

The Story of Saint Nicholas of the Cats

“It is wonderful to see them, for nearly all are maimed by the snakes: one has lost a nose, another an ear; the skin of one is torn, another is lame: one is blind of one eye, another of both. And it is a strange thing that at the hour for their food, at the sound of a bell, they collect at the monastery and when they have eaten enough, at the sound of that same bell, they all depart together to go fight the snakes.” ~visiting Venetian Francesco Suriano (1484)

In 328 A.D., St. Helena visited the island of Cyprus and found it almost totally deserted of most of its inhabitants. This abandonment was a result of a severe and prolonged drought that had last for 36 years. St. Helena’s ship landed at the site of the future monastery of St. Nicholas and found the area swarming with poisonous snakes. She decided to help rejuvenate the island of Cyprus and upon her return to Constantinople, she arranged for an entire shipload of cats to be sent to the area where her ship had first landed to devour the poisonous snakes. St. Helena also reported the dismal state of the island to Emperor Constantine and he appointed Duke Kalokeros as the new Governor of Cyprus. Duke Kalokeros was mandated or required to revive and encourage people to return to Cyprus. It was during this revival period that the Monastery of St. Nicholas of the Cats was constructed. According to legend the monks of the Monastery of St. Nicholas are to feed the cats a little meat morning and evening each day so that they cats would not continually consume the poison of the snakes. In 1983, the Monastery of St. Nicholas of the Cats was revived by nuns after many years of neglect. The monastery is again swarming with cats which are said to be descended from those brought to the island by St. Helena.

Story Location Clue: St. Nicholas of the Cats is located south of Kolossi Castle in Limassol on the southernmost tip of Cyprus. It is located east of Aphrodite’s Rock.