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## **CELEBRATION OF SAINT GEORGE EL REZYKAT IN LUXOR GOVERNORATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Luxor is world-renowned for its extensive ancient Egyptian heritage. However, in addition to historical and archaeological sites, the region offers a diverse range of cultural and religious tourism opportunities. Religious festivals are an important but underutilised component of Upper Egyptian tourism.*

*As a result, the study aims to shed light on Rezykat's St. George Festival.*

*The St. George Festival (Moulid Mar Girgis), held annually in Rezykat near Armant, is one of Egypt's most important Christian religious celebrations. The festival attracts thousands of Coptic Christians from all over the country and commemorates the patron saint, St. George, through rituals, prayers, processions, and vibrant community activities. Despite its cultural and spiritual richness, this festival remains largely absent from the marketed tourism portfolio in Luxor and Aswan.*

*The study adopted a qualitative approach by conducting insightful interviews on the common themes of the St. George Festival in Rezeigat near Armant.*

*To gain insights into the marketing potential of the St. George Festival, The findings were categorized under the following themes: marketing barriers, cultural sensitivity in terms of religious context and religious perceptions, logistical challenges, opportunities for integration between the festival and archaeological sites near the monastery site, seasonal timing of the festival and peak tourism season*

**KEYWORDS:** Luxor ,festival , Rezykat , George , religion

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aims to maximise the tourism benefits of the celebration.

How to integrate it into the tourism promotion plans of tourism offices abroad.

Its impact on stimulating inbound religious tourism to Egypt.

Identifying the site's constraints and marketing it as a tourist destination

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology was based on a qualitative approach, using a field study that included personal interviews with six government representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and tourist information offices, in addition to ten interviews with travel agents and tourism managers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Saint George is known as Georgius in Latin and Djorge in Turkish. The Orientals called him Mar Girgius or Jirias. He is well known as El-Khudr among Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Girgis is the hero, and the Upper Egyptians refer to him as "Abu Harba" and "Quick response" due to his quick response to the afflicted's calls. Saint Girgis is second only to the Virgin Mary in terms of the number of churches and monasteries bearing his name, including the Saint Girgis Monastery in Al-Raziqat, Luxor.<sup>2</sup>

St. George was born in Cappadocia, modern-day Turkey, around 236 A.D. The saint had two younger sisters, Cassia and Madrona.<sup>3</sup>

When he was about ten years old, his father died, and the family moved to Palestine, just as Prince Justus was appointed ruler of Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

He appointed him as commander of 5,000 men and enlisted his assistance in conquering Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Clapton, *The Life of St. George*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, Swan Sonnenschein & Co Limited, Paternoster Square, 1903, p10

<sup>2</sup> روبير فارس ، فى الفولكلور القبطى ، الهيئة العامة لقصور الثقافة، 2007 ، ص 129

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Guiley ,*The Encyclopedia of Saints* 2001 .p129

<sup>4</sup> Hylin A, *The Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* ,vol1,1862 p.244. Darch ,John H ,*Saints on Earth* ,Church House Press ,2006p.56 .

<sup>5</sup> جوزيف ممدوح توفيق :قصة مار جرجس بين التاريخ والتقليد الشعبى ،الطبعة الأولى ، 2017 ، ص 6-7

The saint travelled to Tyre, Lebanon, to meet with Dadianus because the Persians were then the dominant force in the Levant.,<sup>6</sup>

When George arrived in Tyre, Lebanon, with three of his servants, he discovered that the rulers and the majority of the population had abandoned God's worship in favour of idol worship and incense offerings<sup>7</sup>. Christians in the city were afraid to express their beliefs publicly for fear of being killed.<sup>8</sup>

The saint entered the governor's presence and proudly declared his Christian faith. Dadianus summoned him in Christ's name and enquired about his position in the world, his birth, his parents, and his entire life. Dadianus attempted to persuade George to reconsider his fatal decision after learning that he was a nobleman with distinguished service in the imperial army. George ridiculed his sacrifice and despised the gods.<sup>9</sup>

After refusing to bow down to the gods, the saint was subjected to numerous tortures before the king ordered his head to be severed. That was the twenty-third day of Bermuda.<sup>10</sup>

