

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

MOUNT SINAI AND THE MONASTERY OF ST. CATHERINE:
PLACE AND SPACE IN PILGRIMAGE ART

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ABSTRACT

Can a place, or its representation, ever be timeless? The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai is the oldest, continuously existing Eastern Orthodox community in the world. It has celebrated the Byzantine liturgy uninterrupted for centuries while the Sinai fathers have maintained their pursuit of prayer and solitude in the desert. For scholars and art historians, the monastery is justly famous for its ancient library and unrivalled collection of icons. The notion of timelessness has been asserted in the literature and scholarship on Sinai's history, as well as in the monastery's intentional construction of religious identity and its self-representation through visual, architectural, and material means. The accessibility of the past in the present is the central claim made by pilgrimage art. Paradoxically, it is through close examination of the experience and production of sacred place and visual identity at Sinai that we gain a better understanding of the changes and innovations actually necessary for the monastery's survival.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation begins with the formulation of a topographical landscape view representing Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine at the end of the sixteenth century. This image circulated in the form of painted devotional panels, usually part of a triptych, and in prints illustrating accounts of pilgrimage and travel in the Near East. Dependent upon Renaissance pictorial conventions and the developments of Early Modern cartography, the topographical landscape also incorporated earlier religious imagery depicting Sinai's sacred past. The combination of these visual modes created a new *loca sancta* image for the pilgrimage site that could reach multiple audiences and, by offering pictorial access to important figures and events from the monastery's history, became an icon of place. Previous scholars have focused on the iconographic origins of these images rather than their function. I argue for the significance of

their Early Modern context and, by addressing earlier stages of pilgrimage art at Sinai in reverse chronological sequence, hope to undo our expectations for a logical narrative invested in the forward progression of time. While I have selected case studies (and representative samples) based upon the compositional elements found in the sixteenth-century topographical image, namely the holy figures representing Sinai's past and the physical landscape with its commemorative topography of chapels and pathways connecting the monastery's *loca sancta*, each of the subsequent chapters also investigates a period of significant disruption (political, social, even religious in nature) for the monastery and the creative refashioning of its identity through visual and material means.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 analyze the roles of three primary patron saints – Moses, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush – at the Sinai monastery between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, especially as depicted in the monastery's corpus of Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons. Images of Moses before the Burning Bush and receiving the Tablets of the Law drew upon the program of sixth-century mosaics covering eastern wall of the monastery church. Like the mosaic scenes, these icon panels defined holy ground at Sinai in relation to theophanic vision; Moses remained the primary model for pilgrimage and for the experience of divine revelation. Although the monastery now bears her name, the cult of St. Catherine was only introduced at Sinai sometime between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The availability of her relics in the monastery church may have reflected the demands and devotional interest of an increasing number of Latin pilgrims during and after the Crusades. However, the monastic community quickly assimilated Catherine's tomb within its liturgical space and pilgrimage rituals, as well as adapting the veneration of her icon within a larger body of specifically Sinaitic saints. Representation of Mary as the Virgin of the Burning Bush (ἡ τῆς

βάτου) appeared at Sinai for the first time during this same period. Identified through the conflation of Mary's figure with the Burning Bush of Moses' theophany or by accompanying inscription, this new iconography gave visual form to the longstanding typological association between the Mother of God and Moses' vision, which was interpreted as a prefiguration of the Incarnation. Icons of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου frequently place Mary at the center of a Deesis-like composition, emphasizing the importance of her intercessory role on behalf of the monastery and pilgrimage site. They also present this new Marian image as a fulfillment of Old Testament events at Sinai, a manifestation of divine presence now made available through the icon.

Chapter 5 turns to the physical landscape and commemorative topography established at Sinai between the fourth and sixth centuries, when the church and monastery walls were built by Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-65). In this concluding chapter, the materiality of rock and stone provides the interpretive matrix for identifying Sinai's holy places. Commemorative chapels, physical landmarks, and connecting pathways were all means of shaping the surrounding desert terrain to match an authorizing scriptural narrative. Place could also serve as icon. Natural phenomena, such as dendritic patterns in the red granite at Sinai, were collected as relics and imprints of the Burning Bush. Pilgrims added their names and prayers to the Nabataean inscriptions that they read as examples of ancient Hebrew, mapping out the desert routes of the Israelites' journey in relation to their own. It is the physical landscape that finally anchors the experience of sacred place at Sinai, allowing past and present to coexist and reshaping each, even as it offers the illusion of permanence. We continue to write human history over the skin of the earth and create new topographies of meaning – a process to which this study contributes.

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INTRODUCTION

“[W]hen I raised my head... I blinked with astonishment. I stood in a miniature town with narrow paved streets, small courts, covered passages, and whitewashed buildings piled one on another. Outwardly, fourteen centuries had little altered St. Catherine’s. Seeing it was like glimpsing the vanished world of Byzantium.” – George H. Forsyth

“Having started with Sinai, we end with Sinai, the only holy site with an artistic history uninterrupted to the present day.” – Kurt Weitzmann

“It is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present... Space alone is stable enough to endure without growing old or losing any of its parts.” – Maurice Halbwachs

This dissertation investigates the illusion of timelessness presented in visual and material form through the art and architecture of the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, Egypt. The accessibility of a vanished yet venerable past has been promoted not only in the art and architecture constituting Sinai’s holy places, but also in the scholarship that has addressed the monastery’s history and identity as an important site of Christian pilgrimage. Two of the above quotes provide a sense of how this presumed continuity with the past at Sinai has been frequently articulated. George Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann were joint organizers of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions to the Sinai monastery between 1956-65, perhaps the most ambitious project formed with the intention of documenting Sinai’s art and architectural history.¹ While scholarly interest since the seventeenth century was largely driven by the quality and quantity of ancient manuscripts in the monastery library, eventually attention has turned with

¹ George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973); see also their contributions to *National Geographic* 125, no. 1 (January 1964): 82-127.

increased intensity to the religious artifacts preserved at Sinai – in particular, its icons.² In the last couple of decades, Sinai's icons have even served as ambassadors on behalf of the monastic community, traveling as part of international museum exhibitions in New York, St. Petersburg, London, Athens, and Los Angeles.³

The publication that first made the icons of Sinai available to the world outside the monastery's fortress walls was a two-volume catalog prepared by George and Maria Soteriou.⁴ The first volume of plates presented 238 icons dated between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries from the monastery's collection (comprised of over two thousand surviving panels) and appeared in 1956 – the same year that Forsyth and Weitzmann arrived at the Monastery of Saint Catherine seeking a location in the Eastern Mediterranean appropriate for archaeological fieldwork under the auspices of the University of Michigan. Sinai became the focus of an extensive collaboration between Michigan and Princeton, as well as the University of Alexandria, documenting over the course of five separate campaigns the entire corpus of representational arts and architecture

² Robert S. Nelson, "Sinai Studies: an Overview and an Introduction," in Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, *Cursor Mundi* 11 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 1-14.

³ Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom, ed., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, AD 843-1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997); Yuri Piatnitsky et al., *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century* (London: Saint Catherine Foundation; St. Petersburg: State Hermitage Museum, 2000); Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith & Power (1261-1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Anastasia Drandaki, ed., *Pilgrimage to Sinai: Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004); Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006); Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Byzantium, 330-1453* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008); and Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff, ed., *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th to 9th Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁴ Georgios A. and Maria Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sināi*, Collection de l'Institut Français d'Athènes 100, 102 (Athens: Institut français d'Athènes, 1956-58). See also Ioanna Christoforaki, "Paving the Road to Sinai: Georgios and Maria Soteriou on the Holy Mountain," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 15-33, who presents an overview of the Soterious' history in relation to Sinai and the impact of their scholarly contribution.

surviving at the monastery: illuminated manuscripts, icons, mosaics, frescos, and liturgical arts (including textiles and metalwork).⁵ While the schedule of planned publications never fully materialized, it was the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions that put the Sinai monastery on the map, so to speak, as a collection of critical importance for the history of art in Byzantium.

Kurt Weitzmann later described his encounter with the Sinai icons as a revelatory moment, one that redirected the course of his scholarly life with the force of a nearly prophetic calling. Having been encouraged by his friend and colleague Aziz Atiya to examine the icons on display in the Picture Gallery during their initial visit, Weitzmann was struck by the continuity these offered to the history of painting from the fifth century to modern times.⁶ But it was on the day before their departure that he was invited to see the Old Library, a space converted to storage and now, instead of manuscripts, filled with over 600 icons. As Weitzmann stated in his memoirs: “At that moment it became clear to me that, along with manuscripts and ivories, a good deal of my life would have to be devoted to icon painting.”⁷ And it was. Although Weitzmann only published the first volume of his anticipated catalogue representing the period between the sixth to the tenth centuries,⁸ he produced numerous articles based on his Sinai studies, especially focusing on Byzantine and Crusader icons of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹

⁵ For a detailed account of the expeditions, see Weitzmann’s reflections in *Sailing with Byzantium from Europe to America: The Memoirs of an Art Historian* (Munich: Editio Maris, 1994), 253-94.

⁶ “When I saw the collection in the room marked at its entrance ‘Picture Gallery’ in English, I had one of the greatest surprises of my life. Here were gathered icons from the fifth to the sixth century on, and nowhere else in the world is there such a wealth of icons dating before the twelfth century. Here one was faced with a collection that established a continuity from the fifth century without interruption to modern times.” Weitzmann, *Sailing with Byzantium*, 258.

⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁸ Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, vol. 1, *From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁹ Many of which were republished by Weitzmann in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982). See also his “Icon Programs of the 12th and

The unfortunate consequence of both the ambitious scope of Weitzmann's project and its delayed publication schedule in the years after the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions concluded was that the painstaking photographic documentation of the entire corpus of Sinai icons remained basically inaccessible to several generations of scholars.¹⁰ It was not until 1990 that a multi-authored volume edited by Konstantinos A. Manafis, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, finally presented a comprehensive overview of the architecture, mosaics, wall paintings, icons, liturgical arts, and manuscripts preserved at the Monastery of St. Catherine.¹¹ In a similar vein, the Saint Catherine Foundation published an edited volume in 1996, which included essays on the manuscripts and icons of the monastery, but which was more concerned with Sinai's history in its overall content.¹² There has been quite a number of publications addressing the historical and cultural significance of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai over the years ranging from more scholarly treatments such as those by Hyacinth Louis Rabino, Heinz Skrobucha, and Joseph Hobbs,¹³ to beautifully illustrated guides, like the slim photographic essay released by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in conjunction with the exhibition, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, or the more substantial volume by Corinna Rossi, *The*

13th Centuries at Sinai," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaialogikēs Hetaireias*, ser. 4, 12 (1984): 63-116.

¹⁰ Nelson, "Sinai Studies," 12-3.

¹¹ Thus maintaining the categories first proposed by Weitzmann. Nelson, "Sinai Studies," 13. See Manafis, ed., *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990).

¹² Oriana Baddeley and Earleen Brunner, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine* (London: Saint Catherine Foundation, 1996).

¹³ H. L. Rabino, *Le Monastère de Sainte-Catherine du Mont Sinai* (Cairo: Royal Automobile Club d'Égypte, 1938); Heinz Skrobucha, *Sinai* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); and Joseph J. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995). Others include Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: Macmillan Co., 1921); Konstantinos I. Amantos, *Syntomos historia tēs hieras Monēs tou Sina* (Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikōn Spoudōn, 1953); and Jill Kamil, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai: History and Guide* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1991).

Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, published in 2006.¹⁴ If all of the literature addressing Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine is taken into account, the existing bibliography is overwhelming.

The point that I wish to make by providing this abbreviated literature review, one focused on the art and architecture of the Sinai monastery, is to highlight the relatively recent exposure of the monastic community's artistic treasures to the outside world (this historiography is in many ways bound up with the technologies of reproduction – advances in photography and printing – that have made such publications possible). Not only has the collection of Sinai icons contributed to the history of Byzantine art, as anticipated by Weitzmann, but as the history of the icon has also developed within Byzantine studies, Sinai's collection has also drawn new interest and new questions.¹⁵ The recent undertaking by both the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University and the Department of the History of Art at the University of Michigan to digitize the

¹⁴ Helen C. Evans, *Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt: A Photographic Essay* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004) and Rossi, *The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Vercelli: White Star, 2006). See also Albert Champdor, *Le Mont Sinai et le Monastère Sainte-Catherine*, Hauts lieux de l'histoire 16 (Paris: A. Guillot, 1963); Evangelos Papaioannou, *The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai* (Sinai: St. Catherine's Monastery; Cairo: Isis, 1976); John Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985); and Athanasios D. Paliouras, *The Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai* (Sinai: St. Catherine's Monastery; Glyka Nera Attikis: E. Tzaferi, 1985).

¹⁵ Between the publication of Robin Cormack's first book, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and his second major publication, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), appeared Hans Belting's major opus, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); originally published as *Bild und Kult* (Munich: Oscar Beck, 1990). Belting's work alongside David Freedberg's *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) pushed art historical treatments of the Byzantine icon toward the affective nature of reception and response, a trend that has perhaps culminated in Bissera Pentcheva's publication, *The Sensual Icon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). A number of Robin Cormack's students have also published work that belongs to the so-called "London School of Looking." See examples in Antony Eastmond and Liz James, ed., *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium, Studies Presented to Robin Cormack* (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

photographic archives from the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions will open expanded avenues of research as the complete documentation of Sinai's artistic legacy finally becomes available to scholars not only in the United States but also across the globe.¹⁶

There is a distinct body of images associated with the monastery within the corpus of icons and other visual arts preserved at the Monastery of St. Catherine that Kurt Weitzmann and others have categorized as "pilgrimage art."¹⁷ These images usually represent the figures and events defining Sinai's sacred past, whether drawn from scriptural narrative in relation to Mount Sinai or from the early history of monasticism in the surrounding desert (depicting certain of its martyrs and ascetic exemplars).¹⁸ Sometimes the Sinai monastery is itself included within the pictorial frame.¹⁹ In their first catalog of the Sinai icons, the Soterious described these as specifically "Sinaitic" subjects. Weitzmann claimed that the essential features of such *loca sancta* pictures were the combined presence of figures representing a biblical event and either

¹⁶ Presented in the two-day conference, "A New Look: Sinai and Its Icons in Light of the Digitization of the Weitzmann Archive," April 17-18, 2015, held by the Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. For the conference schedule and a brief description of the initiative, see <http://www.princeton.edu/visualresources/sinai-and-its-icons/>.

¹⁷ Kurt Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 31-55. On the phenomenon of pilgrimage art in the Holy Land and Eastern Mediterranean more generally, see Gary Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, revised edition, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection publications 5 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010); first published as *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1982). For additional bibliography, see Brandie Ratliff, "To Travel to the Holy," in *Byzantium and Islam*, 86-8.

¹⁸ The most prominent of these holy figures and patrons of the Sinai monastery are Moses, St. Catherine, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush, identified by Weitzmann in "*Loca Sancta*," 53-4. See also Nelson, "Sinai Studies," 2.

¹⁹ The earliest examples of these scenes appear in the work of Cretan painters like El Greco and Georgios Klontzas, dating to the end of the sixteenth century. However, most of these survive outside the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai. It is not until the seventeenth century and later that the monastery seems to have acquired and collected these "topographical icons." See Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta*," 54-5; Nelson, "Sinai Studies," 2; and Cristina Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry of Domenikos Theotokopoulos's Sacred Landscapes of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 537-62.

architectural or landscape elements evoking the actual location of a pilgrimage site (the *locus sanctus*, or holy place).²⁰ *Loca sancta* images might be produced in a variety of artistic media, although for Weitzmann, the icon was the preferred and foremost pilgrimage souvenir.

There has been a significant number of other scholars who have commented on and further developed the notion of a distinctive visual culture maintained at Sinai, as well as the impact of the monastery's art and architecture upon visiting pilgrims and their experience of a sacred landscape; these will be acknowledged individually in the subsequent chapters. I have emphasized Weitzmann's work here because it set the stage for so much of what followed, including my own contribution. The three moments that I have chosen to focus on in the history of the Sinai monastery and their characteristic forms of artistic production were outlined in Weitzmann's seminal article, "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine." Beginning with the patronage of Justinian at Sinai in the 6th century and concluding with the pictorial emphasis upon a range of site-specific themes as found in the Sinai icons from the medieval period and later, Weitzmann performed a rhetorical claim for the same temporal continuity that he was seeking in the storehouse of surviving panels from the monastery by offering Sinai as a site of access, an unbroken link, to the desired past (more specifically, to the arts of antiquity as preserved in Early Christian images and monuments).²¹

The conflation of past and present operating within Christian pilgrimage art is based upon the same "illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present"

²⁰ Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta*," 39, 55.

²¹ Sinai thus provided the starting point and the conclusion framing a discussion of other Holy Land pilgrimage sites and, more particularly, the development of Early Christian iconography that likewise conflated past and present in representing events from the life of Christ.

that Halbwachs attributed to the spatial image.²² In the following analysis, I hope to undo the trajectory of inevitability and temporal collapse offered in the visual rhetoric of Sinai's *loca sancta* images in order to better understand the historical contexts that informed these distinctive moments of artistic production associated with the Monastery of St. Catherine. Each period discussed in the subsequent chapters faced significant changes taking place with regards to the pilgrimage audience and patronage available to the Sinai monastery, as well as the means by which Sinai's identity in relation to its holy places was asserted. The monastery's successful re-invention of its status and importance as a site of Christian pilgrimage has frequently elided the constructed nature of this venerable history and its representation through specific visual media and forms of material culture.²³

In order to more closely examine the visual rhetoric forming (and informing) Sinai's sacred past, I have chosen three specific moments of pilgrimage art produced at or for the Monastery of Saint Catherine, which range from the sixth through the sixteenth centuries. However, the material presented in my dissertation works backwards in terms of chronology. In this way, I wish to emphasize the role of collective and institutional memory at Sinai, as well as destabilizing our methodological assumptions about the priority of iconographic origins. My first

²² Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 157.

²³ In other words, the technologies at hand for producing sacred space. Described as such by Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 37-71, esp. 43. Robin Cormack offered a similar definition in his essay, "Sinai: The Construction of a Sacred Landscape," in *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Yuri Piatnitsky (London: Saint Catherine Foundation in association with The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, 2000), 40-45. However, after providing a survey of known artists and patrons from among the works of art surviving at the Sinai monastery (from Justinian's church to specific manuscripts and icons), he does little to reconnect these artifacts with the experience of participation in a sacred landscape. In contrast, see the approach to this material by Simon Coleman and Jaś Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73-89.

chapter is situated at the end of the sixteenth century, when the formulation of a topographical landscape view of the Sinai monastery established the primary *loca sancta* image for the pilgrimage site and its holy places, one still in use today. This landscape view depended upon Renaissance pictorial conventions and the developments of Early Modern cartography, but also incorporated earlier religious imagery depicting Sinai's sacred past. I then turn to the corpus of Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons at the Sinai monastery, focusing on images of Moses, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush in chapters 2-4. Each of these holy figures embodied a different aspect of Sinai's history. The development of their cult intersected with changing pilgrimage ritual and devotional practices, and their pictorial manifestation provided a new means of defining sacred place.

Finally, I examine the physical topography and commemorative landscape established through the patterns of monastic settlement and Early Christian pilgrimage. The network of chapels and pathways connecting Sinai's holy places was firmly consolidated when Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-65) built the monastery's main pilgrimage churches and defensive walls. In this concluding chapter, I also address the materiality of rock and stone through examples of physical impressions and naturally occurring forms that were reinterpreted as divinely created relics. At Sinai, place itself became icon. Commemorative chapels, landmarks, and pathways connecting holy sites were all means of shaping the surrounding desert terrain to match an authorizing scriptural narrative. The built environment framed the later installation and display of Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons and was a consistent element in the 16th-century topographical images of Sinai, where landscape anchored the persons and events of the sacred past, making them available to the viewer once again within the here and now.

CHAPTER 1

The Spatial Image: Topographical Prints and Icons of the 16th Century

At the end of the 16th century, a new image promoting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine as an important site of Christian pilgrimage began to circulate in the form of painted devotional panels and printed illustrations, often accompanying accounts of travel to the Near East. It offered visual and devotional access to Sinai and its *loca sancta*, functioning as a souvenir of pilgrimage for those who had visited the monastery, but also providing a form of virtual pilgrimage and veneration for those who might never reach the distant site in person. By combining a topographical landscape view with figures and events from Sinai's sacred past, both prints and icons worked to collapse temporal distance, bringing together past and present within the pictorial frame. The represented landscape provided a visual substitute for pilgrimage experience, successfully combining the descriptive modes of Early Modern cartography and the Renaissance landscape with the established tradition of Byzantine icons in Sinai's visual culture. This new topographical image of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine effectively became an icon of place. Adapted across a range of artistic media, it persisted as the primary *loca sancta* image for the pilgrimage site into the 19th and 20th centuries and is still in use today.

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the surviving corpus of early examples, focusing on nine panels attributed to the Cretan school of post-Byzantine painting and roughly contemporary with one another. Most were part of expanded visual and devotional programs found on portable triptychs, although two were produced as independent landscape views. I will

begin with an introduction to the main components of the new Sinai iconography, utilizing what has become the best-known image within the surviving corpus – the View of Mount Sinai painted by Domenikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco) on the reverse of his Modena triptych. El Greco's work is widely published, which allows for an overview of the historiography and a discussion of methodological issues found in previous scholarship. I then return to the entire group of painted panels from the Cretan School. While most scholars have focused on identifying the new Sinai iconography to the exclusion of its context, my treatment of the following material offers the first interpretation of these topographical landscape images that takes into account both their material and ideological contexts.

The main body of this chapter, therefore, presents each surviving Sinai landscape view alongside the scenes that accompany it. I address the role of the topographical image within a larger visual program, as well as significant aspects of its placement and material characteristics as part of an unfolding sequence of panels. Each triptych constructs a unique physical setting for its depicted content, with successive stages of concealment and revelation determined by the arrangement of its individual parts. Most fascinating is the consistent use of the Sinai landscape as a framing device for the triptych's program as a whole. Frequently, the View of Mount Sinai appears on the front or reverse of the closed polyptych, thus offering a point of entry and interpretive basis for the entire viewing experience. This position also reinforces Sinai's importance as a pilgrimage site within a much broader temporal schema of Christian salvation history, from the events of a biblical past to the anticipated return of Christ (scenes of the Last Judgment appear as a reprised theme at the heart of the opened triptychs).

In order to better understand the early modern context and diverse audiences reached by the topographical landscape view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine, I conclude

by addressing the synthesis it achieved in bridging two distinct visual modes. By drawing upon the formative role of printed maps and topographical city views for conveying knowledge and experience regarding distant places in the illustration of travel narratives from the Holy Lands and Near East, I believe we gain further insight into not only iconographical motifs/sources for the new Sinai imagery but also its potential function, use, and meaning. The authority of this descriptive mode was pursued on varying levels of specificity (from the local to the global or, in Ptolemy's terms, from the chorographic to the geographic) and placed the Sinai landscape within a recognized genre for the ongoing age of discovery/exploration. It should be viewed alongside contemporary collections of topographical views that filled atlases like Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* or the panoramic prints of cities like Venice or Jerusalem that were published and circulated independently, as well as the body of known illustrations accompanying pilgrimage accounts from the early modern period.

Just as essential for the production of Sinai's new *loca sancta* image was the long-standing tradition of pilgrimage art cultivated and maintained at the site. In particular, the collection of Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons demonstrate the growing prominence of certain of the monastery's patron saints, including Moses, St. Catherine, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush – the very same figures depicted in the topographical view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine at the end of the 16th century. Subsequent chapters will further elaborate on this localized pictorial tradition; here I simply wish to acknowledge the contribution of Sinai's own visual culture to the development of a landscape image that would come to dominate its self-representation in the post-medieval period. The most important difference between the earlier collection of pilgrimage art at Sinai and the topographical landscape view was that the latter could circulate far beyond the monastery walls while still effectively

conveying the identity and sanctity of a specific location. The Sinai landscape did not have to be viewed *at* Sinai in order to mediate veneration of its holy places or to bring the figures and events of its sacred history into the time or space inhabited by a now expanded audience.

El Greco's View of Mount Sinai

The Modena triptych is a small portable altarpiece consisting of a central panel with a carved and gilded frame and two folding wings attached at its sides (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). When closed, the outer face of the left wing displays an image of God confronting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The triptych opens to reveal a series of events in the life of Christ, from the Annunciation and Nativity (shown on the outer face of the right wing and the inner face of the left wing respectively) to the Baptism (on the inner face of the right wing). The central panel displays the scene of Christ crowning the Christian knight with iconographic elements of a Last Judgment. It is the reverse of this central panel (Figure 1.1), and the verso of the entire triptych when closed, that holds the Sinai landscape – a scene of barren desert and rugged mountain terrain that covers the entirety of the panel's surface, including the projecting foot and finial of the carved frame.

El Greco's View of Mount Sinai is the only scene within the triptych's visual program that carries an individual titulus. The pilgrimage site is identified in yellow majuscule letters placed across the widest portion of the top of the panel: TO AΓION KAI ΘΕΟΒΑΔΙΣΤΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΣΙΝΕΟΝ ("The Holy and God-trodden Mount Sinai"). The artist's signature appears in the lower right-hand corner, just above a caravan of travellers being welcomed by some of the

Sinai fathers.¹ Another group of pilgrims approaches from the far left. Both groups direct our attention to the monastery nestled at the base of the central mountain and its rugged peak, which dominates the tripartite range shown within the narrow pictorial field. Dark clouds gather at Sinai's summit where the figure of Moses reaches upward to receive the Tablets of the Law from the hand of God. A torrent of light also emerges from the rift, spilling out and anointing the mountaintop. The Monastery of St. Catherine is nestled at the foot of the mountain, shown from a raised bird's-eye perspective and illumined by a long shaft of light that falls from the left-hand side of the panel (faintly echoing the golden river that surrounds Moses and indicating the site of his earlier theophany before the Burning Bush).

The slightly elevated viewpoint allows one to look down upon the collection of buildings within the monastery walls, including the prominent roofline of Justinian's 6th-century church. Other chapels and the walled enclosures of monastic dependencies are scattered across the rocky landscape. The Path of Steps ascending Mount Sinai is clearly indicated by a series of parallel white lines, and helps to draw our eyes back up toward its summit. Behind the figure of Moses, another tableau is enacted on a neighboring peak where two angels stand guard over the body of St. Catherine. Her miraculous burial and transportation from the site of her martyrdom in Alexandria to Mount Sinai were recounted in Catherine's vita, a text dating back to the 7th or 8th century. Recognition of her cult and physical access to the saint's relics at Sinai did not develop until much later, however. By the beginning of the 13th century, pilgrims could venerate her

¹ XEIP ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ, or "by the hand of Domenikos." The formula was commonly used among Cretan painters and can be found on several of El Greco's early works.

tomb within the sanctuary of the monastery church. Catherine's popularity at Sinai, especially among its Latin visitors, eventually led to the adoption of her name by the monastery.²

What I have highlighted in this extended verbal description are the primary components of the new topographical image depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine that began to circulate in painted panels and prints at the end of the 16th century. Important figures and events from the monastery's past occupy the same landscape inhabited by the contemporary pilgrims, monks and Bedouin shown in the foreground. It is the built environment – the Monastery of St. Catherine, its chapels and dependencies, and established routes such as the Path of Steps leading up Mount Sinai – that mediates between the world familiar to a 16th-century viewer and that of Sinai's sacred history, while the landscape serves both to anchor the temporal conflation of past and present and to offer ongoing access to its *loca sancta*. As suggested in the panel's inscription, the very rocks and stones at Sinai have been transformed, marked by divine presence and set apart as holy ground. In my analysis, I argue that the following four elements become essential components within Sinai's new topographical image and effectively create icons of place: 1) holy figures from Sinai's past, 2) figures identified with the viewer's present (whether in the sixteenth century or later), 3) the monastery and other commemorative architecture such as chapels, paths and constructed landmarks, and 4) the depicted landscape. Each can be found and identified in surviving examples of the Sinai landscape, even as the amount of narrative detail might be expanded or reduced depending upon available pictorial space and/or the stylistic preferences of individual artists.

² While pilgrims frequently used her name to refer to the monastery, the monastery did not accept the appellation until the beginning of the sixteenth century. The first official use of this new title occurs in correspondence between the Sinai monastery and the papacy in 1517. Georg Hofmann, "Sinai und Rom," *Orientalia Christiana* 9, no. 3 (1927): 218-99, esp. 270.

The four visual components of the Sinai landscape that I have identified elaborate upon the basic definition of *loca sancta* pictures provided by Kurt Weitzmann in his seminal article, “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine.” According to Weitzmann, such images combine the representation of biblical events with some form of “topographical detail” – architectural or structural elements – that serve to identify a functioning holy site.³ Although he concluded his study with several post-Byzantine examples of the topographical landscape view depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine, Weitzmann’s primary models were Early Christian images from the life of Christ, such as the Nativity or the Women at the Tomb (cf. Figure 1.4).⁴ Beate Fricke has recently argued that the role of narrative scenes associated with holy places in and around Jerusalem coincided with the emphasis upon pilgrims’ visionary experience at these sites.⁵ Small-scale pilgrimage art demonstrates the same increase in narrative cycles found in other media, including monumental church decoration, around the year AD 600. Echoing contemporary concerns about the immediacy of Christ’s presence in the liturgy and eschatological time, images depicting events from the Life of Christ embedded the beholder within the place and time of events that might otherwise seem increasingly distant, either geographically or temporally.⁶

³ Kurt Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 31-55, esp. 39, 55.

⁴ Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*,” 36-39 (on the Nativity) and 41-42 (on the Women at the Tomb).

⁵ Beate Fricke, “Tales from Stones, Travels through Time: Narrative and Vision in the Casket from the Vatican,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 21, no. 2 (2014): 230-50.

⁶ Images and material relics thus serve as prompts to memory and/or pious meditation, as well as offering proof of a one-time historical event. Ibid., 237. Fricke’s argument for the creation of presence through absence is structured in response to the various levels of representation encoded in the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary box discussed by Weitzmann. See also Derek Krueger, “Liturgical Time and Holy Land Reliquaries in Early Byzantium,” in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Cynthia Hahn and Holger Klein (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015), 111-31.

These examples from Palestinian *loca sancta* provide an inverse visual relationship in comparison with our Sinai iconography, however, if we distinguish between the way a site of Christian commemoration is represented and the role of figures and events drawn from scriptural narrative. In Early Christian art the narrative clearly takes precedence, with only minimal attention given to one or two significant elements that might suggest a specific location – the altar from the sanctuary at Bethlehem represented within the scene of Christ’s birth, for example, or the Women at the Tomb shown approaching the aedicule enshrined within Constantine’s Anastasis Rotunda.⁷ By contrast, the topographical images of Sinai from the late 16th century focus on physical characteristics of the site itself – mountains, desert terrain, the monastery walls, chapels, and pathways. The figures and events of Sinai’s sacred past have become anecdotal details within the landscape, helping to identify locations and their significance for the viewer and/or pilgrims to the holy sites commemorated there. They serve as attributes of place rather than providing the primary visual message.

When Weitzmann concluded his article on *loca sancta* and the arts of Palestine, he returned to Sinaitic imagery as evidence for “a continuous artistic history” among the monastery’s rich store of icons.⁸ Sinai offered a tantalizing glimpse of lost treasures from other religious sites and centers of cultural production.⁹ Although the examples of *loca sancta* pictures that Weitzmann identified at Sinai remain representative as the point of departure for this dissertation, I aim to undo the teleological certainty of Weitzmann’s methodology. Rather than presume an unbroken chain of continuity making the artistic legacy of the past accessible

⁷ See note 4 above.

⁸ Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*,” 52, 55.

⁹ For a critique of his approach to the collection of icons at Sinai, see the essay by Paroma Chatterjee, “Archive and Atelier: Sinai and the Case of the Narrative Icon,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. Sharon E.J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 319-44.

through Sinai's icons, I approach each manifestation of new *loca sancta* imagery as a visual re-invention of the monastery's identity. Changes in content, as well as artistic medium and style, between the sixth century and the sixteenth, demand that we consider significant shifts in audience and function for Sinai's pilgrimage art. The production and reception of such images reflect new concerns regarding the status and survival of the monastic community. They indicate moments of rupture in the monastery's history as opposed to sameness.

Yet what each of these moments share is the illusion of continuity posited between Sinai's past and its present. In this way, the topographical landscape painted by El Greco is not so different from the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary box, with its compressed sequence of narrative, symbolic and material forms of representation (Figure 1.4).¹⁰ Both seek to make what is absent present through what Fricke calls "an assemblage of temporal and virtual realities."¹¹ The focus of my analysis here (and for the *loca sancta* imagery addressed in subsequent chapters) is on *how* this illusion of temporal continuity is achieved. By examining the visual strategies employed to mask actual differences of time and place in Sinai's pilgrimage art, we can gain a better appreciation for the immediate context of its production and use. Beginning with the topographical prints and icons of the late sixteenth century, this chapter opens a window onto the "persistence of the material" that offered a recurring motif in Maurice Halbwach's essay on Christian topography in the Holy Land.¹² Following this chapter, I pursue an art historical excavation of sorts – moving backwards in time to address surviving examples of Sinai's

¹⁰ Most recently exhibited in Martina Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), no. 13.

¹¹ Fricke, "Tales from Stones, Travels through Time," 246.

¹² Physical sites, buildings (or their ruins), and material form are only just indicated as an integral part of the "systems of localization" utilized in different periods to create otherwise conceptual or imagined topographies. See Maurice Halbwachs, "II. The Legendary topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land," in *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 193-235, esp. 204, 224-5, and 230-35.

pilgrimage art by following a reverse chronology from that of their first production and use. I hope that acknowledging the successive nature of each reinvention of pilgrimage identity and sacred place, as well as our own temporal position in approaching the history of Sinai's visual and material culture, may aid in distinguishing some of the layers of intended meaning, reception and reinterpretation among the many long afterlives of the monastery's *loca sancta* imagery.

Print vs. Icon/Icon vs. Print

A number of significant contributions have followed Kurt Weitzmann's essay on "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine" – some specifically addressing El Greco's View of Mount Sinai from the Modena Triptych (Figures 1.1 and 1.2), others exploring the iconography and development of the Sinai topographical landscape more generally. The most systematic and comprehensive in approach was an article published by Gustav Kühnel in 1981, "Die »Ikone des Sinai-Klosters« und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen."¹³ Kühnel opens with several examples of what he terms the "Sinai-Icon," including El Greco's views of Mount Sinai depicted on the reverse of the Modena triptych and on a panel now in Heraklion (see Figure 1.5). While he acknowledges a handful of painted panels from the collection of icons at the Monastery of St. Catherine (mostly post-Byzantine), the focus of Kühnel's argument is the importance of Byzantine icon tradition as the primary visual source for printed illustrations of the Sinai monastery that appear in travel literature and pilgrimage accounts from the end of the 16th century through the modern period. Kühnel identified the main components of the image as the bird's-eye view of the monastery and its landscape (with or without scenes from the Life of Moses and other local details relating Sinai's sacred history). He then turns to cartographic

¹³ Gustav Kühnel, "Die »Ikone des Sinai-Klosters« und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen," *Oriens Christianus*, ser. 4 29 (1981): 163-218.

emblems as another point of origin for the distinctive pilgrimage iconography. He concludes, however, that the representation of a church or basilica on Mount Sinai as shown in maps of the 14th and 15th centuries remains schematic and serves as simply a conventional cartographic symbol rather than a specific topographical indication of place as found in the *loca sancta* imagery of the later 16th century.

Scholars have continued to debate whether the landscape view of Mount Sinai derived primarily from the tradition of Byzantine icon painting at the monastery or from the influence of Western prints and cartographic practices. Christa Gardner von Teuffel and Maria Vassilaki provided two different points of view in their contributions to *El Greco of Crete*, a publication of papers from an international symposium held on the 450th anniversary of El Greco's birth.¹⁴ Gardner von Teuffel focused her discussion on an engraving by Giovanni Battista Fontana (Figure 1.6), arguing for its priority in the development of the Sinai iconography on the basis of her investigation of the publisher's cartouche and dedicatory inscription. Vassilaki presented an expanded set of comparanda for El Greco's Modena triptych and his View of Mount Sinai on the independent panel in Heraklion, all of which originate in the Cretan school of painting from the second half of the 16th century. This group of examples contemporary to El Greco's work that also represent the Sinai landscape will be discussed in greater detail in what follows.

Vassilaki has continued to argue for the development of the Sinai topographical landscape within the context of post-Byzantine icon painting on Crete, even going so far as to attribute production of the Modena triptych to El Greco's Cretan period before his move to

¹⁴ Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "El Greco's View of Mount Sinai as Independent Landscape," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings of the International Symposium held on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the artist's birth*, ed. Nicos Hadjinicolaou (Heraklion: Municipality of Heraklion, 1995), 161-72 and Maria Vassilaki, "Three Questions on the Modena Triptych," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 119-32.

Venice in 1567/8.¹⁵ Similarly, Cristina Stancioiu has suggested that View of Mount Sinai found in examples of Cretan painting influenced Fontana's composition rather than the other way around. "It is probable that the Modena panel and other Cretan paintings of Sinai followed the same model, and that this model is to be sought first in post-Byzantine Crete, and then in Europe."¹⁶ Of more than twenty accounts of travel in the Near East published in the 16th century, only five of these include an illustration of the Sinai monastery.¹⁷ Stancioiu uses this point to downplay the importance of printed pilgrimage illustrations in the initial formulation of Sinai's topographical landscape image. She also contrasts the pictorial variety found in European prints with the consistent iconography followed by Cretan painters in how they depicted the Sinai monastery and its surrounding landscape.¹⁸

¹⁵ A claim reasserted and further developed in her joint publications with Robin Cormack on the Heraklion "Baptism of Christ," a single panel that once was part of a triptych quite similar in program to that in the Galleria Estense, Modena. See note 31 below. On the other hand, Andrew Casper maintains that the Modena triptych bears the stamp of El Greco's move to Venice and first-hand experience of/exposure to the style and working methods of artists there. I agree. See Andrew R. Casper, *Art and the Religious Image in El Greco's Italy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 43-56.

¹⁶ Cristina Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry of Domenikos Theotokopoulos' Sacred Landscapes of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 553, 560-62.

¹⁷ Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry," 537-8. She brings one additional topographical view into consideration alongside those previously discussed by Kühnel, Gardner von Teuffel, Vassilaki and others. This appears in the travel account of Hans Jacob Breüning (1579) and is another example clearly related to the print issued in 1569 by Giovanni Battista Fontana. See Breüning von Buchenbach, *Orientalische reyss dess edlen vnnd besten Hanss Jacob Breüning von vnd zu Buochenbach, so er selb ander in der Turkey, vnter dess türckischen sultans iurisdiction vnd gebiet, sowol in Europa als Asia vnnd Africa... benantlich in Griechenland, Egypten, Arabien, Palestina, das Heylige Gelobte Land vnd Syrien...* (Strassburg, 1612); Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry," 544-6, fig. 174.

¹⁸ Arguing that the Sinai landscape derives from Byzantine icons of the Transfiguration. Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry," 55-60; see also idem, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos/El Greco's landscapes of Mount Sinai – between Byzantium and the Renaissance" (master's thesis, Southern Methodist University, 2003).

This iconographic diversity had been acknowledged earlier by Gustav Kühnel, however, who emphasized the didactic and secularizing character of the pilgrimage illustrations in contrast with the affinity for localized, narrative details as found within the “Sinai-Icon” proper.¹⁹ While Kühnel similarly privileged the Eastern icon tradition as the supposed source for the *loca sancta* image that appeared in both prints and icons of the late 16th century, his conclusions remain ambiguous and (sometimes) contradictory.²⁰ He points out the long history of pilgrimage literature and its characteristic intertextuality (providing “the formal and thematic frame” for pilgrimage illustrations of the Sinai monastery), as well as the frequent practice of illustrating such travel reports.²¹ It is my contention that the production of topographical icons depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine should be seen in tandem with the phenomenon of newly printed imagery rather than in competition with it.

The first printed and illustrated pilgrimage account was Bernhard von Breydenbach’s *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam* (Mainz, 1486). Breydenbach’s publication was incredibly popular and was quickly translated into several languages,²² but it also posited a significant eyewitness role for the illustrations that accompanied it.²³ Like the nearly contemporary atlas published by Hartmann Schedel, the *Weltchronik* (Nuremburg, 1493), Breydenbach’s travel

¹⁹ Kühnel, “Die »Ikone des Sinai-Klosters«,” 184-8, 200.

²⁰ Most of Kühnel’s examples of the supposed icon tradition post-date the earliest of the printed images (such as those published by Christoph Führer von Haimendorf, Waltersweil, or Fontana). Yet, he consistently attributes the features of the composition to Eastern sources – e.g., “Eine sehr interessante Ausnahme bildet die Sinai-Illustration des Veroneser Baptista Fontana, der die östliche Ikonentradition vollständig übernommen hat...” Kühnel, “Die »Ikone des Sinai-Klosters«,” 177.

²¹ Kühnel, “Die »Ikone des Sinai-Klosters«,” 183.

²² Including versions in Latin, German and Flemish produced by Erhard Reuwich, who served as draftsman and printer for Breydenbach. Tony Campbell, *The Earliest Printed Maps, 1472-1500* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 93-4.

²³ See Elizabeth Ross, *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book: Breydenbach’s Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

account provided a number of topographical city views for significant stops along his pilgrimage route.²⁴ These were drawn by Erhard Reuwich, printer and draftsman for the cathedral canon of Mainz, who traveled with him. Reuwich includes Mount Sinai in the upper right-hand corner of his panoramic view of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The detail in Figure 1.33 shows the Monastery of St. Catherine tucked away inside a clustered mass of rocky peaks. Several other chapels and landmarks are indicated, such as the tomb of St. Catherine on the top of Mount Sinai. While the labeled sites correspond to some of the primary *loca sancta* also included in Fontana's print, there is little to suggest pictorial dependence of the later topographical images of Sinai upon Reuwich's illustration (cf. Figures 1.31 and 1.32). Rather, the topographical city views found in Breydenbach's pilgrimage account represent a new way of seeing and describing the world applied to the sacred places of Christian history.

In what follows, I argue that the view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine published by Giovanni Battista Fontana and painted by El Greco, Georgios Klontzas, and at least two anonymous Cretan artists, did not emerge from a single artistic tradition to the exclusion of the other (East or West). Rather, it offered a creative synthesis of both. Descriptive modes of mapping and the God's-eye perspective claimed by the Renaissance landscape combined with an already self-conscious use of landscape as a marker of holy places associated with the Prophet Moses in icons used and produced by the Monastery of St. Catherine. What we see happening in the last quarter of the sixteenth century is something brand new. It takes off as a successful pilgrimage image in painted panels, printed form, and other media because of the way in which

²⁴ Illustrations included views of Jerusalem, Iraklion (Candia), Modoni, Rhodes, Venice, Corfu, and Parenzo. The four initial images were printed on folding plates – a first among printed books of the period. Campbell, *The Earliest Printed Maps*, 93.

this blended iconography met the needs of an expanded audience for Sinai's message in the early modern period. It is still used to promote and represent the monastery today.

The Sinai Landscape in Context: An Expanded Iconographic Program

At this point, let us return to El Greco's treatment of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine on the reverse of the Modena triptych, first addressing the Sinai landscape within the context of this small devotional work and then looking at other triptych programs that include the new topographical image for comparison with its themes and possible function as part of an expanded iconographical program. Regardless of whether the Modena triptych was executed while Domenikos Theotokopoulos was still living and working in Crete or whether it was produced in Venice, its format, small size, and diverse subject matter all coincide with devotional works made by other Cretan artists. The carved and gilded frame of the triptych (Fig. 1.3) is typically Cretan; it imitates the elaborate structure of Venetian altarpieces from a century earlier (the production of such carved frames was adapted by Cretan workshops and continued long after Venetian artists abandoned them).²⁵ The position of El Greco's View of Mount Sinai on the reverse of the central panel helps to elide image and frame in some very interesting ways. Unlike the geometrically regular shape of the other narrative panels, the View of Sinai extends to cover the entire back of the triptych (see Figure 1.1). The pilgrims and travellers shown arriving in the foreground of the image move along the triptych's horizontal base, while the narrow summit of Mount Sinai and the rounded peaks on either side of the central mountain echo the pointed finial and carved contours from the top of the frame.

²⁵ Sergio Bettini, "Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos sgrafos," *Arte Veneta* 32 (1978): 244-6.

The position and significance of the Sinai panel is rarely discussed within the context of the entire visual program of the Modena triptych. This is true of all surviving examples of the 16th-century topographical image – previous scholarship has focused on the iconography of the new Sinai landscape to the exclusion of its immediate context, thus isolating the image from possible clues as to its potential role and function as one component within an entire program accompanying a small-scale, portable devotional ensemble. Published reproductions of the Sinai topographical icons have likewise isolated each example for the sake of iconographic comparisons and because of a scholarly emphasis on discovering and identifying visual sources for the image. In the following discussion, I want to broaden our understanding of the landscape view of Mount Sinai that developed in the late 16th century by taking into proper consideration its original program of images, accompanying themes, and interpretive context. These largely consist of biblical scenes also seen in major feast-day icons from the life of Christ and more elaborate allegorical compositions that became popular in post-Byzantine painting.

