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EGYPT: Is it the Virgin Mary or just a curious flash of light?

December 15, 2009 | 6:53 am

The faithful say she comes in a flash of light amid a swirl of pigeons.

Hundreds, if not thousands, have been lining up for hours every night at the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church in a Cairo neighborhood just off the Nile. Many of them claim that a mysterious light hovering above the church's domes is an apparition of the Virgin Mary who will bring Christian Copts prosperity and relief in a time of national and religious struggle.



The crowds began appearing Thursday evening when a number of residents spotted a flickering light. No one was sure where the illumination was coming from, and word quickly spread that the light took the shape of the Virgin Mary wearing a blue gown and standing in the sky between the church's two high crosses.

Since then, many Copts, and more than a few Muslims, have spent their evenings camping outside the church to either be blessed by a glimpse of the "miraculous" scene or to figure out just what's happening in the night sky. It has turned into a pilgrimage for the curious and the devout at a time when Egypt is beset by poverty, high unemployment and a bruised sense of identity, especially after the national soccer team's recent loss to Algeria knocked it out of contention for the World Cup.

"The scene on Saturday was huge when we saw the lightning and white pigeons flying around us. White pigeons always accompany apparitions like these," one Copt told The Times.

Copts form 10% of Egypt's population of 80 million, and many firmly believe that this is the fourth time an apparition of Virgin Mary has taken place. The most famous incident was claimed to have happened in 1968, a few months after the country's military defeat at the hands of Israel and the latter's occupation of the Sinai peninsula.

At the time, some people assumed that she has appeared to help Egypt -- a predominantly Muslim nation -- through a time of crisis. Some Copts believe the Virgin is again appearing at a time of turmoil. There has been no official word from the Coptic Church.

"I had a seven-hour train journey to come and see the apparition," Magdi Sam'aan, a farmer from Asyut told The Times. "Our life in upper Egypt is very rough because of my limited income, but I believe the Virgin Mary has come at this specific moment to lend me and the whole country a hand." However, and according to some intellectuals, it is this very belief of apparitions related to crisis that causes people to be easily influenced by such "alleged phenomenon."

"What is going on now is a result of people's massive feeling of corruption, social injustice and the financial gap between various classes in Egypt," said prominent Coptic scriptwriter Atef Beshay. "Some people are desperately seeking 'aid' from anyone, even if this aid will only come from the Virgin Mary's apparition.

"We also shouldn't disregard the increasing religious tensions between Muslims and Copts. Some Copts wait for phenomenon like this because it gives them some sort of mental advantage over Muslims," Beshay said.

Writer Youssef Al Qaied agrees with Beshay that tough living has forced many Egyptian to turn to spiritualities: "When finances and living expenses are not easy to secure, people find a safe haven in creating spiritual beliefs that can pull them out of their miseries even if those beliefs have no practical or scientific bases."

Unlike their Coptic counterparts, most Muslims are not convinced. Many of them have seen light flashes in recent days, but certainly don't believe it was the Virgin Mary.

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"I was one of the first to notice the laser-like lights. But nothing happened more than this. The shape of Virgin Mary never appeared in front of my eyes," said Mohamed Soliman, who lives one block away from the church.

Columnist Khaled Muntaser said the light over the church could be scientifically explained:

"Lightning in these situations could be no more than a glow accompanying any electric discharge in the sky of a certain area. This glow is scientifically known as St. Elmo's fire, and it is more likely to occur during winter. It is just a static electricity like the one we sometimes feel while taking off a polyester shirt."

-- Amro Hassan in Cairo

Photo: People waiting outside Virgin Mary Orthodox Church. Credit: Al Destour.

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I will not argue about the Virgin Mary Apparition lately in the church named after her holly name & the angel Michael in El Warraq , Giza , Egypt (basic information wasn't mentioned in the report) because this is a matter of faith deeply inside the heart , it's a very personal matter to everyone to believe it or not .. actually to feel it or not
 But i want to talk about that report in a professional way
 Clearly it seems that the reporter didn't bother going to the scene to explore & watch what's happening .. It was very enough to him to sit & watch one of the late night talk shows in the Egyptian media which is (Al Ashera Masa'an) or (10 pm) on Dream TV second channel by the famous Mona El Shazly .
 And all what he has done was to copy - literally - what has been said in this talkshow either from the guests (Atef Beshay & Youssef El Qaied) or the phone callers
 After all , the reporter didn't even mention the talkshow due to the copyrights
 So I can claim that he is not just a lazy reporter .. but a thief one also
 that's why his report came very weak & unprofessional
 Anyone can make a better report while he is sitting in his bedroom watching TV & I think LA times readers deserve to have some better quality in the press service more than this ..!

Do some effort , Mr reporter
 Mina E . Azer

Alexandria , Egypt

Posted by: Mina Azer | December 18, 2009 at 12:05 AM

Merry Christmas everyone.

