas or Menas was born in Egypt in the mid-3rd century AD to idolatrous parents, but became a Christian in adolescence. When he came of age, he decided to follow a career in the Roman army and served as a cavalry officer in Asia Minor.

In 303 AD began the great persecution of the Christians under the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, which lasted until 311 AD. Roman soldiers were ordered to arrest and torture Christians to make them renounce their faith.

St Minas, true to his faith, resigned from the Roman army and lived as a hermit in the mountains. When he was about 50 years of age, a divine vision revealed that the time had come for him to suffer martyrdom. He left the safety of the mountains and went down to the city, where he declared his faith before the idolaters.

He was arrested, imprisoned and horribly tortured. He was whipped, flayed and dragged naked along a road of sharp stones. Despite his horrific martyrdom, the saint refused to renounce his faith and was eventually beheaded.

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Saint Minas was declared the patron saint of Heraklion during the Turkish period. The difference of religion between Cretans and Turks led to Muslim acts of violence against the Christians. Tradition has it that on Easter Sunday 1826, when the Christians were gathered in church attending the Resurrection service, a Muslim mob plotted to slaughter them. An aged officer on horseback, resembling their fiercest warrior, Ayan Agha, intervened, calming and dispersing the mob. The Christians attributed the appearance of the rider to a miracle of St Minas, believing that it was he, rather than Ayan Agha, who had appeared to the Turks. Even if the Turks were right, however, and the rider was not St Minas, it would have been a miracle for the Turkish persecutor of the Christians to act as their protector at the last moment.

Ever since, St Minas has been depicted as a Roman general on horseback and honoured as the patron saint of Heraklion. In his book "Agios Minas" (1939), Georgios Syllamianakis says that Minas was considered the protector of the city by not only the Christians but also the Turks, who regarded him with fear and respect.

Nikos Kazantzakis also wrote about the relationship of Heraklion to its patron saint:

- "...The entire city was a garrison, each inhabitant himself a garrison eternally besieged, and as his captain he had a saint, Saint Minas, the defender of Megalo Kastro. A saint who did not remain only on his icon, who descended every night and went out on patrol. He closed whatever doors the Christians had forgetfully left open, he whistled to night owls to return to their homes, he stood outside the doorway and listened absorbedly, with satisfaction, whenever he heard singing...
- ...And whenever the Turks sharpened their knives and prepared to fall upon the Christians, Saint Minas sprang from his icon once more in order to protect the citizens of Megalo Kastro...
- ...For the Kastrians, Saint Minas was not simply holy, he was their captain. They called him Captain Minas and secretly brought him their arms to be blessed..."

 (Report to Greco, trans. Peter Bien)

Miracles of the saint are also reported in more recent times; he is supposed to have protected his church during the heavy bombing of Heraklion on 23 May 1941. The large bomb which fell on the cathedral but failed to explode is on view outside Saint Minas today.

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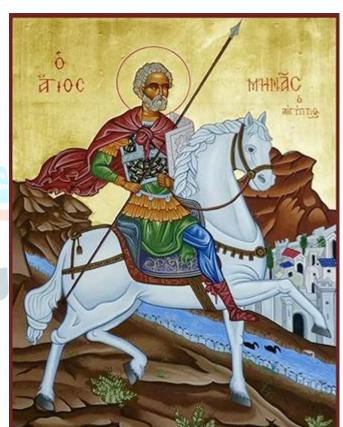
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القدّيس الشهيد ميناس المصري (+296م)

ولد القدّيس ميناس المصري في أواسط القرن الثالث للميلاد، واستشهد في أيام الإمبراطور مكسيميانوس (296-304 م).

شغف بالعسكرية منذ حداثته، فلما اشتّد عوده انخرط فيها. وقد كان قويّ البنية، مغواراً، رجل انضباط. عرف المسيح فبات، إلى ذلك، حكيماً زاهداً.



وفي ذلك الزمان جمع القائد الروماني فرميليانوس فرقاً شتى من العسكر تمهيداً لنقلها إلى أفريقيا الشمالية، وقد زوّدها بتوجيهات من ضمنها أن على الجنود أن يحذروا المسيحيين ويلقوا القبض على الذين لا ينصاعون منهم لأحكام القيص.

وكان ميناس نازلاً، يومذاك، فرقة في فيرجيا، في آسيا الصغرى. فما أن طرقت أذنيه أوامر القيادة العسكرية العليا حتى أصيب بصدمة وشعر بالحنق والقرف فقام وخلع سيره وألقاه أرضاً وفرّ إلى الجبال لأنه اعتبر مسكنة الضواري خيراً من مساكنة عبدة الأوثان وهؤلاء أكثر بهيمية من أولئك.

أقام ميناس في الجبال ردحاً من الزمان ناسكاً عابداً. وقد ساعدته تنشئته العسكرية على ضبط أمياله ومحاربة أهوائه إلى أن بات قوياً في الروح، ثابتاً، راسخاً مستعدّاً للمهمّات الصعبة. ساعتئذ جاءه إعلان إلهي أنه قد حان أوان الرضى وآن أوان الاستشهاد. فقام ونزل على







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المدينة، قيما كان الوثنيون يحتفلون. ثم دخل بينهم وهتف: " ألا اعلموا يا قوم أنه ليس هناك غير إله واحد حقيقي: المسيح، والذين تعبدونهم ليسوا سوى قطع من الخشب الأصم لا حسّ فيها!".

فكان لكلماته في نفوس الناس وقع الصاعقة. وحالما استعادوا رشدهم انقضّوا عليه وأشبعوه ضرباً ولكماً، ثم أسلموه إلى حاكم المدينة، فانتهزها فرصة يسلي فيها الجوع بتعاذيب شاهد آخر للمسيح.

عمد الحاكم، بادئ ذي بدء، إلى الاستعلام: "من هذا الوقح وما مكانته؟!" فأجاب ميناس بكلّ جرأة وقال: "أنا من مصر واسمي ميناس. كنت ضابطاً في الجيش. ولكن لما رأيت عبادتكم للأصنام رددت كراماتكم وجئت اليوم أعلن بينكم أن المسيح هو الإله الحيّ الحقيقي وحده...". فأمسك الحاكم نفسه بعضاً وحاول، بالتهديد والوعيد، ثم بالاستمالة والوعود، أن يزحزحه عن موقفه فأخفق. إذ ذاك أسلمه للمعذّبين فجلدوه بوحشية وفركوا جراحه بقطعة شعرية خشنة. ثم سلخوه وأحرقوا جنبيه بالمشاعل، وبعدما تفننوا في تعذيبه قطعوا هامته وأضرموا النار في بقاياه ليمحوا أثره، ولكن، تمكّن مؤمنون من استخراج بعض عظامه، وقد جرى نقلها، فيما بعد، إلى الاسكندرية.

وفي التراث أن ظهورات القدّيس ميناس وعجائبه لا تعد ولا تحصى، وقد عرفه المؤمنون معيناً لهم في الشدائد والضيقات ومؤدباً للكفرة والمنافقين. والصورة التي اعتاد الناس رؤيته عليها هي صورة فارس على جواد.