Having already introduced El Greco's View of Mount Sinai on the reverse of the Modena triptych, I begin my analysis with a reconsideration of the Sinai topographical landscape from this work in relation to the entire triptych. I then turn to several anonymous examples produced within the Cretan school of painting around the same time as El Greco's panels, dating sometime in the last decades of the 16th century. These include a group of panels from a disassembled triptych now in the Yale University Art Gallery whose Sinaitic imagery was only recently discovered and identified as such.²⁶ My dissertation offers the first extended discussion of these panels in relation to previously published examples. The two final examples that make up the

²⁶ My thanks to Professor Robert S. Nelson for alerting me to the presence of these panels at Yale, and to Daniel Ledford, who has generously shared his research findings based on his discovery and identification of their content. I was able to examine the panels in October 2015 and am pleased to include them in this newly expanded corpus of Sinai topographical icons.

small corpus of Cretan triptychs depicting the landscape view of Mount Sinai can be attributed to Georgios Klontzas, a colleague and contemporary of El Greco. This chapter concludes with a reconsideration of the meaning and function of the Sinai topographical landscape as understood within its immediate context – from the intermingling of styles, iconography and content in painting practices that characterized artistic production on Venetian Crete to a recognition of the expanded pilgrimage audience for the Sinai monastery being sought across Christian Europe in the Early Modern period, one which responded in particular to new forms of pictorial description and visual authority as found in topographical city views and maps. By combining figures and events drawn from a longstanding tradition of pilgrimage art at the Sinai monastery with the 16th-century topographical landscape view of Mount Sinai, the resulting *loca sancta* image became an icon *of place*, effectively situating the monastery and its sacred history within the recognizable terrain of the present.

The Modena Triptych, Reconsidered

The scene of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine painted by El Greco on the reverse of his Modena triptych and introduced at the beginning of this chapter is probably the best-known example of the topographical landscape view under discussion here. Certainly, it has been the most widely published and exhibited. This alone might be reason enough to open my analysis with the same. However, El Greco's work also provides an exemplary case because its own history of scholarship maps the kind of debate outlined above. The place of the triptych within El Greco's oeuvre and the trajectory of his career as he moved from Crete to Venice, then to Rome, and finally from Italy to Spain, has been argued based on considerations of style and

influence similar to the iconographical concerns that have dominated scholarship on the topographical landscape image of Mount Sinai.

The Modena triptych is a transitional work – in part memento to Domenikos’ training in and mastery of Byzantine iconography and devotional imagery, yet also staking a virtuoso claim for its author as equal in invention and painterly skill to the most current Renaissance artists. Scholars still disagree whether or not it should be assigned to El Greco’s Venetian period (1567/8 – 1570), or prior to his arrival in the Serenissima Repubblica. Again, this debate is not one I anticipate resolving in what follows. What this range of dates does provide, even with the degree of uncertainty remaining, is the most definitive attribution for any of the surviving examples of our Sinai iconography from among the Cretan school of painting. Because these dates coincide with the earliest printed examples of the same topographical view depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine, they also point toward a shared impetus for the creation and distribution of a new *locus sanctus* image. Prints and icons need to receive equal consideration in terms of their reception and shared modes of viewing rather than privileging one medium over another in the often futile search for source vs. copy. I hope that the analysis offered below is a positive step in that direction.

The Modena Triptych was discovered accidentally in 1937 as Rodolfo Pallucchini, director of the Galleria Estense in Modena, Italy, prepared a catalog of the gallery’s paintings. Pallucchini found the small-scale, multi-panel work tucked away in a cupboard.²⁷ Recognition of the triptych was mixed; although it was part of an international exhibition of El Greco’s work held in Paris that same year, its attribution was not accepted across the board. At least one major

²⁷ Maria Vassilaki, “4. The Modena Triptych,” in *El Greco of Crete: Exhibition on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of his birth*, ed. Nicos Hadjinicolaou (Heraklion: Municipality of Heraklion, 1990), 337-49.

scholar questioned its place in El Greco's oeuvre.²⁸ As more examples of El Greco's early work have been discovered, however, the Modena Triptych has become an established representative of the artist's transitional period. Only a few surviving works have been linked to his artistic production while he still lived and worked on Crete. Two belong to the collection of the Benaki Museum in Athens – St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child (Figure 1.7) and The Adoration of the Magi – and were acquired in the 1930s.²⁹ Another, representing the Dormition of the Virgin, was discovered in the Church of the Dormition at Ermoupoli, Syros, in 1983.³⁰

The transitional position occupied by the Modena triptych has been further reinforced by the discovery of two panels sold at auction and acquired by different museums that closely replicate the composition of scenes on its outer wings – an Adoration of the Shepherds now in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (inv. 34-011) of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario and a Baptism of Christ purchased by the Historical Museum of Crete, Iraklion in 2004.³¹ While the two panels have been removed from their original settings, the similarity of their dimensions and coloring make a convincing case for their relationship.³² Their compositions are developed from

²⁸ Harold E. Wethey in *El Greco and his school*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), esp. II: 198-200.

²⁹ The Adoration of the Magi was acquired first, in 1934, three years before Pallucchini found the Modena triptych kept in storage at the Galleria Estense. The Benaki Museum purchased the icon of St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child in 1956. See Manolis Chatzidakis, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos. Some works of his early years," in *Domenikos Theotokopoulos Kres, Keimena 1940-90* (Athens: Morphotiko Idryma Ethnikes Trapezes, 1990), 125-31.

³⁰ Cf. the overview of El Greco's early career provided by Nicos Hadjinicolaou, "Early and Late El Greco," in *The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, ed. Anastasia Drandaki (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2009), 29-37, esp. 30-31 and by Fernando Marias, "Crete, Italy, Toledo," in *El Greco of Toledo: Painter of the Visible and the Invisible* (Madrid: Ediciones el Viso, copyright Fundación El Greco, 2014), 125-49, esp. 125.

³¹ Maria Vassilaki and Robin Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ. A Recent Acquisition of the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete," *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaialogikes Hetaireias* 26 (2005): 227-40.

³² The Kingston Adoration of the Shepherds measures 23.8 x 19.1 cm and retains its original form as a rectangular panel with a domed top. The Heraklion Baptism has been set into a

the same sources utilized by El Greco for the Modena panels, offering an early demonstration of the artist's penchant for returning to a subject multiple times and producing variations on preferred themes. Vassilaki and Cormack, who published the Heraklion Baptism, argued that it represented a later version than what we see in the Modena triptych. Refinements in the composition, treatment of figures, and the lighter color palette found in both the Heraklion Baptism and the Kingston Adoration pointed toward "direct acquaintance with the paintings of late Venetian mannerism."³³ The differences were enough to convince them that the Modena triptych must have been executed before El Greco left Crete for Venice, although they suggest the triptych accompanied him, inspiring a second version after the artist settled into his new surroundings.³⁴ Andrew Casper, who has focused on El Greco's career in Venice and Rome as a pivotal moment in his reinvention of the religious image, questions these conclusions.³⁵ Unless documentary evidence regarding a commission or purchase of the panels would be located, stylistic evaluation leaves the matter open to debate.

More importantly, similarities between the Kingston and Heraklion panels and subjects depicted in the wings of the Modena triptych indicate that El Greco may have replicated other

rectangular support, so that the arched shape of the triptych wing is disguised by overpainting designed to match the background details of the scene. It currently measures 23.6 x 18 cm.

Vassilaki and Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism," 229-31.

³³ Vassilaki and Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism," 233.

³⁴ Vassilaki and Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism," 237.

³⁵ Casper acknowledges the difference in mood created by different tonalities used in the two triptychs; the Modena ensemble is dominated by yellows, greens, and red, whereas the Kingston and Heraklion panels offer lighter pinks and blues. Casper also points out traces of actual gold leaf in the highlights of garments on the Heraklion Baptism, a working method more closely related to that of Byzantine icon painting. The Modena triptych instead simulates the effects of gold through the illusionistic application of paint. Idem, *Art and the Religious Image in El Greco's Italy*, 45. Some of the figures in the Heraklion Baptism are more exactly modeled on the print by Battista d'Angeli identified as the source for El Greco's composition than their appearance in the Modena version. This conservative approach seems backwards if the Heraklion panel was executed after the Modena one. Ibid., 47.

parts of the triptych's program, including its view of Mount Sinai. This working method corresponds with the artist's frequent reworking of certain subjects, mentioned above. However, it also links El Greco's treatment of the Sinai landscape within a larger visual program with its role in the hands of other Cretan artists. As we shall see, Georgios Klontzas painted at least two triptychs in which a View of Mount Sinai appears on the reverse of the central panel and the recent discovery and re-identification of the Sinai landscape in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery is part of a now-disassembled triptych that is identical in its choice of subjects to the panels once in the Wilfrid Blunt collection and published by David Talbot Rice in 1947 in an early comparison with El Greco's Modena Triptych.³⁶ Along with the 1940 publication by Manolis Chatzedakis, which identified the Sinai landscape within the program of the anonymous Vatican triptych,³⁷ these two scholars provided the first hints of a larger corpus of Sinaitic imagery produced within the Cretan school of painting at the end of the 16th century.

For El Greco, the View of Mount Sinai becomes an anchor and entry point for the rest of his visual program on the portable altarpiece (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). When closed, the triptych offers two faces, which both present scenes drawn from events in the Old Testament – Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai on the reverse and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden on its front. The panel with Adam and Eve shows our forebears embracing and in the nude, presumably at a moment before their fall from grace (for contrast, see the carefully positioned fig leaves and complicit actions of both figures in Albrecht Dürer's print showing the moment of original sin in Figure 1.8, which served as one of the pictorial sources utilized by El Greco for his own composition). Christ represents the Godhead and stand opposite them, gesturing with one hand

³⁶ D. Talbot Rice, "Five Late Byzantine Panels and Greco's Views of Sinai," *Burlington Magazine* 89 (1947): 93-4.

³⁷ Manolis Chatzedakis, "Mia eikona aphieromene sto Sina," in *Aphieroma eis K. I. Amanton* (Athens: K. L. Kyriakoule, 1940), 351-64.

toward the tree dividing human and divine. The other hand is held out toward Adam and Eve indicating speech – most likely issuing the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.³⁸

In this way, the law given on Mount Sinai continues and elaborates upon the standards demanded of human behavior from the beginning. Both panels represent an old dispensation founded upon law versus grace. Once the triptych has been opened, a series of images depicting the life of Christ offer a glimpse of the new dispensation and posit the figures of Mary and Christ as counterparts to Adam and Eve.³⁹ Their obedience to divine command allows the economy of salvation to be put into motion, an all-embracing schema for human history that culminates in the central panel of the triptych where Christ appears at the center of a Last Judgment, crowning the victorious Christian knight who has kept the faith.⁴⁰ It is this central panel of the triptych that has

³⁸ The exact narrative moment represented in this panel has been variously identified. Maria Vassilaki interprets the scene as following upon Adam and Eve's transgression, so that the divine gesture is one of reprimand. Vassilaki, "4. The Modena Triptych," in *El Greco of Crete: Exhibition*, 348. Andrew Casper follows her lead, describing the Adam and Eve panel as an expulsion from paradise. Casper, *Art and the Religious Image*, 50. Robert Nelson, on the other hand, suggests that the image shows God speaking to Adam and Eve after Eve's creation from Adam's side. Nelson, "61. Triptych with scenes of the Old and New Testaments," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 279. While this latter view comes close to my own interpretation, it does not draw an explicit connection between the law given to Moses on Sinai and the command given Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

³⁹ The contrast between Old and New Testaments presented in the open and closed states of the triptych is noted by Robert Nelson. He also identifies Mary as the new Eve. Nelson, "61. Triptych with scenes of the Old and New Testaments," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 279. This opposing symbolism of sin and salvation, focused on the two figures of Mary and Eve, is elaborated by Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilidis in her catalog entry on the Modena triptych in *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, ed. José Álvarez Lopera (Milan: Skira, 1999), 352-3. However, Constantoudaki-Kitromilidis also reads the figures of Adam and Eve as post-lapsarian and being admonished for their disobedience as they are cast out of the Garden of Eden. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ronald Cueto offers a similar reading of the overall, apocalyptic thrust of the Modena triptych's theological program. As he says, "In a word, the Modena polyptych shows the Last Judgment as the culmination of the process started at Creation. Here is depicted the crucial link between the First and the Last Adam... Thus, the obedience of Christ triumphantly mends the

received the most scholarly attention, in the form of attempts to decipher the subject matter, since its allegorical message and iconographical sources create a densely packed and compelling scene (Figure 1.3).⁴¹ A resurrected Christ stands in triumph over Death and Hades, surrounded by the instruments of his passion. As the new Adam, this figure concludes the narrative cycle of Christ's life and ministry introduced in the wings of the triptych with scenes of the Annunciation, Nativity, and Baptism.

But supported by the four creatures of the apocalypse and bathed in heavenly light, Christ also opens eschatological time. He crowns the Christian knight with a gesture that echoes that of the Baptist on the flanking panel. Below them, the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) are represented by female personifications.⁴² Brought to the foreground by El Greco, they share the main vertical axis with Christ and the Christian knight above, as well as dividing the two groups of figures representing the blessed and the damned along the lower register. On the left-hand side (Christ's right and sharing the benediction received by the faithful soldier) are resurrected souls who kneel to receive the Eucharist from a mitred bishop. On the right (Christ's left), the bodies of the unsaved are themselves consumed by a yawning Hell mouth. The various figural groups brought together in this central panel derive from at least three different visual sources available to El Greco through printed reproductions (cf. Figures 1.9 and 1.10).⁴³ He drew

damage caused by Adam's disobedience." Cueto, "Mount Sinai and El Greco's Spirituality," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 173-85, esp. 181.

⁴¹ See Victor H. Miesel, "La tabla central del triptico de Modena, del Greco," *Archivo español de arte* 26, no. 103 (1953): 205-14 and Lydie Hadermann-Misguich, "Deux nouvelles sources d'inspiration du polyptyque de Modène," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 63 (1964): 355-8.

⁴² Unlike the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance), which can be practiced by anyone and provide the foundation for natural morality, the theological virtues are understood to be divine gifts of grace whose aim/object is God himself.

⁴³ The most influential of these is an anonymous woodcut published in Venice in 1555, titled *Speculum viae veritatis ac vitae fidelis militis christiani*, "Mirror of the way of truth and of the faithful life of the Christian soldier." Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Italian Influences in

from a similar variety of models when composing the more narrative biblical scenes in the triptych's program, as well.⁴⁴

Scholarship on the Modena triptych has so far been focused on identifying the visual sources used by El Greco in his compositions, rather than developing an interpretation that might integrate these observations within the context of appreciating El Greco's creative purpose and programmatic intent. The two panels that have received the most sustained interest, understandably, are the two with the most complex iconography and unusual subject matter – the topographical landscape view of Mount Sinai on the triptych's reverse and the allegorical scene of Christ crowning the Christian knight. Both images are also pivotal for reconstructing a larger theological program and for understanding its devotional impact. I have already alluded to the span of human history illustrated by the triptych in relation to the Christian doctrines of sin and redemption. These concepts play out in terms of the contrast between Old Testament and New Testament scenes on the open/closed panels, as well as in the performative disclosure of the innermost scene. It is only after a viewer engages with the narrative of Christ's life that he or she is prepared for the vision of final judgment offered at the triptych's center, presumably taking the part of the virtuous soldier who is rewarded for his faithful witness.

El Greco's Early Work: Some New Observations," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings of the International Symposium held on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the artist's birth*, ed. Nicos Hadjinicolaou (Heraklion: Municipality of Heraklion, 1995), 112. This pictorial source was identified in the Bibliothèque nationale de France by August L. Mayer and published in "Notes on the Early El Greco," *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 74, no. 430 (1939): 28-33. Two additional prints provided other details, such as the angels bearing instruments of the passion and the apocalyptic throne of judgment composed of the four creatures from Ezekiel's vision and the prostrate forms of Death and Hades, both of which derive from an anonymous woodcut of the Last Judgment within the collection *Figures Mystiques du Sauveur* (mid-16th century). The group of figures driven into the mouth of Hell at lower right come from Dürer's engraving of the Last Judgment belonging to his Small Passion. See Hadermann-Misguich, "Deux Nouvelles Sources," 355-8. On the Last Judgment engraved by Giovanni Battista Fontana and its relation to El Greco's work, see Vassilaki, "Three Questions," 122 n. 14.

⁴⁴ Summarized by Vassilaki, "4. The Modena Triptych," in *El Greco of Crete: Exhibition*.

Victor H. Miesel developed his interpretation of the allegorical scene based on Counter-Reformation themes that he found more clearly illustrated in the 1555 woodcut of Christ crowning the Christian knight (Figure 1.9). Besides a shared emphasis on church sacraments like the Eucharist and Baptism,⁴⁵ the print and El Greco's transformation of its subject matter present the soldier of faith as the primary interpretive key for the rest of the visual program. Counter-Reformation literature, which urged the revitalization of faith and works in the Catholic Church, frequently employed the Christian knight as a symbol of the active life.⁴⁶ While the central panel of the triptych's interior presents the soldier receiving his final reward for defending the church and her works, I would like to suggest the importance of the active life is first introduced in the View of Mount Sinai paired with this image and placed on its reverse.⁴⁷

Many of the components within El Greco's landscape view echo the composition and iconography found in other examples of the Sinai topographical image. These shared pictorial elements include the caravan of travelers arriving in the right foreground – contemporary figures

⁴⁵ In the original print, instead of a bishop distributing communion to the blessed as represented by El Greco, the community of believers are gathered before the figure of St. Paul, who gestures upward toward Christ. An angel "of the [New] Testament" bears a chalice filled with Christ's blood and a vessel of water, pouring both sacraments over the group below. Miesel, "La tabla central," 208. I believe the same sacraments are thematized by El Greco, not just in the scene of resurrected souls taking the Eucharist, but also in the two wings flanking the Last Judgement. These show the body of the infant Christ lying prone as if on a sacrificial altar (a common motif in the Adoration of the Shepherds as depicted in western art and echoed in later Byzantine iconography of the melismos, in which the Christ Child occupies the place of the Eucharistic bread) and his adult Baptism. Both demonstrate his obedience to God the Father and thus the salvific antidote to humanity's fallen nature.

⁴⁶ Miesel, "La tabla central," 211, esp. n. 16.

⁴⁷ Lionello Puppi offers a similar argument for the viewer's progress through the subjects depicted in the Modena triptych as "a kind of allegory of Catholic dogma... recalling the rigid spiritual exercise of a holy mission." Puppi, "El Greco's Two Sojourns in Venice," in *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, ed. Nicos Hadjinicolaou (Athens: Ikoniki Trapeza, 1995), 393-6, esp. 394, and idem, "El Greco in Italy and Italian Art," in *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, 95-113, esp. 97. His general point holds, although he seriously mistakes most of the figures and events being represented in the desert landscape around Mount Sinai.

who are welcomed by several of the Sinai fathers. I have already emphasized their presence as an important part of the temporal collapse facilitated by the depicted landscape, where past and present occupy the same representational space. The caravan provides a point of entry for the viewer of the image. However, El Greco redoubles the visual impact of their arrival and the viewer's identification with the group of pilgrims by placing several travelers who approach the monastery on foot in the lower left-hand corner of the panel. None of the other images that we will examine from the second half of the sixteenth and into the early seventeenth centuries, either painted panels or printed illustrations, duplicate these figures in the same way.

The physical movement and the directed attention of El Greco's two groups of travelers provide the viewer with an engaged double, a compositional means of entering the depicted scene alongside the figures in it.⁴⁸ Their presence in the foreground of the image, actually overlapping the base of the triptych, also helps assert their liminal status. As their figures cross the threshold between this world and the otherworldly vista glimpsed as if through a window onto Sinai's rugged mountain terrain, so we, too, join them in accessing the events and sacred personages of the past. The tradition of world landscapes in northern European and Flemish painting of the 15th and early 16th centuries thematized pilgrimage as a fitting allegory for the Christian life.⁴⁹ Here, El Greco merges pilgrimage to a specific *locus sanctus* with the allegorical themes of the triptych as a whole and of his central image focusing on the Christian knight.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸ A device commonly employed by other artists, as well. For example, cf. the figures peering over a parapet at the cityscape in the background of Rogier van der Weyden's *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin* (c. 1435-40), now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

⁴⁹ See Walter S. Gibson, *"Mirror of the Earth": The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Cueto emphasizes the entire Exodus narrative as a fitting allegory for the hardship and persecution experienced by the Church, both East and West, during the sixteenth century, as well as the broader spiritual metaphor of the Christian's earthly life as one of pilgrimage toward the Heavenly Jerusalem. Idem, "Mount Sinai and El Greco's Spirituality," 179-80.

pilgrims/travelers depicted on the exterior of the Modena Triptych stand in for the viewer at the beginning of her or her devotional journey, just as the triumphant soldier shown at its heart represents a desired outcome of spiritual victory.

The identification between viewer and depicted pilgrims can also be seen in one other View of Mount Sinai attributed to El Greco (see Figure 1.5), although its format and some of the iconographical details are significantly altered from the composition on the reverse of the Modena triptych. Now owned by the Historical Museum of Crete in Heraklion, this example was painted as an independent panel, not part of a triptych, and may in fact be the same work by El Greco that we find listed in an inventory of 1600 and two later catalogues of the Farnese Palace from the 17th century.⁵¹ Described as “a painting with a walnut frame, of a view of Mount Sinai, by the hand of a Greek pupil of Titian,” it first belonged to the collection of Fulvio Orsini and was then bequeathed by him to Cardinal Odoardo Farnese.⁵² Orsini served as librarian and artistic advisor to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and was an accomplished classical scholar and humanist. He eventually acquired a total of seven paintings by the young El Greco.⁵³ Whether or

⁵¹ These date to 1653 and 1662-80. Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “5. View of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine,” in *El Greco of Crete: Exhibition*, 350. For the provenance and history of the View of Mount Sinai now in Heraklion, see idem, “38. View of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine,” in *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, 505-6.

⁵² “Quadro corniciato di noce con un paese del monte Sinai, di mano d’un Grego scolare di Titiano.” See Pierre de Nolhac, “Une galerie de peinture au XVI^e siècle: Les collections de Fulvio Orsini,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, per. 3, 29 (1884): 427-36, esp. 433, no. 39.

⁵³ Nolhac, “Une galerie de peinture,” 433, nos. 39, 43-5. These included a portrait of Guilio Clovio (c. 1571-72), now in the Museo Capodimonte, Naples, as well as a portrait of a young man in a red beret and four small medallions painted on copper (depicting Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, Ranuccio II Farnese, the Cardinal of Sant’ Angelo, Cardinal Bessarion, and Pope Marcello II) that no longer survive. Wetthey comments on Orsini’s collections as well as his likely influence upon the intellectual development of El Greco during the artist’s time in the Farnese Palace. Harold E. Wetthey, “El Greco in Rome and the Portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi,” in *El Greco: Italy and Spain*, ed. Jonathan Brown and José Manuel Pita Andrade, *Studies in the History of Art* 13 (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1984), 171-8, esp. 173-4. For a

not the Heraklion View of Mount Sinai is identified with the painting from Fulvio Orsini's collection, both the surviving landscape and the inventory entry attest to El Greco's continued interest in depicting this subject as well as reinforcing specific themes in his treatment of it.

The main difference between the View of Mount Sinai depicted on the Modena triptych and that on the Heraklion panel, other than dimensions and format, is the absence of any sacred figures representing Sinai's past. Dark clouds still gather around Mount Sinai at the center of the composition, but Moses no longer appears on its summit; neither does St. Catherine, nor her angelic bodyguard on the neighboring peak. For this reason, the Heraklion panel has frequently been discussed as a true "independent" landscape, the first in El Greco's oeuvre.⁵⁴ The supposed secularization of this second version of the Sinai landscape view is open to question. For its primary subject was still a holy site recognized by both Eastern and Western churches and, while the layout of the monastery with its chapels and dependencies still echoes the model used for the Modena triptych, the focus of this panel becomes even more concerned with the contemporary figures of the pilgrims represented in the foreground.⁵⁵

We see here the same groups of travelers that El Greco introduced in the Modena triptych – several arrive by camel in the lower right-hand corner of the panel as others approach by foot

further discussion of this cultural milieu, see Clare Robertson, "El Greco, Fulvio Orsini and Giulio Clovio," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 215-27.

⁵⁴ Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "El Greco's View of Mount Sinai as Independent Landscape," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 161-72; Manolis Chatzidakis, *The Landscape of the God-trodden Mount Sinai: El Greco's painting in the Historical Museum of Crete* (Heraklion: Cretan Historical Studies, 1994); David Davies, ed., *El Greco: Mystery and Illumination* (Edinburgh: Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland, 1989), no. 11, 48-9; and Gardner von Teuffel in *Sotheby's Old Master Paintings*, London, 7 December 1988, no. 84, 90-93.

⁵⁵ Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides states: "At the same time, the more developed presence of the visitors in the painting compared to existing engravings introduces another aspect to the depiction. It emphasizes the high standing of the monastery as a place for pilgrimage and spiritual radiance to both orthodox and Catholics at that time." Idem, "38. View of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine," in *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, 504.

in the lower left. All of the figures have solidified and gained more detail in terms of costume and facial expressions, although their basic movement and gestures remain consistent. El Greco adds a couple of horses to the caravan at right, but more significantly, he also includes a hermit, who does not appear in the Modena panel, alongside the two Sinai fathers. His torso is draped with animal skins, leaving legs and arms bare. Grasping a short staff, the hermit's posture and appearance strongly recall the figure of John the Baptist from the inner right wing of the Modena triptych. I would like to suggest that by including this desert ascetic, El Greco not only alludes to the Baptist as an important biblical model for monastic practice but also draws attention to the two modes of Christian life – active and contemplative – represented in Sinai landscape.⁵⁶ The monastic community demonstrates withdrawal from the world to focus on spiritual things, while the pilgrims and travelers participate in a more active Christian life (again pointing back to the themes developed in the Modena triptych with its allegorical figure of the Christian knight in the central panel of the Last Judgment).

The travelers in the lower left-hand corner are similarly multivalent in their identity, alluding to yet another distinctive pictorial source. In particular, it is the figure closest to the edge of the landscape panel who steps directly out of a Venetian print showing St. Roch surrounded by scenes from his life (Figure 1.11).⁵⁷ He wears the same high leather boots, traveling cloak and broad-brimmed hat, holds a staff in his left hand and turns his face outward toward the viewer as he looks back over his right shoulder (cf. Figure 1.5). Meanwhile, the cloaked figure who strides

⁵⁶ Cueto takes the figure of the hermit to allude not only to John the Baptist as a type of the religious life, but also such Old Testament predecessors as Elijah and Elisha. Monastic life offered its own model of spiritual exile and pilgrimage. Idem, "Mount Sinai and El Greco's Spirituality," 182-3.

⁵⁷ Identified by Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "5. View of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine," in *El Greco of Crete: Exhibition*, 352 and developed more at length in idem, "38. View of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine," in *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, 294-301 (Greek) and 501-6 (English translation).

into the composition in a similar position on the Modena triptych has moved forward one place on the Heraklion panel, engaging their third traveling companion in conversation. The print of St. Roch with scenes from his life was commissioned from Titian in 1516 by the Scuola di San Rocco in order to raise funds for the confraternity through its distribution to pilgrims en route to the Holy Land.⁵⁸ The identification of El Greco's visual source here should not only alert us to his tip of the hat to a revered artist and mentor, but also adds a layer of complexity to the allegorical role of pilgrimage within the Sinai landscape. The pilgrim as St. Roch provides a model for the arduous labor of an active Christian life, similar to the eremitic precedent offered by John the Baptist for the contemplative. Hardly "secularizing," El Greco's approach shifts in this treatment of his subject in order to foreground and further develop some of the very same themes dealt with in greater narrative and programmatic detail in the Modena triptych, just in more condensed (and figural) form.

The documentary evidence that connects the Heraklion View of Mount Sinai with the circle of humanists and churchmen that El Greco became acquainted with during his time in Rome also points us toward the kind of audience for whom the Sinai landscape resonated – an educated and ecclesiastical elite. These were individuals who would fully appreciate the range of artistic and allegorical references that El Greco incorporated into his compositions.⁵⁹ The View of Mount Sinai on the reverse of the Modena triptych and as the primary subject of the Heraklion panel both serve as excellent examples of "artful icons," the phrase chosen by Andrew Casper to characterize El Greco's religious painting and intellectual pursuits during the transformation of his artistic style while living and working in Italy. Or, as Michele Bacci has emphasized in his

⁵⁸ See Lisa Pon, "A Document for Titian's *St. Roch*," *Print Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (2002): 275-7.

⁵⁹ While we don't know the specific audience for the Modena triptych, the parallel themes of its more extended visual program and its theological complexity suggest similar patronage.

reassessment of hybridity as a critical term used to describe Veneto-Byzantine cultural relations, visual forms need to be recognized as communicative strategies deliberately employed by artists to maximize devotional experience.⁶⁰ This applies not only to recognizing the artists' facility with dual modes of production (both *in forma greca* and *alla latina*), but also to taking into account a "transconfessional" audience for certain images, viewers familiar with Latin-rite and Orthodox modes of worship.⁶¹ I will speak more to the unique artistic production and blended cultural heritage of Venetian Crete at the end of this chapter, after assessing some of the shared traits among surviving 16th-century triptychs that include the Sinai topographical landscape.

The Vatican Triptych

It seems likely that the next triptych under consideration, a small and precious object that adheres much more closely than El Greco's work to the traditional canons and iconography of Byzantine art, was created for a highly educated cleric or monk.⁶² As in the case of the Modena triptych, however, we know nothing about the conditions of its production or its original owner. The triptych, as seen in Figures 1.13 and 1.14, has been documented in the Vatican collections since the 18th century.⁶³ Although its carved and gilded frame is quite similar to El Greco's

⁶⁰ "The Venetian artist was able enough to work out a coherently mixed repertory of forms which enabled him to suit his fellow citizens' composite visual habits. The same attitude was inherited and further developed by Cretan artists and more specifically by Constantinopolitan painters established in Candia, who may have assimilated Western means of expression in the Byzantine capital itself." Bacci, "Veneto-Byzantine 'Hybrids': Towards a Reassessment," *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 95.

⁶¹ Michele Bacci, "Veneto-Byzantine 'Hybrids'," 73-106. See also in the same volume Anastasia Drandaki, "*A Maniera Greca*: Content, Context, and Transformation of a Term," *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 39-72.

⁶² A supposition also made by Marisa Bianco Fiorin, "18. Trittico di 'Ognissanti'," in *Icone della Pinacoteca Vaticana* (Vatican City: Pinacoteca vaticana, 1995), 24.

⁶³ It was presented to the Museo Sacro from the collection of the Vatican Library in 1762. Fiorin, "18. Trittico di 'Ognissanti'," 24. J.B.L.G. Seroux d'Agincourt published a line drawing after the

Modena triptych and other examples by the Cretan artist Georgios Klontzas, this portable altarpiece is incredibly tiny. When opened, its dimensions only measure 36 x 16 cm, so that its width barely equals the height of the Modena triptych. A View of Mount Sinai occupies the verso of the right wing. When the triptych is closed, it is the outermost image facing the viewer (see Figure 1.12). Like the image on the reverse of the Modena triptych, the landscape is accompanied by an inscription or titulus. In this case, it announces: Τὸ ἅγι(ον) μοναστήριον τὸ Σίναιον, or “The Holy Sinaitic Monastery.”⁶⁴

The composition of the Sinai landscape as presented by the unknown artist of this triptych is quite close to what we have already seen in the examples by El Greco. But its fidelity to an engraving of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine by Giovanni Battista Fontana is even more striking (see Figure 1.6). Published in Venice in 1569, the dedication in the lower right-hand corner gives credit to the bishop of Ston (Croatia), one Bonifazio Stefani, for providing a description of the pilgrimage site on which its appearance was based.⁶⁵ This print has been cited many times in the literature on El Greco’s Views of Mount Sinai as a likely or possible source for his treatment of the Sinai landscape and, as such, may provide a *terminus*

triptych in *Histoire de l’art par les monumens, depuis sa décadence au IV^e siècle jusqu’à son renouvellement au XIV^e*, vol. 5 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1823), 171-2, pl. XCI. The same drawing was included in the catalog of the Vatican Pinacoteca by Antonio Muñoz, *I quadri bizantini della Pinacoteca Vaticana* (Rome: Danesi, 1928), 10, no. 16, pl. VIII.

⁶⁴ The inscriptions have been published separately in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* IV (Berlin, 1877), 406-7, no. 8970.

⁶⁵ Bishop Bonifazio Stefani was an Observant Franciscan and served as guardian of the Holy Land between 1550-1559, an office to which he was reconfirmed in 1562. The publisher of Fontana’s engraving, Bolognino Zaltieri, stated that he previously distributed a description of the Holy Land, also by Stefani, and anticipated printing the bishop’s description of the Mount of Olives and of Jerusalem in short order. Christa Gardner von Teuffel interprets the term *Descriptio* to mean a topographical view or map, as seen in this example. For her analysis of Fontana’s engraving, see idem, “El Greco’s View of Mount Sinai as Independent Landscape,” in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 161-72, esp. 165-7 and 169.

post quem for the date of the Modena triptych.⁶⁶ However, for scholars invested in attributing the Modena triptych to El Greco's Cretan period, before his arrival in Venice, the legitimate point has been raised that Fontana and El Greco may both have been looking to other visual sources, which have not survived or yet been identified.⁶⁷

Regardless of the priority of Fontana's print in establishing El Greco's timeline, it is clear that the Venetian engraving provided the immediate model for the Vatican triptych. The receding sequence of three mountains, the bird's-eye view of the enclosed monastery, and the approaching caravan of pilgrims and travelers being greeted by Sinai fathers is shared by all the examples we have examined so far. El Greco likewise includes the group of turbaned Bedouin clustered in the left foreground, across from the monastery's defensive walls. However, in the Vatican triptych, as in Fontana's print, this group is represented on a flat outcropping of rock that forms part of the base of the left-most mountain (labeled by Fontana as Mount Aaron). The orientation and layout of each of the surrounding chapels and monastic dependencies seen in the engraving are just as carefully replicated on the Vatican panel, picked out in brilliant patches of red and white against the monochromatic desert terrain. Even the trees and shrubbery provided in Fontana's engraving are copied on the Vatican panel (cf. Figures 1.6 and 1.12).

As on the Modena triptych, the Vatican landscape view includes the figures of Moses and St. Catherine on two of the mountain summits. But on the Vatican panel and in Fontana's print,

⁶⁶ Vassilaki, "Three Questions," 124.

⁶⁷ See Vassilaki's revised position taken with Robin Cormack in "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ," 236. It seems to me that if we take Zaltieri's dedication at his word, the development of the topographical landscape view depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine in the late 16th century owes much to Bishop Stefani and may in fact be his invention. Stefani's travels in the Holy Land make it possible for him to have acquired a model for his view of Mount Sinai elsewhere, perhaps at the Monastery of St. Catherine itself. See Gardner von Teuffel's comments regarding the phrase *certissimis lineis definitum*, where she interprets *linea* as not so much an original drawing but rather a tracing or copy of another model. Idem, "El Greco's View of Mount Sinai," 167 n. 20.

Moses is shown twice – he receives the tablets of the law surrounded by clouds and darkness on the peak of Mount Sinai, but he can also be found at its base, tucked into the narrow crevice created by the two mountains at left. Here the prophet stands with a flock of sheep, shielding his eyes from his encounter with the Burning Bush. Both the Vatican panel and print represent this vision as a medallion portrait of the Virgin and Child surrounded by flames and/or an aureole of light, which appears suspended above the monastery walls. This motif explicitly ties Moses' vision of the Burning Bush with the site of the chapel dedicated to its relics, located at the eastern end of Sinai's monastery church.

The iconography for the Virgin of the Burning Bush (ἡ τῆς βάρτου) occurs consistently in each of the remaining examples of the Sinai landscape from the Cretan school of painting that we will examine here; El Greco is the only painter to have left it out of his compositions. This choice may reflect a specifically Western and/or Catholic audience for his triptych, as opposed to an Orthodox viewer who would appreciate the longstanding tradition of Marian iconography associated with Sinai.⁶⁸ However, Fontana's print was presumably marketed to a wide audience as well, not just to the Greek Orthodox community living in Venice. Whatever his reasons, instead of duplicating the figure of Moses in the Modena triptych, El Greco substitutes a shaft of golden sunlight, which illuminates the *locus sanctus* associated with the Burning Bush (Figure 1.3). It is a move toward naturalism as a form of spiritual metaphor that subsequently

⁶⁸ On the development of this site-specific iconography for the Virgin Mary in the thirteenth century, see Kristen M. Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. P. Getty Trust, 2006), 95-119.

characterizes the entire landscape depicted in his Heraklion panel, now completely devoid of any figures or events directly representing the sacred past.⁶⁹

By contrast, the Vatican panel with its View of Mount Sinai deliberately cultivates the juxtaposition of contemporary figures in the foreground with these three episodes from the monastery's history, celebrating Moses, St. Catherine, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush as the primary patron saints of the monastery and pilgrimage site. The spiritual heritage of the Sinai monastery is further emphasized by another site-specific image related to its history represented on the reverse of the closed triptych. This panel (see Figure 1.13) shows another rugged landscape but one more densely populated by monastic figures. A ladder stretches across the entire scene, reaching on a diagonal from the lower left-hand corner to upper right, where Christ reaches out from a segment of heaven to grasp an arm of one of the ascending ascetics. Executed in grisaille, the image represents the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus.

John Climacus, named for the name of the ladder he devised, was abbot of the Sinai monastery in the early 7th century.⁷⁰ He wrote a spiritual treatise on the struggle to acquire virtue and overcome the passions, structuring his book according to the biblical image of Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12).⁷¹ The *Ladder* of John Climacus became a popular text in Orthodox monasteries from the eleventh century on and is still read out loud during Lent.⁷² John appears in the lower

⁶⁹ See comments by Ronald Cueto, "Mount Sinai and El Greco's Spirituality," in *El Greco of Crete: Proceedings*, 176.

⁷⁰ The dates of his life have been much debated. Most scholars accept that he was born shortly before 579 and died c. 649. The main source for his biography is the *Life* by Daniel of Raithou (PG 88, 596-608). Kallistos Ware, "Introduction," in John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 2-3.

⁷¹ Thirty chapters represent a total of thirty rungs in the ascent toward spiritual perfection. John based this number on the age of Christ at his baptism. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, "A Brief Summary and Exhortation," 291.

⁷² Ware, "Introduction," in John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 1.

right-hand corner of the image on the Vatican triptych, standing in front of a small church with several other members of his monastic community. He gestures toward the ladder, where a number of monks apply themselves to the arduous climb. Others tumble off, distracted and/or aided in their fall from grace by grimacing demons. An open Hell mouth waits below.

The illustration of John's Ladder as a kind of Last Judgment develops quite early in Byzantine manuscripts; we also see it depicted in the first surviving example of the theme from icon painting – one of the Sinai icons dated to the late 12th century (Figure 1.15).⁷³ While the Sinai icon depicting the Heavenly Ladder very deliberately reconstructs all thirty rungs of Climacus' treatise, the Vatican image is content with conveying the general idea. It also combines the iconography of the Heavenly Ladder with another foundational moment in the history of coenobitic monasticism in the East. At the very top of the image, paired with Christ's reception of the monk who has nearly reached the end of the ladder, we see an angel instructing Pachomius regarding the monastic habit that he and his disciples should wear.⁷⁴ The overall composition still resonates strongly with the Sinaitic character of the landscape view placed on the triptych's front, but emphasizes the monastic institution over and above the figures of the pilgrims that were so important to El Greco. The Heavenly Ladder as a Last Judgment also creates an interesting dialectic with the themes placed at the center of the Modena triptych. We find them continued here as well, once the wings of the Vatican triptych have been prized open.

⁷³ Exhibited most recently in *Byzantium, 330-1453*, ed. Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), no. 323; *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 48; and *The Glory of Byzantium*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), no. 247. For the origins of this iconography in manuscript illumination, see John Rupert Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 5 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954).

⁷⁴ The inscription accompanying the scene bears the angel's greeting: Ὡ Παχώμιε, ἐν τούτῳ τῷ [σ]χήματι πᾶσα σὰρξ σωθήσεται, or "Pachomius, in this form (or dress/habit), all flesh is saved." *CIG* 4: 406, no. 8970.b.2.

The remaining panels of the triptych offer the viewer a comprehensive theological program. The outer face (or verso) of the left wing represents the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (see Figure 1.16).⁷⁵ The emperor Constantine is seated prominently in the center of a semi-circular group of bishops. The heretic Arius cowers at their feet. Placed behind the exedra are other church fathers and monastics attending the council including Peter of Alexandria, who confronts a vision of the Christ child on the altar.⁷⁶ The basic composition used to represent an ecumenical council (the presiding emperor and frontally-positioned bishops gathered in a half-circle with a prostrate heretic below them) goes back at least as far as the illustrations in the Menologion of Basil II, dated to the end of the 10th century. However, in the 16th century, it was still a fairly uncommon subject for icon painting.

Christopher Walter has argued that the large panel signed and dated to 1591 by the artist Michael Damaskenos (Figure 1.16) represents the earliest surviving example of this subject.⁷⁷ Damaskenos' icon of the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea makes an especially interesting comparison with the Vatican triptych because it was not created to stand alone. Rather, it belongs to a series of six monumental panels commissioned for the Vrontisi monastery on Crete.⁷⁸ One of the other icons in this series represents the Virgin of the Burning Bush with elements of the

⁷⁵ Titled Ἡ ἄρρητος καὶ οἰκουμένης σ[ύ]νοδος; cf. *CIG* 4:406, no. 8970.d.1.

⁷⁶ Christ points to his torn clothing to illustrate the damage caused to the church through the consequences of heretical belief. On the iconography used for the First Ecumenical Council, see Christopher Walter, *L'iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine* (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1970) and idem, "Icons of the First Council of Nicaea," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias* ser. 4, 16 (1991-92): 209-18.

⁷⁷ Walter, "Icons of the First Council of Nicaea," 210; see also Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "39. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea," in *The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, ed. Anastasia Drandaki (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2009), 104.

⁷⁸ These were transferred to the old Church of St. Minas in Heraklion in 1800 and now belong to the Collection of Ecclesiastical Art displayed in the Church of St. Catherine of the Sinaites. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "39. The First Ecumenical Council," 104.

topographical landscape image included in the background.⁷⁹ The program of Damaskenos' series as a whole has been interpreted in light of the importance of maintaining interreligious harmony between Orthodox and Latin communities on Venetian Crete.⁸⁰ This theme is particularly appropriate for the ecumenical council being depicted by Damaskenos and on the diminutive Vatican triptych. Nicaea established Christian doctrine for both East and West. Besides condemning the teachings of Arius, who denied Christ's divine nature, it formulated the first eight articles of the Christian creed.⁸¹ As the first ecumenical council, Nicaea also became the model and precedent for each successive council, and icons of the First Council of Nicaea came to refer to all ecumenical councils (being frequently used as the feast day icon commemorating the councils in totality).⁸²

The three panels of the Vatican triptych's interior (Figure 1.14) build upon the breadth and scope of theological themes introduced by the image of the First Ecumenical Council.⁸³ The central panel shows Christ in Majesty surrounded by all his saints. Christ is seated on a double arch, flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist who offer intercession in a traditional Deesis composition. The four Evangelist symbols (creatures of the Apocalypse) surround Christ's throne, while the attending host of angels and saints are themselves encircled by a lengthy inscription.⁸⁴ Their paradisiacal setting is further established by the presence of Abraham receiving the souls of the blessed and the good thief at the bottom of the panel. Bust-length

⁷⁹ Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "34. The Virgin in the Burning Bush," in *The Origins of El Greco*, 94.

⁸⁰ Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "39. The First Ecumenical Council," 104.

⁸¹ Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "39. The First Ecumenical Council," 104.

⁸² Walter, "Icons of the First Council of Nicaea," 215-16.

⁸³ Marisa Bianco Fiorin described the triptych as "a veritable handbook" (un vero prontuario) of religious doctrine in visual form. Idem, *Icone della Pinacoteca*, 24.

⁸⁴ Fully transcribed in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*; see note 64 above. I have not been able to identify its source, although I suspect the text comes from a liturgical hymn. It offers praise to Christ and those worthy to stand in his presence.

portraits of the Virgin and of Christ occupy the center of the two wings to either side of the heavenly court. Their figures are supported by the foliate branches of two trees, with additional portraits of prophets and apostles surrounding them in the curling tendrils. The iconography of the left wing represents the Tree of Jesse, emphasizing Christ's royal ancestry and the prophets who foretold his birth. The right wing represents Christ the True Vine.⁸⁵ The text displayed on the open gospel book comes from John 15: "I am the vine, you [are] the branches, and my father is the husbandman."⁸⁶

The interior panels of the Vatican triptych provide a lovely and visually succinct encapsulation of Christological doctrine, as formulated by the ecumenical council at Nicaea and those following.⁸⁷ The central image of Christ in Majesty, for example, asserts the divine nature of Christ questioned by Arius. Christ is shown here as an unmistakable member of the Godhead, surrounded by an aureole of light, hymned and worshipped by the saints and angels that attend him. Christ's dual nature is further emphasized by the allegorical images on either side of the central scene. The Tree of Jesse affirms his human lineage, whereas the gospel text explaining Christ's identity as the True Vine also asserts his divine parentage.⁸⁸ The repeated depiction of Christ with an open gospel book (first as seen on the altar in Peter of Alexandria's vision, then in the image of Christ the Vine, and finally at the heart of the Maiestas) gives visual form to Christ

⁸⁵ Apostolos G. Mantas, "The Iconographic Subject 'Christ the Vine' in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias* ser. 4, 24 (2003): 347-60.