I don't worry about such people, who try to hide and change the truth, they are stubborn and thick headed, the videos are clearer than anything can be, and the last thing ever the Egyptian government would like to see with all the oil rich Islamic terror supporting Gulf countries is to see this spread out. The Egyptian TV stations could not, just could not ignore this huge incident.

To all who can't just accept this, tough luck, this is how it is, like it or not, and Jesus Christ the Lord is coming and each knee will bend and each one will bow to him, including all the thick headed.

As for Bishay, a betrayer could go as far as eating with Jesus from the same plate, he's just another one, all the Copts know that more than the Americans know 911.

I believe the world is coming to an end, and I think all of us need to change and become better, all of us.

God bless you all, including the thick headed change and become headed to think, how about that ?

And who is Amro Hassan ? Is this the Los Angeles Times or Taliban Times, you have no thinking at all, your having a Muslim reporter report on Virgin Mary's Apparition ? are you out of your mind, or is this an act of foolishness?

Amro Hassan will now change his name to George Hassan and cry out the truth to the world ? and you know what even if he does, you will fire him and look for another Muslim reporter, no wonder some guy like bin Laden is giving you a hard time, you've become so clumsy that's why.

And hey if you have some guts watch these videos, don't ask Amro Hassan, he's seen it in reality already and can't stand it, too much for him:

<http://www.light-dark.net/page106-Dubai,-United%20-Arab-Emirates-Saudi-Arabia-and-Islam.html>

And the 1968 Zeiton apparition

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMEWxRB-1dc>

Posted by: Hossam Rafik | December 17, 2009 at 06:58 PM

First of , to the writer: You are a Journalist you write what you see & take eye witness accounts and do a little history . If you don't believe that is o.k. No one is forcing you to believe. but you are biased & I agree with with the post-es above. What the hell dose a soccer game or class have to do with this story

Egypt has always been either high class or the poor hence corruption! second ,soccer is a loved game in the Mediterranean u might have some teens rioting after they lost, but then life goes back to normal. soccer dose not identify the identity of the Egyptian people !! they lost ohh well, they will still be Egyptian.

Seriously hope u take some refresher courses in Journalism maybe world culture.

Second Oh Ye OF LiTtle FAITH. Just info you can look up and not take my word for it. in the bible it states that when Herod who was appointed king by the Romans to rule the land of Palestine. Herod, heard of the birth of the saviour of the Jews & was visited by the three wise men who also told him of the birth of the king, then Herod ordered that all first born sons where to be killed, mean time an angel appeared to marry & told her to go into the land of Egypt & they did till Jesus was around the age of seven then they went back to Nazareth. Also there was a sighting of (mother marry) that over a million people in Egypt in the 60 at zaytouna Coptic Church saw her . with picture evidence that scientists when examining the pictures said that pictures are authentic and no one messed with them . You don't have to believe, but Muslims & christens believe in mother Marry. maybe this could be a good thing for the whole world a message, a sign. That we are losing our faith to materialistic and world power & corruption. Faith is the deep belief in things unseen or untouched.

A common manifestation of mass hysteria occurs when a group of people believe they are suffering from a similar disease or ailment. The definition of mass hysteria and this sighting of mother marry is NOT mass hysteria. if believers & non believers saw it. God/Jesus Christ dose not leave himself without any witness.

Posted by: Mrs. Simmons | December 17, 2009 at 02:11 PM

I saw the youtube video and it certainly didn't look like weather phenomenon of any kind. Your reporter was clearly biased. The prominent Coptic screenwriter your reporter interviewed didn't see the phenomenon and made a broad social statement about social and economic pressure. How is that germane to the phenomenon. As a reader I want to know how many people saw the lights? How long did it last? Is there evidence of weather phenomenon? Was there a device found nearby? One eye witness claimed he saw a laser light, but the video clearly does not fit that description. Why not? Further, the author dismisses the entire phenomenon by broadly claiming intellectuals agree that the underlying cause of mass sightings is clearly social and economic hardship. Really? Please tell me who these intellectuals are and where in the academic literature social phenomenon has led to group hallucinations which incidently

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is supported by a video. Stop the lazy reporting.

Posted by: Neill | December 17, 2009 at 05:32 AM

there are those who have eyes who do not see and those who have ears but do not hear. Its happened to many times for it to be untrue, I thank God that he has remembered his people in Egypt and has sent st mary to us and to the Coptic Church. Lets Pray and Fast that the whole of Egypt can open there eyes and see St Mary and be witnesses to Christ.

Posted by: The Living God | December 17, 2009 at 02:44 AM

Funny that your reporter is doing his best to cast doubts on something seen by thousands, would the LA Times send him again to see for himself instead of just taking orders from State Security to deny the fact.

This video is of an appearance which took place on 16th December 2009 and lasted for 3 hours

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPIV-4vNOYE&feature=player_embedded.

Word of advice change your reporter, he already lost credibility.