The Monastery of Saint George, also known as the Monastery of Saint George in Rizigat, is located south of Armant in Luxor Governorate.<sup>11</sup>

he annual celebrations at the Monastery of Saint George al-Raziqat in Luxor Governorate begin on November 10 and end on November 16 . This event

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<sup>6</sup> Dadianus An illegitimate Persian king who was a pagan and ruled the Cappadocian territory

After the Persians beat the Romans, he seized control of Syria and Phenicia, establishing his reign in the city of Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea, which had previously belonged to Syria but is today located in southern Lebanon. It is said that he promoted the martyr St. George of Rome to the rank of commander of five thousand soldiers and took over his torture for seven years. The saint was martyred for forty years, from 256 to 263 AD, prior to Emperor Diocletian's persecution.

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<sup>7</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,London ,D.Nutt,270,Strand ,1888,p19

<sup>8</sup> جوزيف ممودح توفيق :قصة مارجرجس بين التاريخ والتقليد الشعبي، ص 6-7

<sup>9</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,p20

<sup>10</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,p235

<sup>11</sup> الأنبا صموئيل أسقف شبين القناطر وضواحيها، بديع حبيب جورجي: دليل الكنائس والأديرة في مصر ، 2002 - ص.207

coincides with the anniversary of the dedication of the first church in honour of the famous martyr Saint George in the city of "Lyd" in Palestine.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of seven days, the monastery attracts a large number of visitors, who attend daily masses at the Monastery of Saint George, as well as a procession of an icon bearing the image of the martyr George, Coptic hymns, and daily sermons delivered by fathers and bishops. To achieve the study's objectives, the research methodology was based on a field study of the Monastery of Saint George during the celebration, which included monitoring some social aspects and photographing the monastery that would benefit the subject of the study. It also used a descriptive analytical approach to examine various aspects of the monastery's celebration. The study relied on presenting these aspects to ensure that the reader was familiar with all of the details about this religious celebration.

### **ST. GEORGE EL ROMANY**

George's Latin name is Georgius, and the Turkish name is Djorge. The Orientals called him Mar Girgius or Jirias. He is well known as El-Khudr among Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

St. George was born in Cappadocia, modern-day Turkey, around 236 A.D. His father, Prince Anastasius, ruled Malatya in eastern Cappadocia, Asia Minor, while his mother, Theopisti, came from Palestine. Dionysius was the governor of Lydda. The saint had two younger sisters, Cassia and Madrona.<sup>14</sup> When he was about ten years old, his father died, and the family moved to Palestine, just as Prince Justus was appointed ruler of Palestine. Justus was a good Christian, so he persuaded the saint's mother to join him in the army. St. George spent 10 years with Justus. Justus imitated his father.<sup>15</sup>

He appointed him as commander of 5,000 men and enlisted his assistance in conquering Palestine. When the saint turned twenty, his mother died. Prince Justus wanted to honour Prince Gerges, so he married his only daughter to him. Prince Justus died during the wedding preparations, and everything changed.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ميلاد واصف ، مارجرجس الروماني ، مطبعة المصري ، 1966 ، ص 206

<sup>13</sup> Edward Clapton, The Life of St. George, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, Swan Sonnenschein & Co Limited paternoster Square, 1903, p10

<sup>14</sup> Rosemary Guiley, The Encyclopedia of Saints 2001, p129

<sup>15</sup> Hylin A, The Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record, vol1, 1862 p.244. Darch, John H, Saints on Earth, Church House Press, 2006, p.56.

<sup>16</sup> جوزيف ممدوح توفيق: قصة مارجرجس بين التاريخ والتقليد الشعبي، الطبعة الأولى، 2017، ص 6-7

The saint travelled to Tyre, Lebanon, to meet with Dadianus because the Persians were then the dominant force in the Levant.,<sup>17</sup> the Persian Emperor, and assert his title to rule Palestine after Prince Justus. When George came to Tyre, Lebanon, with three of his servants, he was astonished to see that the rulers and the bulk of the population had abandoned God's worship in favour of idol worship, presenting incense to them. Furthermore, the city's Christian population was afraid to publicly express their beliefs for fear of being slain..<sup>18</sup> George discovered that the king had instructed the destruction of the churches and the abolition of Christianity after the king met with seventy governors. George became ready to be persecuted because the king asked him to confess his faith. After distributing all his money to the needy, releasing the slaves, and preparing for martyrdom with joy, the saint sold everything he had taken from his parents and tore the decree among the crowd in a public place.<sup>19</sup>