⁸⁶ The inscription is an amalgam of verses 1 and 5 from that chapter. It reads, Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς [τὰ κ]λήματ[α], κ(αὶ) ὁ πατήρ μου [ὁ] γεωργός ἐστι. *CIG* 4:406, no 8970.c.

⁸⁷ For an overview of the council and its doctrinal impact, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Also addressed by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrines*, v. 1 *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), esp. 172-277.

⁸⁸ The two wings also represent the appointed spokespersons for God in the Old Testament (the prophets) and the New (the apostles), as pointed out by Apostolos Mantas in "The Iconographic Subject 'Christ the Vine'," 353-4.

as the incarnate Word of God, something commemorated in each liturgy at the First Entrance (when the gospels are processed through the church).⁸⁹

Christ's Incarnation is likewise figured by the Virgin and child cradled within the Tree of Jesse.⁹⁰ Mary's bust-length, frontal presentation of the Christ child brings us back to the medallion representing the Virgin of the Burning Bush shown above the Sinai monastery in the topographical landscape view. I believe, once again, this is an intentional iconographic pairing. Not only does the small Marian image anticipate the figures on the triptych's interior panels, but it also specifically prefigures the Incarnation. Moses' vision of the Burning Bush (which bore divine flame but was not consumed) was interpreted as a symbol of the Virgin, who would become the Mother of God while remaining a virgin.⁹¹ Moses is also depicted as one of the prophets surrounding the Virgin and child in the Tree of Jesse panel, where he holds out the typological symbol of the Burning Bush. Jacob and his ladder are likewise represented.

In this way, the entire program of the triptych focuses on the dual natures of Christ brought together at the moment of his Incarnation, visually expounding upon the doctrines affirmed by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. But these mysteries of the faith are also intimately linked with the pilgrimage site and *loca sancta* commemorated at Sinai, guarded by its monastic community over the centuries. It is especially significant that the landscape view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine prefaces the rich theological content of the

⁸⁹ The panels in the Vatican triptych offer their own performative sequence, since opening the first wing (which depicts the Sinai landscape on its outer face) reveals the Council at Nicaea directly opposite the image of Christ the Vine (on the inside, or recto, of the right wing). Opening the left wing in turn reveals Christ in Majesty at the center of the entire program.

⁹⁰ In distinct parallel with the image of Christ the Vine, this panel is given the titulus, Ἡ ἄμπελος τῆς Θεοτόκου. The right wing is simply inscribed Ἡ ἄμπελος. Cf. a similar observation made by Mantas, "The Iconographic Subject 'Christ the Vine'," 353.

⁹¹ A metaphor first introduced by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*. Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity," 96.

triptych's interior, and its juxtaposition with another image of monastic life in the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus presented on the back makes the triptych's associations with the religious life abundantly clear. Based upon the number of dependencies that Sinai maintained far beyond the South Sinai Peninsula, it may be that the original owner and/or patron of the Vatican triptych was affiliated with one of these monastic houses.⁹²

The Wilfrid Blunt and Yale University Art Gallery Panels

The next two examples of the Sinai topographical landscape that I will be addressing, like that in the Vatican triptych, are unsigned and remain anonymous. They both belong to small portable altarpieces that have been partially or completely disassembled at some point in the course of their history. One group of panels originally belonged to the collection of Wilfrid Blunt (see Figure 1.17). Published by David Talbot Rice in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1947, these have been known to scholars addressing the corpus of Sinai topographical landscape images for quite some time and provided an early set of compranda for El Greco's Views of Mount Sinai.⁹³ The other partially disassembled triptych belongs to the Yale University Art Gallery (Figures

⁹² A list of past and current monastic dependencies is included in Manafis, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 380. The connection between the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai and its Cretan metochia were especially strong, based on the number of Cretan paintings that survive in the monastery's collection of icons and commissions like the great iconostasis built for the monastery church by Jeremias Palladas, another Cretan artist, in the early 17th century (it is signed and dated 1612). This relationship goes back at least as far as the 13th century, when Venice first gained control of Crete during the expansion of Latin Crusaders into the Eastern Mediterranean. See also Nicholas Coureas, "The Orthodox Monastery of Mt. Sinai and Papal Protection of its Cretan and Cypriot Properties," in *Autour de la Première Croisade*, ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 475-84.

⁹³ David Talbot Rice, "Five Late Byzantine Panels and Greco's Views of *Sinai*," *Burlington Magazine* 89 (1947): 93-94. The panels were sold at auction by Sotheby's in 1991 and acquired by a private collector from Greece. They have since been published as part of the Latsis Collection by Vassilis Fotopoulos, *Meta to Vyzantio: The Survival of Byzantine Sacred Art*, trans. David Hardy (London: Private Bank & Trust, 1996), no. 25, 112-17.

1.19, 1.20 and 1.21) and is being introduced to this corpus for the first time.⁹⁴ It was discovered in early 2014 by Mr. Daniel Ledford, who has been generous in sharing his research on the panels with me. Of the Cretan triptychs under discussion in this chapter, it is the only one to which I have had direct access.⁹⁵

The choice of subjects accompanying the View of Mount Sinai in each case presented here is exactly identical and, while there are significant differences in the iconography used to depict Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine, the style and painterly approach of the two ensembles is close enough to suggest that they are both the work of the same artist. I begin with a brief discussion of the Blunt panels, reconstructing their original arrangement with the aid of the panels from the Yale University Art Gallery. I then address the overall themes of the visual program before turning to the two views of Sinai for a closer examination of the differences between the two compositions. While the landscape view from the Blunt panels corresponds with the examples by El Greco, Fontana, and on the Vatican triptych, as already discussed, the Yale View of Mount Sinai (Figure 1.22) offers some interesting changes and

⁹⁴ Inventory nos. 1871.111-13. The panels belonged to the James Jackson Jarves Collection (Florence) before being purchased by Yale University. They were included in the catalog written by Jarves himself when the collection was first exhibited in New York in 1860 (nos. 1-3). The fact that all five panels came from the same triptych and were taken apart for purposes of display was clearly stated in the manual published upon their acquisition by Yale. Russell Sturgis, Jr., *Manual of the Jarves Collection* (New Haven: Yale College, 1868), nos. 7-9, 21-14. When an updated catalog was published in 1916, however, the two panels depicting the Annunciation and Saints Catherine and Mercurios were attributed to a different hand than the three central panels of the triptych and their relationship to the rest of the triptych became confused. See Osvald Sirén, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Jarves Collection Belonging to Yale University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), nos. 111-13, 265-7. The panels have not been included in more recent catalogs of the Yale University Art Gallery. Cf. the “Concordance of Early Italian Paintings in the Jarves Collection,” compiled by Charles Seymour, Jr., *Early Italian Paintings in the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 252-3.

⁹⁵ I thank Paola d’Agostino, Assistant Curator of European Paintings, for making it possible for me to examine the panels in New Haven this past October.

adaptations to the established iconography. It also provides a segue to the final group of triptychs in this corpus, painted by the Cretan artist Georgios Klontzas, whose approach to the Sinai landscape is quite idiosyncratic and distinct from any previous examples.

The five panels that belonged to the Wilfrid Blunt collection in London (see Figure 1.17) share a similar format. They are each rectangular with an arched top, suggesting that they once composed the central panel and outer wings of a triptych similar to what we have seen in the Modena and Vatican examples.⁹⁶ The two wings were both split in half when the triptych was taken apart and reframed in order for all five scenes to be displayed simultaneously. If the back of the triptych's central panel was also painted, this composition was either lost or destroyed during the process. The remaining scenes have been arranged horizontally and given a new setting in a long, rectangular panel reminiscent of a templon or iconostasis beam.⁹⁷ Based on the relative sizes of the panels and slight variations in their shape, the central panel and its two outer wings can be identified. When compared with the panels at the Yale University Art Gallery (see Figs. 1.19, 1.20, and 1.21), this arrangement is confirmed beyond doubt.⁹⁸

The central image of the triptych's interior in both cases is the Anastasis, the feast day icon celebrating Christ's resurrection (iconography known in the West as the Harrowing of Hell).⁹⁹ The reconfigured Blunt panels (Figure 1.17) maintain the position of the Anastasis in the

⁹⁶ The two larger panels measure 21.5 x 15 cm; the three smaller panels 20.7 x 13.5 cm. Fotopoulos, *Meta to Vyzantio*, 112.

⁹⁷ This was, in fact, the interpretation of the panels that Talbot Rice put forward when he first published them. Talbot Rice, "Five Late Byzantine Panels," 93.

⁹⁸ And challenges the hypothetical reconstruction offered by Fotopoulos, *Meta to Vyzantio*, 112, who reversed the left and right wings, as well as the subjects displayed on the recto and verso.

⁹⁹ Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

middle of the series, although the other panels are displayed out of sequence.¹⁰⁰ As seen in Figure 1.21, showing the three images of the opened triptych still attached to one another in the Yale collection, the Anastasis is flanked on either side by the Transfiguration of Christ and the View of Mount Sinai. The scenes on the verso of each wing have been detached from the Yale triptych as in the case of the Blunt panels and placed within carved and gilded frames that copy the original triptych setting. However, discrepancies in size between the left and right wing (the right wing is slightly smaller than the left and corresponds more closely to the central panel, since it nestles directly over this image when the triptych is closed with the left wing resting above it) make it clear that the image of Saints Catherine and Mercurios belong to the same panel as that of the Sinai landscape (the right wing of both triptychs), while the scene of the Annunciation would have been placed on the verso of the Transfiguration (the left wing). When reconstructed as a whole ensemble, the exterior of the closed triptychs first presented the scene of the Annunciation. Then, when the left wing was opened, the recto of this panel displayed Christ's Transfiguration next to Saints Catherine and Mercurios on the verso of the right wing. As the right wing was also lifted, the central image of the Anastasis and the Sinai landscape on its recto both came into view.

Not unlike the program of the Modena triptych, the Blunt panels and the disassembled Yale triptych both offer a typological contrast between narrative images drawn from the life of Christ and iconography that represents the Old Testament pilgrimage site at Mount Sinai. In place of Adam and Eve, however, we find the pairing of two Christian saints – Catherine of Alexandria and Mercurios (Figure 1.20). They happen to share the same feast day, being

¹⁰⁰ It is uncertain when the triptych was disassembled and reconfigured, although this probably happened just before it was put on the market and/or acquired by Wilfrid Blunt. The order of the five panels is mostly symmetrical, balancing the horizontal format by placing the two largest pieces on the ends and framing the central image with the two other scenes closest in size.

commemorated on November 24th in the church liturgical calendar, but are also shown here in parallel fashion. Both saints transfix beneath them the pagan tyrants who ordered their martyrdoms. St. Catherine, holding the martyr's cross and a palm branch in one hand, stands above the figure of Maxentius, while Mercurios (in a more active gesture) pins Julian the Apostate beneath one foot. At the top of the panel, a small bust portrait of Christ oversees their triumph; he is labeled "The Just Judge."¹⁰¹ As noted by Talbot Rice, this title for Christ more often accompanies scenes of the Last Judgment.¹⁰² The inscription thus suggests a link between the sequence of images composing both the Blunt panels and Yale triptych and themes that we have seen in the other triptychs examined above.

The spiritual victory that both saints achieve over death and over their tormentors anticipates the subject of the central panel of the two triptych programs (cf. Figures 1.17 and 1.21). In the Anastasis, which follows standard Byzantine iconography, Christ himself tramples the gates of Hell with the figure of Hades bound beneath him.¹⁰³ He grasps the wrists of Adam and Eve, who are surrounded by other Old Testament figures – John the Baptist, Elijah, David and Solomon.¹⁰⁴ The symmetry of the composition is shared by the Transfiguration panel, purposefully so, since the revelation of Jesus' divinity on Mount Tabor was a foretaste of his

¹⁰¹ Inscribed: ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ ΚΡΙΤΗΣ. All the figures are carefully labeled with their names on the panel. See Sturgis, *Manual of the Jarves Collection*, no. 9, 23-4.

¹⁰² Talbot Rice, "Five Late Byzantine Panels," 94.

¹⁰³ Also note the way in which Hades spits fire (it emerges from both extremities), visually echoed by the blood coming out of the mouths of the two pagan tyrants in the Catherine and Mercurios panel.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Ledford pointed out the similarity between the white-bearded prophet on Christ's left in this panel and the figure of Elijah joining Christ and Moses in the Transfiguration scene. I think his identification is correct, either emphasizing a special veneration of the Old Testament prophet on the part of the owner/patron of the triptych, or perhaps making the typological connection between Elijah and John the Baptist, who was understood to be his successor (Matthew 11:14).

resurrected glory.¹⁰⁵ As seen in the Vatican and the Modena triptychs, themes focused on Christ's divinity and his redemption of human nature continue to resonate within the broader visual program in these two examples. And, even more emphatically than before, the topographical landscape view depicting Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine is placed at the very center of these panels' theological and typological message.

All three of the scenes on the interior of the Yale triptych and in their counterparts from the Blunt panels are set against a rugged, mountainous backdrop (see Figures 1.17 and 1.21). The mandorla of divine and uncreated light surrounding Christ's figure on Tabor and after his resurrection is the same numinous cloud that rests on the peak of Mount Sinai, where Moses receives the Law. Once more, the old dispensation is juxtaposed with its fulfillment in the person of the Incarnate Word. This notion of Christian succession to the revelation of the Old Testament is made explicit in the Transfiguration, where Christ speaks with Moses and Elijah as representatives of the law and the prophets. The New Testament scene has its own history at the Sinai monastery; Christ's Transfiguration fills the apse of the 6th-century monastery church and is the theophanic culmination of events in the Life of Moses also represented in the church's mosaic program.¹⁰⁶ (Cf. Figure 2.9) The fact that this image was depicted at the monastery and pilgrimage site must have been known to the artist and/or patrons of the two triptychs that include it so prominently juxtaposed to the Sinai landscape.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ As per Christ's instructions to the disciples: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (Matthew 17:9)

¹⁰⁶ Discussed brilliantly by Jaś Elsner in several publications; see especially idem, "The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse," *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 81-102.

¹⁰⁷ Descriptions of the 6th-century mosaics at Sinai do not appear in Western travel literature before the 18th century. However, accounts of Orthodox pilgrims in the 15th and 16th centuries clearly indicate the dedication of the monastery church to the Transfiguration. Cf. Appendix II and IV in Braun, "Literary Sources," 288-90, 303-6, with the accounts of Barsanophius (AD

Thus, the figure of Moses shown receiving the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai at the center of the topographical landscape image (Figure 1.22) has his counterpart within the scene of the Transfiguration in both the Blunt panels and the Yale triptych. The figures of Saint Catherine of Alexandria and the Virgin Mary, likewise part of the Sinai iconography associated with the monastery's sacred past, similarly reappear in other panels of the triptychs' shared visual program. Besides the scene of her angelic burial on the mountain peak adjacent to Mount Sinai, Saint Catherine is celebrated in her feast day icon (Figure 1.20). And the Annunciation (Figure 1.19) with which the entire triptych program opens is the perfect complement to the tiny medallion portrait of the Virgin ensconced within the flames of the Burning Bush as found on the Sinai panel. For, as stated previously, Moses' vision prefigured Mary's role in the Incarnation. These three – Moses, St. Catherine, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush, each representing a different aspect of Sinai's history – weave references to the landscape image of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine throughout the whole series of devotional panels.

I will conclude this section by taking a closer look at the iconography used for the View of Mount Sinai in the Yale panels in particular and with a brief nod to the possible identity of the artist responsible for both triptychs. As can be seen in Figure 1.18, the View of Mount Sinai included in the program of the Blunt panels draws from the same basic composition used by El Greco, Giovanni Battista Fontana, and the anonymous creator of the Vatican triptych. Three receding mountain peaks dominate the landscape. Moses' vision of the Virgin of the Burning Bush, Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, and the miraculous burial of St. Catherine are all depicted in the background, while the contemporary figures of pilgrims, monks, and Bedouin occupy the foreground. A bird's-eye view of the Sinai monastery, nestled at the foot of Mount

1462) and Basil Pozniakov (AD 1558) as translated by Georgi R. Parpulov, "Three East Slavic Pilgrims at Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 481-504, esp. 481-93.

Sinai, provides the gravitational center around which figures and events from the past and present mingle and merge.

By contrast, the Sinai landscape on the right wing of the Yale triptych is startlingly different from what we have come to expect (Figure 1.22). It maintains the tripartite mountain terrain as the primary marker of its *locus sanctus*. Mount Sinai still rises in the center of the panel with a number of chapels scattered across its slopes. As discussed above, Moses' vision of the Burning Bush and receiving of the Law, as well as St. Catherine's burial are all included in their usual locations. It is in the foreground of the image that significant alterations have been made. First and foremost, the Monastery of St. Catherine, while occupying the middle ground, has been shifted to the left and the caravan of pilgrims now enters the scene from the same side. This allows for several additional episodes from the story of Moses and the Israelites wandering in the desert to fill the rest of the panel. Moses striking the rock to bring forth water appears just to the right of the monastery walls. The crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh's army fill the lower right-hand corner, while the Israelites worshipping the golden calf are represented in the center foreground. With the inclusion of these additional Old Testament scenes, it is understandable that the early catalogs of the Yale University Art Gallery listed this panel as a history of the life of Moses.¹⁰⁸ There are several anomalies in terms of the style and painterly approach to this panel, as well, especially when compared to the other scenes included in the Yale triptych. It is executed in a much freer manner, almost to the point of seeming incomplete or unfinished in certain areas. The slopes of Mount Sinai and Mount St. Catherine offer a particular contrast to the natural shading and highlights filled in for the left-most

¹⁰⁸ The Sinai monastery and its group of arriving pilgrims was interpreted as the Israelite camp, while the angelic transport of St. Catherine was thought to represent Moses' burial. See Sturgis, *Manual of the Jarves Collection*, no. 7, 21-23 and Sirén, *A Descriptive Catalog*, no. 113, 266.

mountain (Horeb or Mount Moses). Yet, the range of pigments – the dominant greens and reds with pink highlights, the golden ochre tones – all coincide with the palette used throughout the rest of the triptych. It is possible that this panel suffered from some of the overzealous restoration techniques applied to many items in the Jarves Collection (before and after their acquisition by the Yale University Art Gallery).¹⁰⁹

It may also be the case that the Sinai landscape had come to occupy a different category of image-making from that of the other panels included in the triptych. While these scenes all adhere to traditional iconographic formulae, most notably in the brief inscriptions identifying saints and the titles of different scenes, there is no surviving label for the Sinai landscape view.¹¹⁰ Again, this may have to do with later interventions to the panel's surface. But the background of the panel does not receive the same gilding as the others, either. Instead, it is painted with an ochre color that corresponds with the burnished gold of the matching panels, but only mimics its effect. It is a visual compromise that tries to maintain the naturalism of the landscape view (as we saw in El Greco's Modena panels). I offer one final clue in the identification of a possible alternate pictorial source for the bird's-eye view of the Sinai monastery. For the painter of the Yale triptych seems to have sought out a more detailed view of the monastery walls than what we find in the other topographical icons and a variety of buildings are carefully indicated within the main enclosure. The perspective employed here recalls the "Portrait" of Mount Sinai illustrating the travel account of Pierre Belons du Mans (Figure 1.23), but may be modeled upon a more recent example illustrating the pilgrimage of Johannes Helfferich to Sinai and the Holy

¹⁰⁹ Noted by Paola d'Agostino in conversation, October 21, 2015. See also the introductory essay in David Arnheim et al., *Italian Primitives: The Case History of a Collection and Its Conservation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 2-5.

¹¹⁰ Unlike what we've seen on the Modena and Vatican triptychs.

Land in 1577 (see Figure 1.24).¹¹¹ While Helfferich's landscape is rather summarily indicated, the monastery walls are drawn with nearly military precision – in particular, Helfferich includes projecting bulwarks at the corners and center of three of the monastery's four sides. On the Yale panel, this same motif is applied to the entire periphery.

What I propose is that the artist, while bringing the View of Mount Sinai into the very heart of the Yale triptych and its devotional program, treats the image differently from the other scenes that accompany it. Rather than tracing and copying an authoritative model for the landscape image, the artist treats it as history painting – so that he is free to embellish, invent, and alter the components of the iconography that he has to work with. This approach is not unlike the artistic license pursued in both of El Greco's versions of the Sinai landscape (at Modena and Heraklion). And, as we turn to our final examples in the work of Georgios Klontzas, we see the Sinai monastery and its surrounding landscape once more transformed according to the particular style and pictorial imagination of a strong artistic personality.

As mentioned earlier, neither the Blunt panels nor the triptych in the Yale University Art Gallery preserve a signature or attribution to any one artist. Maria Vassilaki proposed a connection between the Blunt panels and the Cretan painter Michael Damaskenos in her article, "Three Questions on the Modena Triptych." But beyond making the assertion, she does not follow up on her statement with any further observations supporting it.¹¹² After my own examination of the panels in the Yale University Art Gallery, however, I agree with her assessment. Damaskenos, or someone emulating his style quite closely, seems the most likely candidate for the execution of these two related triptychs. There are several aspects of the iconography and painterly approach to figures within the surviving panels of the Yale triptych

¹¹¹ See Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters," 190; Stancioiu, "On the Painted Ancestry," 542.

¹¹² Vassilaki, "Three Questions," 124.

that point to this artist. Firstly, the robe worn by Christ in the scene of the Anastasis is torn to reveal the wound in Christ's side from his crucifixion. This is an unusual element of Anastasis iconography, but one closely connected to Cretan painting in the 15th and 16th centuries.¹¹³ It is used by Theophanes the Cretan in his *Noli me tangere* fresco at the Stavronitika monastery church on Mount Athos (c. 1545-46). It is also used by Michael Damaskenos in his icon of the same subject (c. 1585-91) made for the Vrondisi monastery on Crete and now housed in the Collection of Ecclesiastical Art, St. Catherine of the Sinaites, Heraklion.¹¹⁴

The series of panels produced for the Vrondisi monastery on Crete by Damaskenos provide two additional comparisons for figures that appear in the Blunt and Yale University Art Gallery triptychs. The drapery and modeling of Mary's form in the Annunciation (Figure 1.19) corresponds quite closely to one of the figures of the Magdalene represented in the background of the same panel by Damaskenos (especially in the weight borne by her left leg and the reversed curve of her torso and shoulders).¹¹⁵ Mary's anatomy in the Annunciation panel is less convincing, however, and the flattening of her figure may either be the result of the difference in scale or due to the transmission of Damaskenos' figural approach within the work of another artist. Finally, the figure of Saint Mercurios (Figure 1.20) recalls one of the Magi included in a

¹¹³ The motif can be seen in two 15th-century examples of the subject published in Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, nos. 20 and 15.

¹¹⁴ Again, I wish to acknowledge Daniel Ledford's observations in taking note of the unusual iconography employed for the figure of Christ in the Anastasis scene and for suggesting the comparanda listed here. For Damaskenos' icon of the *Noli me tangere*, see Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 37.

¹¹⁵ The two tones (a lighter pink and orange) used to highlight the red garments of figures in the Yale triptych seem especially close to the modeling of Damaskenos' red draperies in the Vrondisi series, although I am making this comparison based on photographic reproductions. I have not seen these icons in person.

related icon panel by Damaskenos.¹¹⁶ They share refined facial features, the short, curly beard, and the elegant, many-pointed crown. Even if the Yale and Blunt panels are not painted by Michael Damaskenos himself, they can be assigned dates in close proximity to his later work, reflecting the importance of these examples as a model for the artist's own approach. A date in the last decade or two of the 16th century (c. 1600 at the latest) seems appropriate for these two related groups of panels and triptych programs.

The Spada and Yorkshire Triptychs

I will treat the final triptychs in this corpus in tandem, since they are signed by the same artist, Georgios Klontzas, and follow nearly identical visual programs. In this way, the two examples by Klontzas reinforce the pattern that we have seen developing from El Greco's Modena triptych to the discovery of the Yale University Art Gallery panels, in which the same devotional program developed by an artist is employed for the production of more than one portable altarpiece. The Spada triptych (see Figures 1.25 and 1.26) once belonged to the Italian family whose name is still associated with the triptych and whose coat of arms was painted onto the outermost panel, illustrating the hymn "In Thee Rejoiceth."¹¹⁷ It is likely the earlier of the two examples, attributed to the 1570s.¹¹⁸ The Yorkshire triptych is dated to the early 1580s

¹¹⁶ The Adoration of the Magi (1585-91) also in the Collection of Ecclesiastical Art, St. Catherine of the Sinaites, Heraklion. See Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 35.

¹¹⁷ The escutcheon was likely added sometime during the 17th century; it depicts a star above crossed swords. The triptych is currently in a private collection in the United States. See Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou, ed., *Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece* (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture and the Byzantine Museum of Athens, 1988), no. 69, 224-7 and Panayiotis L. Vocotopoulos, "A Hitherto Unknown Triptych by George Klontzas," in *East Christian Art*, ed. Yanni Petsopoulos (London: Bernheimer Fine Arts, 1987), 88-95.

¹¹⁸ Both the Spada and the Yorkshire triptychs are discussed by Jeaninne Vereecken and Lydie Hadermann-Misguich in their overview of Klontzas' artistic oeuvre and career. The works represent his mature period and are compared on points of style, conception of space, and certain

(Figures 1.27 and 1.28),¹¹⁹ and has also been modified by later owners, although in a much more drastic fashion than the Spada triptych. In this case, the original carved wooden decoration on the triptych was completely cut away and replaced by a Gothic Revival frame sometime during the 19th century.¹²⁰

Both triptychs by Georgios Klontzas feature the Sinai landscape on the reverse of the central panel, as seen in El Greco's Modena triptych. When closed, the exterior of the left wing displays an iconographic formula celebrating the Virgin Mary, known by the title of the hymn it illustrates – "In Thee Rejoiceth."¹²¹ When opened, the exterior of the right wing shows a combined image of the Resurrection and Anastasis, along with other scenes from the life of Christ (cf. Figures 1.25 and 1.27). The interiors of both triptychs present a magnificent three-part composition of the Last Judgment (see Figure 1.28). The Last Judgment is a theme that was treated frequently by Georgios Klontzas, not only in icon painting but also in manuscript illumination.¹²² The character of his triptychs have a similarly dense narrative feel – they are packed with groups of figures (sinners, saints, angels and devils all vie for attention), animated by Klontzas' lively use of color as much as by the elongated bodies and mannerist gestures.

iconographic details with the illuminated manuscripts produced by Klontzas for Francesco Barozzi, now preserved as Barocci 170 (Oxford, Bodleian Library) and the "Codex Bute" (in a private collection). These were commissioned c. 1577 and are the focus of Vereecken and Hadermann-Misguich's study, *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage illustrés par Georges Klontzas: La version Barozzi dans le Codex Bute* (Venice: Institut Hellénique de Venise & Bibliothèque Vikelaia d'Hérakleion, 2000), 74.

¹¹⁹ Vereecken and Hadermann-Misguich, *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage*, 74.

¹²⁰ The Yorkshire triptych currently belongs to the Mariana Latsis collection in Athens. See the catalog entry by Maria Kazanaki-Lappa in Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 32, 90-1. It has also been published in Eric Vandamme, ed., *Golden Light: Masterpieces of the Art of the Icon* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum, 1988), no. 106, 132-33 and in Fotopoulos, *Meta to Vyzantio*, no. 24, 94-111.

¹²¹ The hymn was composed by St. John of Damascus in the 8th century. An even more elaborate panel with the same subject by Klontzas survives in the Museum of the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Venice. See Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 33.

¹²² Vereecken and Hadermann-Misguich, *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage*, 80.

Klontzas' distinctive approach can be seen in the way he treats the topographical view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine, as well, especially when placed in comparison with the several examples we have already examined. In both Spada and Yorkshire triptychs, the mountainous landscape has receded into the background, occupying less than half the upper portion of the composition (cf. Figures 1.26 and 1.27). The walled enclosure of the Sinai monastery dominates the center of the panel, while the rest of the space is completely filled as though obeying the impulse of a *horror vacui*. Klontzas elaborates upon the Sinai iconography by including additional Old Testament events, taken mostly from the Israelites' exodus and desert wanderings.¹²³ His choice of scenes is similar to what we saw in the Yale panel (Figure 1.22), but much more densely illustrated. In the foreground of Figure 1.26 for example, Klontzas shows Pharaoh's army drowning in the Red Sea, while the Israelites look on. Just above this scene (and immediately juxtaposed with their thanksgiving for such deliverance), the Israelites turn to idolatry by worshipping the golden calf. And while Moses is shown receiving the Tablets of the Law on the very top of Mount Sinai, he seems to appear with stone tablets a second time at the foot of the mountain, perhaps representing the moment when he breaks them in anger at the Israelites' unfaithfulness and false worship.¹²⁴

It is along the horizon of the Sinai landscape that we finally encounter the iconographic elements we have become accustomed to. Saint Catherine's body is deposited and carefully guarded on the mountain at the right of the composition. Moses encounters the Burning Bush on

¹²³ Vocotopoulos, "A Hitherto Unknown Triptych," 92; Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Holy Image, Holy Space*, 224; Kazanaki-Lappa in *Origins of El Greco*, 90.

¹²⁴ Some narrative elements remain ambiguous, like the horse-drawn cart moving over the bridge at right. I have not been able to identify whether this represents a biblical event or an episode related to the monastery's own history.

the left, on a lower hillock tucked into the space between the mountain at left and Sinai proper.¹²⁵

But even this episode of sacred history has been drawn out by Klontzas into a three-part, continuous narrative, as Moses first appears tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, then bends down to remove his sandals, and finally, stands before the vision of Virgin and child inside the flames of the Burning Bush. The miniature composition imitates that of icons showing Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush that may have preceded the kind of topographical landscape image we see here.¹²⁶

Besides the visual expansion of Old Testament events within the Sinai iconography, Klontzas provides almost anecdotal detail of contemporary monastic life within and around the monastery walls.¹²⁷ Monks are shown greeting a caravan of arriving pilgrims, as seen before; these travelers enter from the left edge of the composition instead of the lower right-hand corner. Meanwhile, the local Bedouin have gathered inside a portico adjacent to the monastery wall (rather than sitting on an outcropping of rock). Several of the Sinai fathers are seated outside the monastery gate (on the Spada triptych, others converse at the entrance to the church). There are even monks shown in front of various chapels on the path ascending Mount Sinai and more incredibly tiny figures are inscribed within the arches of a colonnade set against the back wall of the monastery compound, as well as shown sitting around the dining table of the refectory below. The way in which Klontzas represents the Sinai monastery seems to be highly personal – offering an architectural shorthand of sorts. He uses the same arrangement for the structures

¹²⁵ On the right-hand side Klontzas represents the seventy palm trees at Elim.

¹²⁶ CITE Kuhnel; Aliprantis.

¹²⁷ Vereecken and Hadermann-Misguich point out the blurred line between religious and secular themes in Klontzas' treatment of the Sinai iconography. Ibid., *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage*, 80.

shown inside the fortress walls on both triptychs as well as in an icon with the Transfiguration and scenes of monastic life that belongs to the collection of the Monastery of St. Catherine.¹²⁸

While there is no evidence that Georgios Klontzas ever traveled to Mount Sinai, he must have maintained a close relationship with the monastery. Somewhere between ten and twenty icons by the painter are kept there today.¹²⁹ One of these is another version of “In Thee Rejoiceth.”¹³⁰ In terms of the original audience or patron for either the Spada or Yorkshire triptychs by Klontzas, however, we have no contextual information to help interpret the function of the Sinai topographical image beyond the themes of the visual program itself. These themes are by now almost as familiar as the basic Sinai iconography. Not surprisingly, each of Klontzas’ compositions in the panels that make up the two triptychs is just as complex as what we saw in his Views of Mount Sinai. For the sake of brevity, I will limit the following analysis to an overview of the repeated theological and typological motifs that characterize the new Sinai landscape as it was utilized within the Cretan school of painting.

As described in the beginning of this section, Klontzas places his View of Mount Sinai on the reverse of both triptychs’ central panels. While the Spada triptych (Figure 1.25) has a carved and gilded frame surrounding the verso of the triptych as well as its recto (similar to the tiny Vatican triptych), so that the Sinai landscape appears in the same format as the its other panels, on the Yorkshire triptych (Figure 1.27), Klontzas was able to use the entire verso (including base and pinecone finial) as a support for his composition. As a result, even though the triptych was

¹²⁸ See Nikolaos B. Drandakis, “Post-Byzantine Icons (Cretan School),” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, ed. Konstantinos A. Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), fig. 99 and Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 42.

¹²⁹ In “A Hitherto Unknown Triptych,” Vocotopoulos counts a total of five. *Ibid.*, 95 n. 1. By the time of a later publication on Klontzas, he had revised this to ten signed works and eleven or twelve unsigned. Cited by Nikolaos B. Drandakis, “Post-Byzantine Icons (Cretan School),” 128-9, 388 n. 72.

¹³⁰ Nikolaos B. Drandakis, “Post-Byzantine Icons (Cretan School),” fig. 98.

set into another, later frame, its overall size and shape were preserved.¹³¹ Both triptychs juxtapose the topographical landscape view on the reverse of the central panel with the liturgical scene “In Thee Rejoiceth” on the front of the closed altarpiece. In this way, Klontzas likewise offers a typological contrast between the Old Testament pilgrimage site and events focused on the life of Moses and the Incarnation of Christ celebrated in the Marian hymn (evidently a favored subject in his repertoire).¹³² “In Thee Rejoiceth,” like the Annunciation scenes from the Blunt panels and Yale triptych, focuses on Mary’s role as an instrument of the divine plan for human salvation.¹³³ It is echoed by the iconography of the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai and once more anticipates an eschatological scope displayed in the triptych’s interior.

The right wing opens first on both triptychs, revealing scenes from the life of Christ on the verso of the left wing (see Figures 1.25 and 1.27).¹³⁴ The upper half of the panel is dedicated to two versions of the same event – Christ’s Resurrection, first shown as the Anastasis (or Harrowing of Hell) that we saw at the center of the Blunt panels and Yale triptych, and then in a more typically Western composition, in which Christ strides triumphantly from the tomb carrying a banner of victory. Squeezed in on either side of the lunette at the top of the panel are

¹³¹ In general, Klontzas’ triptychs are larger and more substantial than the other examples presented here. The Spada triptych measures 53 x 75 cm when opened; the Yorkshire triptych measures 56.5 x 61 cm (including the Neo-Gothic frame).

¹³² Klontzas’ signature is placed at the center of the lower edge of this panel on both triptychs. The icon of “In Thee Rejoiceth” now in the Hellenic Institute Museum, Venice, is signed with a more elaborate inscription: ΣΠΟΥΔΙ Κ[ΑΙ] ΚΟΠΙΟΣ, ΤΟΥ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΚΛΟΤΖΑ (study and labor of Georgios Klontzas). The wording suggests that it is an original composition created by the artist. Maria Kazanaki-Lappa, in *Origins of El Greco*, no. 33, 92-3.

¹³³ The Marian scene is based upon iconography associated with the depiction of “All Saints” (the composition at the center of the opened Vatican triptych). Here it is the enthroned Virgin who is surrounded and praised by the community of prophets, saints, and angels.

¹³⁴ This panel is the only one that differs significantly between the two visual programs; while the Spada triptych shows Christ being led to the cross and the scene of his Crucifixion on the lower half of the panel, the Yorkshire triptych replaces these episodes with an image of the Massacre of the Innocents. Petsopoulos, *East Christian Art*, no. 75, 95.

two additional scenes, representing the angel appearing to the women bearing spices and Christ commanding Mary Magdalene not to touch his resurrected body (*Noli me tangere*). Christ's spiritual victory and his rescue of humanity from Hades through the representative figures of Adam and Eve is seen opposite our first glimpse of the expansive Last Judgment that stretches across the three inner panels of the two triptychs (see Figure 1.28). On the recto of the right wing, we see the Archangel Michael rolling up the scroll of the heavens and a vast, fiery inferno below. The souls of the damned huddle in the middle register. It is a rather fearsome vision.¹³⁵

Finally, as the left wing is also pulled away from the center of the triptych, the full scope of Klontzas' imagination and the panoramic treatment of his theme are revealed.¹³⁶ He manages to combine nearly all the visual elements touched upon in the previous triptychs examined in this chapter, from the scene of Christ in Majesty on the Vatican triptych, to the Anastasis presented at the heart of the Blunt panels' and Yale triptych's program, to the allegorical scene of Last Judgement at the center of El Greco's Modena triptych. For Klontzas, it is the triptych's interior that offers the fulcrum of his composition as a whole. Christ presides over the Last Judgment from the summit of the central panel, with the Virgin and John the Baptist flanking him on either side. The cross and prepared throne, or *Hetoimasia*, are displayed below. The central panel is also where the souls of the dead are divided and directed to join either the blessed or the damned

¹³⁵ The fantastical architecture and writhing torments of Hell seem worthy of Hieronymous Bosch. One of the sources for Klontzas' image on this panel has been identified as a print after Domenico Campagnola. See Lydie Hadermann-Misguich, "Les Enfers du jeune Klontzas et leur source gravée," *Annales d'Histoire et de l'Art et d'Archéologie* 17 (1995): 39-45. On late and post-Byzantine apocalyptic imagery more generally, see Angela Volan, "Last Judgments and Last Emperors: Illustrating Apocalyptic History in Late and Post-Byzantine Art" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2005).

¹³⁶ As noted by Vocotopoulos, the Last Judgment was frequently illustrated by Klontzas, both in miniature painting and on icons. It is depicted on a wing of the Patmos triptych (also signed by him), miniatures of Codex VII.22 in the Biblioteca Marciana (dated 1590-92), and a number of unsigned works that can be attributed to his oeuvre. Idem, "A Hitherto Unknown Triptych," 91.

on the two wings of the triptych. As on the Modena triptych (cf. Figure 1.3), we see the celebration of the Eucharist being offered to the community of the elect – in this case by Christ as High Priest. Klontzas also includes scenes from Genesis (Adam and Eve’s original sin and their expulsion from Paradise) in the left wing, bringing our understanding of the themes presented on the Modena triptych full circle. In the elaborate narrative program depicted on the Spada and Yorkshire triptychs, this is the company of saints to which the viewer himself or herself would aspire.

Afterlife of the Sinai Topographical Image

The iconography developed in the late 16th-century persisted in both printed form and post-Byzantine icon painting through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to be employed by the Sinai monastery today. By the late 17th century, a second, specifically Orthodox, formulation of Sinai’s *loca sancta* image developed.¹³⁷ Unlike the earlier group of topographical images, we know for certain that this second type was used and promoted by the Sinai monastery itself. These appeared in woodblock and metal engravings (see Figure 1.34) that were distributed by the Sinai fathers in order to increase veneration for the monastery and its sacred sites, but also frequently made a direct appeal for support from the Christian rulers of Europe, as well. In this instance, the group of travelers approaching in the foreground of the image has been replaced with a scene showing the reception of the monastery’s archbishop. Some of these later engravings were included in Kühnel’s survey of Sinaitic imagery and certain

¹³⁷ The earliest examples date from 1665 and 1688. This corpus of Orthodox engravings, or “paper icons” has been thoroughly documented by Dory Papastratos, *Paper Icons: Greek Orthodox Religious Engravings, 1665-1899*, trans. John Leatham, 2 vols. (Athens: S.A. Publications, 1990).

examples have also been addressed in a short article by George Galavaris, which focuses on the application of this *loca sancta* imagery to an 18th-century bread stamp at Sinai.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ George Galavaris, "A Bread Stamp from Sinai and its Relatives," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 27 (1978): 329-42.

CHAPTER 2

Moses, Mimetic Pilgrimage and Theophanic Vision

Two events from the life of Moses identify God's holy mountain and set it apart. The first was Moses' encounter with a strange sight on the slopes of Mount Horeb – a bush that burned but was not consumed and out of which God commanded the reluctant prophet to leave his flocks (see Figure 2.4). In the words of the African-American spiritual (recorded for posterity in the rich, gravelly voice of Louis Armstrong): “Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go!” The second was on Moses' return to the desert with the children of Israel, when he ascended the same mountain and received stone tablets engraved by the finger of God, enumerating the conditions of their covenant (see Figure 2.5). The peak was covered with clouds and thick darkness; no one but Moses was allowed to approach the divine presence and the Israelites feared that he had been devoured by it.¹ Yet Sinai was proof of their previous deliverance. When first addressed from the burning bush, Moses was assured: “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you... when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God *on this mountain*.” (Exodus 3:12, italics mine). Returning to this place

¹ See Exodus 19:1-25, 20:18-21. In Exodus chapter 24, Moses is accompanied up the mountain by Aaron, his sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders, all of whom are granted a vision of God. The people are commanded to remain at a distance, however. The Lord's descent on the mountain is described as “a consuming fire” (Ex 24:17), so I have made the associative leap to Moses' potential danger after disappearing into the clouds and smoke on top of Sinai. Because he stayed away 40 days and nights (Ex 24:18), the Israelites finally turned to Aaron and asked for another god to lead them through the desert. “As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.” Exodus 32:1 (NIV).

brought the prophet full circle. But arriving once more at the mountain of God was not the end point of the Israelites' exodus. Rather, it propelled them forward with a new identity based upon divine law and the ritual apparatus for maintaining God's presence among them not only in the wilderness but also once they reached their promised homeland.²

There is little available information from Jewish sources recording the specific location of Mount Sinai beyond what is given in the basic biblical narrative, nor was the route of their desert wanderings preserved outside of the scriptural account and its itinerary of place names.³ According to Allen Kerkeslager, biblical and post-biblical evidence for Israelite pilgrimage traditions points to northwestern Arabia rather than the Sinai Peninsula for the location of Sinai/Horeb.⁴ Within the Old Testament, Horeb appears again in the book of Kings when Elijah flees from the wrath of Jezebel and receives his own particular theophany (a still, quiet whisper

² "The mythology of national origins, the distinctive outlines of Jewish ritual and legal practice, and the Jewish liturgy read in the synagogues were all based directly upon the exodus traditions. Jerusalem appropriated the ritual potential of these traditions through the yearly pilgrimage festivals celebrated in the temple. Jews who could not go to Jerusalem to celebrate these festivals also usually could not go to distant sites associated with the events of the exodus. Instead, they developed alternatives by which Passover and other festivals... could be celebrated within their own homes and synagogues. Jewish identity therefore became almost completely detached from concrete sites associated with the mythology of the exodus. This made it easy for Byzantine Christians to attach traditions about the exodus to new sites that had never been associated with the exodus in Jewish tradition." Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 146-7.

³ Numbers 33:3-49. Kerkeslager gives an overview of the scholarship and major positions of the debate regarding proposed sites. Idem, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity," 149, n. 211. See also Joseph J. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 51-54 and Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, "The Route Through Sinai: Why the Israelites Fleeing Egypt Went South," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1988): 28-37.

⁴ More specifically, in the vicinity of the ancient city of Madyan – modern Al-Bad in Saudi Arabia. Kerkeslager proposes taking a closer look at Jebel al-Lawz, which he identifies as the most promising candidate for Mount Sinai as identified in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, in contrast to the focus of much modern research on the South Sinai Peninsula. Idem, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity," 146, 151, 207-13.

following wind, earthquake, and fire).⁵ And Sinai is mentioned several times as the special dwelling place of God,⁶ usually in words that echo the final blessing of Moses: “The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran.” Deuteronomy 33:2 (NRSV). The names for Sinai and Horeb are frequently interchangeable in references to the giving of the Law throughout the Bible,⁷ so that patristic commentaries beginning with Jerome conflated the two mountains.⁸

It is not until the Early Christian period and a burgeoning interest in pilgrimage to the Holy Land that Sinai/Horeb was sought out and settled by monks and holy men.⁹ The pilgrim Egeria, a noblewoman from Spain or Gaul, visited Mount Sinai in AD 383. Her travel narrative provides the first eyewitness source for the holy places commemorating Moses’ theophanic

⁵ 1 Kings 19:1-18.

⁶ As in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:5) and Psalm 68:8. Psalm 68 celebrates the relocation of the temple to Jerusalem. Thus, Mount Zion becomes a successor to Sinai as the place of God’s “holy habitation.” (See esp. verses 15-18).

⁷ For example, in one of the first sermons of the early church, the martyr Stephen recalled that Moses saw the angel of the Lord in the bush on Mount Sinai and heard his voice there once again when he received the “living oracles.” (Acts 7:30, 38). Other references to Sinai and/or Horeb can be found in Nehemiah 9:13, Malachi 4:4, Sirach 48:7, 2 Esdras 2:33, 3:17, and 14:4. In general, the book of Deuteronomy refers to the place of God’s covenant with Israel as Horeb, whereas the other books of the Pentateuch (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers) use Sinai.

