

The project aims to investigate an entire cluster of miracle collections of St Menas, one of the most important and popular late antique Christian saints. Project team examines for the first time the origins, developments, and transformations of St Menas' miracula across centuries, languages, and cultures.

The cluster consists of late-ancient and medieval collections of short narratives dedicated to the post-mortem interventions of the Saint. They are preserved in many recensions in several languages of the Christian East, which makes them an extremely complicated case study. The Miracles of Saint Menas are preserved in many languages, in collections that differ in terms of the number and sequence of the miracles: Greek, Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Old Slavonic, Old Nubian. Most of them remain in oblivion or have been largely understudied at the very least.

The majority of the Miracles of St Menas belong to elaborated compilations (menaia, synaxaria, martyrologies, and others) of initially independent textual units brought together, adapted, and sometimes rewritten for liturgical services. Using hagiography in historical research is already nothing exceptional. Several scholars made it manifest that the lives of saints, passions, or – most importantly for us – miracle collections may bring valuable historical data. However, only rarely do historians problematise the primarily liturgical context of the deliverance of the pieces under examination. Therefore, it seems reasonable to ask to what extent the literary context and public character of commemoration (space and time, the presence of a specific type of audience) may influence the text of a miracle narrative.

There are five main research questions raised in the framework of the project:

1. What are the literary genres and performative contexts of the particular compositions and manuscripts containing the Miracles of St Menas?
2. What is the historical framework of the initial composition: its original language, date, milieu, and the agenda behind it?
3. What are the historically valuable data present in the Miracles, especially concerning cultic practices in Abu Mena sanctuary and pilgrimage logistics?
4. What are the literary topoi, patterns, and larger narrative units shared by the miracles of Saint Menas with other miracle stories in Byzantine and Coptic literature?
5. What are the transmission lines of the Miracles between various Christian languages, confessional and liturgical traditions?

The approach applied in the project combines the philological, historical, and literary analyses in a complementary way. At the purely philological level, the project uses the New Philology (material philology) approach focusing on single manuscripts in their materiality, especially the relationship to other textual units in the codices (compositional rationale), the peritexts, and lectional signs.

Answering the historical questions, the team members not only take advantage of textual sources. The results of archaeological works dedicated to specific sites (Marea) and particular types of artifacts mentioned in the miracles is included in the scope of research as well.

Literary analysis will be undertaken on the one hand from the comparative perspective (against the other miracle collections and hagiography in general) with elements of narratology to examine narrative patterns of the miracula, and on the other hand from the perspective of translatology (tracing the continuity and changes in the process of translation between languages and cultures) on the other.

The project results will be published as papers in journals suitable for studies in hagiography and particular Christian traditions. Among the papers will be editions of source texts. An independent study will be dedicated to the methodological issues. As the collective result, a volume of commented translations into English will be published, which will make the texts of many miracle collections available to other scholars and other interested readers for the first time.