

ORTHODOX PATRIARCHAL CONVENT

OF VIRGIN MARY SAINT-NAIA

A BRIEF HISTORIC NARRATION OF THE GENERAL PATRIARCHAL CONVENT OF VIRGIN SAINT NAIA

Saint Naia is a Syrian word, arising from the world (Santa Virgin) which has another meaning in the same language (Saint-hunting-Dnaga- a hunting place).

In the Convent there is an icon of the Virgin, one of the four ones painted by the Evangelist Lukas. They call it Heagoura in Syrian language. The glorious, famous and well known Heagoura, in the Arabic language.

There are other precious icons of the Virgin as well as of other saints of the V, VI and VII b.C. century.

This convent is Orthodox and it belongs to the Patriarchate of Antiochia whose base is in Damascus, where more than 50 nuns are living here with the mother-superior.

The convent has properties in Syria and Lebanon.

A holly pilgrimage for thousands of Christians pilgrims, especially the 8th September of each year, when the birthday of the Virgin is celebrated. This convent is situated in a very high mountain of the Syrian Village Saint Naia. It has a big library rich of handwritings of precious value which witness that the convent was built the year 547.

It is believed that by that time the emperor of Byzantine Iustinianos passing by Syria with his soldiers on his way to a battle against the Persians, he arrived at a desert area and stopped to have some rest, drink water and give water to their horses. Suddenly, in front of the emperor a deer appears and he ran after it to hunt it.

Then the deer stood up in a stony place of the mountain, which leaded to a source with clear water. Before he takes water, at the place of the deer the vision of the Virgin Mary appears to him extending her hand and telling him: No, you will not kill me, instead, you will build for me a church in the mountain, and the vision disappeared.

Iustinianos told his assistants the whole story and instructed them to prepare immediately an architectural design and build a church in this place.

Some time passed and the architects could not find a suitable architectural design. So, Virgin Mary appeared again as a deer in his dream and led Iustinianos at the place where an architectural design of the convent was traced on the ground as it is today, Byzantine type since they followed the instructions of the Virgin.

The convent of Virgin Mary Saint Naia possesses the second grandiose place after Jerusalem in the Middle East.

The glory of Virgin Mary grows with the numerous miracles she makes to the pilgrims who believe in Her, even those who belong to another religion. Pilgrims go from all the parts of the world to get the grace of the Heagoura of Saint Naia in order to pray with respect asking for the help of the decent Virgin Mary.

The Icon of Heagoura was placed in the convent later, after the convent was built. It is said that once a monk, probably of Greek origin, on his way to Jerusalem passed through Syria and so he remained one night in the convent of Saint Naia.

The mother superior asked him to buy for her a beautiful and precious icon of Virgin Maria from Jerusalem. As soon as he arrived in Jerusalem he fulfilled the requirement of the mother superior. On his way back to the convent he met some burglars and he prayed and asked from the icon of Virgin Maria, which he was holding with him, to save him and his companions. Virgin Maria listened to his praying and saved them all.

When he returned to the convent he lied to the Mother Superior telling her that he could not buy the requested icon, because he intended to keep it for himself, as it worked wonders. The next morning when he woke up and was ready to leave the convent on his way back to his country, an invisible strength stopped him from leaving, so he could not get out of the

convent although he tried many times unsuccessfully. He realized that he had no choice, he had to give the icon to the Mother Superior. He confessed to the Mother Superior that he wanted to keep for himself the icon because it saved him and his companions from the burglars. Since then, the miraculous icon remained in the convent and it is honored by the pilgrims.

Since then, more churches have been built in Saint Naia, by vows and offers of benefactors, and rich Christian Orthodox coming from other countries.

The convent has built an orphanage for girls, and its expenses are covered by donations and offers of believers.

The citizens of the area speak the Syrian language.