⁸ Sinai is not included in Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* when it is first composed in AD 330. See Daniel Caner, “Introduction,” in *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 17-18, notes 68 and 72. Yet in Eusebius’ entry for Horeb, he stated: “It is located beside Mount Sinai beyond Arabia in the desert.” Thus, he reconciled the two names of biblical tradition by identifying two mountains located next to one another. Kerkeslager, “Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity,” 197. When Jerome translated Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* from Greek into Latin in the late fourth century, he identifies them as two names for the same mountain. *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹ Hagith Sivan has articulated the mutual interdependence of pilgrims and monastic communities in the development of a Christian Palestine. See *idem*, “Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the Emergence of Christian Palestine in the 4th Century,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 54-65. On the innovative nature of Christian pilgrimage to Sinai, see Rudolf Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen: Studien zum Frühchristentum auf der südlichen Sinaihalbinsel – Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn islamischer Herrschaft*, Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen 3 (Altenberge, 1989).

encounters that are still visited by tourists and pilgrims as such today. Thus by the end of the fourth century AD, the biblical Mount Sinai became identified with a peak known as Jebel Musa in the South Sinai Peninsula (see Figure 2.1). The adjacent slopes of Ras Safsafa were distinguished from the larger massif and identified as Mount Horeb.¹⁰ Both sites represent the “invention of tradition” in Hobsbawn’s terms.¹¹ The physical landscape and rugged mountain terrain might be considered the equivalent of “ancient materials” used to construct “invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” – especially if the temporal gap and lack of intermediary documentation of the mountains’ locations between the Israelite’s Egyptian exodus and the arrival of Christian pilgrims to the Sinai Peninsula is acknowledged. The association of Sinai/Horeb with the revelation of divine law and successive Old Testament theophanies was re-written at Jebel Musa in the language of emergent Christian tradition and through the ascetic rigors of monastic practice, communal celebrations of liturgy, and the extensive network of pilgrimage routes that traced a new map of sacred places across Roman Palestine.¹²

¹⁰ It is often generally stated that ascetics settled in the South Sinai as early as the third century AD. However, archaeological surveys in the region have found little to suggest their arrival before the fourth century. See Uzi Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000), 21, 63, and 166-68. Derwas J. Chitty also argues for the fourth century in *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (London and Oxford: Mowbrays, 1977; copyright 1966), 168-78.

¹¹ “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” Eric Hobsbawn, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

¹² On the reformulation of the Roman empire through pilgrimage, see Jaś Elsner, “The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine’s Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 181-195. Sinai in particular represented a new frontier – a previously unknown region for Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians. See Caner, “Introduction,” in *History and Hagiography*, 1. On the Saracen threat (referring to Arab nomads in general, “Saracen” is the equivalent to our modern term “Bedouin”) during this period, *ibid.*,

Following in Moses' Steps: Defining Sinai's *Loca Sancta*

There is little need to argue here either for or against the actual continuity of sacred history and physical terrain at Mount Sinai as it was identified in the Early Christian period and afterwards. What matters for my purposes is the potential reiteration of Moses' journey, his privileged experience of and friendship with God, sought by the pilgrims who traveled to this distant holy site, as well as by the monks who dwelt on the mountain. Following in Moses' footsteps, these individuals pursued, if not a personal encounter with divine presence, at least the evidence of divine activity as traced upon a biblical landscape. Perhaps, like the Old Testament prophet, they also dared request a vision of God's glory upon the rocky heights. The route that pilgrims took to reach to the mountain's summit retraced the story of Exodus in as much entirety as was possible.¹³ But participation in liturgical ritual and practices of devotion at the Sinai monastery helped to reinforce the experience of mimetic pilgrimage for both outside visitors and members of the local community.

This chapter will address how the Moses' example of piety and the nature of his theophanic encounters on Horeb/Sinai shaped the expectations and patterns of behavior for travelers and worshippers arriving at the Monastery of St. Catherine in the medieval period (see Figures 2.2 and 2.13). Their actions were also directed by the kinds of images made available to

39-51. Also just published; see Walter D. Ward, *Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

¹³ The monks at Sinai pointed out many of these sites around their community to pious visitors. Some pilgrims, like Egeria, may have participated in (or even precipitated) the process of identifying these very landmarks through their demands to see the specific locations where events recorded in scripture took place. The Bible essentially functioned as a guidebook for many Early Christian travelers. Sivan, "Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the Emergence of Christian Palestine," 56-8, 62.

them within the monastery church and its surrounding chapels.¹⁴ Beginning with the program of 6th-century mosaic decoration original to Justinian's imperial foundation and continued within the production of Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons at or for the Sinai monastery, scenes of Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush and receiving the Tablets of the Law were a prominent feature among the saints and cycle of feast-day images celebrated throughout the liturgical year. While Moses claimed his own place in the ecclesiastical calendar on September 4th, these two narrative moments from the prophet's life resonate with the specific holy places, or *loca sancta*, commemorated at the monastery and pilgrimage site. Thus, I will be referring to the scenes from Moses' life, representing events believed to have occurred in the vicinity, as Sinai's *loca sancta* images. This visual record of the sacred past becomes foundational to the monastery's identity and its *raison d'être* as a focus of Christian travel and veneration.

As several scholars have argued, the images of Moses at Sinai participate in a site-specific, self-referential visual culture intentionally developed and cultivated by the Monastery of St. Catherine during this period; they may in fact provide the first instance of "localism" as an artistic idiom found at Sinai.¹⁵ My following chapters examine two additional examples of *loca sancta* imagery that appear for the first time in the collection of Sinai icons between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. These are icons depicting St. Catherine of Alexandria and the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου ("of the Bush"), whose roles as patrons of the monastery seem to take on complementary visual forms. The importance of Moses, St. Catherine and the Virgin of the

¹⁴ Cynthia Hahn, "Seeing and Believing: the Construction of Sanctity in Early Medieval Saints' Shrines," *Speculum* 72, no. 4 (1997): 1079-1106.

¹⁵ Kurt Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 31-55; Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 37-71.

Burning Bush were maintained in the 16th-century topographical images of the Sinai monastery, where these three holy figures from a venerable past are frequently included in the otherwise contemporary landscape. The pattern of mimetic pilgrimage established at Sinai as a means of “following in the footsteps” of Moses and the model provided by his theophanic visions on the slopes and peak of this mountain lay the groundwork for all of Sinai’s other *loca sancta* images.

In the second part of this chapter, focused on the meaning and significance of images of Moses in relation to the holy places commemorated at Sinai, I will be discussing a series of monumental icon panels dating between the 11th-13th centuries that show the prophet and law-giver in the guise of his two great, theophanic encounters – before the Burning Bush and receiving the Tablets of the Law. The events are frequently conflated, depicted as if occurring simultaneously, in order to focus the viewer’s attention on the figure of Moses and his role as mediator through the icon. However, the narrative juxtaposition is also serves as a pictorial nod to the two scenes from the Life of Moses represented in the mosaic program on the eastern wall of Sinai’s monastery church and dating from the time of its foundation in the mid-6th century (Figure 2.3). Dominating the interior space of the church, these mosaic images manifest the sacred history of the pilgrimage site and made distinct claims about what was possible for those imitating Moses’ ascent in their own spiritual journey. According to Jaś Elsner and others, the mosaics also provided the foundation for a specifically Christian theorization of viewing at Sinai, prescribing not just the manner but also the means of encountering God “face to face.” The theological significance of sight continued to operate as a kind of visual imperative within liturgical worship and pilgrimage experience. It also informed the production and/or

consumption of icons at the monastery, especially those depicting local Sinaitic saints, which appeared in increasing numbers during the Middle Byzantine period (11th-13th centuries).¹⁶

Closely intertwined with the possibility of seeing divine presence at Sinai was the structural framework of mimetic pilgrimage – actions that closely imitated those of Moses as recorded in the biblical narrative.¹⁷ For example, before entering the chapel of the Burning Bush, visiting pilgrims were asked to remove their shoes. The gesture recalled Moses' response to God's command to "remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5). Magister Thietmar, a German pilgrim who arrived at the Sinai monastery in 1217, claimed that it was a standard procedure observed by every visitor to the monastery regardless of creed. "This place no one, neither bishop nor monk, neither Christian nor Saracen, dares to walk upon without taking off his shoes. The Great Sultan himself, the king of Babylon, had gone there at one time and, out of reverence for the place, entered it humbly with bare feet. There I too worshipped barefoot."¹⁸ Later travelers mentioned the same practice, citing divine command – "put off thy shoes" – as the motivation for their actions.¹⁹

¹⁶ Elsner and Wolf propose what they call a "law of icons" operating at Sinai. The monastery becomes a sacred storehouse whose very accumulation of holy images rewrites Sinai's Old Testament history within post-Iconoclast, Christian terms. See Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 60-64.

¹⁷ I am using this term as introduced by Jaś Elsner in his paper, delivered at the symposium accompanying the Getty exhibition, "Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai," and replaced by the term "scriptural pilgrimage" in his published essay, co-authored with Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 39. "Mimetic pilgrimage" is a concept used by other scholars to define the experience of Holy Land pilgrimage in the Early Christian period, as well. For example, see Gary Vikan, "Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, 97-107.

¹⁸ Translation by Sister Joan Mary Braun in "St. Catherine's Monastery Church, Mount Sinai: Literary Sources from the Fourth through the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D. Thesis: University of Michigan, 1973), 306.

¹⁹ Braun, "Literary Sources," 252-3 and 306-15 (appendix with excerpts from pilgrim accounts, beginning with Thietmar up through the end of the 19th century). When I first visited the Sinai

Thus, while the larger journey of pilgrimage retraced the steps of the Israelites through the Sinai desert and followed Moses to the mountain's peak, this mimetic action was especially focused within the sacred space of the monastery church.²⁰ Scriptural precedent both informed ritual practice at Sinai and provided the ultimate founding narrative for its status as holy ground. Even the goal of seeing/perceiving divine light rests upon Moses' vision of the burning bush as its originating exemplar (a theme that will be developed further in my chapter on iconography related to the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai). The Chapel of the Burning Bush, located directly behind the main altar, is dedicated to Moses' first encounter with God on Sinai/Horeb (Figure 2.6). While alterations to the architectural fabric of the church make it clear that the chapel was a later addition to the Justinianic structure (c. AD 548-65), we have no secure archaeological or textual data to suggest at what point the structure was enclosed.²¹ The area may

monastery in August 2006, Father Nilus still requested that my travel companions and I remove our footwear before going into the Chapel of the Bush.

²⁰ Inscriptions set into the lintel over the main entrance to the nave identified Sinai's primary *locus sanctus* by quoting from Exodus 3:14-15. "And the Lord spoke to Moses in this place, saying..." This passage can be read on the perpendicular face of the lintel, while the horizontal face carries a verse from the Psalms that repeats an inscription from the main entrance of the monastery's fortress-like walls. "This is the gate of the Lord: the righteous shall enter by it." (Ps. 118:20). Caner, "Introduction," in *History and Hagiography*, 25-26. Cf. Ihor Ševčenko, "The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in the Light of Its Inscriptions," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 262, nos. 1 and 2. See also Simon Coleman and John Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): 78-79.

²¹ George Forsyth, whose architectural studies were part of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions in the 1950's and 60's, proposed a medieval date, sometime before Thietmar's visit in 1216 [sic]. See idem, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968): 5. This position is also supported by Denys Pringle in *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56. Peter Grossman argues that the Chapel of the Burning Bush was added at date closer in time to the construction of the church, noting the similarity of masonry techniques and stating that the addition must have been completed before Sinai was lost to Byzantine sovereignty (thus before 614). Grossman, "Architecture," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. Konstantinos A. Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 35-6. Because the church and its easternmost chapel rest on the most venerated of Sinai's *loca sancta*, no archaeological work in this area has been (or is likely to ever be)

have started out as an open-air courtyard surrounding the remains of the bush, an arrangement comparable to that found at other Holy Land pilgrimage sites.²² Magister Thietmar, quoted above, was the first pilgrim to describe entering the chapel. He also stated that the Burning Bush had been broken up and divided among Christians for relics, so that it could no longer be seen by visitors to the monastery. Egeria, on the other hand, found the bush “alive and flourishing” when she arrived in the late fourth century. It stood just outside a small church within a well-watered garden, where her party prayed and received the Eucharist.²³ This arboreal link with the past seems to have disappeared over the intervening centuries between Egeria’s visit and the early 13th century.²⁴ Even by the middle of the 6th century, when Justinian’s church was being built,

approved by the monastic community. The question may remain unresolved. Pringle states that the mosaic in the apse of the chapel of the Bush has a dedicatory inscription dating to the 11th century. However, Weitzmann does not accept any specific date for the mosaic’s execution; see idem, “Mosaics,” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 66.

²² For example, at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem where the cave of Christ’s birth was enshrined within an octagonal martyrium, at the eastern end and distinct from the five-aisled basilica adjoining it. This separation between the main place of worship and the focal point of veneration can also be seen in the original Constantinian layout of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Anastasis Rotunda. Forsyth was keen to make the comparison between the monastery church at Sinai and other pilgrimage churches from the Syria-Palestine region. See idem, “The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: Church and Fortress,” 3, 15-19.

However, in contrast to the strict typological approach followed by Forsyth – especially in arguing for a pilgrimage ‘route’ circumambulating the interior of the Sinai church and its sacred spaces, Robert Ousterhout has emphasized the diversity of architectural forms that can be found serving various pilgrimage sites in Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. As he states, “our simplistic modernist explanation that ‘form follows function’ seems inadequate. Although Christian architecture is often analyzed in terms of the creation of a setting for the performance of ritual acts, it is important to realize that architecture did not simply house sites and rituals, it glorified and magnified them, it authorized and validated them, and it ultimately became an integral component of the ritual experience.” See his essay, “Pilgrimage Architecture,” in *EGERIA: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage*, ed. Maria Kazakou and Vasileios Skoulas (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2008), 47-57.

²³ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 4.6-8, trans. John Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1999; reprinted with corrections 2002, 2006), 112.

²⁴ A descendant of the Old Testament shrubbery shows up again at Sinai in the eighteenth century, according to Richard Pococke’s travel account in *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries* (London: W. Boyer, 1743-45), 143. This is described as a type of bramble

the anonymous Piacenza Pilgrim (c. AD 551-70) made no mention of the bush itself surviving at Sinai. Instead, his description focused on a spring of water enclosed by the monastery that marked the spot where Moses saw his vision.²⁵

Regardless of whether the sacred bramble was still green and sprouting when the Emperor Justinian offered his patronage to the monastic community on Mount Sinai, the location of Moses' encounter with God on holy ground determined not only the orientation of the monastery church but also its awkward relationship with the surrounding defensive wall (Figure 2.7). The site of the bush is the lowest corner of the whole enclosure, which forms a rough parallelogram placed as far from the valley floor as possible.²⁶ Construction of the church had to

common in Europe, although not native to the surrounding area. It may have been the same species of raspberry bush that grows inside the monastery walls today, classified as *Rubus sanctus* – a subspecies of the *Rubus ulmifolius* (synonyms include *Rubus anatolicus* and *Rubus sanguineus*). The *Rubus* genus is especially complex and includes raspberries, blackberries, and dewberries, as well as numerous hybrid brambles. See E. Monasterio-Huelin and H. E. Weber, "Taxonomy and Nomenclature of *Rubus ulmifolius* and *Rubus sanctus* (Rosaceae)," *Edinburgh Journal of Botany* 53, no. 3 (1996): 311-22.

²⁵ PP, *Itin.* 37, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 257. See also the editor's commentary in note 23.

²⁶ Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine," 6, 8; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 2:55, 57. The defensive walls measure 80 meters from east to west and 75 meters north-south. The church is aligned east-west, but set at an angle to its surrounding perimeter. The builders clearly had to negotiate between the practicable and the sacred – protecting the monastery's traditional *locus sanctus* while at the same time avoiding the danger of flash floods along the Wadi ed-Deir. The system of drainage within the Justinianic fortress is quite intricate and still functions efficiently. George Forsyth was able to follow the trail of water to its single exit channel during a rainstorm in 1960, a discovery he explains in coverage of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton Expeditions by *National Geographic Magazine* 125, no. 1 (January 1964): 101-2. Water was not just a fixation of the Piacenza Pilgrim during his desert sojourn, but a crucial resource for survival and maintenance of the monastic community at Sinai. More recent archaeological surveys have emphasized the relationship between the non-porous red granite of the South Sinai with increased water availability due to accumulated run-off in certain valleys and the settlement pattern of Early Christian ascetics. The gardens that were celebrated and remarked upon by Egeria and nearly every pilgrim to follow after her were made possible due to the specific geo-morphology of the region. This agricultural productivity is continued in many instances by the Sinai Bedouin. See Aviram Perevolotsky and Israel Finkelstein, "The Southern Sinai Exodus Route in Ecological Perspective," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 11, no. 4

accommodate the sloping surface of its location – the western entrance is a good four meters below the level of the monastery’s main gate and the general approach.²⁷ A long flight of steps mediates between these disparate elevations and lends to the monastery’s complex interior topography.²⁸ The entire site revolves around its primary *locus sanctus*, the place of the miraculous bush. With the addition of an enclosed chapel to the east of the church’s main altar, whenever this occurred in the monastery’s history, further ritual significance could accumulate and re-define the role of Moses’ theophanic vision for its medieval audience.²⁹

(Jul/Aug 1985): 26-35, 38-41 and more recently Zoltan Matrahazi, *Sinai Gardens: Retreats in the Sinai High Mountain Region* (Southsea, UK: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010). Cf. remarks by Caner, “Introduction,” in *History and Hagiography*, 22-23, who suggests that monks may have been the first to successfully introduce agriculture to the South Sinai.

²⁷ The monastery church measures approximately 20 x 34 meters overall, measuring from the western wall inside the narthex (added in the 11th century) to the outer wall of the apse. Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 2:55.

²⁸ Forsyth, “The Monastery of St. Catherine,” 8.

²⁹ I lean toward a date in the 11th-century, corresponding to the addition of a narthex on the western end of the monastery church. This is also when another 6th-century building that served as a guesthouse (or possibly refectory) was converted into a mosque. On these structures, see Forsyth, “The Monastery of St. Catherine,” 7-8 and Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 2:55, 57. As stated above, Peter Grossman in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 36, argues that the Chapel of the Burning Bush must have been built when craftsmen were still available who were trained in the same masonry style as the 6th-century church. The large, square-cut granite blocks clearly correspond to those of the Justinianic church in contrast with the smaller, rubble-based building materials used for later structures. Grossman notes the joints between the eastern wall/apse of the Burning Bush chapel and the pastophoria, projecting side chapels, that form its boundaries. Access to the chapel also required architectural intervention, with passages opened from the lateral walls of the pastophoria, as well as at the junction with the northern chapel where space for a narrow corridor was created. These efforts were obviously not of a piece with the original floorplan, even if the church was enlarged during the process of its construction (cf. Grossman in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 35). Would it not be possible for the construction of the Chapel of the Burning Bush to re-use blocks from the Justinianic structure on top of Jebel Musa, which had fallen into disrepair by the eleventh century? Some of these were put to use in building a mosque on the summit, also in the eleventh/early twelfth century. See Sophia Kalopissi-Verti and Maria Panayotidi, “Excavations on the Holy Summit (Jebel Musa) at Mount Sinai: Preliminary Remarks on the Justinianic Basilica,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 77-78 and 82-83. A final point supporting this hypothesis is the dedicatory inscription from the mosaic decorating the apse in the Chapel of the Burning Bush, which names an Archbishop Solomon from the early 11th century. Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 2:56.

The 1214 typikon written by Abbot Symeon details several processional liturgies in which the Chapel of the Burning Bush forms the focal point of prayers and petitions offered by the monastic community at Sinai.³⁰ When considering evidence from the typikon alongside descriptions of the chapel from the accounts of visiting pilgrims, this space seems to have become one of the most efficacious of Sinai's *loca sancta* – certainly, access to it was carefully controlled and manipulated. As described above, visitors were instructed to remove their footwear before entering the chapel. The Sinai fathers did the same. They also stood with heads uncovered during prayers addressed to both Moses and the Virgin Mary.³¹ The space dedicated to the Burning Bush continues to be used today for tonsuring new members of the monastery community and for the celebration of liturgy each Saturday.³² According to Abbot Symeon's typikon, the Chapel of the Bush was part of stational liturgies celebrated on each Agrypnia, or all-night vigil, preceding feast days that were observed at the monastery.³³ These included vigils for the prophet Moses (September 4), the martyrs St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Merkourios (November 24), Theodosios the koinobiarch (January 11) and the martyred fathers of Sinai and

³⁰ Sinai Ms. 1097. The original manuscript has not been edited, although sections of it have been transcribed by Aleksei Dmitrievskii in his 3 vol. collection of Byzantine liturgical texts, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisej*, vol. 3 (Kiev and St. Petersburg, 1895-1917; reprinted in Hildesheim: G., Olms, 1965), 394-419. Passages especially relevant to the history and sacred topography of the Sinai monastery are translated by Nancy P. Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon* of Symeon of Sinai," in *Metaphrastes, or Gained in translation: Essays and translations in honour of Robert H. Jordan*, ed. Margaret Mullett, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 9 (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2004), 274-88. The typikon is a liturgical calendar with instructions given for the order of each day's services. Monastic typika include specific rules for administrative organization and communal behavior, as well as liturgical observances. Symeon's typikon for the Sinai monastery was based upon that of St. Sabbas of Jerusalem. Sinai Ms. 1097 has two later copies, Sinai 1101 (dated 1311) and Sinai 1103. Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 274 n. 1.

³¹ Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 285.

³² "The Sacred Bramble," from the official website of the Holy Monastery of the God-trodden Mount Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery (<http://www.sinaimonastery.com/en/index.php?lid=39>).

³³ Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 276. According to the monastery website, the chapel is currently used to celebrate the feast of Annunciation. See note above.

Raithou (January 14), as well as the annual commemoration of the monastery's preservation from an earthquake on May 1, 1211. General instructions for the procedure followed in each Agrypnia specified that the chapel of the Holy Bush should be entered after having completed morning prayers. Invoking the intercession of the Virgin (Δέσποινα), the priest recited the litany, 100 Kyrie Eleison's, made the final commemoration and then dismissed those present.³⁴

By the early 13th century, and perhaps earlier, architectural intervention at the eastern end of the monastery church at Sinai had created a new focal point for liturgical celebration and pilgrimage rituals within the space of the Burning Bush Chapel (Figure 2.8). We know little about the chapel's original decoration during the medieval period other than brief hints from travel accounts like that of Magister Thietmar. However, the Chapel of the Burning Bush received more frequent treatment in pilgrim narratives than any other part of the church, only excepting the tomb of St. Catherine and her relics.³⁵ Pilgrims consistently mention the altar, which stood over the place of the Bush, and the lamps burning there. Paul Lenoir (1868) called the chapel "the most curious and richly ornamented" at Sinai.³⁶ Besides taking note of God's command to Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground and the continued practice of entering the chapel without shoes, visitors also pointed out the presence of carpets on the floor and, occasionally, textile hangings (described as tapestries and/or silks).³⁷

³⁴ Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 276.

³⁵ Braun, "Literary Sources," 252. Interestingly, by the 18th and 19th centuries, the Chapel of the Burning Bush was said to be the oldest part of the monastery and attributed to the patronage of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine. While unfounded and subsequently disproved by the architectural record, this legend reinforces the importance that had accrued over time to the site of the Burning Bush and its significance to the monastic community at Sinai. Cf. Braun, "Literary Sources," 251.

³⁶ From a selection of *The Fayoum* (p. 219), as quoted by Braun in Appendix V, "Literary Sources," 315.

³⁷ Felix Fabri (1483) and Deacon Ephrem (17th C) both say that the walls of the chapel were covered in slabs of white marble. By the middle of the 19th century, James Hamilton's travel

The altar, as can be seen today, is a stone table raised on four pillars. Another marble slab covers the floor beneath the altar and marks the location of the miraculous bush. A number of pilgrims indicated that this stone was covered with silver plate, although the metal is sometimes described as gold or bronze instead.³⁸ At the center of the marble slab an opening once held oil, which was collected by pilgrims at least in the 14th century as a replacement for the miraculous oil once available from the bones of St. Catherine.³⁹ Both this metalwork cladding and the circular vessel at its center are reflected in the current arrangement of a gilded revetment covering the stone at the base of the chapel's altar.⁴⁰ The rich ornament provides a focal point for the devotion of worshippers who kneel with shoes removed, offering their own prayers and

account describes porcelain tiles painted with patterns in arabesque – the sheathing of Syrian glazed tile that can still be seen today. An inscription in Greek on four of the tiles bears the date 1680, although this may not reflect the program of tiles in the chapel as a whole since another bilingual inscription (Greek and Arabic) found on a marble plaque set into the west wall of the chapel indicates that the tile paving was reset in 1770. See John Carswell, "Syrian Tiles from Sinai and Damascus," in *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon*, ed. Roger Moorey and Peter Parr (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1978), 269-96, esp. 274-76.

³⁸ Felix Fabri (1483) says that he saw a brazen plate set into the pavement. Paul Lenoir (1868) describes the reflection of the lamps on gold. Braun, "Literary Sources," 309, 315. Pilgrims mentioning silver include Niccolò da Poggibonsi (1346-50), Baron d'Anglure (1395-96), Arnold von Harff (1498), the Prefetto of the Franciscans in Egypt (1722), Edward Robinson (1838 and 1852), James Hamilton (1854), and Edward H. Palmer (1868-69). Braun, "Literary Sources," 307-8, 310, 312-15.

³⁹ The oil is mentioned by Niccolò da Poggibonsi (1346-50), gathered from a silver cup with a silver spoon ("style"), and by Baron d'Anglure (1395-96), who says that pilgrims can place their fingers inside an opening in the silver plate to collect the oil. Braun, "Literary Sources," 307-8. James Hamilton (1854) likewise mentions plates of silver surrounding a hole in the floor, marking the site of the Burning Bush beneath a raised altar. Braun, "Literary Sources," 314. On the miraculous oil collected from St. Catherine's relics at Sinai, see discussion below.

⁴⁰ Photographs of the marble slab beneath the altar with and without its metal revetment have been published in Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), pl. CI. A color image, although not as detailed as the older black & white photographs, can be found in Helen C. Evans, *Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt: A Photographic Essay* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 60.

petitions in the place of Moses' theophany and, like the Old Testament prophet, tread here on holy ground. Three lamps hang suspended beneath the altar.⁴¹

What seems obvious, perhaps, is that this most sacred place within the monastery church was given special treatment through material form – the altar and stone beneath embellished with metal revetments not unlike the use of similarly precious cladding on Byzantine icons, reliquaries, and gospel book covers. The reflective and light-bearing properties of such gilded relief will come into play in my discussion of developing iconography for the Virgin of the Burning Bush during this period; I conclude this section with one final, if enigmatic, clue to the interior decoration of the Chapel of the Burning Bush at the beginning of the 13th century. This is the description given by Magister Thietmar (1217) of several 'golden images' he sees there representing the Lord above the bush, Moses taking off his sandals, and Moses standing once again with bare feet to receive his instructions about what to say before Pharaoh. Perhaps the most fascinating detail is a golden bush made "on the pattern of the original bush," which has been removed and its relics divided among eager Christian pilgrims.⁴²

⁴¹ An arrangement that corresponds with the descriptions found in several pilgrim accounts. Both Basile Posniakov (1558-61) and Deacon Ephrem (17th C) mention that these lamps were kept burning day and night, whereas Paul Lenoir (1868) emphasizes the mystical quality of this light, which was carefully tended and revealed to visitors by the monks. Braun, "Literary Sources," 311, 315. "The altar in this little chapel is placed where the burning bush stood. A bright light reflected in a plate of gold is the emblem of the sublime apparition; and it was with gestures of respect and awe that the monks withdrew for us the veil which hides the little flame from profane eyes." Ibid., 315.

⁴² "Rubus quidem sublatus est et inter Christianos pro reliquiis distractus, ad instar autem illius rubi factus est aureus rubus ex laminis aureis, et ymago Domini aurea super rubrum, et ymago Moysi aurea stans ad dexteram rubi, discalcians se. Stat et alia ymago Moysi aurea in sinistra parte rubi tamquam discalcata et nudis pedibus. Ubi Dominus dedit ei legationem ad Pharaonem, regem Egypti, de educendo populo suo." *Mag. Thietmari Peregrinatio (1217). Ad fidem codicis Hamburgensis*, ed. J.C.M. Laurent (Hamburg: Nolte & Köhler, 1857), 42. Braun, "Literary Sources," 306, provides a translation of this section, as does Denys Pringle in *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 2:52-3.

Earlier scholarship assumed that Thietmar must have been talking about the scenes from the life of Moses executed in mosaic high up on the eastern wall of the monastery church (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5), somehow confusing their actual location with his experience in the *locus sanctus* of the Burning Bush chapel.⁴³ Others proposed that Thietmar may have seen icons depicting the moment of Moses' theophany.⁴⁴ His description of the "*ymago... aurea*" could indicate the use of gold ground prevalent on such painted panels (Figure 2.11, for example).⁴⁵ Since most of the monumental icons at Sinai showing Moses before the Burning Bush have been attributed to the early 13th century, if not before that date, it is plausible to suggest that Thietmar encountered at least one such image within the monastery church (or in its dependent chapels). According to Anastasia Drandaki, it is worth considering the possibility of a metal relief image that depicted the scene of Moses and the Burning Bush on display within the chapel, as well.⁴⁶ This may have been a relief icon executed completely in gold or silver gilt, or Thietmar's description may indicate figural scenes included on embossed or repoussé sheets covering the

⁴³ As stated by Braun, "Literary Sources," 98, "This appears to the writer to be the earliest description of the mosaic in the apse of the church." Although in her later discussion of the mosaics, she admits it is possible, "and probably more likely," that Thietmar refers to an iconic representation within the Chapel of the Bush, especially considering the fact that explicit mention of the 6th-century mosaics at Sinai does not appear in pilgrim accounts until the 18th century. Braun, "Literary Sources," 238-9.

⁴⁴ Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 149-65, esp. 159 n. 47.

⁴⁵ Although Thietmar knew and used the term *ycona* (icon), for example in his recounting of the story of a miraculous icon of the Virgin found in Damascus. *Mag. Thietmari Peregrinatio* (1217). *Ad fidem codicis Hamburgensis*, ed. J.C.M. Laurent (Hamburg: Nolte & Köhler, 1857), 13-8. There may have been ecclesiastical or dogmatic reasons for Thietmar's stress upon the term "golden image," especially at Mount Sinai where the divine command forbidding graven images was first given and where Aaron led the Israelites astray by agreeing to produce an idol in the form of a golden calf for their adoration.

⁴⁶ Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 496, 499 n. 51.

marble slab that marked the site of Moses' miraculous vision.⁴⁷ At least one other pilgrim in the 15th century specifies that the brazen plate set into the floor of the Burning Bush chapel beneath the altar was engraved with an image of the bush and of Moses removing his shoes.⁴⁸

The revetment that today sheathes the site of the Burning Bush is clearly historiated (Figure 2.8), although the scenes and their subject matter represented in the embossed metal cannot be determined from any of the published photographs. When I had access to the chapel during my first visit to Mount Sinai, I did my best to observe the forms of piety expected and did not linger or attempt to take my own photographs within this space. Nor was I aware at that time of the particular interest I would later take in the marble slab beneath the altar and its ornament! Therefore I cannot further elaborate upon the possible date or iconographic significance of the metal revetment currently in situ.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that the relief decoration visible today is the same gilded plate described by pilgrims in the 14th and 15th centuries, as suggested by Drandaki.⁵⁰ Her efforts to connect surviving works of art at the Sinai monastery with specific

⁴⁷ The form of the golden bush is especially curious, since Thietmar tries to explain that it is *ad instar autem* (in the likeness, resembling, equal to the form of the original bush) and *ex laminis aureis* (made from sheets of gold), in contrast to the *ymago... aurea* (golden image) of the Lord or of Moses found above and to the sides of the bush. Drandaki initially proposes that the artifact may have been a three-dimensional tree not unlike the famed automata of the Byzantine court during the 10th century, then focuses on the possibility of a metal relief image instead. Idem, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 496 n. 38.

⁴⁸ Felix Fabri (1483), quoted in Braun, "Literary Sources," 309. Cf. Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 499.

⁴⁹ Drandaki cites a source in Modern Greek that I have not been able to access: M. Myriantheos-Koufopoulou, "Το παρεκκλήσιο της Αγίας Βάτου στο καθολικό της Μονής Σίνα," in *Εικοστό Πέμπτο Συμπόσιο βυζαντινής και μεταβυζαντινής αρχαιολογίας και τέχνης* (Athens, 2005), 90. Idem, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 499, n. 51.

⁵⁰ Anastasia Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes: Mt. Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the 13th and 14th Centuries," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaiologikēs Hetaireias* 27 (2006): 499. A survey of the accounts quoted in Appendix V from Braun, "Literary Sources," and supplemented by my own reading of other pilgrimage narratives demonstrates that the marble slab was sometimes seen with metal sheathing and sometimes without. Precious metals were a fungible commodity in pre-modern economies and uncertain political contexts, especially. Very few of the icons in the

descriptions of visual ornament and pictorial decoration drawn from these early travel accounts are intriguing, yet can only offer tentative conclusions.⁵¹

It may be just as problematic to presume that the ‘golden images’ seen by Thietmar at the start of the 13th century and the engraved bronze sheathing described by Friar Felix Fabri at the end of the 15th refer to the same artifact as it is to suggest continuity between these medieval travel accounts and the metal revetment that remains in situ today.⁵² Whether or not the pilgrim narratives testify to surviving objects at the Sinai monastery, they do point towards the prominence of Mosaic imagery (referring to the Old Testament prophet, not the artistic medium) available in the visual culture of these centuries, and its close relationship with the holy places commemorated at Sinai. In the section that follows, I turn from the actual *loca sancta* associated with the life of Moses to the pictorial tradition established by the 6th-century program of mosaics in the monastery church and its continuation through the production and consumption of

Sinai monastery’s collection have metal revetment surviving as part of their frame. Some scholars have suggested an aesthetic motivation (see Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain,” 63); however, the lack of survival may be a matter of simple economic necessity and the monastery’s deployment of available resources.

⁵¹ See also Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Pilgrimage to Sinai: Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 26-44.

⁵² The various aims and goals of each pilgrim’s authorial voice are important to take into consideration as much as the potential for their mistaking content or iconography in what visual images they describe (or simply misremembering certain details). The accounts of Magister Thietmar (1217) and of Felix Fabri (1483) stand out from most other examples because of their eye for detail and use of vivid anecdotes illustrating their travel experiences. Another such writer is Niccolò da Poggibonsi. His *Libro d’Oltromare* has been translated into English by T. Bellorini and F. Hoade, *Fra Niccolò of Poggibonsi, A Voyage beyond the Seas (1346-1350)*, Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945). It is striking that Niccolò does not mention any figural imagery within the Chapel of the Burning Bush, since he alludes to a number of images inside the monastery church and even provides one (or more) of the rare literary references to a still-existing work of art. See Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th Century,” 36-8; idem, “Through Pilgrims’ Eyes,” 500-502.

monumental icon panels during the 11th-13th centuries, iconic images that self-consciously replicate these mosaic/Mosaic scenes.

Envisioning Theophany: From Apse Mosaic to Icon Panel

Just as celebrated as the rich collection of Early Christian and Byzantine icons at Sinai is the preservation of the monastery church and its 6th-century program of mosaics covering the eastern wall and apse (Figure 2.3). Few such early Byzantine imperial foundations have survived intact, whether in Constantinople or in the Holy Land. The monastery's construction at the foot of Mount Sinai was chronicled by Justinian's court historian, Procopius, in his panegyric *De aedificiis*, V.viii.1-9:

On this Mount Sina live monks whose life is a kind of 'careful study of death,' and they enjoy without fear the solitude which is very precious to them. Since these monks have nothing to crave – for they are superior to all human desires and have no interest in possessing anything or in caring for their bodies, nor do they seek pleasure in any other thing whatsoever – the Emperor Justinian built them a church which he dedicated to the Mother of God, so that they might be enabled to pass their lives therein praying and holding services.⁵³

Procopius also mentioned the fortress enclosure, stressing its defensive purposes not necessarily for the local community but rather for the interests of the empire – “in order that the Saracen barbarians might not be able from that region... to make inroads with complete secrecy into the lands of Palestine.”⁵⁴

The date of the church has been established with some certainty by the discovery of dedicatory inscriptions on the ceiling beams.⁵⁵ These commemorate the Empress Theodora after

⁵³ Procopius, *De aedificiis*, V.viii.4-5, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 275-6.

⁵⁴ Procopius, *De aedificiis*, V.viii.9, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 276.

⁵⁵ Published by Ihor Ševčenko, “The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in the Light of Its Inscriptions,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 255-64. On the range of possible dates for the

her death in AD 548 and must have been completed before the end of Justinian's reign in 565.⁵⁶

They also name the local architect and/or builder of the church, Stephanos of Aila, requesting salvation for himself and repose for his two children.⁵⁷ Due to the prominence of the Sinai abbot, Longinus, the deacon, John, and Theodore, "second in command," in the dedicatory inscription of the apse mosaic and appearing in the portrait medallions that frame the central image,⁵⁸ it seems that the local monastic community was responsible for the rich interior decoration of the church and its theologically complex visual program (although scholars generally assume that the mosaics must have been executed by a Constantinopolitan workshop vs. local craftsmen).⁵⁹

monastery church and its mosaic decoration, see Caner, "Introduction," *History and Hagiography*, 27-9. Cf. Ihor Ševčenko, "The Early Period," 256-7.

⁵⁶ Justinian's patronage is also celebrated in an inscription above the main portal (now sealed) on the northwest wall, facing the monastery garden and plains of Raha. The massive lintel carries a quotation from Psalm 118:20 (also used above the entrance to the basilica) and the following attribution: "In the age of Justinian, Sole Ruler, Who Loves Building Buildings." Caner, "Introduction," *History and Hagiography*, 25; Ihor Ševčenko, "The Early Period," 262, inscriptions 1, 4, and 5.

⁵⁷ Caner, "Introduction," *History and Hagiography*, 27, 29 n. 118; Ihor Ševčenko, "The Early Period," 262, inscription no. 3.

⁵⁸ The inscription in mosaic that runs along the bottom of the apse reads, "In the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit: All this work was done for the salvation of the ones who provided the fruits in the time of the most holy priest and *hēgoumen* Longinus, by zeal of Theodore, priest and *deuterarius* [i.e. 'second in command'], indiction fourteen." Caner, "Introduction," *History and Hagiography*, 27; Ihor Ševčenko, "The Early Period," 263, inscription no. 7. The abbot Longinus and deacon John appear at the corners of the apse mosaic as part of a ribbon of portrait medallions on blue ground that frame the central composition. They are distinguished from the prophets and apostles whose company they keep by their square halos and tituli. See George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), plates CIII, CXX, and CXXI.

⁵⁹ Kurt Weitzmann, "The Mosaic in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 110, no. 6 (Dec. 16, 1966): 392-405, esp. 400, 403, and 405; idem, "Introduction to the Mosaics and Monumental Paintings," in *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian*, ed. Forsyth and Weitzmann, 11-18, esp. 12 and 16; idem, "Mosaics," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 61-66, esp. 64 and 66. William Loerke argues that the composition of the Sinai mosaics reflects a specifically local, monastic vision, but agrees that the craftsmen and materials must have arrived under imperial patronage. Idem, "'Real Presence' in Early Christian Art," in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed.

Attendant scholarship on the Sinai mosaics is vast.⁶⁰ While I shall summarize the relevant points made in other publications, my focus will be limited to the two narrative images from the Life of Moses found at the top of the church's eastern wall (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). As stated, these represent the two moments most specifically associated with Sinai's nearby holy places, or *loca sancta* – Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush on Horeb and Moses receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai. Each scene occupies a rectangular area to the left and right of a divided, columned window (cf. Figure 2.3).⁶¹ Below these narrative panels, two angels bearing

Timothy Verdon (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 29-51, esp. 43. Weitzmann's assertions are generally accepted by Jaś Elsner, although Elsner focuses on the meaning of the mosaic program and the nuances of its possible reception by contemporary viewers rather than the circumstances of its production. See Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse," *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 81-102, esp. 89 and "Viewing and the Sacred," in *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88-124, esp. 102. Most recently, Andreas Andreopoulos reaffirms the likelihood of ties between Sinai and Constantinople in the creation of the Sinai mosaics. His analysis takes the scene of Transfiguration as its primary concern, arguing that the Sinai composition establishes the iconographic type for this event in the life of Christ in Byzantine art. While depending heavily on Weitzmann's observations throughout, he proposes a closer examination of the role of the priest Theodore, second-in-command to the abbot Longinus, in overseeing the theological conception of the mosaic program. Andreopoulos, "The Mosaic of the Transfiguration in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai: A Discussion of its Origins," *Byzantion* 72 (2002): 9-41, esp. 14 n. 13; idem, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), esp. 76, 132 n. 14.

⁶⁰ Besides the works listed above, see also William C. Loerke, "Observations on the Representation of *Doxa* in the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, and St. Catherine's, Sinai," *Gesta* 20, no. 1 (1981): 15-22; Jerzy Miziolek, "Transfiguratio Domini in the Apse at Mount Sinai and the Symbolism of Light," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53 (1990): 42-60; Simon Coleman and John Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (June 1994): 73-89; and Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 37-71.

⁶¹ Tesserae on the column delineate its architectural form, creating a base, ornamented shaft, and acanthus leaf capital. A wide border with alternating cruciform rosettes separates the double window from the rest of the mosaic program and continues along the top and sides of the images on the eastern wall. Small birds are introduced between stylized rosettes and geometric knots in

scepters and orbs fill the spandrels of the triumphal arch above the space of the apse.⁶² They turn inward toward a small figure of the Agnus Dei at the epicenter of the mosaic-filled wall.⁶³ Beneath their floating feet are two roundels with unlabeled bust-length portraits, which show a bearded man in the disheveled, Dionysian mode of classical tragic masks and a young woman whose serene, untroubled face is completely encircled by her veil.⁶⁴ Kurt Weitzmann and others agree that these figures should be understood to represent John the Baptist and Mary.⁶⁵ As the first human witnesses to Christ's Incarnation and foremost among Christian intercessors, their portraits form a proto-Deesis in relation to the Lamb of God placed at the summit of the arch.⁶⁶

the border along the arch of the apse, while a series of simple palmettes mediates the edge between the flat surface of the wall and conch, where portrait medallions frame the scene of Christ's Transfiguration. See Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, pls. CIII, CXXXVI-VII, CLXXIV.

⁶² Echoing the posture and position of winged victories on the Roman monuments for which this architectural element was named. Weitzmann, "The Mosaic," 402; idem, "Introduction to the Mosaics," in *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, 13; idem, "Mosaics," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 63.

⁶³ See discussion by Elsner, "Viewing and the Sacred," in *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 120-23.

⁶⁴ The simple tunic and dark blue or purple maphorion worn by this figure corresponds to the iconography already well established for the Virgin in the 6th century. See Suzanne Spain, "'The Promised Blessing': The Iconography of the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore," *Art Bulletin* 61, no. 4 (1979): 534. Before Iconoclasm, images of Mary were usually labeled Ἡ Ἁγία Μαρία. The honorific title Μήτηρ Θεοῦ (MHP ΘY) did not become common until after the 9th century. Ioli Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary became 'Meter Theou'," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 165-72.

⁶⁵ Monastic tradition at Sinai, at least between 1869-1965, asserted that these two medallion portraits represented the imperial couple Justinian and Theodora. The Russian scholar Sergei Alekseevich Usov was first to propose an alternative interpretation, seeing them as John the Baptist and the Virgin. Lithograph drawings published by C.W. Wilson and H.S. Palmer in their *Ordnance Survey of the Peninsula of Sinai* (Southampton, 1869) and by S.A. Usov, *Mosaics in the Church of the Transfiguration in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai* (Moscow, 1879; in Russian) were the first to record these portraits correctly. The earliest line drawing by Comte de Laborde, published in 1830, actually reduces their features to the schematic outline of male and female theater masks. See Weitzmann, "The Mosaic," 394-95, figs. 3, 5a-b, and 6, and 402.

⁶⁶ Weitzmann, "The Mosaic," 402; idem, "Introduction to the Mosaics," in *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, 15; idem, "Mosaics," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 65.