When he entered the governor's presence, he proudly professed his faith as a Christian. Dadianus summoned him under the name Christ and questioned about his place in the world, his birth, his parents, and his entire history. Dadianus sought to persuade George to reconsider his deadly decision after learning that he was a nobleman who had distinguished himself in the imperial army. Admiring his fine body and charming features, he gave large rewards and promises of advancement in the empire to lure him to continue serving. George mockingly declined his sacrifices and despised the impersonal gods, pointing out how abhorrently contaminated they were. <sup>20</sup>

After many torments, and when he was blessed with heavenly visions in the midst of his suffering, as God was assisting and blessing him, the king feared a revolution against him as word spread of God's miracles through the

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<sup>17</sup> Dadianus An illegitimate Persian king who was a pagan and ruled the Cappadocian territory

After the Persians beat the Romans, he seized control of Syria and Phenicia, establishing his reign in the city of Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea, which had previously belonged to Syria but is today located in southern Lebanon. It is said that he promoted the martyr St. George of Rome to the rank of commander of five thousand soldiers and took over his torture for seven years. The saint was martyred for forty years, from 256 to 263 AD, prior to Emperor Diocletian's persecution.

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<sup>18</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,London ,D.Nutt,270,Strand ,1888,p19

<sup>19</sup> جوزيف ممدوح توفيق :قصة مارجرس بين التاريخ والتقليد الشعبي، ص 6-7

<sup>20</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,p20

saint's hands, so he had his head severed. That was the twenty-third for Bermuda.<sup>21</sup>

## THE MONASTERY

The Monastery of Saint George is situated in the Rizeigat area, 13 kilometres south of Arment and 5 kilometres southwest of the village. Because the monastery was the nearest village, the village name was incorporated into the monastery's name. It became known as the Monastery of St. George in Rizeigat..<sup>22</sup> Between 1865 and 1870, the famous priest "Paul El Keber" built the monastery of St. George at Rizeigat, in the middle of Armant, to replace the old monastery. The monastery is located in Hajar Naqada. Queen Helena built it as part of a group of monasteries in the fourth century AD.<sup>23</sup> This monastery is no longer around. It was located approximately 10 kilometres west of the modern St. George Monastery in the Rizeigat area, Armant's core, where the ruins of its constructions can still be found. Coptic families from Esna to Luxor used to visit only on fasting and holiday days, and because of the distance, they founded the current monastery around 1856 AD..<sup>24</sup>

The High Priest "Paul El Keber" built the Monastery of Saint George in the Rizeigat in the middle of Armant between 1865 and 1870, replacing the original monastery. Which was located in the desert to the west, and the monastery was abandoned due to the difficulty of reaching it.

Talaat Ayoub Armanious wrote a book about the monastery, claiming that it was founded between 1850 and 1870, and describing the abandoned monastery.<sup>25</sup> The monastery was founded after a family walked more than 35 km with camels and cattle on one of the nights of fasting. When they entered the monastery, they looked tired. The late priest Paul El Keber, the priest of the monastery, tried to calm them down and give them patience. Then, the martyr George appeared during the prayer of the rosary and was assigned a position. The people began to bring the bricks and materials needed to build

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<sup>21</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge, M. A. , The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia: The Coptic Texts ,p235

<sup>22</sup> الأنبا صموئيل أسقف شبين القناطر وضواحيها، بديع حبيب جورجي: دليل الكنائس والأديرة في مصر ، ، 2002 - ص.207.

<sup>23</sup> واصف ميلاد : مارجرجس الروماني ، مطبعة المصري ، 1966 ، ص 207  
<sup>24</sup> نبيل كامل داود ، د عادل فخري ، تاريخ المسيحية والرهبة وآثارهما في أبروشيتي نقادة وقوص ، وإسنا وأرمنت ، الطبعة الأولى ، مؤسسة القديس مرقس لدراسات التاريخ القبطي ، 2008 ، ص 191  
<sup>25</sup> طلعت أيوب أرمانئوس : سيرة الشهيد العظيم مارجرجس ، وتاريخ دير العامر بالرزقات -أرمنت ( 1977 ) ، ص

it. They also used all the original doors of the monastery and the wood to build the new monastery..<sup>26</sup>When the Patriarchate took over administration of this monastery, it was in disrepair. Bishop Agathon, the general bishop, was appointed as the Pope's deputy in 1975 AD. His first task from 1975 to 1978 AD will be to repair the monastery of Saint George in the Rizeigat and build a new wall to replace the current demolished clay wall, as well as other necessary facilities. He will be in charge of organising Saint George's feast..<sup>27</sup>.