Posted by: MaryAbdelmassih@Yahoo.com | December 16, 2009 at 11:46 PM

@George Sadek

If you noticed dear, the electricity was off from the beginning of the video by state security because the church always leaves the crosses illuminated and they turned off from here, please don't support common ignorance of commentators loool

Posted by: Hany | December 16, 2009 at 10:57 PM

ohh yea of little faith...

Posted by: Believe | December 16, 2009 at 07:51 PM

The writer was very biased and ignored the fact that St. mary apparitions was not limited to Egypt only. It is a worldwide phenomena. St. Mary appeared in France, Belgium, United States and Mexico.

Posted by: George Sadek | December 16, 2009 at 07:09 PM

here u r the real video on youtube watch the min 4:43 when the electricity was cut the flas light radiator appeared . plz don't support the common ignorance of egyptian ordothx

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPIV-4vNOYE>

Posted by: maxpen | December 16, 2009 at 05:18 PM

It is very aggravating, that your Muslim correspondent would be the only one to cast doubts on the appearance of the Virgin. All Egyptian TV station showed it, with witnesses from Muslims and Christians. Shame on him

Posted by: Amira Fahmy | December 16, 2009 at 12:51 PM

To those who feel that only "weak minded" and "sheep" could believe things like this, your lack of faith in the miracles of the world don't surprise me. Apparitions of St. Mary in Egypt has happened many times, and thousands of people have tried and failed to deny it, or to disprove the claims as atmospheric occurrences, or electrical discharges, as this derogatory article has stated. Video's clearly show the Virgin Mary atop the roof of this church, and her appearance comes at the perfect time when Coptic Christians are facing devastation and turmoil in their homeland. The writer of this article fails to mention the tremendous religious discriminations that Copts experience, and how an apparition from St. Mary can keep their faith strong, and keep them working towards a future they wish they could attain. Faith is a strange thing to those who have never experienced it, and those who do have a strong faith in Christ understand the meaning behind her appearance.

Posted by: Diana | December 16, 2009 at 11:57 AM

I am all for a scientific explanation if we can find one. The St. Elmo's fire theory can't explain why it happens over top the domes of a church (named St. Mary's Church) besides, it wasn't just a faint light or flashes, it was a clear illuminous object shaped like a person that remained for few minutes. Refer to the youtube videos.

Posted by: Hany G. | December 16, 2009 at 09:56 AM

Saint Mary appeared in Egypt on Saturday 12/10/2009 (10:00PM) until 12/11/2009 (3:00AM) and last night in egypt on the top of Archangel Michael and Saint Mary Church in El-Warrak, Egypt. Thousands of Christians and Muslims saw her and witnessed her apparition. she appeared in 2 different places of the church as shown in the following 2 links:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lq3IObuSRM8&feature=related>

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkFywQqauvQ&NR=1>

last night she appeared again after the Egyptian Intelligence cut the power off from the area, and you can see in the following links that crosses are not lighted:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ez_wihw3g

Posted by: Monica | December 16, 2009 at 08:58 AM

Miracles can and do happen, not just on a public scale like this one (and I do believe it is the Virgin Mary) but in the daily life of every one of us. How many times you passed an exam you thought you would never pass? How many times you had a narrow escape from a serious accident?

If you do not believe in miracles, please ignore these news, but save us your insulting and stupid remarks.

Posted by: Zeedy | December 16, 2009 at 08:30 AM

Virgin Mary & pigeons and 8 angels on 12/16 overnight! was that not enough?! how kind is our lord Jesus, nobody can deny that unless he is a BIG llier!

if i see the sun in the morning and you say there is no sun! how can i persuade you!??? you say whatever and that wont change the facts that Virgin MARY blesses the people over El-Waraq cairo egypt.

Posted by: Reda | December 16, 2009 at 08:28 AM

please see this two videos and take your decision

16-12-2009

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4Hds_0Oj1I

10-12-2009

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22e7V2xkeII&feature=related>

Posted by: kerollos | December 16, 2009 at 08:16 AM

I can understand the cautious attitude as you are writing about this story but I don't think you were very

fair in the reporting, you wrote it without any indication if you saw any of the videos that both Muslims and Christians that lasted much longer than 4 or 5 minutes at a time, so I am not sure how you can classify it as "flashes". Also, its true that the videos did not show the virgin Mary perhaps, but eye witness, again both Muslim and Christian identified her form to be the Virgin Mary. I think its very irresponsible of you as a journalist to paint this story with this much unbelief when there is lots of tangible evidence to indicate that its alot more than you present.

Posted by: Nader | December 16, 2009 at 08:12 AM

what a serprise to the world from VIRGIN MARY?

Posted by: eyob | December 16, 2009 at 02:40 AM

I saw this video and can't figure out how people could think it's just flashes of light. You can see the figure of the blessed virgin mary. And, as others have stated, it's not the first time she appear in egypt. Hopefully things get better between the copts and muslims in egypt.

Posted by: marie | December 15, 2009 at 11:57 PM

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