The apse presents a Christological fulfillment of Moses' theophanies on Horeb/Sinai in the episode of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Figure 2.9). Here, three of the disciples (Peter, James, and John) witnessed a vision of Christ's divine glory on the eve of his passion. They saw Jesus talking with Elijah and Moses and heard God speak from an enveloping cloud – "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."⁶⁷ The mountaintop experience described in the gospel accounts clearly echoes the giving of the Law through Moses on Sinai and validates Jesus' teachings, his life and ministry as expressions of divine revelation on par with that of the Decalogue.⁶⁸ The apse mosaic at Sinai shows Christ surrounded by a blue aureole (lightest in hue on the periphery, with gradations of color reaching their deepest blue at center – see detail in Figure 2.10). Elijah and Moses stand to either side, participating in a *sacra conversazione* intimated by parallel gestures of speech. The apostles kneel in a variety of poses below Christ's feet, each expressing their astonishment as they wake from sleep and perceive his transformation/metamorphosis. They are joined by a "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) in the portrait medallions that frame the apse, which represent the apostles and evangelists alongside prophets from the Old Testament (see Figure 2.9).⁶⁹ Portraits of the abbot, Longinus, and Deacon

⁶⁷ Recorded in all three synoptic gospels (not in the Gospel of John, however). See Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. For an overview of the biblical text and its redaction history, as well as a thorough discussion of the role and meaning of Christ's Transfiguration in patristic exegesis, see John McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 9 (Lewiston, NY and Queenston, Ontario: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ Homilies of John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, for example, both emphasize the harmonious fulfillment of the law and the prophets (represented in the two Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah) in and through the person of Christ. See Chrysostom's *Hom. 56 In Mattheaeum 17* and Cyril's *Hom. Diversae 9*, translated with selections on the Transfiguration from other Greek fathers in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 174-80. A similar analogy is further elaborated by John of Damascus in his *Oratio, De Transfiguratione*; *ibid.*, 205-25.

⁶⁹ Because Peter, James, and John appear in the apse, they are not repeated in the framing border. Instead, the evangelists Mark and Luke take their place along with Matthias, the disciple elected to after Judas' betrayal of Christ (Acts 1:15-26). The apostle Paul is likewise included among the

John are included in this august company, although their square halos indicate that both men were alive at the time of the mosaic's construction.⁷⁰

Previous scholarship has focused on the representation and symbolic role of light in the scene of Christ's Transfiguration, as well as within the context of mosaic decoration in Early Christian churches more generally.⁷¹ William Loerke connects the mandorla surrounding Christ

twelve medallions. Unlike the figures of John the Baptist and the Virgin above, these portraits are all inscribed with the names of those depicted. The labels are especially useful for identifying major and minor prophets shown beneath the apse and its dedicatory inscription. King David appears at center, immediately below the kneeling figure of Peter and on axis with Christ and with the cross and Agnus Dei at the summit of the triumphal arch. Weitzmann suggests that, while representing Christ's human lineage, the figure of David also refers to the patronage of Justinian I since he is dressed in the costume of a Byzantine emperor (he wears a purple chlamys and jeweled crown). Weitzmann, "The Mosaic," 401; idem, "Introduction to the Mosaics," in *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, 15; idem, "Mosaics," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 62-3. A strikingly similar image of David in the guise of a Byzantine ruler, perhaps specifically intended to represent Justinian, can be found in the author portrait of David the Psalmist in a Syriac translation of the Book of Kings dating to the 7th century. The image belongs to a manuscript (Syriac New Finds Ms. 24) surviving in two quires and discovered in 1975 in a cache of several hundred complete manuscripts and more than 1,000 folios sealed up in the north wall of the monastery. Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff, eds., *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), no. 31. On the New Finds, see Panayotis Nicolopoulos, "The Library," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 354-5.

⁷⁰ They appear in the lowest corners of the arch, mediating between the ranks of apostles and Old Testament prophets. Weitzmann assumes that they must be donors or patrons of the mosaic decorative program at Sinai, which seems plausible enough (and coincides with the presence of donors in the votive panels at Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki, for example). The abbot Longinus also receives mention in the dedicatory inscription at the base of the apse, although here credit for the work seems to belong to Theodore, second-in-command. See article by Andreopoulos cited in note 59 above. In her dissertation, Katherine Marsengill argues that elevation to a spiritual hierarchy may in fact be the very point of including Longinus and John's images within the framing border of portrait medallions around the apse. Marsengill, "Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Holiness in Byzantium," (Ph.D. Thesis: Princeton University, 2010), 138-67, esp. 145-56; idem, *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 158-172, 181.

⁷¹ Besides the concluding section in Miziolek's article cited below, see also John Gage, "Colour in History: Relative and Absolute," *Art History* 1 (1978): 104-30, esp. Part II, "Mosaic Technique: A Comparative Study," 112-21 [This article is reprinted as chapter 4 in *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 67-89]; idem, "Light from the East," in *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 39-64; and Eve Borsook,

in the Sinai apse (a manifestation of his glory, or *doxa*) with Early Christian attempts to establish a pictorial form for the Hebrew concept of *Kabod* found in scripture – both a revelation and demonstration of divine power – now achieved in the light-filled cloud of the aureole.⁷² Jerzy Miziolek, on the other hand, looks to ancient and classical art for formal precedents in the use of solar imagery to represent the transfigured Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. In this vein, he suggests that the apse mosaic refers not only to the gospel narrative and events taking place on Mount Tabor, but that it also anticipates the Parousia, or Second Coming.⁷³ Actual light – the placement of windows high up on the eastern wall and their incorporation within the typological message of the mosaic program – also plays an important part in the architectural and ritual space of the church at Sinai, and reflects a phenomenological awareness of the mosaic medium and the cultivation of its potential for theological signification within the decorative systems of Early Christian and Byzantine art.⁷⁴

Jaś Elsner provided the first in-depth analysis of the entire program of Sinai's 6th-century mosaics, reaching well beyond Weitzmann's allusions to the dual nature of Christ at issue in the monophysite controversy (which he claimed influenced not only the choice of imagery at Sinai

“Rhetoric or Reality: Mosaics as Expressions of a Metaphysical Idea,” in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 44, no. 1 (2000): 2-18.

⁷² Loerke, “Observations on the Representation of *Doxa*,” 15-22. The immediacy of this vision and the power of transfiguring light depicted in the Sinai apse “project and stimulate an experience” of the biblical event in the present/presence of its viewers. The mosaic image thus helps to realize the goal of monastic prayer and spiritual progress toward a timeless contemplation of the immaterial Godhead. Loerke, “‘Real Presence’ in Early Christian Art,” 42-43, 45-48.

⁷³ Miziolek compares eschatological aspects of the Sinai apse with form and content of other Early Christian apse mosaics such as those in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Rome and Osios David in Thessaloniki. Idem, “*Transfiguratio Domini* in the Apse,” 52-55.

⁷⁴ Cf. note 71 above; on light at Sinai specifically, see Robert S. Nelson, “Where God Walked and Monks Pray,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 1-37, esp. 16-33, and Patrik Reuterswärd, “Windows of Divine Light,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 51, no. 3 (1982): 95-102.

but also its formal properties) in order to contextualize the significance of its three narrative scenes for an informed, monastic audience.⁷⁵ By drawing upon the writing of early patristic authors such as Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius, Elsner argued that the images present a hierarchy of visions that parallel the soul's ascent to God. He retraced the steps of spiritual progress through their analogy to the events of Moses' life as depicted in the mosaic program. These culminate in the full revelation of divine glory manifested in Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor – a vision finally accessible to Moses and Elijah and secured for the elite among Christ's disciples. And while the “trio of theophanies” represented at Sinai (from the Burning Bush to the Giving of the Law on the eastern wall of the monastery church, to the Transfiguration depicted in the apse) move from the local and specific to the universal and abstract,⁷⁶ the mosaics offer themselves as a necessary intermediary (through their imagery and material presence) for viewers/worshippers to access this vision of divine light.⁷⁷ In his words:

⁷⁵ See Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision,” 81-102; republished and slightly expanded in *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 88-124, esp. 99-123. Weitzmann begins with the juxtaposition of human and divine natures in the medallion that shows the Eucharistic lamb in front of a tripartite blue background (interpreted by him as a symbol of the Trinity), then compares the Agnus Dei with a medallion at the center of the upper border around the apse where a golden cross alone appears against the same tripartite blue. Here the transcendent, divine nature of Christ is celebrated in juxtaposition with his human lineage, represented by the figure of King David in the lower border. All three medallions share the central axis of the mosaic program in line with the Transfigured Christ of the apse. Idem, “The Mosaic,” 401-2. He goes on to argue that the abstraction of human form for certain figures in the mosaic program also represents “the expression of the Divine by the absence of the Human.” Ibid., 404. Although Weitzmann limits his observations to mostly formal analysis, the chiastic structure dichotomizing human pathos and serene detachment in the expressions of various figures certainly lends weight to the tensions inherent in ascetic discipline as described by Jaś Elsner. Spiritual progress demanded denial of the flesh. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa with regards to the mystery of the Burning Bush, “Sandalled feet cannot ascend the height where the light of truth is seen, but the dead and earthly covering of skins... must be removed from the feet of the soul.” *De Vita Moysis*, II.22. See also Procopius' summary of monastic life quoted above.

⁷⁶ Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision,” 86-88.

⁷⁷ “The viewer is being taken through a hierarchy of images which represents the ladder of his own spiritual path as monk or pilgrim towards the vision that encapsulates and fulfills them all.

For the Sinai image is both the representation of a vision and at the same time an image, a paradigm, of what it is to view a vision.... When we take the narrative scenes at Sinai together, the two Mosaic panels clearly represent a development, an ascent toward the full vision of the transfigured Lord in the apse. The image of the transfigured Christ is simultaneously a paradigm for what is seen in mystic vision; a proof for what was seen (by those who ascended the spiritual mountain, like Moses, Elijah and the apostles); an exhortation to the Christian generally of what can be seen if that spiritual mountain is ascended; and a prescription of what the congregation (as initiate Christians present in this church at this time) ought to see.⁷⁸

Similarly focused on the theophanic nature of the Sinai mosaics,⁷⁹ Andreas Andreopoulos has taken Elsner's analysis of a tripartite ascent one step further by emphasizing the graduated hierarchy of spiritual contemplation that leads to divine illumination of the soul. Beginning with symbolic representations of God (as seen in the Burning Bush), the ascetic progresses toward partial theophany and the withdrawal of symbols (demonstrated by Moses' encounter on the summit of Mount Sinai, although still limited by human nature) and hopes for spiritual fulfillment in the experience of complete theophany (himself transfigured, Moses is finally able to see God face to face in the person of Christ on Mount Tabor).⁸⁰ Like Weitzmann, Andreopoulos also draws a connection between the dual nature of Christ stressed by the depiction of his Transfiguration in the Sinai apse and the importance of defending Chalcedonian

The very structure of the mosaics works as a simulacrum for the viewer's own spiritual journey." Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 93. As he goes on to argue, the mosaic program foregrounds the processes of looking and spiritual vision. The Transfiguration in particular collapses the distinction between the space occupied by Christ and his disciples within the image and that of viewers of the Sinai apse – they become participants in the mystical experience through active viewing (articulated by patristic commentators as staying awake through spiritual vigilance and prayer vs. sleeping). Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 94-96.

⁷⁸ Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 97.

⁷⁹ As opposed to the eschatological themes proposed by Miziolek.

⁸⁰ Andreopoulos, "The Mosaic of the Transfiguration," 13-14.

Christianity against the monophysite heresy, which circulated widely throughout the east during the 5th and 6th centuries.⁸¹

Embellishment of the apse within Early Christian and Byzantine churches tended to adhere to the most foundational of theological claims. As Jean-Michel Spieser has pointed out in his survey of apse mosaics between the 4th and the 7th centuries, issues of representation and especially the anthropomorphism of Christ pivot on the critical balance of human and divine natures expressed in the doctrine of Incarnation.⁸² Whereas early apsidal compositions emphasized Christ's role as divine sovereign, images that were essentially no different from the real presence manifest by cult statues of pagan gods in their own sanctuaries,⁸³ the problem of representation had become more acute in response to Arianism and accompanying codifications of Christian doctrine.⁸⁴ Spieser suggests that the multiplication of pictorial subjects found in apse compositions by the middle of the 6th century indicate growing theological dissatisfaction with the earlier presentation of Christ as divine ruler.⁸⁵ The brief introduction of visionary subjects such as the Transfiguration (at Sinai, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Classe, and the Ecclesia

⁸¹ Andreopoulos, "The Mosaic of the Transfiguration," 14-18. Citing references to the two natures of Christ, human and divine, in a number of patristic commentaries on the Transfiguration, Andreopoulos concludes: "The Transfiguration was, in the sixth century, the best possible way to express the major Christological issues of the time in a visual form." Ibid., 18. Most of his analysis then focuses on iconographical precedents and particularities in the composition of the Sinai apse, which Andreopoulos claims to be the seminal "type" for the transmission of this scene in later Byzantine art.

⁸² J.-M. Spieser, "The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches," *Gesta* 37, no. 1 (1998): 63-73.

⁸³ Spieser responds to Thomas Mathews' argument prioritizing the divinity of Christ in Early Christian images over their presumed dependence upon imperial iconography. Ibid., 65-66.

⁸⁴ Debates over the possibility of representing the Christian god extended even to images in the mind. Yet, as Spieser cautions, theological debate did not necessarily engage with actual representations – "this is a clear example of images developing by their own impetus. Theologians argued on their side, but in an intellectual context which, in the end, allowed pictures and theological development to be linked without causal effects from one to the other. Idem, "The Representation of Christ," 67.

⁸⁵ Spieser, "The Representation of Christ," 70-71.

Salvatoris in Naples) and the diversification of figures and compositional devices worked to distance images of God from the actual space of the church, perhaps also from their pagan predecessors. According to Spieser, this trend culminates in the form of the Theotokos preferred in apsidal compositions from the period of Byzantine Iconoclasm on.

The mosaic of Christ's Transfiguration found in the apse at Sinai must be interpreted in relation to the scenes from the life of Moses included in the mosaic program as a whole, the typological significance of the Old Testament figures (Moses and Elijah) to the new Christian dispensation, and (last but not least) the scriptural inheritance of Sinai/Horeb as the specific location for viewing these images. The liturgical texts assigned to the feast of the Transfiguration would have reinforced a Christological reading of the Old Testament theophanies experienced by both prophets. The lections of the Prophetologion for August 6th include Exodus chapters 24 and 33-34, as well as 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings) chapter 19.⁸⁶ These passages recount Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai with Aaron, his two sons, and the 70 elders of Israel, Moses' request to see God's glory and the second giving of the Law, as well as Elijah's encounter with the Lord on Horeb. While the selection of readings clearly evoked Tabor's role as the successor to and fulfillment of previous mountaintop theophanies, only *at Sinai* could these texts be recited (and heard) in a way

⁸⁶ The Prophetologion contains the Old Testament readings used throughout the liturgical year for the Byzantine church calendar. It survives in manuscripts dating from the 9th to the 16th centuries and would have been familiar and accessible to Byzantine worshippers in a way not unlike the entire canon of the Old Testament after the advent of the printing press (since copies of the whole Bible become progressively more common only after the 16th century). See James Miller, "The Prophetologion: the Old Testament of Byzantine Christianity?," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), 55-76, esp. 69. After the 7th century, lections from the Old Testament were no longer included in the Divine Liturgy, but appointed for Vespers, the Mass of the Presanctified Gifts offered during Lent, and for vigils of major feasts (such as the Transfiguration). Derek Krueger, "The Old Testament and Monasticism," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, 217; cf. Miller, "The Prophetologion," 69-72, for a more detailed discussion of the lectionary's liturgical evolution.

that brought the New Testament vision of God, manifest in the person of Christ, to complete/comment on the visions first given at this site in the Old Testament. For even as the monastic community and pilgrims worshipped on the same mountain as Moses and Elijah once did, they participated in a new mystical order.⁸⁷ John of Damascus speaks to this contrast between the old and new communities of God in his homily on the Transfiguration: “At that time Israel could not look upon the glory of the face of Moses... but we behold the glory of the Lord with faces unveiled, and are transfigured from glory to greater glory...”⁸⁸

While questions regarding the original patronage and production of the Sinai mosaics remain largely unanswered, the significance of their material survival over the intervening centuries and their pictorial impact upon a growing body of *loca sancta* imagery made at/for the monastery and pilgrimage site can hardly be understated. Kurt Weitzmann and George Forsyth both celebrated the physical link that the mosaics and Justinianic church provided with the past, evoking the illusion of spiritual and artistic continuity for over a millennium within the Byzantine empire and promoting the opportunity to glimpse this lost world – now sustained within a timeless present – at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.⁸⁹ The same rhetoric tantalizes readers of more recent publications and catalogs of blockbuster museum exhibitions supported by the Sinai monastery and its impressive holdings of Byzantine art. In

⁸⁷ For a useful overview of the relationship of Old Testament history to the Byzantines and their conception of themselves as the new Israel, see Magdalino and Nelson, “Introduction,” in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, 1-38.

⁸⁸ *Oratio, De Transfiguratione*, translated in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 222.

⁸⁹ “Outwardly, fourteen centuries had little altered St. Catherine’s. Seeing it was like glimpsing the vanished world of Byzantium.” George Forsyth thus introduces his first glimpse of the Sinai monastery in the first publication of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions, “Island of Faith in the Sinai Desert,” *National Geographic* 125, no. 1 (1964): 87. He concludes the essay on a similar note after describing the ceremony of Divine Liturgy being celebrated within the Justinianic basilica – “Here, before me, was the Byzantium of old.” *Ibid.*, 103.

particular, Sinai's icons have stolen the show. (Unlike the 6th-century mosaics, these panels can be exported from the site and circulate outside the ancient monastery walls).⁹⁰

As Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf have argued in their joint essay, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage," the 6th-century program of mosaics in the monastery church at Sinai became the primary point of reference for establishing a site-specific visual culture, especially celebratory of its local identity.⁹¹ Just as the two narrative scenes from the life of Moses on the top of the church's eastern wall corresponded to the holy places enshrined and commemorated immediately behind the main altar and on top of the nearby mountain, the production of Sinaitic icons reiterated this relationship between person and place, saint and *locus sanctus*. The repertoire became almost infinitely expandable. As the introduction of St. Catherine of Alexandria's relic cult in the medieval period demonstrates, not all of Sinai's patrons needed to be homegrown. However, many of these additions were local characters and often formative members of the monastery's sacred history – either biblical figures associated with the site or monastic saints whose lives (and deaths) were anchored in the desert terrain.⁹²

Not surprisingly, Moses plays a prominent role in the larger body of Sinai icons, and appears as one of the ten most frequently represented figures in panels assigned dates between the 11th-14th centuries.⁹³ According to the handlist of published Sinai icons prepared by Georgi

⁹⁰ See Veronica Della Dora's review of the Getty exhibition "Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai," "Taking Sacred Space out of Place: From Mount Sinai to Mount Getty Through Travelling Icons," *Mobilities* 4, no. 2 (2009): 225-48.

⁹¹ Published in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 37-71.

⁹² These include the holy fathers of Sinai and Raithou, martyred sometime in the late 4th century, St. Onouphrios, St. John Climacus, and others. For a thoughtful and critical discussion of the early martyr traditions at Sinai, especially the function of such narratives in Christianizing a remote frontier, see Daniel F. Caner, "Introduction," in *History and Hagiography*, 51-69.

⁹³ See Georgi R. Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai in the Thirteenth Century, Appendix: Eleventh- to Fourteenth-Century Painted Icons at Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy*

Parpulov, the Old Testament prophet ranks on par with the apostles Peter and Paul and follows closely behind the number of icons depicting the Archangel Michael.⁹⁴ Saints George and Nicholas are the only venerable figures that surpass this select few,⁹⁵ with the sole exception of the Virgin Mary. Icons representing the Theotokos, or Mother of God, are the most popular of the period; my count from the published handlist comes to a total of 72, twice that of any other saint or holy figure.⁹⁶ While my own survey of unpublished photographs in the Weitzmann archive at Princeton identifies several additional whole and fragmentary panels representing the

Mountain, ed. Gerstel and Nelson, 378-414. Parpulov's handlist is an impressive collection of published material from the Monastery of St. Catherine. It does not, however, represent all the Sinai icons. The scholarly community eagerly awaits full online access to the Weitzmann archives currently being digitized at Princeton University and their collaboration with the holdings of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expedition kept at the University of Michigan, which are also being digitized. I have accepted Parpulov's handlist as a representative sample, however these rankings must be considered tentative and subject to future revision/change.

⁹⁴ By my count, the Sinai top ten include: the Virgin Mary (72), St. George (37), St. Nicholas (33), Michael (33), Moses (32), St. Paul (32), St. Peter (31), Christ (30), John the Baptist (28), and Gabriel (28). These represent a distinct set of popularly represented figures in the monastery's icons from this period, since St. Demetrius – the next on the list – comes in at 20, with Sts. Basil and John Chrysostom close behind him with a total of 19 icons each. Saints Peter and Paul, along with the archangels, John the Baptist and the Virgin, frequently accompany icons depicting Christ Pantocrator in the sets of large intercolumnar panels that were placed in the iconostasis or sanctuary screen at the front of the church.

⁹⁵ Sts. George and Nicholas are two of the most popular and frequently represented among Byzantine saints. Their role at Sinai may simply correspond to the influence of their patronage across the Eastern Mediterranean. Both were shown as the main protagonists in extended narrative cycles (see the work of Nancy Patterson Ševčenko and Temily Mark-Weiner), depicted in a range of artistic media, but were also widely venerated as personal name-saints and protectors, especially of travelers by land and sea.

⁹⁶ The number of icons representing Christ is only 30, although I did not include narrative images (the so-called festival icons – events from the life of Christ commemorated during the liturgical year, from his Nativity to his Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension). The majority of these show the figure of Christ Pantocrator (23/30); the rest depict a variety of compositional types, from Christ Emmanuel to the Man of Sorrows. Of course, Christ frequently appears as an infant together with his mother and I have assigned most images depicting the Virgin and Child to the category of Marian icons, since her role as mediator and intercessor is predominant.

prophet Moses that may also have been made or acquired by the monastery in this period,⁹⁷ a complete catalog of the Sinai icons is not yet readily available to myself or other scholars. Still, acknowledging the discovery of additional icons of Moses in relation to the numerical tally derived from Georgi Parpulov's appendix only reinforces the significant role played by the Old Testament lawgiver as patron saint, ascetic exemplar, and archetypal pilgrim at Sinai.

Among the thirty-some icons that include the figure of Moses, there are four panels in particular that seem to intentionally recall the mosaic scenes from the Life of Moses from the eastern wall of the monastery church. Noted for their large scale, similarity in pictorial compositions, and striking visual character, each of the panels has received its share of scholarly attention. I revisit them here because, while certain aspects of their rapport with one another and with the 6th-century decorative program of the monastery church remain unique, I believe their presence at the monastery also helped to establish a distinctive visual culture in relation to Sinai's *loca sancta*, rites of pilgrimage, and devotional practice during the Middle Byzantine and Crusader periods. As stated by Elsner and Wolf: "It is surely the mosaic that established the visual culture of local celebration at Sinai as itself something specific to the monastery. While the later icons of Moses and Elijah are not in themselves necessarily derived from the mosaic..., nonetheless the need for such images... was fundamentally established by the presence of the

⁹⁷ Weitzmann Archives, nos. 289, 291, 392, 401, 810, 1064, 1176, and 1799. Nos. 289, 291, and 401 are likely post-Byzantine in date, although overpainting on 289 and 291 may complicate attempts at stylistic attribution. No. 407 is a fragmentary panel with most of its surface heavily abraded. However, the lower register seems to represent the Burning Bush; little else can be made out from the composition. My research of the Weitzmann Archives was undertaken in May 2012 with the assistance of Shari Kenfield, then curator of Research Photographs for the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. I also wish to thank Tasha Vorderstrasse, Research Associate at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, for her invaluable help in providing introductions for this visit.

mosaic.”⁹⁸ The relationship between the mosaic and these four monumental images of Moses in the later Sinai icons offers a glimpse of the ongoing construction of sacred place at Sinai.

Figures 2.11 and 2.12 present two icons attributed on the basis of style to the early 13th century.⁹⁹ They are unsigned, although it is clear that both panels were painted by the same artist and were designed as a pair.¹⁰⁰ In terms of their subject matter and basic format, the icons recapitulate the major theophanic events from the Life of Moses shown on the top of eastern wall of the monastery church.¹⁰¹ The orientation of Moses’ figure in each scene echoes the mosaic compositions, as he faces the Burning Bush on the right-hand side of one panel and reaches upward to receive the Tablets of the Law from the hand of God in the top left corner of the other (cf. Figures 2.4 and 2.5), thus preserving the central axis of the mosaic program.¹⁰² Like the 6th-century mosaics at Sinai, the icons draw attention not just to the prophet and his actions but also

⁹⁸ Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain,” 58.

⁹⁹ Doula Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons at Sinai with the Scenes of the Burning Bush and the Receiving of the Law,” *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias* ser. 4, 16 (1991-92): 171-84, esp. 182. Georgi Parpulov re-assigns them to the 11th century; see idem, “Mural and Icon Painting, Appendix,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 379, nos. XI.90.1 and XI.90.2.

¹⁰⁰ Their dimensions are nearly equivalent, although the panel with Moses Receiving the Law has lost part of the supporting frame on the top and bottom. It measures 87.6 x 65.1 cm, while Moses Removing his Sandals before the Burning Bush measures 100.5 x 65.7 x 3.1 cm. Mouriki reviews some of the technical details regarding the type of wood used and its treatment, as well as iconographic and stylistic characteristics that confirm their role as companion pieces. See *ibid.*, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 179.

¹⁰¹ Mouriki provides an in-depth analysis of the iconography used in each panel, with a substantial review of existing literature; cf. her comments in “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, ed. Manafis (1990), 110-111. More recent catalog entries include: Demetrios Kalomoirakis in *Egeria: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage*, nos. 35 and 69; Sharon E. J. Gerstel in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 51; Nancy Patterson Ševčenko in *The Glory of Byzantium*, no. 250.

¹⁰² In comparison with other paired icons at Sinai, these “constitute the only parallel to the pair of Early Byzantine mosaic panels with the same subjects above the triumphal arch of the sanctuary of the Basilica.” Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 171. See also Mouriki’s emphasis on the opposing diagonals that structure the two icons in relation to one another; *ibid.*, 177-178.

to the landscape setting in which Moses encounters the divine.¹⁰³ In contrast to the rugged precipices of barren rock that overshadow the figure of Moses in both mosaic scenes, the mountainside depicted on the early thirteenth-century icons blushes green and is covered with small red, blue, and white flowers.¹⁰⁴

In the icon of Moses before the Burning Bush (Fig. 2.11), the prophet's posture and the folds of his drapery correspond closely to those depicted in the 6th-century mosaic. However, the *manus Dei* and segment of heaven are not repeated on the painted panel, so that Moses' attention is focused on an inscription instead (now greatly abraded).¹⁰⁵ What can be deciphered of the letterforms indicates a passage from Exodus 3:4 (NJKV): "God called to him from the midst of the bush, saying 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" The prophet's lowered head and the way both hands clasp his left foot while he removes the remaining sandal help to draw our own gaze downward. Moses' gesture is the focal point and fulcrum of the entire panel. As seen in the Sinai mosaic, the prophet's stooped figure provides a counterweight to the miraculous vision of the bush. The pictorial balance of body and bush hinges on the action Moses performs as he removes his footwear in obedience to divine command. In this moment – in the space between prophet and epiphanic presence – the primary *locus sanctus* of the monastery church is brought into being. Like Moses, we stand before these images on holy ground.

¹⁰³ Mouriki cites Kurt Weitzmann's observation that the artist of the Sinai mosaics may have been inspired "by the serrated peaks of the actual locality," and connects the 13th-century panels with the popularity of an ongoing *loca sancta* tradition within the monastery's icons. Mouriki, "A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons," 180-181, esp. n. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Their verdant setting offers more in common with the 6th-century mosaics of San Vitale at Ravenna, which include images of Moses receiving the Law and removing his sandals before the Burning Bush, than the rugged landscape/topography represented in the Moses scenes at Sinai.

¹⁰⁵ Transcribed by Mouriki: [Ε]ΚΑΛΕΣΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΝ [ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΕΚ Τ]ΟΥ ΒΑΤΟΥ [ΛΕ]ΓΟΝ ΜΩΣΗ [Ο Δ]Ε ΕΙΠΕΝ ΤΙ Ε[ΣΤΙΝ; Ο ΔΕ ΕΙ]ΠΕΝ ΜΙ... Because the letters are written in black, which is unusual for the period, she also proposes they were redrawn at a later point, perhaps in the eighteenth century. Idem, "A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons," 174-175, n. 8. There is no trace of any inscription surviving on the panel with Moses receiving the Law. Ibid., 178.

In the icon that shows Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law (Fig. 2.12), the artist similarly adjusts certain pictorial details within the composition, while retaining the overall visual thrust of the monumental mosaic. In this case, it is the prophet himself that occupies the center of both images (6th-century mosaic and 13th-century icon panel). His body, almost fully covered by his mantle, becomes as solid and enduring as the mountain on which he stands.¹⁰⁶ Weitzmann and others have noted that the bare, jagged rocks included in the two mosaic scenes could have been modeled directly on the rough granite peaks surrounding the monastery. Here the artist attenuates their forms so that they rise up precipitously on either side of Moses.¹⁰⁷ Moses' act of receiving the Law becomes compositionally intertwined with a later moment of the scriptural narrative when Moses asks to see God face to face. Unable to bear this sight and live, Moses was instead given a partial glimpse of God's receding glory on the mountaintop (Exodus 33:18-23).¹⁰⁸ God covered Moses with his hand, hiding him in "a cleft of the rock."

¹⁰⁶ Here, I echo the observations made by Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf regarding the figure of Moses receiving the Law in the 6th-century Sinai mosaics. Moses' body parallels the form of the two mountain peaks between which he stands, a mountain for his people in the same way that Peter, in the apse below, is the rock upon which Christ will build his church. Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 55.

¹⁰⁷ Mouriki notes that while Moses strides across seemingly flat ground on the 13th-century icon, he is still flanked by the regular geometry of two mountain peaks. Therefore, the icon panel retains the visual impression that Moses stands within a gorge or deep valley. Idem, "A Pair of Early 13th-century Moses Icons," 180. The emphatic representation of the mountain peak in the Sinai mosaics, imitated on the 13th-century icon panel, might be compared with the more continuous, rugged green landscape that provides the setting for the scenes of Moses receiving the Law and of Moses before the Burning Bush in the 6th-C mosaics at San Vitale, Ravenna. The paired scenes at Ravenna participate in an expanded typological program with a much greater number of Old Testament figures and stories represented than at Sinai, so that the landscape setting serves to integrate these events within the verdant green, gold, and blue tonality of the mosaic sheathing as an aesthetic whole. Even the burning bush has been distributed in clumps of flame that transfigure the entire background, instead of being represented as a distinct entity.

¹⁰⁸ Moses' request and the divine response take place within the context of a renewed covenantal relationship between God and Israel, immediately following the breaking of the first stone tablets after Moses came down from Mount Sinai and discovered the people worshipping a golden calf. The revelation of God's glory accompanies the second giving of the law, as described in Exodus

The narrow valley depicted in the Sinai mosaic (Figure 2.5), where Moses stands between two rocky outcroppings that closely follow the contours of his body, may allude to this additional episode in the biblical narrative. Indeed, the pictorial conflation of Moses receiving the Law and his second theophanic experience is crucial to understanding the interpretive themes of spiritual vision, ascent, and hierarchies of divine revelation that both Jaś Elsner and Andreas Andreopoulos argue are central to the meaning of the 6th-century mosaic program.¹⁰⁹ In comparison to the rugged terrain emphasized within the mosaic image (Fig. 2.5), the landscape depicted in the icon panel seems rather diminished (Fig. 2.12). Yet the icon painter has further emphasized the shrouded body of the prophet by covering his legs from thigh to calf with the voluminous mantle, not just draping his arms and shoulders.¹¹⁰ The diagonal thrust of Moses' body as he steps forward to receive the stone tablets also expands the total area dedicated to his figure on the painted surface of the panel.¹¹¹ In this way, Moses' outer garment becomes the focal point of the image – serving, I would suggest, a dual purpose. While it cloaks the prophet's hands as he receives the sacred words of the Law (inscribed on stone tablets by the Lord himself), a pictorial convention that mirrored Byzantine liturgical practices,¹¹² it also anticipates

34:1-28. When Moses again descends from the mountain, his own face is transfigured as a result of this interchange (Exodus 34:29-35).

¹⁰⁹ Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 86-88, 93.

¹¹⁰ "The great sweep of the flowing drapery is achieved by the fact that Moses receives the tablets with his hands veiled not by the short ends of the himation but by the long himation proper." Mouriki, "A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons," 180.

¹¹¹ The rendering of this episode on the icon panel follows standard iconography for the scene as established in Middle Byzantine manuscript illumination, but can also be found in earlier examples. The dynamic 'climbing' pose can also be traced back to examples of Early Christian art. See Mouriki, "A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons," 180-181, n. 17. Cf. Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler on the iconography of Moses receiving the Law at the synagogue in Dura Europos; idem, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990), 53.

¹¹² Adapted from the rituals of court ceremonial. The application to Christian iconography is most frequently found in scenes of Christ's Baptism (where attendant angels hold his clothing)

within the visual narrative the veil worn by Moses once he had returned to the Israelite camp and his own face still shone with the reflected glory of God.¹¹³ Within the larger program of the Sinai mosaics, Moses' hidden body is the counterpoint to Christ's luminescent form in the apse below, where divine light is fully manifest at his Transfiguration (Fig. 2.10). Perhaps this expanded typological reference can be read in the prophet's shrouded figure on his 13th-century icon, as well.¹¹⁴ The link between Moses as lawgiver in the Old Testament and Christ as the source of the New goes beyond this singular moment when dispensations are joined on the summit of Mount Tabor, as recorded in the gospel narrative.¹¹⁵ It provides the Christological underpinning of the whole enterprise of pilgrimage and ascetic monasticism at Sinai, beginning with the construction of its first chapel by monk/pilgrim Julian Saba (died AD 367).¹¹⁶

and of the Divine Liturgy (where recipients of the Eucharist also extend covered hands). See Charles Barber's comments on an icon of the Archangel Michael with Donor Monk (Sinai, early 13th century) in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, ed. Nelson and Collins, no. 12, 151.

¹¹³ Exodus 34:29-35. The waiting Israelites are often shown as a group standing at the foot of the mountain while Moses receives the tablets of the Law in Byzantine manuscript illuminations, such as in the Paris Psalter (fol. 442v) and Leo Bible (155v). These images also combine the Giving of the Law with Moses' encounter before the Burning Bush.

¹¹⁴ As mentioned above, the lectionary readings for the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) included key passages from the Old Testament that made the typological connection between Mount Sinai and Tabor explicit. One of these readings was the account of Moses receiving the tablets of the law in Exodus 33-34.

¹¹⁵ John McGuckin emphasizes the Sinai narrative as an important literary archetype for the earliest version of the Transfiguration story, "maintaining a vision of Jesus who is like the New Moses... promised in Deut. 18:15." Idem, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 13. He proposes that Peter may be the preacher behind the original source used by the synoptic gospel writers (see the apostle's homily in Acts 3:18-26), although Mark (like the apostle Paul) makes significant changes in order to displace Peter's role in the presumed chain of prophetic authority from Moses to Christ to Kephas. Ibid, 12-14. McGuckin also cites B.D. Chilton, "The Transfiguration: Dominical assurance and apostolic vision," *New Testament Studies* 27:1 (1981): 115-24, regarding the status/authority given to Christ's apostolic witnesses.

¹¹⁶ The juxtaposition of old and new covenants forms the main theme of two Syriac hymns about Julian Saba's pilgrimage to Mount Sinai attributed to Ephrem the Syrian. "Small is the construction of Moses the great/ as for that tabernacle, its time has passed./ Great is the construction of little Saba/ for he has built there the church of truth.... The one man is no greater than the other;/ Moses is exalted and honoured,/ but Christ is greater as the Son of the Lord/ and

The typological comparison between Moses and Christ was continuously reinforced by the performance of the Eucharistic liturgy within the sanctuary,¹¹⁷ and informed the production (and consumption) of other sacred images at Sinai. One such example is a late 13th-century icon that depicts Moses in a bust-length portrait modeled upon images of Christ Pantocrator (see Figures 2.14 and 2.15).¹¹⁸ Another places Moses directly beneath an enthroned Christ, echoing the Deesis composition above with the flanking figures of St. Euthymios and the archangel Michael on either side of the Old Testament prophet below (see Figure 2.16).¹¹⁹ As in the bust-length portrait of Moses, the coloration of his garments in pink and blue is the exact inverse of Christ's robe and mantle, while their facial features, hair, and beards further establish the

great[er] is His covenant....” Stanzas 2 and 5 from the 20th Hymn, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 207.

¹¹⁷ Again quoting from the hymns attributed to Ephrem the Syrian: “For all the mysteries of the tabernacle/ came and were completed through the church of Christ.” Stanza 15 of the 19th Hymn. “Moses set up the altar of sacrifices/ and sprinkled the blood of animals on it./ Saba set up the altar of the Holy/ and broke upon it there the living body [of Christ].” Stanza 3 of the 20th Hymn. Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 206, 207.

¹¹⁸ Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, “236. Icon with Moses,” in *Byzantium: Faith & Power (1261-1557)*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 381-2.

¹¹⁹ Euthymios the Great was an ascetic of the late 4th-early 5th century (376/7-473) who lived in the Palestinian wilderness and helped to spread acceptance of the fourth ecumenical council (the Council of Chalcedon, 451) among other hermits and holy men of the desert. He is considered the founder of coenobitic monasticism in Palestine and episodes from his Life draw careful parallels between Euthymios and biblical models for Christian asceticism, including John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah. His feast day is celebrated on January 20th. I have already mentioned Michael's place in the extended Deesis usually found on the intercolumnar panels of the iconostasis. It is possible that his position next to Moses also recalled their concurrent celebrations in the liturgical calendar. Moses' feast day is on September 4, while the Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae (a water miracle performed in the ancient town of Colossae, near Hieropolis and Laodicea in Asia Minor) is commemorated September 6th. The Sinai monastery has an exquisite 12th-century icon depicting this subject in its collection; see the exhibition catalog, *The Glory of Byzantium*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), no. 66, 118-119, and Manafis, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 154, fig. 23.

pictorial symmetry between them.¹²⁰ Moses gestures upwards at the seated figure of Christ; the scroll he carries declares the status of their relationship, suggesting that the dialogue Moses held with God during his lifetime continues in the person of the Son. These additional examples help confirm that many of the exegetical themes presented in the church's 6th-century mosaic program continued to resonate in later works of art produced at or for the monastery – whether or not the exact subject matter or compositional schema of the mosaic scenes was directly imitated.¹²¹

Other scholars have noted the likely influence of the 6th-century mosaics on the two icons just introduced. Less obviously connected to the mosaic program of the church is a pair of panels containing the full-length figures of Elijah and Moses, which are dated variously from the 11th to the 13th centuries and signed by the painter Stephanos in both Arabic and Greek.¹²² In Figure 2.18, we see Elijah standing with both arms raised in the traditional gesture of prayer and

¹²⁰ Moses was more typically shown beardless in Byzantine art. This mature depiction of the prophet seems to be especially popular at Sinai. See comments made by Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus,” 472 and n. 75.

¹²¹ Bibliography tracing the iconography of the two scenes, Moses before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Law, as depicted in the mosaics of the eastern wall at Sinai, can be found in Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990): 34-38 and 52-55; see also Kurt Weitzmann and Ihor Šečenko, “The Moses Cross at Sinai,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 385-98, esp. 387-88, which emphasizes iconographic transmission through the medium of miniature painting. The most comprehensive monograph on both subjects remains the publication by Theologos Chrestou Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai: Die Ikonographie der Berufung des Moses und des Empfangs der Gesetzestafeln*, Tuduv-Studien, Reihe Kunstgeschichte 20 (Munich: Tuduv-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986). Aliprantis devotes a significant portion of his discussion of the iconographical themes to the theological parallels drawn between Christ and Moses. See pp. 43-78 and 105-115, in particular.

¹²² Stephanos is likely both the artist and donor. Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 109-110. Georgi Parpulov has stressed that the wording of the inscriptions is similar enough to other Byzantine texts that Stephanos should only be understood as the donor who paid for the two panels, and not the painter of the icons as well. See Parpulov, “29. Moses Receiving the Law before the Burning Bush,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 193. I am not fully convinced that Stephanos cannot be described as the artist in this case.

intercession.¹²³ He wears a prophet's mantle and shares the heavily bearded, disheveled appearance of the classical Dionysian portrait type with John the Baptist as seen in Sinai's 6th-century mosaic program (cf. Figure 2.3).¹²⁴ Elijah gazes at the upper right-hand corner of the icon where a small, pointing hand directs the path of a raven bringing him food/sustenance. Figure 2.19 is clearly the companion piece to this monumental image.¹²⁵ Here we find the now-familiar pose of Moses reaching upwards to receive the Tablets of the Law from a diminutive *manus Dei* at upper left. The orientation of his figure matches that of the 6th-century mosaic panel of Moses Receiving the Law within the Sinai monastery church. However, Stephanos presents two further iconographic details that suggest the narrative and temporal conflation of this event with Moses' theophany before the Burning Bush. A blazing shrubbery appears in the lower left-hand corner and Moses' sandals rest on the ground between his feet, already removed in preparation for encountering the dual *loca sancta*.¹²⁶

¹²³ The posture is unusual for images of Elijah in Byzantine art, however. He is more commonly shown seated on a rock and turning his head toward the arriving raven. As Weitzmann pointed out, the statuesque form of the prophet on Stephanos' icon is unique among the panels surviving in the collection of the Sinai monastery. Idem, "Icon Programs of the 12th and 13th Centuries," 104. The more narrative image of Elijah being fed in the wilderness can be found in several Middle Byzantine examples, such as the mid-13th century Bulgarian fresco exhibited in New York for *The Glory of Byzantium*, no. 221. It is also represented on at least two other icons from Sinai; see Parpulov's appendix, nos. XII.22 and XIII.239.

¹²⁴ Both were important biblical models for the ascetic virtues pursued by in Christian monasticism. Byzantine typika (monastic foundation documents) frequently invoked Elijah and John the Baptist as the founders of monasticism. Two examples are the 12th-century typikon for the Kosmosoteira monastery established by Isaac Komnenos and the 13th-century typikon for the Monastery of St. Neophytos on Cyprus. Krueger, "The Old Testament and Monasticism," 205.

¹²⁵ Both panels are over 4 feet tall; the icon of Elijah measures 129.2 x 69.2 x 3.5 cm, while the icon of Moses is slightly larger all around, measuring 134 x 69.9 x 4.1 cm. As with the 13th-century pair discussed earlier, most of the difference in dimensions between the two panels is due to the attachment of a supporting piece of wood along the bottom (and/or top) of one icon and not the other.

¹²⁶ While Moses is unshod in the 6th-C mosaic panel at the top of the church's eastern wall, this is not typically the case in Early Christian/Byzantine iconography showing Moses receiving the

Stephanos' contribution to the group of site-specific Sinaitic icons at the Monastery of St. Catherine has been celebrated as an example of some of the most classicizing of Middle Byzantine art.¹²⁷ The two standing saints are not only imposing in scale but also beautifully executed, with painterly highlights and deeply receding folds of drapery that model the form and volume of each figure. Elijah and Moses share their contemplative expression, gazes turned inward. And while the cursory ground line and narrative details (the Burning Bush, the pair of discarded sandals) seem to place Moses at a slight remove from the viewer, the figure of Elijah nearly steps forward into our space – toes brushing the beveled edge of the projecting frame and nearly transgressing the plane of the inscription below.¹²⁸ The intimacy and immediacy of this figure helps to underscore the specific role of the additional narrative elements included in the icon of Moses. Unlike the 13th-century panels in which a receding landscape creates a feeling of pictorial depth, almost achieving an Albertian “window” as we glimpse discrete moments of the sacred past in these two scenes from the life of Moses (see Figs. 2.11 and 2.12), the ground line in Stephanos' image does not serve as a distancing motif. Instead, the conflated narrative is indicated by the barest of pictorial embellishments, each accompanying detail boldly placed against the gold background. These share a kind of foregrounded immediacy with the figure of

Tablets of the Law. At San Vitale in Ravenna, for example, Moses' sandals are fully laced and clearly represented on both feet (even in the scene of the prophet before the Burning Bush).

¹²⁷ Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” 109-10; Kurt Weitmann, “The Classical in Byzantine Art, as a Mode of Individual Expression,” in *Byzantine Art, an European Art: Lectures* (Athens, 1966), 172-3 and idem, “Icon Programs,” 102-5.

¹²⁸ This dedicatory prayer, offered by Stephanos in two languages, is another reason the panels are so well known – few of Sinai's icons have specific attributions and/or artist's names that can be associated with them. The Greek reads: Μορφούντι, Θεσβίτα, σε [Στεφ]άνω δίδου / τοῖς σοῖς ἱλασμοῖς πτεσμάτων ἁμνησίαν (“For Stephen, who fashioned your image, O Tishbite, obtain by your mercy pardon of transgressions”). The Arabic is nearly identical, reading in translation “Forgiveness for Stephen who painted you, O [prophet] Elijah. May God forgive him the sins he has committed.” See Parpulov, “28. Prophet Elijah Fed by a Raven,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 191.

