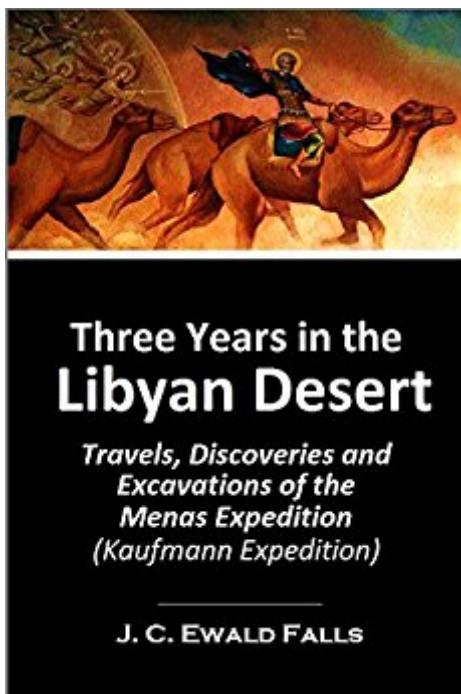


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Three Years In The Libyan Desert (1913)



Synopsis

Three Years in the Libyan Desert is a fascinating account of Monsignor Kaufmann's expedition to the early Christian ruins of Cyrenaica, which led to the discovery of the marble city of Menas, the "Egyptian Lourdes," and its excavation by the Beduins. The object of the Kaufmann expedition was to rediscover the highly important, long, and vainly-sought early Christian sanctuary in the Libyan desert, the Tomb of St. Menas. Saint Menas (285 – c. 309), the Martyr and Wonder-worker, is one of the most well-known Egyptian saints in the East and the West, due to the many miracles that are attributed to his intercession and prayers. Menas was an Egyptian soldier in the Roman army martyred because he refused to recant his Christian faith. After his martyrdom in the early fourth century, Menas acquired a reputation for miraculous healing powers. The cult of St. Menas was centred on Abu Mena near Alexandria. Sick people from all over the Christian world used to visit that city and were healed through the intercessions of Saint Menas, who became known as the Wonders' Maker. Today, numerous little clay Menas flasks, or bottles for holy water or oil on which the saint's name and picture are stamped, are found by archeologists in diverse countries. The cathedral of Saint Menas was destroyed during the Arab invasions of the 7th century. The author of this book, backed by the moral support of the influential Pascha, the president of the Alexandrian antiquities commission, they obtained permission from the Egyptian government to excavate the ruins of what has been aptly called "The Egyptian Lourdes." Dr. Bode of the Berlin museum and other friends furnished the money, and the two archaeologists spent the next 3 years unearthing the tomb of St. Menas, the Constantine church, the Areadius basilica, the baptistry and consignatorium, and the baths of Menas. In all the rooms of the baths water vessels were found, and many of the well-known Menas ampullae on which were written invocations to the saint. Just as at Lourdes to-day, the pilgrims of this fourth century shrine bathed in the baths of St. Menas, and carried home some of the water with them to use in sickness. Incidentally it was at this same location in World War II (after this book had already been published for 3 decades), that the weaker Allied forces, including some Greeks, confronted the numerically and militarily superior German army, and the result of the coming battle of El Alamein seemed certain. During the first night of engagement, at midnight, Saint Menas came out of his ruined church and appeared in the midst of the German camp at the head of a caravan of camels, exactly as he was shown on the walls of the ruined church in one of the frescoes depicting his miracles. This astounding and terrifying apparition so undermined German morale that it contributed to the brilliant victory of the Allies.

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