**Fig.1** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.GorgeThe main entrance of the monastery.



( source : <https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 7:49 PM )

**Fig .2** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.GorgeThe main



entrance of the monastery

(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 7:49 PM)

<sup>26</sup> طلعت أيوب أرمانيوس : سيرة الشهيد العظيم مارجرس , وتاريخ دير العامر بالرزقات ، ص37

<sup>27</sup> مجلة الكرازة ، السنة السادسة ، العدد 25 ، في 1975/6/20 ، ص4-5

## **FESTIVAL**

The annual celebrations at the Monastery of St. George the Rizeigat in Luxor Governorate begin on November 10 and end on the 16th of that month..<sup>28</sup> The event takes place on the anniversary of the consecration of the first church in honour of the renowned martyr Mar Gerges in "Lydda" in Palestine.

Prior to this date, hundreds of families travelled to the monastery on an area of more than 60 acres, sleeping in tents designed specifically for the occasion

**Fig .3** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:00 PM)



It is worth noting that one million Christians visit Deir Rizeigat every year for the annual celebrations. During the seven days, Saint Gerges Monastery in Mount Rizeigat celebrates with daily masses, a procession of the icon bearing the figure of Martyr George, Coptic heritage hymns and chants, and daily sermons for the fathers, bishops, and fathers' priests.

## **THE ICON PROCESSION**

The most important feature of the celebration is the procession of the icon, in which the icon of the martyr George is carried by a group of deacons led by the archbishop, as well as a group of deacons in their special uniforms carrying crosses and church musical instruments and singing melodies in a grand procession, and thousands flock to receive the blessing from the icon of George.

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<sup>28</sup> واصف ميلاد : مارجرس الروماني ، ص 209

**Fig .4** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:01 PM)



**Fig. 5** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
The procession of saint George  
(souce:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:03 PM)





**Fig .6** Luxor.Arment city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
The procession of saint George .

(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:04 PM)

### **THIS CELEBRATION IS DISTINGUISHED BY ITS SPIRITUAL SEASON**

During the day, masses, prayers, meetings, tournaments, and Sunday schools for children were held, which is especially important during the season.

### **AN ECONOMIC SEASON.**

Christians and Muslims can buy and sell, and all merchants look forward to the season of St. George's Monastery in Rizeigat to gain blessings and a plentiful livelihood from the rush to buy and sell, which creates job opportunities, increased income, and economic prosperity, as religious celebrations are an important factor in stimulating the economy of the areas that enjoy this privilege<sup>29</sup>, as brides from neighbouring villages and cities prepare their outfits from St. George's shops.

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<sup>29</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371231050\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_religious\\_tourism\\_on\\_the\\_economy\\_and\\_tourism\\_industry](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371231050_The_impact_of_religious_tourism_on_the_economy_and_tourism_industry)



**Fig .7 Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge**  
Sellers in the monastery area  
(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:04 PM)



**Fig .8 Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge**  
Sellers in the monastery area  
(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:04 PM)



**Fig .9** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
Sellers in the monastery area(Taked by researcher )

### THE SOCIAL SEASON

Religious occasions play an important role in shaping and strengthening societal identities. They are moments when people come together to improve communication and bonding. These occasions provide an opportunity to reflect and consider religious values and teachings, which help to promote positive morals and behaviours. Furthermore, these events provide an opportunity to promote tolerance and understanding among members of society, whether they practise the same religion or come from different religious backgrounds. Individuals who participate in these events can overcome differences and foster a sense of unity and solidarity in society. These occasions are marked by deep values and a spirit dedicated to achieving understanding and peace in their social environment.<sup>30</sup>

The festival and camping season at the monastery allows everyone to break free from the constraints that encircle the world. During those seven days, a person returns to his natural state and achieves psychological and social balance. The celebrations are viewed as a sign of unity and harmony among

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<sup>30</sup> على ليلة ، النظرية الاجتماعية وقضايا المجتمع.: الكتاب الثالث، آليات التماسك الاجتماعي ، مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية ، 2015 ص133 ،

the people of Upper Egypt, northern Egypt, Muslims, and Christians, where tribe families gather and everyone enjoys joyous days with the blessings of the great martyr George of Deir Rizeigat. Offerings and vows are part of the celebration, as are hand-drawn crosses for children. Some young people also draw a picture of the saint on their shoulders.