Moses and formulate, perhaps for the first time at Sinai, an icon of place. Moses' role as intercessor and exemplum of the spiritual life is no less important than that of the prophet Elijah, and yet this icon carefully presents a simulacrum of the two events that most clearly define Moses' theophanic experience, his privileged position as the "God-Seer," and the relationship between Moses' encounters with the divine and the demarcation of sacred place.¹²⁹

The pictorial conflation of Sinai/Horeb in the icon panel that shows Moses standing before the Burning Bush as he receives the Tablets of the Law (Fig. 2.19) works to reinscribe the mountain's identification as holy ground. Moses' bare feet, like Elijah's toes curled above the painter's dedicatory prayer, are the most accessible portion of the holy figure to those venerating each saint. Because of the large size of the two panels depicting Moses and Elijah, I am making the assumption that these icons would have hung on the walls of the Sinai monastery church or of its dependent chapels or might have been placed within the frame of an iconostasis screen. It is highly unlikely that they would have been used or intended for more private monastic devotion (some icons were kept by monks within their cells, for example). The lower half of the icon would have been the most accessible portion for traditional gestures of veneration – including crossing oneself in prayer, kissing or touching the surface of the icon, and/or kneeling in proskynesis.¹³⁰ It is no accident that the donor figures we do see in a handful of Sinai icons (including several that depict the prophet and God-seer, Moses), kneel in exactly this spot, prostrated at the saint's feet and frequently shown in reduced scale to match their display of

¹²⁹ The title "God-seer" is used for Moses in both the Greek and Arabic inscriptions at the base of the icon panel. The Greek reads: + Ὁς ἰστόρησεν, ὃ θεόπτα, σὸν τύπον/ [αἰτ]εῖ Στέφανος λύσιν ἀμπλακημά(των) or "The person who painted your likeness,/ named Stephen, requests, O God-seer, release from his errors." The translation of the Arabic is nearly identical, "O you who have seen God, grant forgiveness to Stephen who painted your virtues." See Parpulov, "29. Moses Receiving the Law before the Burning Bush," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 193.

¹³⁰ See Annemarie Weyl Carr's introduction to new catalog for Menil collection, "How Icons Look," in *Imprinting the Divine* (Houston: Menil Foundation, 2011), 19-33, esp. 21.

pious humility.¹³¹ The icon of Moses painted by Stephanos does not represent the figure of either artist or donor.¹³² However, a later inscription added to the gold ground just above the licking flames of the Burning Bush makes use of the same prime real estate for asking intercession on the behalf of another – a certain Manuel.¹³³

Although his identity and the date of his intervention on the panel remains obscure, the choice of placement for Manuel's prayer seeking remembrance corresponds with the diminutive donor figures and/or dedicatory inscriptions found on other Sinai icons of the 13th century.¹³⁴ Besides the anonymous and turbaned figure that appears in the frame of the icon of Moses before the Burning Bush already discussed, Doula Mouriki lists three more examples of donors that are incorporated into the parallel *loca sancta* image of Moses receiving the Law. One, a small panel with a rounded top (Figure 2.20),¹³⁵ places the burning bush (appearing as a brazier of green leaves that contains the intense, red flames of divine manifestation) behind the figure of Moses while the donor crouches in front of him. A partial inscription identifies him as the monk

¹³¹ Doula Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs et invocations sur les icônes du XIII^e siècle au Sinaï," *Études balkaniques, cahiers Pierre Belon* 2 (1995): 105-35, esp. 133. On the variations in posture and meaning of the gesture, see Anthony Cutler, "Proskynesis and Anastasis," in *Transfigurations: Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (1975), 53-110.

¹³² Georgi Parpulov suggests that the name Stephanos should be understood as the donor who commissioned this pair of icon panels, rather than the artist who created them. However, sometimes artist and donor were one and the same. It is often difficult to differentiate between them when donor portraits are included. See Cutler, "Proskynesis and Anastasis," 76-7.

¹³³ + ΜΝΗΣΤΙΤΗ Κ(ΥΠΙ)Ε ΤΗΝ ΨΥΧΗΝ ΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ (as transcribed by Doula Mouriki in "Portraits de donateurs," no. 16.); + Μνήστῖτη, Κ[ύρι]ε, τὴν ψυχὴν Μανουὺλ or, "Remember, Lord, the soul of Manuel," as transcribed by Parpulov, "29. Moses Receiving the Law before the Burning Bush," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 193.

¹³⁴ Mouriki notes ten votive inscriptions that appear without portraits, five of which represent artists' signatures. As summarized by Annemarie Weyl Carr, "The inscriptions, like the portraits, characteristically hover near the feet of the holy figures depicted, but two are on the icon's back and four are on the frame." Idem, "Donors in the Frames of Icons: Living in the Borders of Byzantine Art," *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 189-98, esp. 197 n. 28.

¹³⁵ The panel was originally the central piece of a triptych. Both wings have been separated from the icon and lost.

Peter.¹³⁶ The portrait of Theodosius Salustius is shown accompanying the figures of Moses and Aaron on another icon in which they jointly receive the Tablets of the Law.¹³⁷ A third example is the large-scale *vita* icon of Moses (Figure 2.22), which includes the prostrate form of the archbishop of the Sinai monastery, Neilos Vooueri, carefully tucked beneath Moses' raised foot and the wrinkled hem of his garment on the lower edge of the icon's central panel (see detail in Figure 2.23).¹³⁸ There are at least two icons from the unpublished research photographs in the Weitzmann archive at Princeton that should be added to this list (nos. 810 and 1064). Although fragmentary and heavily damaged, the composition of Moses receiving the Law is clear enough to be identifiable and both panels include donor figures crouching in prayer next to the Old Testament prophet.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ "Ἀγίε τοῦ Θεοῦ βοή[θη]σον [σὸν δοῦλ]ον Πέτρον μ(οναχὸν). Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs," no. 2. The article publishes a detail of the donor from no. 1, a bishop of Sinai and Raithou named Abrahamios who kneels before the Patriarch Abraham and Melchisedek, instead of the triptych panel. It first appears in the catalog by George and Maria Soteriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*, no. 161 and was soon published in color by *Time Magazine* in volume 73, no. 11 (15 April 1959), 92. Georgi Parpulov reassigns the date of this panel from the thirteenth to the twelfth century in his handlist published in the edited volume, *Approaching the Holy Mountain* (2010). See idem, "Mural and Icon Painting, Appendix," XII.105.1.

¹³⁷ Shown as a member of the laity with a full, dark beard, his kneeling figure is inscribed: + Δέ(ησις) Θεοδωσίου τοῦ Σαλουστίου. Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs," no. 9, detail; Soteriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*, no. 162; Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting, Appendix," (XIII).40

¹³⁸ The archbishop raises his hands in prayer, gesturing toward the inscription gives voice to his petition: ὁ εὐτελ(ής) (μον)αχ(ός) Νε(ῖλος) ὁ βοουερί[...], ἀρχιεπίσκοπος καὶ καθη[γού]μενος τοῦ ἁγ(ίου) ὄρους Σινᾶ. Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs," no. 3. Earlier publications such as those by Amantos and Rabino transcribed Neilos' family name as Κουερίνος, leading Nancy Ševčenko to suggest a link to the Venetian Quirini family, who lived on Crete in the 13th century. Idem, "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 158 n. 39.

¹³⁹ Almost half the painted/gilded surface of icon no. 810 is gone, having flaked and broken off. However, the hand of God and Tablets of the Law are still clearly visible, as well as Moses' discarded sandals and one bare foot. Most of the prophet's body is missing along with the donor's head/face, so that using stylistic analysis to assign a probable date for the panel is limited in scope. Icon no. 1064 is better preserved, but consists only of one third to one fourth of the whole – it is a sliver from the right-hand side of a rectangular panel that again shows the segment of heaven from which the *manus Dei* would extend to Moses, a pair of discarded sandals, and a figure kneeling in proskynesis. The style of this fragment is identical to the panel with a rounded

Doula Mouriki published a total of 23 examples in her study of thirteenth-century icons from the Monastery of St. Catherine that provided either visual or verbal evidence of their dedication.¹⁴⁰ She calculated that these represent five percent of the total amount of material surviving from this period.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the breakdown of which saints and/or subjects carry donor figures and/or invocations on their behalf reflects a similar hierarchy of popular saints in comparison to what can be observed from Georgi Parpulov's handlist of Sinai icons dating from the 11th-14th centuries. The Virgin maintains preeminence among the 13th-century examples with donor portraits and/or inscriptions, but within this subset the Prophet Moses ranks as a close second to the Mother of God, almost her equal, and quite far ahead of any other holy figure in the number of times he is represented.¹⁴² Most of the other saints – hierarchs, military saints, or persons from the Old and New Testaments – are shown only once.¹⁴³

What I want to argue for here is the special prominence, not only of Moses as prophet and patron of Sinai's biblical holy sites and the monastery built to commemorate them, but also for the icons that visually conjoined both of Moses' epiphanies as distinctive *loca sancta* images

top and the donor portrait of the monk Peter. There is even a partial inscription above the kneeling donor figure that might be compared with Peter's dedication.

¹⁴⁰ An additional example not treated by Mouriki is a small triptych published by Jaroslav Folda in *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 353, fig. 209, which shows a Latin couple kneeling before the Virgin Galaktotrophousa in the central leaf, flanked by Saints Marina and Catherine. Cited by Carr, "Donors in the Frames," 191.

¹⁴¹ Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs," 105.

¹⁴² The Virgin is the dedicatee of six examples, as counted by Mouriki (nos. 12, 17, 18, 21, 22 and 23), plus the triptych published by Folda. Moses is likewise the recipient of six icon panels that include the donor's portrait or dedicatory prayer (nos. 2, 3, 6, 9, 16 and 17). Mouriki, "Portraits de donateurs," 130.

¹⁴³ St. George is the exception, with four icons dedicated to him (nos. 7, 8, 10 and 14). Ibid. Two of these are vita icons, and in the other two St. George is shown in the company of another saint, as well as the kneeling figure of the donor.

for the monastery's pilgrims.¹⁴⁴ The two events – God speaking from a bush that refused to burn although laden with fire and the revelation of God's law upon the same mountain after Moses returned from Egypt with the Hebrews – become equal markers of sacred presence, each reinforcing the mountain's status as a place set apart, chosen by God and transformed by divine self-disclosure.¹⁴⁵ The images representing these moments do more than just evoke the nearby sacred places for the pilgrims, monks, and other worshippers who venerate them. They create access to the holy ground trodden and so defined by Moses' ascent. In fact, by depicting key markers of the prophet's dual theophanies (the bush, the tablets of the law), the icons can be understood to recreate this space, to perform the interruption of divine presence once more in relation to the viewer/worshipper. The bush, in particular, offers its vision of divine light to those accompanying Moses into the clouds and darkness on God's holy mountain.¹⁴⁶

Within the 6th-century mosaic program of the monastery church at Sinai and in the paired 13th-century icons that show Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law as separate subjects, the two events maintain a distinct narrative

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 39-42.

¹⁴⁵ Byzantine manuscript illumination also frequently pairs Moses removing his sandals with ascent of Mt. Sinai to receive the Law; prominent examples include the Leo Bible (Vatican, Reg. gr. 1), dated to the 10th century, and no. of psalters in the so-called 'aristocratic' recension, most of which date to the 11th and 12th centuries. For an example, see the full-page miniature of Moses receiving the Law in the Walters Art Gallery, W.530.B, a cutting from a psalter on Mt. Athos, Vatopedi MS 761, fol. 111v (c. 1087-88); published by Anthony Cutler in his catalog, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium* (Paris: Picard, 1984), no. 15, fig. 71 and in *The Glory of Byzantium*, no. 241. For a psalter image that combines the narrative moments of Moses before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law with a single figure of the OT prophet, see Dumbarton Oaks MS 3, fol. 73r (c. 1084); published as no. 51 in Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters*, fig. 327; the image is also available online through the Harvard University Library, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/44659780>.

¹⁴⁶ See Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II.162-164, esp. 163. "For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until... it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God."

and temporal sequence.¹⁴⁷ This is necessary for establishing the idea of spiritual progress at the heart of Jaś Elsner's interpretation of the mosaics. However, when the episodes that take place on Horeb/Sinai are pictorially conflated, the conclusion that Elsner draws for the abstracted setting of Mount Tabor in the apse mosaic might similarly be applied to Stephanos' icon of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush: "the spiritual point is surely that this icon is already on a mountain, as is the viewer who is in its presence."¹⁴⁸ The symbolism intrinsic to the notion of ascent, developed by Elsner in his reading of patristic commentary and monastic pursuit of mystical union with God, focuses on the mountain's peak. It is this culminating moment of encounter that the Moses icons produced at/for the Sinai monastery in the 11th-13th centuries seek to replicate. They do so by effectively combining the two moments from the Life of Moses and the two most revered places among Sinai's *loca sancta*.

The monumental icon panel of Moses that Stephanos painted as a companion to the icon of Elijah may very well be the earliest example of this conflated iconography celebrating both Sinai's *loca sancta* in the same image. Georgi Parpulov has argued for an 11th-century date (1050-1100) for the two panels, pushing back the stylistic and epigraphic comparanda to a much earlier period than what scholars had previously considered.¹⁴⁹ Some scholars still disagree, maintaining that the icons belong to a late 12th century or early 13th century date.¹⁵⁰ Whether or not this earlier attribution should be accepted, we are also limited by our analysis of what

¹⁴⁷ Note the variations in Moses' age and indications of facial hair in the 6th-century mosaics.

¹⁴⁸ Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 94.

¹⁴⁹ Parpulov, "29. Moses Receiving the Law before the Burning Bush," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 193; see also idem, "The date of two icons from Sinai," in *Wonderful Things: Byzantium through its Art*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 149-54. This paper publishes his argument presented at greater length in the symposium attending the Getty exhibition, "Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai," held January 26 and 27, 2007.

¹⁵⁰ Vassilaki in *Byzantium, 330-1453* and Kalomoirakis in the Egeria Project catalog; Elsner and Wolf remain uncommitted.

survives from the corpus of Sinai icons. I am not making the claim that Stephanos invented the site-specific image of Moses' dual theophanies; I simply wish to acknowledge that this impressive figure of the prophet and God-seer may represent the earliest example among the Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons preserved in the monastery's collection.¹⁵¹ It does not need to be the first in order to exert significant influence within the constellation of Moses icons similarly attributed to the early 13th century. Its size and scale, as well as the quality of Stephanos' painting, are all characteristics that would recommend the panel and its treatment of the prophet's figure in relation to Sinai's holy places for emulation by other artists. In the case of our next example, a large *vita* icon depicting Moses surrounded by scenes from his life, the role of Stephanos' portrait of Moses as prototype even extends to matching scale.

Allow me to offer one final point of observation before moving on from Stephanos' treatment of Moses as a new *loca sancta* image at Sinai. The icon panel depicting Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush itself betrays close observation of the 6th-century mosaic scenes from the Life of Moses within the monastery church. If we compare Figures 2.19 and 2.5, we see how Moses turns to face the left side of the icon panel as he reaches up and grasps the stone tablets, imitating the posture and orientation found in the mosaic scene. In Stephanos' panel, Moses stands with his legs much further apart than with the only slightly bent

¹⁵¹ There are two similar images of Moses receiving the Law with discarded sandals placed next to the Burning Bush that appear in miniatures illuminating Byzantine psalters from the so-called 'aristocratic' recension. Both psalters date to the 1080's – Rome, BAV, cod. gr. 342, fol. 133v and Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks MS 3, fol. 73r. They are included in Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters*, nos. 42 and 51 respectively (figs. 283 and 327). Both examples focus on a single figure of Moses within a conflated narrative, like what we see on Stephanos' panel (vs. representing Moses more than once as he first removes his sandals and then steps forward to receive the Tablets of the Law). They are also more static figures, showing Moses almost completely upright instead of using the dynamic 'climbing' pose seen in the 10th-C Paris Psalter, the Leo Bible and many other manuscripts. Doula Mouriki points out the rarity of this standing posture in her discussion of the 13th-C *vita* icon of Moses; idem, "A Moses Cycle," 536.

knee that we see in Figure 2.5. Although not as dynamic as the climbing pose used in the 13th-century icon already described (Fig. 2.12), his posture similarly intimates the motion of stepping forward and offers a hybrid resolution of the two very different stances seen in the church's mosaic decoration. The drapery of Moses' himation provides the most telling clue, however. In Figure 2.19, its folds cascade over the prophet's outstretched arms (forming an extended point beneath) while at the same time creating a second zigzag fold of cloth that more closely follows the contour of his back. There is some extra fabric falling behind Moses' figure in the mosaic scene where he receives the Law (Fig. 2.5), but this pattern is especially striking in the mosaic of Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush (Fig. 2.4). Stephanos maintains the diagonal line of the himation as it wraps around the prophet's body in this image. Moses' furthest knee juts out and presses against the stripe bordering his blue tunic while the lighter fabric of the himation adds to the substantial weight of the supporting leg/thigh closest to us.

Certainly, there may have been pictorial models other than the Sinai mosaics that the artist used and depended upon for crafting his painted panels; manuscript illumination is one such possibility. And the mosaics themselves are high up on the eastern wall of the church, perhaps not easily perceived in the dim interior.¹⁵² Yet the paired icons of the two prophets, both of which relate to the most holy sites encountered on the mountainside beyond the monastery

¹⁵² Although the mosaics have survived intact from the 6th century, there is surprisingly no mention of them by pilgrims or travelers until the 18th century. See Appendix II and IV in Braun, "Literary Sources," 288-90, 303-6. They must have still been visible but perhaps, with limited access to the church, the original mosaic decoration made less of an impression on one-time visitors than other aspects more frequently commented upon (the stone and marble construction of the church, the number of lamps lighting the interior). While daylight helps to fully illumine the eastern wall, nighttime services would certainly have left the Moses images in obscurity. Cf. an 18th-C drawing of the church interior by a Russian monk published by Albert Champdor, *Le Mont Sinaï et le Monastère Sainte-Catherine*, Les Hauts Lieux de l'Histoire 16 (Paris: Albert Guillot, 1963), 67. In the drawing, the two Moses scenes at the top of the eastern wall are clearly indicated above the iconostasis, still visible between the arms of the large crucifix and flanking icons of the Virgin and St. John that project above the screen into the upper half of the nave.

walls, also appear prominently on either side of Christ in the apse mosaic just above the main altar (Figure 2.9). This image must have been seen and appreciated by the monastic community at Sinai on a regular basis. For the artist Stephanos, who probably created his icons at the monastery,¹⁵³ it may have been the apsidal image of Christ's Transfiguration that inspired presenting his monumental figures of the Old Testament prophets as a twosome.¹⁵⁴ The most telling detail linking Stephanos' icon of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush to the 6th-century apse mosaic is the covered form of the prophet's left hand, clearly outlined against the stone tablet that he holds. Moses' thumb is especially prominent. It is a distinct visual motif, not seen in any of the other published icons of Moses receiving the Law.¹⁵⁵ I believe Stephanos deliberately copied the left hand of Christ from the Transfiguration mosaic, emphasizing Moses' role as predecessor to his Lord (see detail in Figure 2.10). The prophet's covered hand also draws

¹⁵³ Argued by Doula Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 109-110.

¹⁵⁴ Their basic costume remains the same in the icon panels as in the 6th-century mosaic, even if their posture and iconographic details are adapted to convey specific events from the scriptural narrative of their lives. The pink and blue colors used for Moses' garments are drawn from Middle Byzantine manuscript illumination. However, the deep V-shaped fold of the himation between Moses' legs may have been modeled on the drapery covering his figure in the apse mosaic. Stephanos applied a similar series of deep creases to Elijah's tunic. These dark folds help to project the solidity of his body – Elijah is no frail desert ascetic! Stephanos also chose to show both Old Testament prophets as younger, middle-aged men in contrast with their depiction in the 6th-century apse mosaic. See above comments on the biographical stages of Moses' life suggested in the mosaic program according to the three narrative moments represented.

¹⁵⁵ I have found this prominent thumb represented on only one unpublished icon of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush in the Weitzmann photo archives at Princeton University (no. 189). However, it seems that this icon is later in date than the 11th-13th century images under discussion here. It also looks like the drapery covering Moses' hands is painted over his bare hands. The icon of Moses published by Kurt Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," fig. 33, from the chapel dedicated to Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai, also has a clearly delineated thumb, which can be seen through the fabric of his himation as he holds the tablets extended toward him by the hand of God. It would not be surprising if the later image (signed and dated 1841) was an intentional homage to Stephanos' icon, perhaps replacing it in the chapel. Georgi Parpulov suggests a possible 13th century date, believing the icon panel to be an earlier work, which was then overpainted. There are sufficient changes in the iconography of the entire scene that I do not accept a Middle Byzantine date for its creation.

attention to the typological association between the tablets inscribed by the hand of God and Christ as the Incarnate Word by linking the icon of Moses receiving the Law with Christ's figure revealed in all his divine glory in the apse.¹⁵⁶

Other scholars have made the general point that this pair of monumental icons, as well as the early 13th-century pair showing Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Law as separate compositions, must relate to the subjects as depicted in the church's original program of decoration. Yet, other than the repetition of content and paired scenes, little has been introduced to argue for the specific impact of the mosaics upon the body of Sinai icons.¹⁵⁷ As I have argued above, Stephanos' panels, besides providing a stunning sample of the artist's work and naming their creator in the bilingual inscriptions that weight the lower edge of the frames, do offer pictorial clues as to their close relationship with the mosaics of the eastern wall and apse. His accomplishment in producing such powerful icon portraits of Sinai's two Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, effectively demonstrates that medieval artists

¹⁵⁶ David Olster has argued for a shift in Early Christian/Byzantine imagery of Moses receiving the Law, in which Moses looks away from the hand of God on the mountain, emphasizing the incomplete or partial nature of this revelation, to post-Iconoclastic imagery, in which the relationship of text and image have been redefined so that the giving of the Law is later understood as an *eikon* of Christ. Moses himself serves as an antetype, and in the theological discourse developed during the Iconoclastic Controversy, is no longer understood to be as limited in the quality of his spiritual knowledge as expressed by patristic commentators. Idem, "Byzantine Hermeneutics after Iconoclasm: Word and Image in the Leo Bible," *Byzantion* 64 (1994): 419-58.

¹⁵⁷ The two events from the Life of Moses represented in the Sinai mosaics were selected as a thematic pair in other monumental decorative programs, from the Jewish synagogue at Dura Europos (3rd century) to Christian churches contemporary with the Justinianic monastery at Sinai (St. Vitale, Ravenna and the Church of St. Anthony at the Red Monastery in Egypt), and even in post-Byzantine examples such as the 16th-century mural painting from the eastern wall of the church of Panagia Podithou on Cyprus, where a deliberate echo of the Sinai monastery's visual culture and pilgrimage identity has been argued by Annemarie Carr. See idem, "Sinai and Cyprus: Holy Mountain, Holy Isle," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 473-6.

were not merely copyists – rather, they should be seen as creative and inventive collaborators with the visual material that preceded and informed their own work.¹⁵⁸

More recently, some scholars have offered interesting observations regarding the intentional copying of subjects and/or compositions from older icons in the Sinai collection within the production of later panels, a kind of honorific reduplication of venerable images within the monastery's holdings. Paroma Chatterjee nuances the notion of a late 15th-century revival of Sinaitic subjects suggested by Weitzmann for several instances in which he saw icons of the 12th and 13th centuries being copied and “updated” in style.¹⁵⁹ Likewise, Anastasia Drandaki has further developed the example of several Late Comnenian Deesis icons (identified by Weitzmann as a “master set”) already used as a model for production in the Crusader period.¹⁶⁰ The icons showing Moses before the Burning Bush and receiving the Tablets of the Law can be understood to operate within a similar trajectory. These are “icons of icons” – terminology used by Annemarie Weyl Carr to evaluate the role of donor portraits occupying the frame of sacred images,¹⁶¹ but which can apply to the format of *vita* icons with their narrative borders (sometimes also incorporating small donor figures within the central image).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ See also Jeffrey C. Anderson, “The Seraglio Octateuch and the Kokkinobaphos Master,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 36 (1982): 83-114.

¹⁵⁹ Paroma Chatterjee, “Archive and Atelier: Sinai and the Case of the Narrative Icon,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 319-44; Cf. Weitzmann, “Icon Programs,” 94 and 94-107.

¹⁶⁰ Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery,” 38 and 44 n. 52. In her words, “These icons demonstrate how artists invited to work at the monastery incorporated into their work the wealth of tradition they found there.” Ibid., 38. She explores this example further in “*A Maniera Greca*: Content, Context, and Transformation of a Term,” *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 51-61.

¹⁶¹ Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Donors in the Frames of Icons: Living in the Borders of Byzantine Art,” *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 189-98.

¹⁶² Carr acknowledges the influence of Nancy Patterson Ševčenko's work and draws upon her arguments in “The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” in particular. While words and text have played a role in framing images throughout the history of Byzantium, the *vita* icon is one example of the increasingly visual commentary developed in icons/images from the later period of Byzantine art. Carr, “Donors in the Frames,” 195.

We find all of these possible scenarios used for framing the central image when looking at Sinai's monumental icons of Moses. Carr herself points out the importance of the crouching, anonymous figure in the lowest left-hand corner of the 13th-century icon of Moses before the Burning Bush (see Figure 2.21).¹⁶³ This turban-wearing layman, possibly a Melkite Christian, speaks not only to the role played by the Arab Christian community in patronage and devotion at Sinai, but also to the deliberate act of setting apart and venerating important *loca santa* images.¹⁶⁴ The dual inscriptions that provide the artist's invocation in both Greek and Arabic on the Moses and Elijah panels (Figures 2.18 and 2.19) function in the same way as the donor portrait. On the central panel of the large vita icon of Moses (Figure 2.22), image and text work together to present the abbot and archbishop of the Sinai monastery. The icon is his offering to God and thus makes specific claims (both verbal and visual) on his behalf.¹⁶⁵ Like the donor figure on the paired icons of Moses, Neilos prostrates himself – a physical enactment of the humility expressed in the accompanying dedication (ὁ εὐτελής μοναχός, lit. “worthless”). Also like the anonymous layman, Sinai's archbishop is firmly embedded within the composition of the

¹⁶³ It is the first known instance where the donor portrait is positioned in the frame of the icon. Ibid., 191-2. While Kurt Weitzmann believed the diminutive figure was a later addition, both Doula Mouriki and Annemarie Weyl Carr argue that it functions as an integral part of the painting as a whole. Mouriki points out the similar location of a prostrate monk in the lower border of a Sinai icon depicting the Great Deesis (15th century). Idem, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 184 n. 52.

¹⁶⁴ It is possible that a second donor portrait would have occupied the same location in the lower right-hand corner of the 13th-century icon depicting Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, the companion piece to Moses before the Burning Bush. This area is heavily abraded, so that the gilding and even the linen canvas that supports the paint and gesso is gone. But this is the complementary position at Moses' feet that would share the opposing diagonal of the second icon panel. Cf. Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 177-8.

¹⁶⁵ On donor portraits in Byzantine art more generally, see Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, “The Representation of Donors and Holy Figures on Four Byzantine Icons,” *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaialogikēs Hetaireias* ser. 4, 17 (1993-1994): 157-64 and idem, “Close Encounters: Contact between Holy Figures and the Faithful as Represented in Byzantine Works of Art,” in *Byzance et les images*, ed. André Guillou and Jannic Durand (Paris: Documentation française, 1994), 257-85.

vita icon.¹⁶⁶ His kneeling form occupies the very center of the panel directly beneath the much larger figure of Moses, and is carefully tucked in between the few accompanying iconographic details – a discarded pair of sandals and the Burning Bush (see detail in Figure 2.23).

In this position, Neilos' bent back serves as a footstool for the Old Testament prophet. Moses steps forward with his left leg, a posture that recalls the unlacing of his sandals (cf. the 6th-C mosaic and the 13th-C icon panel depicting this scene; Figures 2.4 and 2.11). It is the mirror image of his pose in the icon painted by Stephanos (Fig. 2.19), only slightly more dynamic since this "climbing" action floats unanchored by any visible ground line or intimations of a landscape. The space of the icon, which Stephanos shares with the viewer, is claimed and possessed in this case by Neilos alone. Neilos' prostrate form may stand in for the whole of the monastic

¹⁶⁶ Just as the turbaned donor crouches at the lower left corner of the 13th-century icon showing Moses before the Burning Bush and shares the main diagonal thrust of the composition as it moves upward from left to right, the figure of Neilos Vooueri (or Querini) is placed on the central axis of the vita icon in line with the predominantly vertical body of Moses in the central image. The archbishop kneels directly above the central narrative scene of the framing *vita* along the icon's lower border. He is thus inserted between the *loca sancta* image of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush and the illustration of the second time Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the Law, after the prophet had destroyed the first set of stone tablets in angry response to the Israelite's disobedience. The first episode of Moses receiving the Law appears in the lower left-hand corner of the vita icon. It is the last scene of the left-hand border and, like the second giving/receiving of the Law, establishes both the vertical and diagonal movement of Moses' body as he reaches upward toward the manus Dei and stone tablets once more being dispensed in the central panel. The opposing diagonal (moving from the upper left-hand corner to the lower right) links the narrative scene of Moses before the Burning Bush with the theophanic emblem in the main image. I think it is no accident that the scene of Aaron and the Golden Calf sits adjacent to the flames of the Burning Bush in the central panel, juxtaposing the idol's unholy fire with that of divine revelation. The entire narrative frame is self-consciously composed in this chiastic manner, a visual device that can be found in the surrounding narrative of other vita icons as well. To take the analysis one step further, the first and last scenes of the upper and lower borders represent Moses' birth and death/miraculous burial on the descending left-right diagonal, while on the opposing diagonal scenes of Moses confronting the Egyptian slave driver and then the Israelite idolators are aligned. For the narrative order and iconographic particularities of each scene in the vita icon, see Doula Mouriki, "A Moses Cycle on a Sinai Icon of the Early Thirteenth Century," *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Doula Mouriki et al. (Princeton, NJ: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 1995), 531-46.

community at Sinai and Raithou, those under his authority, just as the commemorative portrait of the archbishop, Antonios, leads his brethren up the heavenly ladder of St. John Climacus in the 12th-century Sinai icon of the same name (Figure 2.24).¹⁶⁷ Like Peter who kneels beneath Christ in the apse mosaic of the Transfiguration (see Figure 2.9), Neilos occupies a highly privileged position yet at the same time offers himself as an intermediary for the viewer by modeling proper modes of piety, prayer, and devotion – the aims of sanctity.

Nancy Ševčenko made the argument that the *vita* icon of Moses (Fig. 2.22), so similar in terms of its pictorial composition within the central panel to that of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush as painted by the artist Stephanos (Fig. 2.19), is a direct copy of this monumental *loca sancta* image. It is an icon of an icon, reduplicating and intensifying the cult of Sinai's sacred places through the process of visual production/consumption. Ševčenko points out not just the transfer of the central image,¹⁶⁸ but also the imitation of the large scale and dimensions found in Stephanos' panel. Whereas Stephanos' icon of Moses measures nearly 134 x 70 cm,¹⁶⁹ the *vita* icon is 142 x 90 cm,¹⁷⁰ the largest icon extant in the monastery's collection

¹⁶⁷ See Kathleen Corrigan, "247. Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of John Klimax," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 376-7. The abbot/archbishop makes a striking visual claim to the source and transmission of his authority in both commissions. In the *vita* icon, Neilos' body is anchored below that of Moses in a similar way to Peter's position beneath Christ in the apse mosaic of the Transfiguration (see Elsner's discussion of the paradigmatic role of the apostle waking from sleep; idem, "The Viewer and the Vision," 94-6, 97-8 and emphasizing Peter as the rock/foundation of Christ's church with Gerhard Wolf in "The Transfigured Mountain," 55). In the much smaller panel representing the Heavenly Ladder, Antonios follows close behind John Climacus, a former abbot and leader of the Sinai monastery. In the *Life of John Climacus* written by Daniel of Raithou, the prophet Moses mysteriously appears at the consecration of St. John as the new abbot, and his writings as well as his contemplative way of life were understood to mimic the Old Testament prophet and lawgiver.

¹⁶⁸ The reversal of the main image raises the possibility of a direct transfer process – tracing the composition from one icon to apply to the surface as the underdrawing for the second.

¹⁶⁹ Ševčenko gives the dimensions as 129 x 69 cm. Ševčenko, "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 159. According to Parpulov, the icon measures 134 x 69.9 x 4.1 cm. Idem, "29. Moses Receiving the Law before the Burning Bush," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 193.

today.¹⁷¹ Mouriki indicates that the narrative cycle adds a width of 11 cm to each side of the panel so that, if this border were removed, the sizes of the two icons become more approximate to one another.¹⁷² As with the impressive panels by Stephanos, size and scale alone encourages us to consider that these images were all locally produced, made at the site where the events being depicted were also believed to have occurred.¹⁷³

Summarizing Nancy Ševčenko's argument regarding the embellishment of noted icons by the addition of a framing *vita*, Annemarie Carr states: "In the case of Sinai, it seemed clear that the icon in question was the mosaic of Moses on the triumphal arch of the monastery church... These ancient and highly visible images, so intimately bound to the monastery and its site, must lie... behind the sequence of monumental panel painted icons with these two themes at Sinai."¹⁷⁴ Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf have likewise asserted the influence of the mosaic scenes depicting Moses before the Burning Bush and receiving the Law on the series of Moses icons under discussion here, as well as the broader phenomenon of Sinai localism in the selection and

¹⁷⁰ Ševčenko uses the same and these are also the dimensions published by Doula Mouriki in "A Moses Cycle," 531 n. 2.

¹⁷¹ Mouriki, "A Moses Cycle," 531; Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," 97; Weitzmann, "The Study of Byzantine Book Illumination: Past, Present, and Future," in *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 1-60, esp. 24-6.

¹⁷² Thus, we end up by comparing 134 x 70 cm to 120 x 68 cm. Ševčenko, "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 159 n. 47. The height of Stephanos' panel might also be adjusted if the lower frame with the dedicatory inscriptions were not considered part of the pictorial field being copied by the artist of the *vita* icon.

¹⁷³ Additional physical characteristics listed by Mouriki include the distinctive combination of supports on the back of the panel and their decoration, which can be compared to other large icons from the same period in the monastery's collection. Ibid., 539. The reverse of the Elijah and Moses panels display wavy blue-black and red lines that alternate in color, a pattern found on a number of other icons at Sinai. Ševčenko, "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 159 n. 46. See photographs of the reverse of both panels accompanying their catalog entries by Georgi Parpulov in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 191, 193.

¹⁷⁴ Carr, "Donors in the Frames," 191.

depiction of various saints within the monastery's collection of icons.¹⁷⁵ However, by proposing a shared ideology of production - a kind of spiritual identity vs. national, ethnic, or ecclesiastical – as foundational to the development of Sinai's site-specific visual culture, Elsner and Wolf challenge the traditional approach of art historical studies to the corpus of Sinai icons. These have used models of patronage and provenance to focus on the range of artistic styles and diverse formats represented in the collection (a rather forensic approach that seeks to establish a point of origin for each image and to identify the trace of individual artists' hands or the collective identity of supposed workshops).¹⁷⁶

What Elsner and Wolf propose instead is a "Law of Icons" operating within a highly regulated cult of images in the post-Iconoclastic period. The abundance of icons gathered at the monastery includes few, if any, miraculous or wonder-working images (in contrast to prominent Marian icons celebrated in Constantinople, for example).¹⁷⁷ Thus, in contrast to icons as the object or goal of pilgrimage elsewhere,¹⁷⁸ the holy places at Sinai maintain their importance during the Middle Byzantine and Crusader periods, continuing to function within the matrix of

¹⁷⁵ "One can hardly overestimate the mosaic's significance. It was the main visual focus of worship on the site, from the sixth century until the iconostasis that covers it was put up, the current example dating from the seventeenth century. It is surely the mosaic that established the visual culture of local celebration at Sinai as itself something specific to the monastery. While the later icons of Moses and Elijah are not in themselves necessarily derived from the mosaic (nor are the images of Moses on the Moses Cross), nonetheless the need for such images in other chapels and perhaps also in some sites of private devotion was fundamentally established by the presence of the mosaic." Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 58.

¹⁷⁶ Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 39-58, esp. 40-43. As stated in the introduction, Elsner and Wolf clarify: "The aim of this paper is to put forward the fundamental question 'why is this there?' and to resist the traditional model of Sinai as a repository for someone else's goods." Ibid., 38.

¹⁷⁷ Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 60-64, esp. 63.

¹⁷⁸ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 75-92.

scriptural topography that first defined Christian travel to and experience of the Holy Land.¹⁷⁹

The negotiation of older and newer forms of pilgrimage/devotion at Sinai may also self-consciously engage with the dangers of idolatry, countering former Iconoclast concerns with the sheer number of holy images collected at the monastery.¹⁸⁰ Yet, as depicted in the narrative scenes surrounding the 13th-century vita icon of Moses, the cautionary tale of the Israelites worshipping the golden calf also belongs to the Sinai landscape – their disobedience to divine command took place at the very foot of the mountain where Moses received the Tablets of the Law and the two events occur simultaneously in the biblical text.¹⁸¹

The only alternative for the Orthodox cult of images is to identify the icon with the divinely-inscribed tablets and not the manufactured idol. Elsner and Wolf describe the Sinai icons as “spiritual tablets,” or *plakes pneumatikai*,¹⁸² evoking a diptych-like structure of paired images that keeps recurring within the monastery’s visual production and consumption. The first formulation of this structure is in the two scenes from the Life of Moses placed on either side of a divided window at the top of the triumphal arch on the eastern wall (so that the window also

¹⁷⁹ See the synopsis of Egeria’s 4th-century pilgrimage account by Elsner and Wolf and their discussion of the sacred landscape at Sinai as defined by scriptural events in relation to the Justinianic building program of the 6th century. Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain,” 46-9. In the final portion of their essay, the authors argue for the ongoing topographical cult of Sinai’s holy places, perhaps even aided/abetted by the localist emphasis of its icons, in the face of a new, charismatic form of pilgrimage introduced with the relic cult of St. Catherine of Alexandria sometime before the 13th century. Ibid., 64-71.

¹⁸⁰ Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain,” 63.

¹⁸¹ So that the prohibition against graven images and transgression of this very commandment are mutually reinforcing. See further discussion by Richard Neer on Poussin’s painting of “The Adoration of the Golden Calf.”

¹⁸² The label given to a miniature in a late 11th/early 12th century manuscript of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus (Vatican, cod. Ross. gr. 251, fol. 12v), illustrating the tablets of the Law with images of the Mandylion and its copy, the Keramion. Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain,” 61.

forms a doubled opening to the rays of light coming into the monastery church; see Fig. 2.3).¹⁸³ The monumental paired images of Moses are another example,¹⁸⁴ as are the contemporary 13th-century icons that juxtapose St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush.¹⁸⁵ My next two chapters address these two additional figures and the cultivation of their patronage, cult and iconography within the larger group of specifically Sinaitic saints. However, before turning to their role in the visual culture of the Sinai monastery, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the impact that the Moses *loca sancta* images may have had in shaping the liturgical space of the monastery church and its chapels, as well as devotional practice.

Addressing Visual Experience: Location and Liturgical Context

In some ways, it is easy to argue for the prominence of the 6th-century mosaic program at Sinai and its presumed impact upon the monastery's visual culture during the Middle Byzantine and Crusader period due to its placement at the eastern end of the church and the permanence of its materials. Thanks to the most recent intervention (cleaning and preservation) undertaken by a

¹⁸³ Ibid., 55; see also Robert Nelson's essay from the Getty catalog, as cited earlier ("Where God Walked and Monks Pray").

¹⁸⁴ To the large-scale panels of Moses and Elijah, the 13th-C *vita* icon of Moses and the two individual panels representing Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, Doula Mouriki added the sanctuary doors with figure of Moses and Aaron as representative of the cult of Sinaitic saints in the same period. Idem, "A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons," 171 n. 4. These were included in the Getty exhibition, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, no. 23. Besides the sanctuary doors, there are a number of smaller icons in the Sinai collection that specifically pair Moses with Aaron, either as the focus of veneration or as flanking figures shown with other subjects. As mentioned above, they both reach up to receive the Tablets of the Law in the icon commissioned by Theodore Salustius, which includes a portrait of the donor kneeling beside them. The prevalence of their joint appearance is a topic that remains to be explored in terms of its significance for the Sinai community, monastic and otherwise.

¹⁸⁵ See Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 69.

team of skilled conservators, the mosaics should remain *in situ* for many years to come.¹⁸⁶

Because the images from the life of Moses and their New Testament counterpart in the apse envelop the focal point of liturgical action/Eucharistic offering within the sanctuary, their impact and the accumulation of meaning (typological and topographical) over the history of the monastic community is more certain than that of the individual Moses panels – however monumental and impressive in scale these might be – in relation to monastery’s collection of icons as a whole.¹⁸⁷ The only aspect that seems clear with regards to the location and display of these images is that they were movable, perhaps intentionally so.

¹⁸⁶ The mosaics have recently undergone a second extensive conservation effort led by Roberto Nardi of the Center for Archaeological Conservation, Rome. This project, started in November 2005, was completed in April 2010 and revisited the same issues of consolidating preparatory layers and tesserae in areas where the mosaic had detached from its substrate that Hawkins dealt with earlier. Leaking rainwater also contributed to serious deterioration of the mosaic in certain areas, in particular the area immediately beneath the mullioned window. Approximately 4% of the original tesserae have been completely lost. Advanced technical documentation has allowed these missing cubes to be replaced by modern materials, returning the mosaic program to its full splendor (yet adhering to a fully reversible process of restoration, in order to distinguish between ancient and modern interventions). See Roberto Nardi, “Restoration of the ‘Mosaic of the Transfiguration’ in St. Catherine Monastery on Mount Sinai,” *Solo Mosaico: Tradition, Technique, Contemporary Art* (2011): 28-37, especially the map of tesserae displacements on p. 34; also available online (<http://www.solo-mosaico.org/portfolio/restoration-of-the-mosaic-of-the-transfiguration-in-st-catherine-monastery-on-mount-sinai/>). The conservation efforts are also described in a small pamphlet that was translated into the eight languages most common among Sinai pilgrims – Italian, French, German, Spanish, Greek, Russian, Arabic, and English. Roberto Nardi, *The Conservation of the Mosaic of the Transfiguration: Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai* (Rome: Centro di Conservazione Archeologica, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ The same might be said of the large bronze cross dated to the 6th century at Sinai that likewise bears the monastery’s dual *loca sancta* images, showing Moses removing his sandals and receiving the Law on the cross arms while two divine hands extend from a celestial globe at the top. The majestic uncial inscription provides a lengthy quote from Exodus 19:16-18 with a dedicatory prayer by the donor, a certain Theodora. The scriptural passage alongside the two images of Moses makes the intended destination for the bronze cross “abundantly clear.” See Kurt Weitzmann and Ihor Ševčenko, “The Moses Cross at Sinai,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 385-98, esp. 392, and Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “35. Cross with Scenes of Moses,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 210-13.

Not only could icons of Moses adorn the chapels dedicated to the Old Testament prophet and commemorating different events from the scriptural narrative of his life and of the Israelites' desert wanderings,¹⁸⁸ but they might also be set out for special veneration on feast days when Moses and/or readings associated with the Sinai *loca sancta* were celebrated.¹⁸⁹ Usually, large-scale icons are distinguished from smaller panels assumed to function as *proskynetaria*, icons displayed for the purpose of kissing and receiving prayers. Smaller panels are also more frequently described as “devotional” – either personal donations and/or votive panels that represent the act of prayer through leaving a physical offering at the church and pilgrimage site,¹⁹⁰ or icons that might be kept within a monk's cell for private use (although the prayers and acts of devotional piety offered here may not have differed very much from those performed within the “public” space of the church or in shared ritual performance).¹⁹¹

When George Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann arrived in the 1960s to pursue their campaign of documenting the monastery's art and architecture as part of the Alexandria-Michigan-

¹⁸⁸ Such as the chapel dedicated to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, or in the monastic dependencies and hermitages scattered throughout the surrounding terrain.

¹⁸⁹ The feast day of Moses, established in the 10th century, was held on September 4. This date is included in the Synaxarion of Constantinople along with what seems to be an earlier feast on July 20, when Moses is commemorated along with his brother Aaron and the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha. See Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 182; J. Blanc, “La fête de Moïse dans le rite byzantin,” *Cahiers Sioniens* 8, no. 2-4 (1954): 345. As mentioned previously, the readings assigned to the feast of Transfiguration also recount the events from Exodus 24 and 33-34, and I Kings 19. Cf. Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 183.

¹⁹⁰ The number of donor figures and inscriptions on the icons of Moses receiving the Law testify to the popularity of this practice at Sinai.

¹⁹¹ In his memoirs, Weitzmann describes finding a manuscript leaf bearing the evangelist portrait of St. Luke pasted to the ceiling above Father Pachomius' bed (the “last” of Sinai's icon painters, this resident artist passed away on June 15, 1958 and Weitzmann assisted in collecting his drawings and materials from his cell after the funeral proceedings). Several icons were documented in the private quarters of the abbot and skevophylax, as well. Idem, *Sailing with Byzantium from Europe to America: the memoirs of an art historian* (Munich: Editio Maris, 1994), 281-82.

