



## Pilgrimage by monks and nuns of the Russian Orthodox Church takes place to Egypt



**DECR Communication service, 17.10.2024.**

With the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and the blessing of His Holiness Tawadros II from 7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November Egypt was visited by a delegation of monks and nuns from the Russian Orthodox Church on a pilgrimage to those locations tied to the origins and flowering of Christian monasticism as well as for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the monasteries and convents of the Coptic Church.

The visit took place within the context of the developing dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church as part of the corresponding bilateral commission between the two churches.

The delegation was headed by the Patriarchal exarch for Africa the metropolitan of Zarskoye Constantine. Making up the delegation were: the bishop of Krasnoslobodsk and Temikov Clement; auxiliary bishop of the Patriarchal exarchate for Africa the bishop of Lukhovitsy Euthemius; secretary of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate hieromonk Stephan (Igumnov); father superior of the Hermitage of the Cross monastery in the diocese of Sochi abbot Lev (Grysun); the vicar abbot of the Saint Michael the Archangel Monastery in the village of Kozikha in the diocese of Novosibirsk abbot Nikolai (Trachev); the head of the department of theology at the Moscow Theological Academy abbot Adrian (Pashin); the mother superior of the Saint George and the Holy Trinity Convent in Sochi abbess Drosida (Skorokopud); cleric of the Abakan diocese archpriest Alexander Fominykh; senior lecturer at the department of theology at the Moscow Theological Academy Father Dimitry Artyomkin; DECR colleague hieromonk Mark (Akhmatkhanov); workers at the Moscow Patriarchy nun Siluana (Chugunkina) and nun Antonia (Potapova); monastics from the Krasnoslobodsk diocese nun Platonida (Veitsel) and nun Seraphima (Stonis); personal secretary to the metropolitan of Zarskoye Constantine the reader V. Dendyj; and subdeacon V. Starkov.

On 7<sup>th</sup> November the delegation arrived in the Nitrian Desert, the homeland of Christian monasticism located between Cairo and Alexandria.

The first visit made by the pilgrims was to the Monastery of Saint Macarius the Great, founded in 360 by the saint after whom it was named and who is venerated throughout the Christian world, and which is the place where he accomplished many great spiritual deeds and where his blessed repose took place according to the Paterikon of Egypt. Metropolitan Constantine and the delegation venerated the relics housed in the churches of the monastery of Saint Macarius and other great monastic ascetics and martyrs. The members of the delegation exchanged impressions with the brethren of the monastery.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November the pilgrims arrived at the lavra in the Nitrian Desert, which is to say the Monastery of Saint Paisius the Great (Anba Bishoy), which was founded by him around 357. The guests venerated the relics of this man of God that were housed in this monastery and the relics of many other saints. An excursion was arranged for the guests from Russia around the Logos Patriarchal and Synodal Centre located on the territory of the monastery, which is one of the administrative ensembles of buildings where many historically important events have taken place, including meetings of the mixed commission for theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Ancient Oriental Churches, as well as the convocation of the Local Orthodox Churches and the Ancient Oriental Churches which was held on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

A meeting took place with the father superior of the Monastery of Saint Paisius bishop Agapius and the brethren.

Then the Russian pilgrims visited the Monastery of the Syrians (as-Suriani), founded at the end of the fourth century by the disciples of Saint Paisius the Great at the site where his remote cell was to be found and which received its name in memory of the sojourn here for several hundred years of monks from Syria. Saint Ephraim the Syrian had a close connection with this monastery as this saintly ascetic came here to meet with Saint Paisius. Within the monastery today one still sees the tree which bore fruit more than one thousand and five hundred years ago which grew from the staff thrust into the earth by Saint Ephraim as a living testimony to the meeting between the two great fathers and founders of Christian monasteries. The monastery also reverently preserves the cell of the holy abba Paisius in which he prayed without sleep.

The guests also had a meeting with the inmates of the monastery which was held in a spirit of fraternal love.