**Fig .10** Luxor.Arment city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
Tattoo drawing for a visitor

(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:10 PM)



**Fig .11** Luxor.Arment city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
Tattoo drawing for a Baby

(source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:10 PM)



**Fig .12** Luxor.Armant city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge  
Tattoo drawing (taken by researcher )

## **FIELD STUDY**

### **INTERVIEWS INSIGHTS ABOUT THE COMMON THEMES OF THE SAINT GEORGE FESTIVAL IN AL-RIZIQAT NEAR ARMANT.**

To gain insights into the potential of marketing the St. George Festival, the researcher conducted 6 interviews with governmental representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and tourism information offices, alongside 10 interviews with travel agents and tourism managers. The findings are categorized under the following themes:

#### **1. Marketing Barriers**

- Lack of awareness: The festival's potential as a tourism attraction is largely unknown to both domestic and international audiences.

- Limited promotional efforts: Neither the Egyptian Tourism Promotion Authority nor major tour operators have prioritized this festival in their marketing strategies.

## **2. Cultural Sensitivity**

- Religious context: Stakeholders expressed concerns about balancing the sacredness of the event with the commercial aspects of tourism.
- Perceptions: Misinterpretations of the festival by international audiences may risk cultural misunderstandings.

## **3. Logistical Challenges**

- Infrastructure: Transportation and accommodation facilities in Al-Riziqat are insufficient to handle large-scale tourist inflows.
- Accessibility: The remote location poses logistical difficulties for seamless integration into existing Luxor-Aswan itineraries.

## **4. Opportunities for Integration**

- Complementary experiences: Stakeholders identified synergies with nearby attractions such as the temples of Armant and the cultural fabric of Luxor.
- Seasonal timing: The festival's timing coincides with Egypt's peak tourist season, offering an opportunity to enhance visitation rates.

## **FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS**

### **SWOT ANALYSIS**

#### **Strengths:**

- Unique cultural and religious significance.
- Potential for immersive, authentic experiences.
- Alignment with Egypt's broader cultural tourism objectives.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Insufficient infrastructure and accessibility.
- Limited stakeholder engagement.
- Risk of cultural insensitivity in marketing efforts.

### **Opportunities:**

- Growing global interest in niche cultural tourism.
- Potential partnerships with religious and cultural organizations.
- Opportunities to diversify Luxor's tourism portfolio beyond antiquities.

### **Threats:**

- Risk of over-commercialization affecting local acceptance.
- Competition from other established festivals in the region.
- Political or economic instability impacts tourism.

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ACTIONABLE Steps for Positioning**

#### **1. Enhance Infrastructure**

- Improve transportation links to Al-Riziqat.
- Develop eco-friendly and culturally respectful accommodation facilities.

#### **2. Develop Marketing Strategies**

- Create targeted campaigns emphasizing the festival's authenticity and communal spirit.
- Collaborate with religious and cultural institutions to ensure accurate representation.

#### **3. Engage Stakeholders**

- Facilitate workshops for Tour Guides, local authorities, tourism operators, and community leaders to align objectives.
- Encourage local businesses to participate, offering food, crafts, and guided experiences.

#### **4. Integrate into Itineraries**

- Combine festival visits with nearby attractions such as Medinet Habu and the Armant temples.
- Promote the festival as a key highlight during the peak tourism season.

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## **Potential Partnerships**

- Religious organizations such as the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- Cultural NGOs focusing on heritage preservation.
- International tour operators specializing in religious and cultural tourism.

## **THE DIFFICULTIES THAT THE RESEARCHER FACES**

Studying religious celebrations was one of the subjects that required a lot of effort, but I overcame it with the help of some religious men, to whom I owe a lot of information and rituals about this celebration.

The limited number of references that dealt with these topics

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## **WEB SITES**

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