Princeton expeditions, a number of early and Middle Byzantine icons had already been pulled from their previous locations to create a “Picture Gallery” – a process initiated by the work of George and Maria Soteriou in first identifying and publishing key examples from the monastery’s collection.¹⁹² Icons were also being removed from many of the outlying chapels and brought into the monastery for storage and safekeeping as incidences of theft and vandalism increased alongside the greater number of casual visitors and tourists.¹⁹³ Weitzmann alludes to several large-scale icons that were displayed high up on the walls of the nave in the monastery church.¹⁹⁴ It is likely that the panels by Stephanos representing the prophets Elijah and Moses were among these, since these were each hung on one of the north or south walls of the basilica at the time of the Princeton expeditions.¹⁹⁵

Kurt Weitzmann attempted to reconstruct a number of “icon programs” in his analysis of Sinai icons attributed to the 12th and 13th centuries, focusing on the probable function of various types of images in relation to their placement within the monastery church or its chapels.¹⁹⁶ He

¹⁹² Weitzmann, “Icon Programs,” 64; cf. description of the documentary campaign to photograph all the Sinai icons during the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions. Idem, *Sailing with Byzantium*, 276-82, 284-6.

¹⁹³ Ibid., *Sailing with Byzantium*, 286. Weitzmann describes an incident when a small icon disappeared from one of the side chapels of the monastery church, precipitating the removal of all icons of small and middle sizes from the chapels to the storage magazine in the Old Library. Before this, the side chapels were also filled, “magazine-like,” with icons covering the walls in several rows. Ibid., *Sailing with Byzantium*, 277.

¹⁹⁴ “...icons of large format too high up to be still accessible to worship and to burn candles in front of them.” Weitzmann, “Icon Programs,” 64.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 102. This location for the pair of icons was repeated by Nancy Ševčenko in “The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” 159.

¹⁹⁶ The project assumed a level of coherent planning and intentional execution in the visual embellishment of the monastery’s liturgical spaces that was probably too idealistic to reflect the actuality of Sinai’s history. In his words, “When one walks today through the various places in the monastery where icons are to be found it will become immediately clear that hardly any are in the place for which they were destined.” Weitzmann, “Icon Programs,” 64. The question is whether or not most of the Sinai icons were ‘destined’ for a specific location, implicated in the conditions and outcome of their making. Or, if many panels and the holy subjects represented in

began with surviving iconostasis beams from the period as the linchpin for constructing groups of related images within icon screens presumed the original focal point for artistic decoration in each chapel,¹⁹⁷ then proceeded by proposing sets of individual panels that might have belonged to an extended Deesis in the intercolumnar spaces of each iconostasis.¹⁹⁸ Finally, Weitzmann introduced panels characterized by the distinctive format of the *vita* icon, which he termed “title-saint icons.” For Weitzmann, the surrounding border of narrative scenes isolated the central image of the saint in such a way that it would not have functioned properly within an iconostasis program and thus suggested an independent role for such images, providing the main focus of veneration for individual chapels at Sinai.¹⁹⁹ A few other large-scale icons of prominent saints,

them were adaptable to multiple contexts of viewing and Christian (Orthodox) worship and should be considered as participants in a collective visual culture of devotion/iconization rather than being assigned particular roles in a programmatic approach.

¹⁹⁷ “What makes the beams so important is that they must have been produced *ad hoc* in the monastery where they were made in accordance with the width of the respective chapel in which they were placed.” Ibid., 65. Weitzmann contrasts the pristine condition of the original iconostases in the monastery with the “makeshift” appearance of their later replacements – “filled at random with icons of various periods, often with pieces of wood added where the provided space was too big or sawed off where it was too small.” Ibid., 64. Yet, these assemblages of icons and their piecemeal framework may offer a more accurate glimpse at what the monastery’s visual environment may have looked like/sustained throughout its history!

¹⁹⁸ For example, paired icons with the apostles Peter & Paul, busts of the archangels, Christ, the Virgin, and/or John the Baptist. The sizes of the two 13th-century icons depicting Moses before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Law are similar to the dimensions of two large icons of Peter and Paul (“outranking all the others”), measuring 104.3 x 89.8 cm, that Weitzmann assigns to the main iconostasis of the church vs. the surrounding chapels. Idem, “Icon Programs,” 93. Mary Aspra-Vardavakis offers an alternate explanation for the placement of such Deesis series above the epistyle beam rather than between the intercolumnar spaces of an iconostasis. See her article, “Three Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons of John the Baptist Derived from a Cypriot Model,” in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, ed. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko and Christopher Moss (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 179-93, esp. 184-6. It is possible that the Moses icons, created as a pair, were intended for display on or above an iconostasis, as well.

¹⁹⁹ Weitzmann, “Icon Programs,” 94. Art historical scholarship has richly expanded the discussion of *vita* icons in Byzantium since their initial discovery in the collection of the Sinai monastery – in particular with regards to the number of early examples that survive, the complexity of their possible multi-cultural audiences and narrative function.

like the panels with Moses and Elijah by Stephanos, were also included in this category before Weitzmann concluded his discussion with calendar icons (saints grouped according to their place in the liturgical year and displayed by month).²⁰⁰

While recreating coherent programs of decoration for each subsidiary chapel at the Sinai monastery as they might have existed during the 12th and 13th centuries is a challenging if not impossible task, Weitzmann's categories of various icon types and the sheer volume of surviving panels at Sinai do reflect the profound iconization of liturgical space taking place in the Middle Byzantine period.²⁰¹ Elsner and Wolf suggest that it may have been exactly these changes to the main sanctuary, as the fully enclosed icon screen came to replace the more open form of Early Christian chancel barriers, that first interrupted visual access to the 6th-century mosaics at Sinai. Replicating the subjects already depicted in the apse and high up on the eastern wall of the church in the Sinai icons may have supplemented or compensated for their diminished impact.²⁰² Yet, in the case of the *loca sancta* images drawn from the Life of Moses, I would like to take the relationship between the mosaics and icons one step further, for it seems plausible that within the impulse to visually embellish Sinai's devotional spaces (the main church and its many chapels, inside and outside of the monastery walls), the mosaic program provided more than inspiration. Its compositional devices and emphatic theological defense for the very nature of seeing not only underscored the potential for human vision in religious experience as encounters with the divine but also offered a model that the production and viewing of sacred images could emulate.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Marking holy time: the Byzantine calendar icons," in *Byzantine Icons: Art, Technique and Technology*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2002), 51-62; reprinted in *The Celebration of the Saints in Byzantine Art and Liturgy*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS975 (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), no. IV.

²⁰¹ A process which occurred on many levels, from the ordering of the festival calendar through the commemoration of specific saints to the monumental decoration of Byzantine churches.

²⁰² Elsner and Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain," 69-70.

The juxtaposition of Old Testament scenes with the Transfiguration of Christ found in the 6th-century mosaics at Sinai was maintained as the primary typological and theological thrust of the *loca sancta* icons of Moses, as well. For example, the paired icons of Moses in Figures 2.11 and 2.12 create a shared, central axis like that seen in the mosaics set above the triumphal arch (cf. Figure 2.3). Operating without the same extended visual program, the panels only gesture toward an invisible Christ at their point of meeting.²⁰³ Their compositional symmetry does not include the *manus Dei* that emerges from a segment of heaven in both mosaic scenes (cf. Figures 2.4 and 2.5).²⁰⁴ The hand of God is retained in one of the 13th-century icons (Figure 2.12), showing Moses receiving the Law, for obvious reasons – it is necessary in terms of pictorial logic as well as iconographic tradition (otherwise the Tablets of the Law would appear without a corresponding point of origin). However, in the icon of Moses before the Burning Bush (Fig. 2.11), the *manus Dei* as usual indicator of divine presence in this Old Testament theophany is missing.²⁰⁵ Moses' gaze continues upward along the left-right diagonal established by the position of his raised foot, yet in contrast to the mosaic, his face is turned downward toward the miraculous shrubbery. It is the bush itself, and the stone tablets inscribed by the hand of God and

²⁰³ Cf. Glenn Peers on the Ohrid icons representing Gabriel and the Virgin Mary in dialogue; scene of Annunciation with spatial dynamic similar to the placement of their figures above the triumphal arch of bema or on the royal doors of iconostasis as preface to Eucharistic sacrifice and liturgical performance of divine presence within the sanctuary. *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (2004).

²⁰⁴ Nor do they replicate the phenomenological link with rays of sunlight that the windows of the monastery church provide. As stated by Robert Nelson, the placement of the two Moses scenes on the eastern wall “both sacralize the early-morning light and merge the voice of God, represented by the extended hand, with the actual light of the window.” Idem, “Where God Walked and Monks Pray,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 16.

²⁰⁵ Doula Mouriki comments on the absent visual device as “a major omission,” but offers no clues as to why the hand of God would be left out of this composition when included in its companion piece other than suggested that the artist did not wish to significantly alter his model by introducing the figure of the angel that had become common in Middle Byzantine depictions of the subject. Mouriki, “A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons,” 179-80.

given to Moses in the companion panel, that serve here as pictorial devices anticipating the person of Christ.²⁰⁶

The role of played by these visual motifs is multivalent. On the one hand, they are simple narrative details that set the scene, identifying which events from the life of Moses are being depicted and calling these specific stories to the mind of the viewer out of a much greater well of presumed knowledge of biblical history. On the other, they drive forward the trajectory of scriptural exegesis foundational to Christian understanding of these events, introducing typological emblems that can be understood as “types” foreshadowing Christ the antitype. In this way, the theophanic potential of the Old Testament narrative scenes displayed at Sinai was ultimately secured by the Incarnation (as in the apse mosaic depicting Christ’s Transfiguration).²⁰⁷ Each of the *loca sancta* images at Sinai that conflated Moses’ encounter with the Burning Bush and his receiving of the Law worked to reiterate this singular doctrinal mystery that lay at the heart of Orthodox identity and worship. And perhaps the movement of light over the gilded surfaces of the Sinai icons did more than just capture the wandering eye – it may also have offered a glimpse of Tabor’s uncreated light in its reflective, scintillating play.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Similarly, the actual inscription from Exodus (3:4) that fills the upper right-hand corner of the icon depicting Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush can be read as a visual signifier of divine presence. For further discussion of Christ as the Pre-existing Logos in relation to this iconography, see Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 43-78.

²⁰⁷ The tripartite cycle of viewing and notion of spiritual ascent that Elsner applies to the 6th-century mosaic program help to enrich the basic typological juxtaposition of Old and New Testament figures/scenes. Weitzmann offers a similar reading of the bronze Moses cross at Sinai, since the Eucharistic prayer included in the dedicatory inscription and the form of the cross itself make the comparison between the divine revelations on Mount Sinai and at Golgotha (a sacrificial moment continually repeated/reenacted in the liturgical performance). See Weitzmann and Ševčenko, “The Moses Cross at Sinai,” 389-90.

²⁰⁸ In terms of reflected light embodying Christ’s Incarnation, cf. the performative role of a shaft of light shown descending within the same trajectory as the dove of the Holy Spirit toward Mary’s womb in the Sinai icon of the Annunciation (12th century); discussed by Glenn Peers in “Silver Cladding and the Assimilation of Bodies and Faces,” in *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual*

Unlike the program of 6th-century mosaics at Sinai, the later icons that show Moses before the Burning Bush and/or receiving the Law were not necessarily positioned at the eastern end of the monastery church, where architectural surroundings and a regular liturgical context might aid interpretive efforts with regards to reception/ritual significance of these *loca sancta* scenes.²⁰⁹ However, as quoted earlier, Jaś Elsner's statement about the Transfiguration mosaic in the apse applies to the Moses icons, as well.²¹⁰ What makes these scenes from the life of Moses function as *loca sancta* images is the resonance between the events being represented and the place where they are displayed; they occupy the same space identified as holy ground within the image. In this way, their role as pilgrimage art could not occur anywhere else than at Sinai. The Moses images not only define the sacred history of the site, they also allow the viewer to participate in a receiving a vision of the divine – enabling the imitation of Moses' theophany as the culminating moment within a more prolonged experience of mimetic pilgrimage (one that includes the entire journey to/from Sinai).

The proliferation of *loca sancta* images at the Sinai monastery in the 11th-13th centuries expanded the number of possibilities for this optic encounter, and perhaps the popularity of the Moses icons as votive offerings was meant to communicate the success of various individuals

Experience in Byzantium (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 116-7. "The gold surface also generates meaning. It catches, reflects, and disperses light from limited light sources within and outside the building. The light created by reflection is different from these other sources, and it creates an unnatural, otherworldly atmosphere." Ibid., 107. The role of light and shadow in relation to the multi-sensory performativity of Byzantine icons has been explored in depth by Bissera Pentcheva. See idem, "Moving Eyes: Surface and Shadow in the Byzantine Mixed-Media Relief Icon," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 55/56 (2009): 222-34 and *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), esp. ch. 5, "Transformative Vision," 121-54.

²⁰⁹ Discussion by other scholars acknowledged above; Robert Nelson on the placement of windows/actual light on the eastern wall in relation to iconographic themes of Sinai mosaics and symbolism of liturgical performance; J. Elsner on participatory culmination of Eucharist.

²¹⁰ "[T]he spiritual point is surely that this icon is already on a mountain, as is the viewer who is in its presence." Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision," 94.

who attained the foot of Mount Sinai, climbed the rugged peak, and hoped for the kind of spiritual transformation exemplified by Moses' life. We find one such clue as to the pilgrim's response and identification with images of Moses in the travel narrative written by Fra Niccolò di Poggibonsi, an Italian monk from Tuscany, who visited Sinai and the Holy Land between 1346 and 1350. Like the early 13th-century pilgrim, Magister Thietmar, with his evocative description of the Chapel of the Burning Bush, Niccolò includes several passages in his account that take careful note of the architecture and works of art he encountered at Sinai.²¹¹ When Niccolò reached the chapel dedicated to Moses on the summit of the mountain (see Figure 2.17), he found the entire story of the Old Testament prophet "depicted from beginning to end" on a wooden panel hanging inside the chapel. The painted board seen by Niccolò may in fact be the vita icon of Moses still housed at the monastery.²¹² His account of the pictorial narrative stresses an explicit parallel between events in Moses' life and the places visited on his own pilgrimage. Responding to the scene of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, Niccolò asserts, "and at the very place... I have been."²¹³ As Anastasia Drandaki explains, "The details of the icon are significant, not merely as illustrations of the biblical story but because they serve the pilgrim as a kind of memento and even... justification for his entire journey."²¹⁴

Besides the evidence provided by Niccolò and Thietmar, there are few indications as to the actual location of various panels within the monastery church and its subsidiary chapels over the course of Sinai's history – most medieval pilgrim accounts are much less specific about the

²¹¹ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas (1346-50)*, trans. T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945); Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 500-503.

²¹² Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 502.

²¹³ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, 111.

²¹⁴ Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 502.

kinds of images available for veneration and their placement.²¹⁵ Both Kurt Weitzmann and Doula Mouriki suggest that Stephanos' monumental panels may have been intended for the chapels dedicated to Moses and Elijah on top of Mount Sinai.²¹⁶ An inventory by N. Nikolaïdis from the 1920's indicates that the icon of Elijah was being kept in the prophet's chapel.²¹⁷ However, the only reference we have to these icons within extant travel literature documents their location inside the main basilica by the end of the 16th century, at which time they were displayed to either side of the door leading from the narthex into the nave.²¹⁸ The same 16th-century account places the vita icon of Moses no longer on top of Mount Sinai, but in the Chapel of the Burning Bush where it hung opposite the altar with its relics.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Plumbing the depths of medieval and early modern travel literature to Sinai for useful references to the monastery's art and architecture was the stated goal of Sister Joan Mary Braun's dissertation, "St. Catherine's Monastery Church, Mount Sinai: Literary Sources from the Fourth through the Nineteenth Century," submitted to the Department of Library Science (now School of Information) at the University of Michigan in 1973. While Braun was largely focused on the architecture of the monastery church and its chapels along with references to the 6th-century mosaics, Anastasia Drandaki has revisited pilgrim accounts between the 12th-15th centuries with a more specific interest in Sinai's icons. See idem, "The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 13th century," in *Pilgrimage to Sinai: Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 26-45 and "Through Pilgrims' Eyes: Mt. Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias* 27 (2006): 491-503.

²¹⁶ Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," 102-6; Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 110.

²¹⁷ Cited by Hyacinth Louis Rabino in "Le Monastère de Sainte-Catherine (Mont-Sinaï): Souvenirs épigraphiques des anciens pèlerins," *Bulletin de la Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte* 19 (1935): 47 and in *Le Monastère de Sainte-Catherine du Mont Sinaï* (Cairo: Impr. E. Spada, 1938), 59; Parpulov in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 191 n. 3.

²¹⁸ This detail occurs in a versified account of pilgrimage to the monastery by a Greek Orthodox metropolitan from Rhodes. See A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ed. "Paisiou Hagiapostolitou Mētropolitou Rhodou Historia tou Hagiou Orous Sina kai tōn periochōn autou," *Pravoslavnyi palestinskii sbornik* 35/XII.2 (1891): 1-90, esp. 16 (lines 383-4). Parpulov in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 191 and 193; idem, "The date of two icons," in *Wonderful Things*, 150.

²¹⁹ "In the western part is the story/ of Moses, whose fortitude is known to all./ These are the miracles, they say, which in Egypt/ he performed against Pharaoh through the incomprehensible will [of God]." Paisios Agiapostolites, Metropolitan of Rhodes, *Historia tou Hagiou Orous Sina*, 34, lines 847-50; translated by Drandaki in "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 502-3.

The impressive vita icon of Moses could be just as instructive to a viewer/worshipper whether it was seen in the chapel on Sinai's peak, where Moses spoke "face to face" with God, as with a friend,²²⁰ or glimpsed within the Chapel of the Burning Bush, the most venerable location (eventually believed to be the oldest, as well) of the monastery church. Pilgrims like Niccolò might identify the miracles depicted in the framing narrative, retracing their own desert journey – "how Moses divided the Red Sea with rod in hand, and how the people of Israel passed over, and how Pharaoh's army was drowned in the Red Sea; and at the very place on the Red Sea I have been, which is five days from Babylon."²²¹ The central image of Moses condenses its narrative impact to focus on Sinai's primary holy places, so that the Old Testament prophet occupies both *loca sancta* simultaneously. His enormous figure (especially outsized in contrast with the kneeling figure of Neilos, the Sinai archbishop, at his feet and with the smaller scenes and personages that illustrate his vita) stretches between the holy ground defined by the presence of the Burning Bush and the hand of God extending the tablets of the Law to him from the mountain's summit.

It comes as no surprise that visitors to the Sinai monastery would report their own encounter with such imagery at exactly these two places. Like the diminutive donor figures, they were invited to participate in the creation of sacred space, to reenact Moses' devotion and obedience to divine command as they drew aside to "see this great sight" (Exodus 3:3). Turning aside to look was the first step required of the great prophet and God-seer. Just as pilgrims removed their shoes to enter the Chapel of the Bush barefoot, they could imitate Moses in this regard and expect God to respond. A handful of these pleas and prayers for salvation have been recorded on the icons that helped to mediate visual access to Sinai's theophanies. Many more

²²⁰ Exodus 33:11

²²¹ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, 111.

must have accumulated over the centuries, and the practice of asking for intercession at Sinai is maintained by current visitors who place folded pieces of paper with inscribed prayers into the cracks of a stone wall that surrounds and supports the living descendant of the Burning Bush within the monastery today (see Figures 2.25 and 2.26).

The scenes from the Life of Moses high up on the triumphal arch of the church worked to anchor the repeated imagery found on Sinai's *loca sancta* icons, wherever they might be displayed. They anticipated and reinforced the pilgrim's sense of standing, like Moses, on holy ground. Besides modeling the appropriate response of each worshipper, who was reminded to take off his own footwear before entering the Chapel of the Burning Bush, the images mediated access to the divine. Sacred image and *locus sanctus* merged and folded into one another in this space in a way that could only happen similarly on the peak of Mount Sinai, where Moses once more spoke face to face with God.²²² Thietmar's intriguing mention of a 'golden image' within the Chapel of the Bush clearly hints at the role played by contemporary images of Moses in relation to Sinai's various chapels and holy places.²²³ The ambiguity of his description and scholarly disagreement over its material form do not contradict the fact that Thietmar and others encountered some kind of manufactured visual aid at the site, one that enhanced their own

²²² It is also significant that pilgrim accounts continued to recount the scriptural passages, sometimes nearly verbatim, describing the events of Moses' theophanies at each location, weaving them into their own narratives and pilgrimage experience. This habit (perhaps not just as a literary motif, but as enacted practices of reading?) goes back as far as Egeria's visit to Sinai in the late 4th century.

²²³ See the passage quoted in note 42 above. Thietmar's observation is also discussed by Nancy Ševčenko in connection with the series of monumental Moses icons dated to the 13th century. Idem, "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 159 n. 47 and "250. Icon of Moses before the Burning Bush," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 379-80.

experience of Sinai's *loca sancta* by bringing these events from a distant past into the present moment. Thietmar testifies: "There I too worshipped barefoot."²²⁴

My next chapter turns to the cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, introduced to the Sinai monastery and celebrated in its visual culture during the same period (11th-13th centuries) as the images of Moses just examined. Magister Theitmar once again provides crucial evidence for the presence of her tomb in the church's sanctuary by the early thirteenth century. Besides the written claims of pilgrims and visitors to have seen or obtained fragments of Catherine's relics at Sinai,²²⁵ the collection of icons at the monastery offer their own testimony to her veneration and growing importance during the Middle Byzantine/Crusader period at Sinai.²²⁶ Because Catherine of Alexandria comes to eclipse most of the other Sinaitic saints associated with the monastery and is one of only three holy figures from the sacred past included in the 16th-century topographical icons (alongside Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush), I will address her origins and role at Sinai before concluding this section (in Chapter 4) by analyzing the new forms of iconography which developed in this same period for Mary as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου – perhaps competing with St. Catherine for the honor of serving as primary patroness of the monastery and pilgrimage site.²²⁷

²²⁴ Braun, "Literary Sources," 306; translation of *Mag. Thietmari Peregrinatio (1217)*, 42.

²²⁵ The earliest secure references date to the second half of the 12th century. See David Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, 79-93, esp. 82-3.

²²⁶ Nancy Patterson Ševčenko "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of St. Catherine," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557), Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006) and "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai," in *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (London: Pindar Press, 2006).

²²⁷ As argued by Kristen M. Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 95-119. The process of accommodating different forms of pilgrimage at Sinai in the thirteenth century is also discussed by Elsner and Wolf in "The Transfigured Mountain," 64-71.

CHAPTER 3

Encountering St. Catherine: Relic & Icon

Upon his visit to the Sinai monastery in 1349, the pilgrim Niccolò da Poggibonsi noted a mosaic image above the door to the church. It represented the Virgin Mary “with her son in her arms... On the one hand stands that precious Saint Catherine, and on the other Moses, and in front of these figures, that is, in front of the door, hang three silver lamps.”¹ While nothing of the once-seen mosaic remains within the narthex, the selection of figures mentioned by Niccolò correspond with their appearance on an early 13th century icon from the monastery’s collection (Figure 4.3).² Here, Saint Catherine of Alexandria is paired with a full-length figure of the Virgin and Child. Mary’s robe is overlaid by a network of branching red lines, each concluded with dots of green foliage. The image of Mary represents a new figural type in which she appears as a manifestation of Moses’ vision of the Burning Bush. Moses is shown twice, once on either either

¹ Niccolò da Poggibonsi traveled to the Holy Land between 1346-50. His account, titled *Libro d’Oltramare*, has been translated into English by T. Bellorini and F. Hoade in Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945). Translation cited in Joan Mary Braun, “Saint Catherine’s Monastery Church, Mount Sinai: Literary Sources from the Fourth through the Nineteenth Centuries” (Ph.D. Thesis: University of Michigan, 1973), 292.

² There is no physical evidence that a mosaic was ever installed above the door leading from the narthex into the church. Kurt Weitzmann, “Mosaics” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. Konstantinos A. Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 66. Anastasia Drandaki has argued for the identification of Niccolò’s description with a mosaic icon depicting the Virgin and Child that still belongs to the monastery’s collection. See Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th century,” in *Προσκόνημα στο Σινά = Pilgrimage to Sinai: Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 26-44 and 69-70, no. 2.

side of the Virgin, and much smaller in scale than the other figures, thus emphasizing the fulfillment of his vision. All three were significant personalities at Sinai, not only to the construction of its sacred past, but also to an accumulation of visual images and a self-conscious assertion of its identity as a *locus sanctus* through its pilgrimage art.

In this chapter, I focus on how Saint Catherine of Alexandria reached such prominent status among the many saints venerated at Sinai that she would be represented alongside the monastery's greatest and most long-standing patrons, Moses and the Virgin Mary. The thirteenth century, in particular, is important due to the recent introduction of Catherine's relics within the monastery church and the impact of her cult upon the veneration of biblical holy places commemorated at the site. I will be drawing upon both textual and visual evidence to analyze the growing importance of St. Catherine to Sinai's pilgrim audience.³ During this period, it is impossible to discount the role of Latin crusader kingdoms in the Holy Lands and the effect of increased diplomatic and commercial exchanges taking place between East and West throughout the medieval Mediterranean. While the interests and demands of Latin visitors may have led to the practice of relic cult at Sinai, Saint Catherine's presence within the pictorial record suggests additional consequences for the monastery's visual culture.⁴

As I have argued in my previous chapter, icons of Moses that were produced at or for the Sinai monastery in this period drew upon previous imagery already at the site, imitating scenes

³ Nancy Patterson Ševčenko has written two important articles on Saint Catherine and her cult at Sinai that are foundational to my own understanding of its history. See idem, "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai" in *Ritual and Art: Byzantine essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (London: Pindar Press, 2006), 129-43 and "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," in *Byzantium: Faith & Power (1261-1557), Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 118-37.

⁴ See also Kristen Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. P. Getty Trust, 2006), 95-119.

from the Life of Moses in the 6th-century mosaic program that sheathed the eastern wall and apse of the monastery church (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). While Moses remained a prominent figure at the pilgrimage site and may have even increased in importance during the Middle Byzantine period, a larger body of Sinaitic saints also seems to have come into being between the 11th and 13th centuries. These figure regularly in the corpus of icons surviving in the monastery's collection, reflecting their veneration and patronage at Sinai, but most especially a new form of collective identity in the visual culture and devotional practices cultivated at the site.⁵ As seen in Figure 4.3, it was the Virgin of the Burning Bush who offered the most compelling pictorial counterpart to St. Catherine's presence (mediated through both her relics and icons) at Sinai. I will be addressing the development and function of this new Marian imagery in my fourth chapter, the final installment in a three-part analysis devoted to each of Sinai's primary patron saints – Moses, St. Catherine, and the Virgin of the Burning Bush – as depicted in the monastery's icons.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of Saint Catherine and the invention of her cult, established through her bodily relics and her depiction on the icons preserved at the Sinai monastery, sometime in this same period. Although Western sources refer to her presence on Mount Sinai during the 11th and 12th centuries, the first secure documentary evidence that we have for her relics inside the monastery church dates from the beginning of the 13th century. This coincides with the celebration of St. Catherine and scenes from her life on a large-scale vita icon and an increased number of depictions that place Saint Catherine within the collective orbit of other specifically Sinaitic saints. I then turn to discuss the nature/character of Sinai's visual culture between the 11th and the 13th centuries. While stylistic analysis and attribution of the

⁵ Elsner and Wolf hint at this broader transformation of the monastery's religious practices in their essay, "The Transfigured Mountain," especially with regards to the 'law of icons' that they see governing the production and accumulation of painted panels at the site.

icons is complicated by their production within the milieu of the Crusades, I wish to avoid the tangled scholarly debate over possible Sinai workshops and the identification of various artists' hands. Rather, by examining the ways in which the icons at Sinai responded to one another and to the commemorative, architectural spaces of the site, I believe we can make new observations about changing practices of pilgrimage at Sinai and the participation of the monastic community in shaping and defining its visual identity through such examples of pilgrimage art.

The Cult of St. Catherine

How did Saint Catherine, martyred in Alexandria sometime in the fourth century, become associated with Mount Sinai? The primary link between saint and holy site was established in the text of Catherine's Life, which circulated during the Middle Ages in Latin and in Greek. Her biography can be briefly summarized as follows – after confronting the pagan emperor Maxentius (or Maximianus) and his entire troop of philosophers, whom she persuaded to convert to the Christian faith, Catherine was imprisoned, tortured, and finally beheaded.⁶ The distinguishing factor in her martyrdom was Catherine's education and rhetorical skills, demonstrated in her debates with the emperor's wise men.⁷ Just before her death, the saint

⁶ The conversions of Maxentius' wife and of his general, Catherine's famous torture on the wheel, and the episodes occurring at her death seem to be further elaborations of the *vita*, although already present in Symeon Metaphrastes' hagiographic compilation in the late 10th century. On the early manuscript tradition, see Joseph Viteau, *Passions des Saints Écaterine et Pierre d'Alexandrie, Barbara et Anysia* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1897) and Giovanni Battista Bronzini, *La leggenda di S. Caterina d'Alessandria, Passioni greche e latine*, Memorie dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche et filologiche, ser. 8, vol. 9, fasc. 2 (Rome, 1960). By the mid-13th century, Western accounts included details on Catherine's birth and upbringing, introducing her mystical marriage with Christ.

⁷ This is the one narrative moment found in Byzantine manuscript illumination. For example, in the Theodore Psalter (1066) in the British Library, Add. MS 19352, fol. 167r, and in the Menologion of Basil II (c. 1000), now in the Vatican Library, Vat. Gr. 1613, p. 207. Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," figs. 66 & 68.

prayed that her body should be hidden (so as not to be divided into relics) and that God should answer any petitions made in her name. Her sanctity was further confirmed when angels carried her body away for burial on Mount Sinai.⁸ Interestingly enough, Catherine's prayer regarding the division of her body was omitted in later texts, which circulated at a time when her relics were available throughout Western Europe.⁹ These later accounts explicitly referred to the location of Saint Catherine's body preserved on Mount Sinai, where it produced miraculous oil.

The earliest extant version of the Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria is found in the menologion compiled by Symeon Metaphrastes at the end of the 10th century. Metaphrastes' influential text, a collection of saints' lives arranged according to their place in the liturgical year, seems to have provided the source for most later, Latin *vitae*.¹⁰ While there is no trace of any other surviving text before the early 9th century,¹¹ scholars suggest the composition of Catherine's *passio* took place sometime between the late 6th and late 8th centuries.¹² Further evidence of the saint's liturgical celebration is available from the invocation of Catherine's name

⁸ See the manuscript illumination of Saint Catherine's body being carried by angels to Mount Sinai by the Limbourg brothers in the *Belles Heures of Jean, duc de Berry* (1405-1408/9) from the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (54.1.1), fol. 20r.

⁹ In the 12th-century *Life of Saint Catherine* by Clemence of Barking, for example, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (c. 1260). Christine Walsh argues that specific mention of Catherine's relics in the early *Passio* relates to the composition of these texts during Byzantium's iconoclast controversies in the 8th and 9th centuries. Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 13-6.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis, "Introduction," in *St. Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 7.

¹¹ A Latin Passion of Saint Catherine is mentioned in the contents of a German manuscript dated c. 800-840 (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Claromonte 4554, fol. 1r-v). The form of the saint's name, "Ecaterine," suggests translation from a Greek original. Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 155.

¹² Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 18-9.

in litanies and the composition of kontakia, or liturgical hymns, in her honor.¹³ During the 10th century, the feast day for Saint Catherine begins to appear on November 24 or 25 in various church calendars, including the Synaxarion and Typikon of the Great Church, Hagia Sophia, in Constantinople.¹⁴ This is also when visual evidence suggests the spread of her cult. Portraits of Catherine can be found during the 10th and 11th centuries in both manuscript illumination and monumental programs of church decoration.¹⁵ She is shown in imperial dress, wearing a crown and loros, and usually appears in the company of other female saints (such as Sts. Irene and Barbara on the south wall of the narthex at Hosios Loukas in a mosaic dating to the early 11th century). Her importance in Byzantium was largely that of a defender of the faith, perhaps associated with other imperial patrons of Orthodoxy, but otherwise universal in her scope and not affiliated with any specific cult site.¹⁶ By the early 13th century, her role had changed at one location in particular – Mount Sinai.

While the narrative of Saint Catherine's Life supports her association with Mount Sinai, this textual tradition should be distinguished from the actual cult of Saint Catherine and its localization at the Sinai monastery.¹⁷ As I have stated above, secure documentation of Catherine's relics at Sinai only dates to the early 13th century and it is not until the 12th century that Latin pilgrims record visiting Sinai with the express intent of venerating Saint Catherine

¹³ The earliest is a 7th-century Syriac litany preserved in the Vatican Library, MS Syr. 77. Walsh mentions two early liturgical hymns. One dates to the 8th century and is signed by "the humble monk," perhaps from the circle of Theodore Studites. Another, 9th-century canon, is attributed to the hymnographer Theophanes Graptos. Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 24-7.

¹⁴ Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 27. See Juan Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église: MS Sainte-Croix No. 40, Xe siècle*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 165-6. (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1962-63), 1:112, 114.

¹⁵ The majority of early examples of Catherine's portrait in mural decoration come from the rock-cut churches in Cappadocia. Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 29-38.

¹⁶ Argued by Ševčenko, "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai," 132 and Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," 142, 126-8.

¹⁷ Cf. Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, 46.

there. These accounts survive primarily in the form of letters authenticating relics or oil from the saint's body that were brought back with them. Gui de Blonde, a monk from Grandmont (in the diocese of Lyon), lists the oil of Saint Catherine in a donation given by him to churches in the Limousin region of France after his return from the Holy Land (c. 1150).¹⁸ Another letter, written by Philip de Nablus in 1169, accompanied a relic presented by the nobleman (he was appointed lord of Montréal between 1161 and 1166 and Templar Grand Master from 1169 to 1170) to Maurice II of Craon. Philip claimed that the relic was given to him as a gift on his visit to Mount Sinai, after he had persuaded the abbot of monastery to open Saint Catherine's tomb.¹⁹ Philip also describes climbing the mountain to reach the saint's shrine, suggesting that Catherine's body was not inside the monastery church at this time.²⁰

However, by the beginning of the 13th century, Saint Catherine's relics had been brought inside the very sanctuary of the monastery church at Sinai, where her marble sarcophagus was placed at right angles to the main altar (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). This location is clearly indicated in the account given by Magister Thietmar, a German pilgrim (likely a cleric or monk) who reached the Holy Land in 1217.²¹ Thietmar specifically extended his visit in order to include

¹⁸ Drandaki, "The Sinai Monastery," 30.

¹⁹ Ibid. Philip de Nablus' testimony is also mentioned by David Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the late Fifteenth Century," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 83. Jacoby suggests that serious doubt has been cast upon the historical reliability of the letter supposedly written by Gui de Blonde.

²⁰ Walsh, 44.

²¹ "It should also be noted that the tomb of the blessed Katherine is located in the same church next to the choir in a prominent place toward the south. The tomb is in fact small and has been handsomely fashioned of very white marble." Translation by Braun, "Literary Sources," 291. Thietmar's account has been edited by J.C.M. (Johann Christian Mortiz) Laurent, *Magister Thietmari Peregrinatio (1217). Ad fidem codicis Hamburgensis cum aliis manuscriptis collati edidit...* (Hamburg: Nolte & Köhler, 1857), 42. The marble sarcophagus, which Thietmar and other medieval pilgrims saw at the monastery, is preserved today in the Icon Museum (no. 15).

Mount Sinai and expressed his own great devotion to Saint Catherine as the motivating factor.²²

His efforts were rewarded. Thietmar found not only the saintly body made available to him, but also a fully developed ritual presentation of Catherine's relics by the monastery community. As he recounts:

When the bishop of the place understood my desire and the cause of my coming, having prepared with devotion and prayers and singing, he went with lighted candles and thuribles to the sarcophagus of blessed Katherine the virgin, and opened it and commanded me to look within. And I clearly saw the body of the blessed Katherine face to face without shadow, and I kissed her uncovered head. Her limbs and bones adhering together are floating in oil, since the oil itself sweats forth from each joint of her body, not from the tomb; just as from a human body in a bath, sweat breaks forth from the pores in drops.²³

Thietmar received some of this oil at the end of his visit,²⁴ after seeing the other holy sites in and around the monastery.

Thietmar's experience is corroborated by textual evidence from the monastery itself. In 1214, the Abbot Symeon composed a new liturgical typikon referring to the tomb (*larnax*) of Saint Catherine as one of the stations within the monastery church.²⁵ It was visited, along with the relics of other Sinai martyrs (the fathers of Sinai and Raithou), during the Great Feast of

²² Braun, "Literary Sources," 96-7.

²³ Translation by Braun, "Literary Sources," 34. Cf. Laurent, *Magister Thietmari Peregrinatio*, 42-3.

²⁴ The bishop also gave Thietmar provisions for his journey (fruits, fish and bread). Laurent, *Magister Thietmari Peregrinatio*, 50.

²⁵ The typikon is largely based upon that of St. Sabbas of Jerusalem, but contains some information specific to the Sinai monastery. The original manuscript is Sinai 1097. There are later copies of the typikon preserved in Sinai 1101 and 1103. Select passages were transcribed by Aleksei A. Dmitrievskij and included in his collection of Byzantine liturgical texts. See idem, *Opisanie liturgiceskich rukopisej*, (Kiev and St. Petersburg, 1895-1917; repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 3: 394-419. Those specific to the history and topography of the Sinai monastery have been translated into English by Nancy P. Ševčenko, "The liturgical typikon of Symeon of Sinai," in *Metaphrastes, or, Gained in translation: Essays and translations in honor of Robert H. Jordan*, ed. Margaret Mullett (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2004), 274-86.

Moses celebrated on September 4.²⁶ The typikon also marks the commemoration of Catherine's feast day, celebrated on November 24, for the first time at Sinai.²⁷ Hymns were sung before the tomb of Saint Catherine on both occasions and on the saint's feast day, the account of her passion was read aloud. Nancy Ševčenko notes the incipits of several hymns to Catherine in the typikon that were not specifically connected with her feast day, and suggests these may have been sung during the presentation of her relics to visiting pilgrims.²⁸ Certainly, the tomb of the saint was incorporated not just into the architectural fabric of the church. It was also made part of the liturgical order observed by the monastic community at Sinai, dictating certain aspects of its performance (in time and place) and the sequence of processional movement. St. Catherine and her relics were thus woven into the experience of sacred time and space at the Sinai monastery.

What becomes clear from these documents is that, by the end of the 12th and/or early 13th century, the Sinai monastery was fully prepared to show the relics of Saint Catherine and to mediate her cult to its visitors (Figure 3.2). The monastery did this through both the ritual presentation of the saint's body and through the distribution of secondary relics – oil miraculously produced from her bones. Later pilgrims confirmed the ceremonial opening of Saint Catherine's tomb and the opportunity to view her relics, although the number of relics in the monastery's possession diminished slowly over time.²⁹ Felix Fabri saw “ribs, shin-bones, and many other members of the holy virgin” lying in the marble sarcophagus when it was opened for

²⁶ Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgisceskich rukopisej*, 3: 409-10 and Ševčenko, “The liturgical typikon,” 278-9. For other *troparia* in honor of Moses, Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgisceskich rukopisej*, 3: 417.

²⁷ Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgisceskich rukopisej*, 3: 411 and Ševčenko, “The liturgical typikon,” 280.

²⁸ Ševčenko, “St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai,” 141. Cf. Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgisceskich rukopisej*, 3: 418.

²⁹ On occasion, pilgrims mentioned trouble between the monastic community and local Arabs as cause for having to hide the relics or their possible loss. Braun, “Literary Sources,” 34.

his pilgrim company in 1483.³⁰ Most accounts consistently record seeing the head and left hand of the saint.³¹ And while 14th-century pilgrims still might acquire samples of the miraculous oil, by the end of the 15th century, it had also ceased flowing. Anselm Adorno (1470-71) and Felix Fabri mention scraps of silk that the monks placed into Catherine's sarcophagus among her relics and then distributed to the pilgrims.³² Fabri said that members of his company later dipped these *brandea* into the oil lamps hanging in the Chapel of the Burning Bush.³³ This substitute ritual may have originated as a parallel devotional practice at the site, since other 14th-century pilgrims mention oil that they collected in the Chapel of the Burning Bush.³⁴

The exact evolution of cult practices that we find chronicled in these accounts is less interesting than what kind of information such details provide with regards to the interactions between pilgrims and the monastic community. It becomes evident that the monastery clearly facilitated and encouraged their devotional responses within the various chapels commemorating Sinai's saints and *loca sancta* (cf. Figure 3.7, a photograph of a modern procession with St. Catherine's relics outside the monastery church). The presentation of Saint Catherine's relics to Magister Thietmar in 1217 agrees for the most part with what Felix Fabri and his company encountered at the end of the 15th century. Both pilgrims were met by the abbot and bishop of the monastery, emphasizing the importance of the ceremony and by implication St. Catherine's role as patron and protector at Sinai. In Fabri's account, the whole company of pilgrims held lighted

³⁰ *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society 10 (London, 1893-7), 2: 2, 601.

³¹ These are also the relics of Saint Catherine available to visitors at Sinai today. Each is kept separately in one of two 18th- or 19th-century silver gilt reliquary boxes.

³² Anastasia Drandaki, "The Sinai Monastery," 34.

³³ *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, 601.

³⁴ Niccolò da Poggibonsi indicates that a cup filled with oil was set on top of the altar in the Chapel of the Bush, while the Baron d'Anglure states that an opening in the silver plate of the altar was big enough to fit one's finger and that oil was obtained from this opening. Braun, "Literary Sources," 254. She includes the relevant passages in Appendix V; see *ibid.*, 307-8.

candles around the tomb and, while they venerated the relics in turn, the monks chanted a Greek antiphon. Many of the pilgrims placed gold or silver coins into the marble sarcophagus as donations to the saint; Fabri mentions gems that he had brought all the way from home. He touched these to the bones and then retrieved them again, intending to take them back with him as blessings for friends and family.³⁵ The group sang some of their own hymns before the saint's tomb, as well as concluding their devotions with collects from a *ProceSSIONal* to insure the receipt of plenary indulgences.³⁶ What we see in Fabri's extended account of the pilgrims' experience in venerating Catherine's relics is a careful balance maintained between the monastery's ownership and the contribution allowed by individual (or collective) pilgrims at the site. The mediation of her cult at Sinai is especially interesting due to the intersection of Christian creeds that met and mingled in it.

It may very well have been due to the expectations and demands of Latin pilgrims arriving over the course of the Crusades to find the relics of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, where the text of her Life said she would be, that eventually led to the development of her cult by the Orthodox monastic community already settled there.³⁷ We do not have sufficient evidence at this point to make a persuasive claim for influence one direction or another. Yet the degree of sophistication with which the Sinai monastery first presented their new saint, incorporated within liturgical ritual and given the appropriate legends to describe her invention, translation, and value (in particular, accusing earlier pilgrims of *furta sacra*, or the attempt to steal her body), suggests

³⁵ The term is a familiar one for *loca sancta* souvenirs. The pilgrim Egeria also mentions eulogiae, or "blessings," that the monks and holy men in the South Sinai give to her as tokens of her visit. However, these were often perishable items, like fruit or vegetables from their well-tended gardens, as opposed to Fabri's costly gemstones.

³⁶ *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, 599-602.

³⁷ Suggested by David Jacoby and others. Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai," 80, 83; Ševčenko, "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai," 136, 142; Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," 124.

that they knew what was expected of relic cult and exactly how to authenticate veneration of Saint Catherine for her western audience.³⁸ When Thietmar arrived in 1217, the story of how the monks discovered Catherine's body was already projected backward by about 300 years.³⁹ A useful comparison of how the relic cult of Saint Catherine was established at the Sinai monastery can be made with the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Rouen, which became the main center for Saint Catherine's cult and source for its dissemination in the West.

The monastery of Sainte-Trinité-du-mont-de-Rouen was founded c. 1030 by the nobleman Goscelyn and his wife Emmeline. While Goscelyn has been described as a confidant to the Norman duke, Robert I (1027-35), his foundation of Saint Trinity and the nearby convent of Saint-Amand were the first monastic establishments provided by someone outside the ducal family.⁴⁰ The endowment was intimately tied, not only to a public expression of piety, but also to the attendant expectations of Goscelyn's rising career and his new title as *vicomte* of Rouen.⁴¹ The original dedication of the monastery of Saint Trinity was to the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and all saints. Catherine of Alexandria is not mentioned in the foundation charter.⁴² However, within the first few decades of its establishment, the monastery acquired three finger bones of the saint

³⁸ On this process in the relic cults of the Medieval West, see Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979; revised ed. 1990).

³⁹ Thietmar cites Catherine's *Passio* as he describes the angelic translation of her body to Mount Sinai. The exact location of her burial was then discovered by an unnamed hermit, who saw strange lights coming from the mountain each night. Laurent, *Magister Thietmari Peregrinatio*, 43. In the version told by Fabri, this discovery was anticipated by the abbot of the monastery. He was told in a dream that he and his monks should look for a treasure, "coveted by Easterners and Westerners alike." *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, 604-7.

⁴⁰ Christine Walsh, "The Role of the Normans in the Development of the Cult of St. Katherine," in *St. Katherine of Alexandria: Text and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, ed. Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 19.

⁴¹ Walsh, "The Role of the Normans," 20.