At the conclusion of their stay in the Nitrian Desert the delegation visited the Monastery of the Romans (al-Baramus). This monastic house, founded by Saint Macarius the Great around 335, is believed to be the first specifically built monastery throughout the entire Christian world. It received its name in memory of the sons of the Roman emperor Valentinian Maximinus and Domitia who led strict monastic lives here at the end of the fourth century. The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate were warmly greeted by the brethren of the monastery. Metropolitan Constantine and the members of the delegation venerated the relics of Saints Paphnutius the Great, Moses the Black, Isidore and other desert fathers who once lived here and the site of the spiritual exploits of Saint Arsenius the Great. The pilgrims then looked round the ancient site of the monastery refectory built during the first millennium of the monastery's history. It is part of the buildings of the katholikon of the monastery where many generations of monks held their agape meals after the Sunday Liturgy before withdrawing into the desert to pray in solitude.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November the pilgrims arrived in Cairo and venerated the holy sites of the early Christian centre of the Egyptian capital. The delegation visited the famous Hanging Church (Mualliyaka) built on the ruins of the ancient Roman fortress of the Egyptian Babylon and which for a lengthy time was the cathedral church of the Coptic patriarchs. The guests visited the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus where they venerated the relics of the first Christian martyrs. This church in Cairo was built in the fourth century above a cave where for three months the Holy Family lived during their enforced flight to Egypt from King Herod's persecution.

There was then a visit to the Church of the Holy Martyr Barbara where a particle of her relics is housed, as well as particles of the relics of the Saints Juliana, Damiana and other holy men and women. Later, the pilgrims visited the exhibition of the Coptic museum and the Cairo national museum of Egyptian civilization.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church arrived in the Eastern Desert by the Red Sea, which houses the great holy sites of the Christian world, which are the Lavras of Saint Anthony the Great and Paul the Anchorite.

The first visit in the Eastern Desert was to the monastery of Saint Paul. Metropolitan Constantine and the guests of the delegation visited the cave church of Paul the Anchorite and venerated the tomb of the saint on the very site where lions who appeared from the desert once dug the grave for the reposed monk and elder. The monks spoke to the pilgrims of the monastery's history, showed them the holy sites of the Lavra, the ancient windmill, the old refectory and the monastery museum, as well as the spring of Saint Paul flowing from a height of about three hundred meters and which every day supplies the brethren with approximately four cubic meters of water.

On the same day the metropolitan of Zaraisk Constantine celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the monastery cave church in honour of Saint Mark the Ascetic, while the auxiliary bishop of the Patriarchal exarchate from Africa the bishop of Lukhovitsy Euphemius celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the parish of Saint Sergius of Radonezh in Cairo.

The delegation also spoke with the father superior of monastery bishop Daniel, the chairman of the Patriarchal commission from monastery affairs and monasticism of the Coptic Church.

On 11<sup>th</sup> November the pilgrims visited the Lavra of Saint Anthony the Great. The members of the delegation from the Moscow Patriarchate climbed the mountain where the cave cell of Saint Anthony is located in which for around seventy years he laboured and prayed.

The pilgrims visited the monastery churches and venerated in them the holy objects, then visited the monastery museum and the spring of Saint Anthony. They also spoke with the brethren of the monastery. On 13<sup>th</sup> November the pilgrims returned to Cairo, visiting along the way the Coptic Cathedral Church of the Nativity of Christ in the new administrative capital of Egypt. The cathedral is one of the largest Christian church complexes in the Middle East. The solemn opening and consecration of the cathedral was held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2019 in the presence of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church visited in Cairo the Convent of the Holy Martyr Mercurius Philopatra (Abu Seifen) where they were solemnly greeted by the mother superior abbess Kyria and the inmates of the convent.

On 14<sup>th</sup> November the delegation from the Moscow Patriarchate visited the ecclesiastical administrative ensemble in the Cairo region of Abbasia and met with the Primate of the Coptic Church

His Holiness Tawadros II.

Then the pilgrims from Russia visited the Convent of the Holy Martyr Theodore Stratelates in the old city where they were received by its mother superior abbess Edrosis and her sisters.

In the evening of that day the members of the delegation attended the opening of the fifth session of the commission for dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church.

On 15<sup>th</sup> November the members of the delegation set off to return to Russia.

During the visit the delegation was accompanied by the father superior of the monasteries of Saint Homas and the Holy Martyr Victor in Hatatbeh bishop Severius, the representative of the Coptic Church in Russia hieromonk Daoud el-Antoni, advisor to His Holiness Patriarch Tawadros A. Milaf and monks and nuns of the Coptic Church.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/92510/>