⁴² Walsh, "The Role of the Normans," 21.

and began to promote a healing cult through the agency of miraculous oil that was exuded by the relic fragments.⁴³

In a late-eleventh century account composed at the monastery, the relics of Saint Catherine were said to have come from Sinai. They were believed to have been brought to Rouen by a peripatetic monk named Symeon, who spent the last years of his life as a recluse in the Porta Nigra in Trier and died in 1035.⁴⁴ Symeon quickly became venerated as a holy man himself, but the text of his Life says nothing about Catherine, even though it supports his connections with the East.⁴⁵ As Nancy Ševčenko so succinctly states, “if we look at this story in detail, we find that though there was indeed a Symeon, and he indeed came from Sinai, he himself had nothing to do with St. Catherine.”⁴⁶ After spending time as a hermit on Mount Sinai, Symeon was appointed by the abbot of the monastery to travel to France in order to collect alms from the Dukes of Normandy.⁴⁷ Symeon never returned to Sinai,⁴⁸ but his role as go-between is confirmed by the chronicle of Rodulfus Glaber (c. 980-1046): “Each year, monks came to Rouen even from the famous Sinai in the East, and took back with them many presents of gold and silver for their

⁴³ The relics’ arrival dates to the tenure of Saint Trinity’s first abbot, Isembert, thus sometime between 1030/33 and 1050/54. The composition of an office of Saint Catherine by a monk named Ainard (now lost) also support their introduction before 1046/7, when Ainard left Holy Trinity to become abbot of Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives. Walsh, “The Role of the Normans,” 22-3.

⁴⁴ A copy of the account survives in the Bibliothèque municipale of Rouen (MS U22), while an edited version has been published by A. Poncelet. See idem, “Sanctae Catharinae virginis et martyris: Translatio et Miracula Rotomagensia saec. XI,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 22 (1903): 423-38. Cited by Walsh, “The Role of the Normans,” 21 n. 11.

⁴⁵ Symeon’s *vita* was written by his friend and former traveling companion, Eberwin, who became the abbot of St. Martin in Trier. See *De Sancto Symeone, Auctore Eberwino*, in *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. J. Bollandus and others (Antwerp and Brussels, 1643-1940) for June (I), 85-104. For more recent information, see Tuomas Heikkilä, *Vita S. Symeonis Treverensis. Ein hochmittelalterlicher Heiligenkult im Kontext* (Helsinki: Tiedekirja, 2002).

⁴⁶ Ševčenko, “St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai,” 133.

⁴⁷ Ševčenko, “St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai,” 134.

⁴⁸ Apparently, he arrived just after the death of Richard II, Duke of Normandy. Ibid.

communities.”⁴⁹ These accounts suggest an intriguing geographical and historical link between Mount Sinai and the region of Normandy.⁵⁰ But the provenance of St. Catherine’s relics at Rouen (attributing their origin to the saint’s shrine on Mount Sinai) was certainly a later elaboration and their connection to St. Symeon of Trier completely fabricated after his death.⁵¹ Even so, the new relics proved a success, performing miracles and helping to spread St. Catherine’s cult from Normandy into England and elsewhere during the 11th century.⁵²

The account of how Catherine’s relics reached Rouen from Sinai was repeated by Hugh of Flavigny in his *Chronicle* (c. 1096).⁵³ By the 12th century, the monastery of Sainte-Trinité-du-mont-de-Rouen had changed its dedication and was called by St. Catherine’s name instead.⁵⁴ Its evolution was not all that unlike what happened at Sinai between the 13th and the 15th centuries, when the monastery originally dedicated to the Theotokos, or Mary of the Bush, became better

⁴⁹ Rodulfus Glaber, *The Five Books of the Histories*, ed. and trans. by John France (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36-7 (I.V.21).

⁵⁰ Walsh, “The Role of the Normans,” 25-6.

⁵¹ The connection was disproved by R. Fawtier, “Les reliques rouennaises de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923): 357-68. See also Charles W. Jones, “The Norman cult of Sts. Catherine and Nicholas, Saec. XI,” in *Hommages à André Boutemy*, ed. Guy Cambier (Brussels: Latomus, 1976), 216-30. In fact, Jones argues that the cult of St. Catherine was transported from Rouen to Sinai, although he perceives the popularity of her cult as a successful imitation of Saint Nicholas, another Eastern *myroblytes* (oil-producing) saint. *Ibid.*, 218-9, 230.

⁵² The efficacy of Catherine’s relics at Saint Trinity is mentioned in late 11th-century charters, and a collection of miracles (perhaps dating from the same period) is preserved in a 13th-century manuscript in Rouen. This is the same manuscript in the Bibliothèque municipale (MS U22) that contains the anonymous translation account and promotes Catherine’s intercessory powers. The saint both helps individuals seeking her aid and punishes those who fail to keep their obligations toward her. Walsh, “The Role of the Normans,” 26-7. For the transmission of Catherine’s cult from Normandy to England, see *ibid.*, 27-33, as well as Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2000), 45-63.

⁵³ Hugh of Flavigny, *Chronicon Hugonis monachi Viridunensis et Divionensis, abbatis Flaviniacensis*, ed. G.H. Pertz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* 8 (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1925), 398-9.

⁵⁴ Ševčenko, “St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai,” 136.

known as the Monastery of St. Catherine.⁵⁵ While official correspondence between the monastery and Roman popes referred to the monastery according to its association with the Mother of God through the mid-15th century, Western pilgrims already preferred the designation of St. Catherine's (although some, like Felix Fabri, acknowledged the different title for the monastery as it was known in the East).⁵⁶ The Sinai monastery did not adopt St. Catherine's name for itself until after 1517.⁵⁷

In this way, the association between the Sinai monastery and the place of St. Catherine's burial seems to have been made concrete in the western imagination. The notion of her shrine and the availability of her relics on Mount Sinai circulated along with the spread of her cult throughout Europe. Scenes from the life of St. Catherine were frequently illustrated in the West, concluding with her angelic burial.⁵⁸ For example, a late 13th-century panel from Pisa adapts the format of a Byzantine vita icon to depict Saint Catherine with scenes of her passion and martyrdom.⁵⁹ The final narrative image at lower right shows her body being carried by angels to a chapel and other structures on the top of Mount Sinai (Figure 3.15). Another western image that explicitly links the Sinai monastery with the place of Catherine's miraculous burial was inserted at the beginning of the *Belles Heures* of Jean, duc de Berry (see Figure 3.1). Illuminated

⁵⁵ The dedication to the Virgin Mary is first recorded by Procopius in the 6th century, when the emperor Justinian built the monastery church and fortress at the foot of Mount Sinai. Procopius of Caesarea, *On Buildings*, V.viii.4-8.

⁵⁶ A papal bull issued by John XXII in 1328 to Latin pilgrims also describes it as the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (*ecclesia monasterii S. Catherinae in Monte Synay*). Cited by Anastasia Drandaki, "The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th century," in *Pilgrimage to Sinai*, 34. The letters and documents exchanged between Sinai and Rome have been published by Georg Hofmann, "Sinai und Rom," *Orientalia Christiana* 9, no. 3 (1927): 221-99. For the bull issued by Pope John XXII, see *ibid.*, 258-59.

⁵⁷ When the St. Catherine's name does appear in papal correspondence to address the monastery, used by Leo X. Drandaki, "The Sinai Monastery," 34; Hofmann, "Sinai und Rom," 270.

⁵⁸ Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," 124-5.

⁵⁹ Housed in the Dominican Church of San Silvestro until 1894 and now in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa. Exhibited in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, no. 296

by the Limbourg brothers in order to represent St. Catherine among the saints particularly esteemed by the duke, it not only shows Catherine's body borne by her angelic transport, but also a cloaked and bearded monk seated before the monastery walls at the foot of Mount Sinai and a group of pilgrims approaching from the left foreground.⁶⁰

The illustration of St. Catherine's burial in the *Belles Heures* (1405-1408/9) represents the end point in a more gradual process in which the cult and relics of St. Catherine of Alexandria became accessible to pilgrims and visitors at the Sinai monastery, as I have outlined in this section.⁶¹ It is no surprise, therefore, that Latin pilgrims such as Thietmar would have arrived at Sinai specifically seeking to venerate St. Catherine there. Likewise, the ways in which Catherine's cult was instituted at Sinai echoes the strategies we see put into practice at Rouen and elsewhere in the West. What is more unusual is how the pictorial representation of Saint Catherine in the icons at Sinai becomes integrated within a distinctive visual culture maintained and celebrated by the monastery and pilgrimage site. The following section turns to address these examples and situates images of St. Catherine at Sinai in relation to the role played by other specifically "Sinaitic" saints.

St. Catherine in the Sinai Icons

Textual documents attesting to the bodily presence of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai date from the beginning of the 13th century and we find artistic evidence for the saint's association

⁶⁰ Timothy B. Husband, "297. The Body of Saint Catherine Carried to Mount Sinai," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, 487.

⁶¹ The duc de Berry probably knew contemporaries who had made the pilgrimage themselves. The unusual view of the Sinai monastery presented by the Limbourg brothers could have been based upon firsthand descriptions of the site, as suggested by Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson in their facsimile of the manuscript. Idem, *Les Belles Heures de Jean, Duc de Berry, The Cloisters, the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 119.

with the monastery appearing at exactly the same time. I began this chapter by describing one such example, an icon panel that pairs Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush (see Figure 4.3). This relatively small icon (it measures 38.1 x 29 cm) must have been produced after the saint's relics were brought into the monastery church and once her prominence at the pilgrimage site was both accepted and being actively promoted.⁶² Because I discuss the icon in Figure 4.3 at much greater length in relation to its iconography of the Virgin of the Burning Bush, this section concentrates on several other examples of St. Catherine's image within the corpus of Sinai icons. I have selected these based upon the prominence given to St. Catherine and the reciprocity between her image and a visual identity claimed/created by the Sinai monastery. Besides the proskynetarion icon that so clearly places Catherine of Alexandria's patronage on par with the sacred personages and biblical events defining Sinai's holy places, the other example that speaks to the growing importance of St. Catherine's cult in the early 13th century is a the large-scale vita icon dedicated solely to Catherine and scenes of her Life. Shown in Figure 3.5, this vita icon belongs to a small group of narrative icons in the collection at Sinai that celebrate especially prominent saints venerated at the monastery – other examples depict Moses, John the Baptist, Saints Nicholas, George and Panteleimon.⁶³

The vita icon offers a combination of hieratic portraiture and narrative scenes that provide a comprehensive visual summary of Catherine's passion and martyrdom to viewers who may or may not have been familiar with her story. As Nancy Patterson Ševčenko has argued for format of the vita icon more generally, it may have been specifically intended for a culturally

⁶² First published by Kurt Weitzmann and discussed in his article, "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 31-55, esp. 54, fig. 51.

⁶³ See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 149-56, esp. 150 n. 3.

hybrid and multilingual pilgrimage audience as found at Sinai.⁶⁴ The emphasis upon visual narrative would be one way to reconcile different viewing practices and/or expectations brought by Eastern and Western Christians to such icons. It has also been proposed by more than one scholar that Catherine's vita icon may have been intended for display in front of the saint's tomb, thus bringing together the martyr's relic cult with a pictorial celebration of her life and death.⁶⁵

The vita icon presents Saint Catherine in a full-length portrait at the center of the painted panel. She is positioned frontally, holding a red cross that symbolizes her martyrdom in one hand and reaching out toward her viewers and supplicants with the other. While Catherine is sometimes shown holding a globe in her left hand along with the cross, the combination of gestures we see here is commonly shared with other virgin martyrs (such as Barbara, Marina, etc.).⁶⁶ It is the same posture adapted on the proskynetarion icon in Figure 4.3. On the vita icon (Figure 3.5), Catherine's imperial dress includes a richly ornamented crown and loros, complete with hanging *prependoulia* and a *thorakion*.⁶⁷ Her jewel-studded costume, especially brilliant against the dark blue color of her main garment, stands out in each of the surrounding narrative

⁶⁴ Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon," 162-5. For a thoroughly considered study of the development and function of the narrative icon between the 11th and 13th centuries in both East and West, see Paroma Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶⁵ See Kurt Weitzmann, "Icon Programs of the 12th and 13th Centuries at Sinai," *AXAE*, ser. 4, 12 (1986): 63-116, esp. 95-7; Doula Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, ed. Konstantinos Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 114-5 and 386 n. 71; Demetrios Kalomoirakis, "38. Icon with Saint Catherine and Scenes of her *Vita*," in *Egeria: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage*, ed. Maria Kazakou and Vasileios Skoulas (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2008), 243. This connection between the vita icon and a saint's place of burial or the deposition of his or her relics seems to be borne out in some instances more than others. See the arguments made by Titos Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives: Narrative in thirteenth-century vita icons," *Museio Benaki* 7 (2007): 33-64.

⁶⁶ Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity," 105; Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," 123.

⁶⁷ See Alexander P. Kazhdan, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), s.v. "crown" and "loros."

scenes as well.⁶⁸ The golden nimbus likewise sets her apart.⁶⁹ The saint's name is clearly inscribed in capital letters on the central panel, while smaller tituli provide captions in Greek for each of the events depicted in the frame.⁷⁰

The surrounding narrative progresses from the top left corner across to the top right and then down the right-hand side, returns to the left-hand side and then moves downward and across the bottom register.⁷¹ It begins with an angel announcing Catherine's forthcoming trials and martyrdom, and ends with her death. The Sinai vita icon is the only extended cycle of the Life of Saint Catherine surviving in Byzantine art.⁷² Its striking formal composition is activated by a number of intersecting diagonals and paired scenes throughout the narrative border. The first of these perform a chiastic X, linking each of the four corners to the saint's own passion. The initial angelic warning at the upper left is paired with Catherine's final martyrdom at lower right. The

⁶⁸ Cf. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko's comments on her imperial garb in *Byzantium: Faith & Power (1261-1557)*, no. 201, 341-43.

⁶⁹ Maxentius and the empress are also shown wearing crowns and the loros, although after the initial scene of confrontation with Saint Catherine, Maxentius is usually cloaked. I would suggest the shift in iconography was intended to avoid visual confusion with the saint. In fact, in some of the narrative scenes the pagan ruler was given a halo, which had to be subsequently filled in (this is especially noticeable in the 4th and 9th panels). The conversion of the empress, on the other hand, allows her to appear haloed throughout.

⁷⁰ Η ΑΓΙΑ ΕΚΑΤΕΡΙΝΑ. For the tituli accompanying each of the narrative scenes, see Paroma Chatterjee, "55. Saint Catherine and Scenes from Her Life," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 265. Cf. Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives," 33-6.

⁷¹ The sequence of narrative scenes follows one of two distinct modes of composition identified by Papamastorakis, and similar to the way in which textual epigrams are used to frame Byzantine images. Idem, "Pictorial Lives," 59.

⁷² Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," 123. Illustrated menologia usually include a standing, full-length portrait of the saint along with her abbreviated *passio*. Two exceptions are the Theodore Psalter (1066) and the Menologion of Basil II (c. 1000), which show Catherine debating the philosophers and their shared martyrdoms respectively. Catherine is beheaded while the group of philosophers are burned on a pyre. Ibid.

opposing diagonal joins her imprisonment with the famous episode on the wheel.⁷³ Meanwhile, Catherine's outspoken defense of Christianity and her successful conversion of the empress and fifty philosophers are aligned on the vertical and horizontal axis of the panel. The confrontation between Maxentius and Catherine occupies the central scene on the upper and lower narrative registers. At the top of the icon, Maxentius gestures toward the pagan altar, trying to enforce Catherine's worship of the false gods represented by three skinny idols in bronze and marble. At the bottom of the panel, their roles are reversed. Catherine stands at the center between the conquered ruler and his converted wife, defending her faith to the last. The conversions of the empress and of the philosophers are paired on the central horizontal axis of the narrative.

I think it is no accident that Catherine's active confession of Christianity is depicted on parallel lines with the cross she holds. The larger "X" shape describing her martyrdom and suffering is intersected by a smaller "x" which develops the two main themes in further detail. Catherine is subject to flagellation on the uppermost scene from the left-hand column in the surrounding vita, whereas the death of the philosophers (who were burned alive) takes place in the lower corner of the right-hand column. The long, licking flames of the furnace provide a formal echo for the ribbons of blood overlaying the saint's body.⁷⁴ The second diagonal of this smaller chiasm belongs not to the collective scenes of physical torment and martyrdom, but rather to Catherine's extended confrontation with the pagan emperor. At the top of the right-hand column, among the three scenes completely dedicated to Catherine's debate with the philosophers, the group of sages is introduced by Maxentius, emphasizing his role in opposition

⁷³ Papamastorakis identifies the visual narrative with the Life of St. Catherine contained in the 10th-century codex, Ms. Par. Gr. 1180, edited by Viteau (*Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca* 31). Idem, "Pictorial Lives," 35-6.

⁷⁴ She bleeds again on the wheel in the bottom, left-hand corner. In this scene, Catherine does not seem to escape the instrument of torture, although we see a bust-length angel hovering above her (another angel appears to her in prison, accompanying the empress's conversion).

to the saint. The ruler is implicated once more in a second altercation on the bottom of the left-hand narrative column, which includes the eparch Chursasadem.⁷⁵

Thus, the depicted Life of Catherine, although seemingly straightforward in its chronological narrative, is complicated by the two interwoven themes characterizing the saint.⁷⁶ The physical suffering of her imprisonment, torture and martyrdom is counterbalanced by the intellectual and spiritual prowess demonstrated in her skills of debate and convincing Christian apology. Both aspects of the depicted vita are central elements of the textual tradition, and suggest its careful overall design. The visual program and its distinctive rhetoric may have originated in the wishes and demands of the patron. However, unlike some of the other vita icons in the Sinai collection, the panel depicting Saint Catherine with scenes from her Life has no donor portrait or dedicatory inscriptions that reveal or hint at a possible provenance.⁷⁷ Only its preservation within the monastery's collection and the association of Catherine's relics with Sinai confirm the probable significance and circumstances surrounding its production.

What is most striking in the choice of narrative scenes on the Sinai vita icon, however, is the blatant omission of Catherine's miraculous burial. If, in fact, the vita icon was intended to reflect the new prominence of Saint Catherine at the Sinai monastery, this seems an obvious visual connection to the site that has been completely left out. Perhaps on the basis of such disparity, Nancy Patterson Ševčenko considers that vita icons in the East "had no obvious

⁷⁵ Chursasadem advised Maxentius on the construction of the wheel.

⁷⁶ Ševčenko identifies the two main themes of the pictorial vita. "There are no miracles and there is no concern with Catherine's place of burial: the emphasis is on the tortures sustained and survived by the saint and on her steadfastness in confronting secular authority." Idem, "201. Icon with Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Scenes of Her Passion and Martyrdom," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, 341.

⁷⁷ See Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon," 158.

connection to any particular sanctuary or to the saint's relics."⁷⁸ She offers, by way of contrast, the narrative cycle on an Italian panel of Saint Catherine (dated only slightly later, to the mid-13th century) that concludes with both the burial and transportation of Catherine's body to Mount Sinai by angels (see Figure 3.15).⁷⁹ As mentioned previously, it was especially typical in the West for narrative cycles representing the Life of Saint Catherine to end with her burial on Mount Sinai. Given the exceptional status of the Sinai *vita* icon as the only surviving example from Byzantium of an extended pictorial narrative of Catherine's Life in any medium, perhaps the important point is that it survives at Sinai. There may not have been a perceived need for representing the location of Catherine's burial when the narrative scenes were seen and read *in situ*, on the mountain itself.⁸⁰

For a pilgrim or visitor to be escorted to the saint's relics in the monastery church at Sinai would have offered the same satisfactory conclusion to the sequence of images depicted on St. Catherine's *vita* icon as an illustration of her burial, if not more so. In fact, her physical remains proved the reciprocal identity of saint/site, matching the pilgrim's arrival at Mount Sinai with the revelation of the martyr's body, which had been secretly hidden on its heights. The most significant redoubling is that of Catherine's body kept in its marble sarcophagus to the right of the main altar in the monastery church (Figure 3.2) and as represented (reconstituted) in the full-

⁷⁸ Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon," 151.

⁷⁹ Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon," 153-4.

⁸⁰ Titos Papamastorakis, on the other hand, argues for the clear connection between several examples of *vita* icons and either the burial place and relics of a saint, or *loca sancta*. Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives," 58. See also Joanna Cannon's discussion of a *vita* panel depicting Margherita of Cortona (c. 1300). Idem, "Beyond the Limitations of Visual Typology: Reconsidering the Function and Audience of Three *Vita* Panels of Women Saints c. 1300," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt, Studies in the History of Art 61 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), esp. 293-5, 306. Cannon argues that, at least in the West, the association between the representation of a saint on a *vita* panel and their burial place was a relatively new one.

length, standing portrait at the center of the icon panel (see Figure 3.5). It seems highly plausible that icon and relic were also paired within the space of the Sinai monastery. Kurt Weitzmann and others have argued that the vita icon originally stood next to the sarcophagus with Catherine's relics.⁸¹ On the one hand, the large scale of the panel supports a public function and/or use for this icon of Saint Catherine, in contrast with the smaller size of the icon representing Saint Catherine, the Virgin of the Bush and Moses, for example. On the other hand, displaying the vita icon next to the tomb of the saint coincides with evidence from other vita icons surviving in the Sinai collection. Each of the extant examples can be connected with specific chapels in and around the monastery dedicated to the represented saint.⁸²

Only one of the surviving vita icons at Sinai, that of the Prophet Moses (see Figure 2.22), receives mention in any medieval sources. It appears in the pilgrimage account of Niccolò da Poggibonsi, who (as we saw in the previous chapter) describes a painted panel with "the whole story of Moses... from beginning to end" and recounts several of the depicted episodes.⁸³ This panel hung on the templon beam inside the chapel of Moses at the very summit of Mount Sinai. Niccolò also gives us the only textual hint of where the vita icon of Saint Catherine may have hung. Besides his reference to the portraits of Catherine, the Virgin of the Bush, and Moses, illuminated by lamps and hanging before the door of church (thus, in the present-day narthex),

⁸¹ Kurt Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," 95-7; see note above.

⁸² Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," 94-107, 113. Because of the large number of early vita icons that survive at the Sinai monastery, Ševčenko suggested that the icon's hybrid compositional format may have developed within the unique milieu found at the pilgrimage site. Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon," 156-7 and 161-5. Some of her conclusions have been revised by Papamastorakis, esp. regarding the date of the earliest known examples. Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives," 61. However, see Chatterjee on the relationship of vita panels to hagiographic texts of the 12th century, as well as developments in liturgical practice and celebration that similarly challenged the relationship between icon and prototype. Idem, *The Living Icon*, 86-90, 123-6.

⁸³ Anastasia Drandaki, "The Sinai Monastery," 38 and idem, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes: Mt Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the 13th and 14th Centuries," *AXAE* 27 (2006): 502.

Niccolò also indicated that images of Saint Catherine and of the Virgin were shown on either side of Christ within the church sanctuary.⁸⁴ These were most likely icon panels placed within the semicircular apse and would have been seen in close proximity to the location of Catherine's tomb within the same space (cf. Figure 3.4).⁸⁵ Regardless of whether any of these images of Saint Catherine from Niccolò's account can be specifically identified with her vita icon in Figure 3.5, his descriptions confirm the prestige of Catherine's patronage at the Sinai monastery by the mid-fourteenth century and testify to her frequent appearance within the visual embellishment of the church interior at that time.

Weitzmann's reconstruction of the location of a vita icon placed next to the saint's tomb was based upon the removal of a later icon of St. Catherine from the pier immediately adjacent to her sarcophagus during the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions in 1960. The empty marble frame can be seen to the left of Catherine's tomb and ciborium in Figure 3.3.⁸⁶ The 17th-century panel and its Rococo frame were then placed in the narthex, where they remain today

⁸⁴ "Dinanzi dall'altare, nella tribuna." Braun interprets this as a mistaken reference to the apse mosaic. Idem, "Literary Sources," 240. However, as the vita icon is the only early example surviving at Sinai that depicts Catherine by herself and not paired with Marina or with the Virgin of the Bush, there is also the possibility that Niccolò describes panels that are now either lost or damaged.

⁸⁵ This photo, taken of the main altar and tomb of St. Catherine by the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions, offers a "documentary" view, with most of the liturgical furnishings (including icons) having been removed. As a point of contrast, see the photographs of this same space around the altar published with Robert S. Nelson's essay, "Where God Walked and Monks Pray," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 1-37, figs. 27-30. Most noticeably, the icons of the church hierarchs that hang in the semicircular apse are missing from the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton photograph. Although it seems that the icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Stephen and the Prophet Moses (see Fig. 4.25) still hangs in the same location!

⁸⁶ Weitzmann was following a hunch that he might find an encaustic painting of the 7th century beneath them, paired with the Sacrifice of Isaac represented on the northern pier. See idem, "The Jephthah Panel in the Bema of the Church of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 341-52.

(Figure 3.14).⁸⁷ Along with the current location of the 13th-century vita icon of Saint Catherine, housed in a newly carved, wooden proskynetarion in the north aisle of the church (see Figure 3.6), both icons announce St. Catherine's importance to the monastery and the presence of her relics within the sanctuary to modern visitors. Both also receive tokens of veneration from pilgrims and worshippers, as Catherine's tomb on the right-hand side of the main altar is generally inaccessible to the public.⁸⁸ Candles are lit and placed next to the icon of St. Catherine in the church narthex, and people cross themselves as they pray before each of the panels, reaching out to kiss and touch the icons surfaces. The vita icon is protected behind a glass panel, as are the relics of the saint displayed in a secure box within the proskynetarion stand.

So, what was the function of the vita icon in relation to Saint Catherine's body in the 13th century? It may not be possible fully to determine this role, since most pilgrim accounts (like that Magister Thietmar) were focused more on access to and veneration of her relics than they were

⁸⁷ Weitzmann argued that the Cretan work was copied "in all essential features" from the 13th-century vita icon, which it replaced. Idem, "Icon Programs," 95-7. I see no basis for this supposed formal relationship. Other than depicting the same saint on a monumental scale, there is no direct connection between the two icons. However, another clue that Weitzmann offers to support his reconstruction of the original location of Catherine's vita icon displayed next to her tomb was a 19th-century Russian icon of Saint Catherine surrounded by scenes from her Life and nearly completely covered by gilt repoussé, placed to the right of the tomb and above the door leading from the south aisle into the Chapel of the Forty Martyrs. See Weitzmann, "Icon Programs," 96-7, fig. 27. I have not seen this area of the church in person, so I do not know if the later vita icon is still displayed here. But its presence suggested to Weitzmann an institutional echo or communal memory of the pictorial hagiography once associated with Catherine's relics at Sinai.

⁸⁸ Modern visitors are allowed to enter through the main doors of the basilica and then proceed along the north aisle, past the bema and out a side door. The smaller chapels flanking the nave are not open to the general public, including the Chapel of Saint James and that of the Burning Bush behind the apse. While a rope cordons off the front half of the basilica, visitors do get to see the main altar and tomb of Saint Catherine behind the iconostasis as they move through the sanctuary (although kept to the left-hand side by the barrier of a previous chancel screen).

on visual images that might have further legitimized St. Catherine's cult status.⁸⁹ Perhaps it was intended more for the monastic community at Sinai than it was for the occasional visitor?

Whether or not the production of a monumental icon celebrating the life and death of an Alexandrian martyr was prompted by the arrival of her new relic cult at Sinai or preceded it, the icon panel did complement the presence of Catherine's physical remains through her pictorial manifestation. Her virtues could be seen and read in the delineation of her portrait, as well as through the elaboration of her fearless martyrdom and eloquent confession of faith in the surrounding narrative scenes. As an embodiment of Catherine's Life, the *vita* icon best serves to incorporate her person and example of Christ-like sacrifice into the cycle of saints already being commemorated at Sinai. In this way, it functions on a pictorial level in the same way that reading the account of Catherine's martyrdom on her feast day did on a liturgical or ritual level.⁹⁰ And for the one-time pilgrim who arrived at the Sinai monastery seeking Catherine's relics, the icon panel with its narrative border would have offered confirmation of a familiar story, reaffirming something (and someone) felt they already knew.

From the thirteenth century onward, St. Catherine's presence in the collection of Sinai icons becomes more and more noticeable.⁹¹ While a handful of icons at Sinai show Saint

⁸⁹ This intensive desire for visual contact with the remains of the saint (rather than her image) is expressed in Thietmar's response to the opened shrine; "And I clearly saw the body of the blessed Katherine face to face without shadow, and I kissed her uncovered head." Translation by Braun, "Literary Sources," 34.

⁹⁰ This activity is specified in the 1214 *typikon* written by Abbot Symeon for the Sinai community. The martyrion of the saint was read at Orthros (the last of the four night offices; Orthros is usually observed just before the beginning of Divine Liturgy on Sunday and feast day mornings. Literally, ὄρθρος means "early dawn" or "daybreak.") on November 24th. See Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 280.

⁹¹ There is no existing catalog of the entire collection of icons at Sinai, outside the records kept by the monastery itself. As noted before, the series of publications on the Sinai envisioned by Weitzmann did not progress beyond the first volume (covering the 6th-10th centuries). Because I have not had access to the complete archive documented by the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton

Catherine together with Marina of Antioch (see Figures 3.10 and 3.11, for example), I would argue that these icons do not presuppose Catherine's cult at the monastery in quite the same way as the panel that juxtaposes the saint with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and the Prophet Moses (Figure 4.3).⁹² Rather than promoting a visual association between St. Catherine and the specific *loca sancta* celebrated at Sinai, icons representing the two female martyrs draw upon a shared hagiographic type as can be seen in other examples that pair soldier saints or the *anargyroi* (physicians).⁹³ This inherent ambiguity is true for several of the earliest examples of St. Catherine as she is depicted at Sinai. Was she included because her cult was beginning to be important and more widely recognized in association with the monastery or was she becoming more significant in the commemorations there because she was represented in the icons?

expeditions, I am not attempting to present an exhaustive survey here, although I hope that the ongoing digitization project will bring further examples of St. Catherine's place within the monastery's corpus of icons, as yet unpublished, to light. For the moment, I depend upon the handlist of published examples collected by Georgi Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai in the Thirteenth Century, Appendix: Eleventh- to Fourteenth-Century Painted Icons at Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 378-414, although I differ on some of the attributions (Parpulov assigns both the vita icon of St. Catherine and the small icon of St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses to the 12th century, for example).

⁹² Even though Marina did have a chapel dedicated to her at Sinai. The location of such spaces and who was commemorated there probably shifted over time, although it is also variously identified by pilgrims visiting the site. See Appendix VII in Braun, "Literary Sources," where she matches the names of specific chapels with the plan of the monastery church as drawn by George Forsyth (Fig. 2.6 here). *Ibid.*, 320-24.

⁹³ Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity," 104-5; Ševčenko, "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai," 141. On Saint Marina, see Jaroslav Folda, "The Saint Marina Icon: *Maniera Cypria*, *Lingua Franca*, or Crusader Art?" in *Four Icons in the Menil Collection*, ed. Bertrand Davezac (Houston, TX: Menil Foundation, 1992), 107-32. Folda briefly addresses her veneration at Mount Sinai and the issue of identifying a specific chapel. *Idem*, "The Saint Marina Icon," 117, 129-30 n. 51.

Along with the panels that pair her with other female saints, Saint Catherine is occasionally depicted alone or appears as one of a larger collective.⁹⁴ The next two examples of Sinai icons that I wish to address in relation to the growing importance of St. Catherine's cult are related images that both place the Alexandrian martyr within the frame, where she joins a body of other so-called "Sinaitic" saints (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9). Both icons show a scene of the Crucifixion at center surrounded by a wide frame, in which numerous saints and holy figures bear witness to this momentous event in salvation history.⁹⁵ The strongly beveled edge on the inside of the framing portraits in Figure 3.8, like the raised border provided between the central narrative scene and the surrounding saints in Figure 3.9, emphasizes these dual spaces of representation.⁹⁶ It also suggests a very specific role for the figures supplementing the narrative scene. They become a representative body of saints, not unlike the holy portraits filling the lower zone of mural decoration in most Byzantine churches.⁹⁷ Constituting Christ's mystical body, they offer a living counterpart to the figure of the dead Savior at the icon's center and declare the victorious, eternal present granted to those whose lives and deeds imitate the sacrifice modeled by Christ.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ For two examples of Crusader icons at Sinai that show Catherine as the primary figure represented in the icon panel (both 13th century?), see Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre 1187-1291* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), fig. 292 and 371.

⁹⁵ For the publication history of both icons, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, "245. Icon with Crucifixion," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 372, 374 and Rebecca W. Corrie, "15. Crucifixion with Deesis and Saints," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 157.

⁹⁶ Perhaps, as in the case of Moses' vita icon, we are looking at icons of icons, where the Crucifixion image intentionally replicates another known image of the scene from Christ's life or refers to a specific *locus sanctus* (Golgotha).

⁹⁷ Note how the saints are paired with appropriate types, as on the icons depicting St. Catherine with Marina – apostles, prophets, church fathers, soldier saints, monastic exemplars, and female defenders of the faith.

⁹⁸ Cf. this concept of the saints as expressed in the West; Ellert Dahl, "Heavenly Images: The Statue of St. Foy of Conques and the Signification of the Medieval 'Cult Image' in the West," in

Figure 3.8, the earlier of the two examples, has been discussed primarily in terms of the relationship between its depiction of the Crucifixion and the emotive intensity of “living painting” that came to characterize Byzantine art in the 11th and 12th centuries.⁹⁹ Scholarly attention regarding the icon in Figure 3.9 has also focused on the Crucifixion at its center, particularly in relation to similar images produced by Crusader workshops in Acre during the middle of the 13th century.¹⁰⁰ While there is much more that could be said about the central narrative image on either panel, I will turn my attention to the saints gathered about its periphery. In different ways, they both reflect and identify the community of viewers whose gaze centered on this icon offered within an icon. Catherine also plays a distinct role in each example. It is her place in the surrounding group of saints that I hope to explore further, illuminating in this way what it might mean to label such a collective image as “Sinaitic.”

St. Catherine is depicted at the very foot of the cross in Figure 3.8, sharing the central axis of the icon (a significant place in the formal language of Byzantine art) with John the Baptist in the upper frame and Christ at center. It is a privileged position within the hierarchies of the frame, and suggests an intentional juxtaposition of her own story of martyrdom not only with Christ’s death, but also with that of John the Baptist, who suffered a fate similar to hers in his long imprisonment and eventual beheading.¹⁰¹ Certainly by the 13th century, St. Catherine and John the Baptist were well represented in devotional practices and religious imagery produced at/for the Sinai monastery. Both saints have significant vita icons within the monastery’s

Acta ad archaeologiam et Artium historium pertinentia a Rome (Institutum Romanum Norvegiae) 8 (1978): 175-91.

⁹⁹ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 271; Elizabeth A. Fisher, “Image and Ekphrasis in Michael Psellos’ Sermon on the Crucifixion,” *Byzantinoslavica* 55, no. 1 (1994): 44-55.

¹⁰⁰ See the overview of previous scholarship and contribution provided by Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 296-9.

¹⁰¹ The account of John’s death is told in Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:17-29.

collection and both were commemorated within the monastery church in locations that have basically remained constant since the early 13th century.¹⁰² This Crucifixion icon would be a rather early indication of their shared veneration at Sinai. It has been attributed to the 11th or the 12th century.¹⁰³ The radiated haloes that circumscribe each of the saints' portrait busts in the frame and can be seen adorning the figures of Christ, his mother, and John in the center panel is another characteristic that links the icon to Sinai – a number of panels in the monastery's collection are embellished with this technique.¹⁰⁴

The second Crucifixion icon introduced above closely imitates the subject matter and format of the Crucifixion with saints that we have just examined. Although slightly larger in size, it differs primarily in terms of its style. Figure 3.9 is an important example of a specific Crusader workshop (the French school), whose painting was especially distinguished by the rolling eyes of its figures and can be attributed to the middle of the 13th century based upon Louis IX's presence in Acre between 1250-1254.¹⁰⁵ The Crucifixion at the center of our Sinai icon has direct parallels to several examples depicting the same subject, one in the Perugia Missal, another manuscript illumination in the Egerton Missal, and a third on yet another Sinai icon that is nearly identical to

¹⁰² As documented in the 1214 typikon written by Abbot Symeon, which indicates the location of St. Catherine's tomb in sanctuary as well as a chapel dedicated to John the Baptist in the southeast corner of the church. Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 280-21, 285. Its dedication to John the Baptist was mentioned regularly by pilgrims to the monastery between the 14th and 17th centuries. See Appendix VII in Braun, "Literary Sources," 320.

¹⁰³ Annemarie Carr suggests c. 1100 as a fitting date in her catalog entry for *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 245, interpreting the icon's subject and style in relations to the discourse of "living painting" (*empsychos eikones*) that became current in the last decades of the eleventh century. I am more comfortable with this date than c. 1200, assigned in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 157.

¹⁰⁴ It is possible that the burnished patterns were applied after the icon was created. For a more thorough discussion of the technique and its implications in the ways icons at Sinai may have been viewed/venerated, see Chapter 4, pp???

¹⁰⁵ Corrie, "15. Crucifixion with Deesis and Saints," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 157.

this one (although it survives in much worse condition).¹⁰⁶ These stylistic affinities with the output of a prolific workshop and the clear model/copy relationship of the Crusader icons to the Byzantine Crucifixion panel provides the most compelling case for Crusader artists actually working at the Sinai monastery (a much debated scenario and often hypothetical in terms of grouping icons into specific workshops and artist's hands).

More to the point for our purposes are the changes made to the composition and layout of the saints gathered in the frame of Figure 3.9 when compared to the earlier and more properly Byzantine Crucifixion in Figure 3.8. Along the top border, John the Baptist has been displaced from his central position by the figure of Christ. The Virgin Mary is shown a second time, as well (Figure 3.8 does not repeat the saints who occupy the central narrative scene in the frame), creating a standard Deesis group. However, they are flanked in the outer corners not by the apostles Peter and Paul (an "offense," in Weitzmann's words, "against the order of rank" that no Byzantine painter would have committed),¹⁰⁷ but by the Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Moses. Peter and Paul are still represented in the framing ensemble, but have been bumped aside and taken down a notch, standing at the top of the border on each side of the icon panel. The selection of additional saints mirrors the Byzantine preference for pairing hagiographic types. We see church fathers, soldier saints, and female martyrs/defenders of the faith, while along the lower edge of the panel, a row of monastic saints, ascetics and stylites completes the circle.

¹⁰⁶ Identified and discussed at different times by Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 51, 145; Kurt Weitzmann, "Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai," *Art Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (1963): 179-203, esp. 180-81; idem, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 49-83, esp. 56-8; and Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 295-99 and fig. 365 (the second Sinai icon of the same subject produced by yet another Acre painter).

¹⁰⁷ Weitzmann, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," 57.

Whatever the implications of the reordered saintly hierarchies for the liturgical education of the Crusader artist who painted the Crucifixion with Deesis and Saints in Figure 3.9, the framing figures are much more clearly associated with the patronage of the Sinai monastery than what we saw in Figure 3.8. Instead of just two primary figures (John the Baptist and St. Catherine) who might be considered site-specific in their inclusion in the visual program, the Crusader example offers at least four or five. The most prominent are the Old Testament prophets associated with Sinai's *loca sancta* – Elijah and Moses.¹⁰⁸ Saint Catherine and John the Baptist both appear again in the border of the Crusader icon, and St. Onouphrios (a desert hermit whose cave was one of the recognized landmarks nearby the Sinai monastery) presents another local figure within the group of monastic saints on the lower edge of the frame.¹⁰⁹

The fact that two nearly identical copies were made of the Crucifixion icon and its broad frame of surrounding saints during the 13th century suggests the significance attributed not just to the central image, but also to the collective identity of those figures accompanying it. We saw this nascent conception of a “Sinaitic” identity in the 11th or 12th century icon (Figure 3.8). However, in the hybrid context of Crusader workshops, artists and patrons, perhaps this visual “branding” of certain saints and their local associations took hold. We find another such example produced in a diptych of the Veneto-Byzantine Crusader style that will be discussed further in the next chapter (see Figure 4.1). Here, the frame once again serves to embellish a pair of “icons within icons” and to identify either the donor or the recipient of the images.¹¹⁰ Most relevant to our purposes are the paired bust-length figures who appear above and below the Virgin and Child on the right panel. At the top, Mary is represented a second time, but appears enmeshed

¹⁰⁸ Their role in relation to the holy sites commemorated at Sinai was noted by Weitzmann. Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” 57-8.

¹¹⁰ Discussed at length by Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus: Holy Mountain, Holy Isle,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 449-78.

within the flames of Sinai's Burning Bush. Sharing this vertical axis, St. Catherine appears just as confidently as one of the monastery's primary saints/holy figures.

Catherine East & West

I would like to conclude this chapter with a couple examples of images depicting St. Catherine of Alexandria that testify in particular to the wide reach of her cult by the end of the Middle Ages from Sinai around the entire rim of the Mediterranean. One of these examples is no longer kept in the Monastery of St. Catherine, but bears her image as a marker of its place of origin (see Figure 3.12).¹¹¹ The other, clearly Western medieval in its style and manufacture, provides a donor inscription and the artist's signature documenting its arrival as a gift to the Sinai monastery (Figure 3.13).¹¹² I will address each of these briefly, then conclude with a discussion of St. Catherine's role as one of many specifically "Sinaitic" saints – figures that were used to collectively identify the monastery and its community of saints, often serving as a framing device but also represented as large groups on various examples from the Sinai icons (from single panels to diptychs and polyptychs).

Figure 3.12 shows Catherine in byzantinizing dress; she wears an approximation of the imperial loros that we saw in both the proskynetarion icon (showing St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and the Prophet Moses) and her vita icon, and she is crowned. Certain aspects of her costume are fairly unusual, such as the veil covering her head and the cloak draped over her shoulders. She carries a long cross in her right hand, while the wheel

¹¹¹ See Helen C. Evans, "131. Mosaic Icon with the Akra Tapeinosis (Utmost Humiliation), or Man of Sorrows," in *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, 221-23.

¹¹² Kristen Collins, "57. Saint Catherine," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 269.

displayed in her left is what clearly identifies her as Catherine of Alexandria.¹¹³ Painted on the reverse of a wooden frame that secures a micro-mosaic icon of Christ as the Man of Sorrows, the image of St. Catherine offered a visual marker of the eastern origins and provenance of the mosaic icon. The icon was brought back to Italy from the Holy Land by Raimondello Orsini del Balzo, count of Lecce, who traveled to Mount Sinai in 1380.¹¹⁴ Supposedly, he also acquired one of the finger bones of St. Catherine from the monastery – this relic, along with another miniature mosaic, were given by him to the monastery of Sta. Caterina of Alessandra at Galatina, Apulia which Raimondello founded c. 1391.¹¹⁵

The mosaic icon depicting the Man of Sorrows with St. Catherine on its reverse was donated slightly earlier (1385-86) to the Church of Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme at Rome, where it still is today.¹¹⁶ However, at this point in its history, the icon of Christ overshadowed the image of St. Catherine on its back. It became identified as a much earlier work recording the miraculous vision of Christ seen by Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th century, and was eventually encased in a large wooden frame that held a vast collection of relics.¹¹⁷ The image of St. Catherine was

¹¹³ The Man of Sorrows mosaic icon and the image of St. Catherine painted on its reverse are the subject of a current dissertation project by John Lansdowne in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Mr. Lansdowne shared some of his research and tentative conclusions in the two-day symposium, “A New Look: Sinai and its Icons in Light of the Digitization of the Weitzmann Archive,” held April 17-18, 2015. According to his observations, the figure of St. Catherine was altered, probably in Italy, in order to match the saint’s characteristic iconography. When it was produced, however, the icon likely represented a different female martyr.

¹¹⁴ The silver frame around the mosaic icon carries the coats of arms belonging to the Anjou and Orsini-Montfort families. Evans, “131. Mosaic Icon with the Akra Tapeinosis,” 222.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Both donations are also discussed in Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 341.

¹¹⁶ Evans, “131. Mosaic Icon with the Akra Tapeinosis,” 222.

¹¹⁷ While the mosaic icon measures 13 x 19 cm, its silver frame extends those dimensions to 23 x 28 cm. The size of the later reliquary case (14th-17th centuries) measures a total of 98.7 x 97.1 cm when opened; 98.7 x 62.4 cm when closed. Ibid.

completely hidden within the reliquary shrine at Sta. Croce and only rediscovered during a cleaning and restoration of the micro-mosaic icon in 1959.¹¹⁸ Even though the history of this image is a complex one, I mention it because it shows how firmly the relics *and* the icon of St. Catherine had become associated with the Sinai monastery by the end of the 14th century. While one micro-mosaic accompanied her relics to the monastery church at Galatina, another was combined with the saint's icon in order to indicate its pedigree and eastern origins. Both donations served to commemorate Raimondello's pilgrimage to Mount Sinai and the monastery dedicated to St. Catherine (at least in the eyes of its Western visitors) there.

The altarpiece in Figure 3.13 traveled in the opposite direction of the Man of Sorrows mosaic icon and its accompanying figure of St. Catherine. It is kept in the collection of the Sinai monastery today, although its style and form betray its origins in the International Gothic of the Medieval West.¹¹⁹ St. Catherine is shown still wearing a crown and holds a spiked wheel to indicate the events of her passion, but she is dressed like an Italian princess. The palm frond that she carries replaces the cross as a sign of her martyrdom. A painted inscription and three coats of arms indicate the donor who dedicated this panel to the monastery on Mount Sinai.¹²⁰ He was Bernardo Maresa and served as consul for the Catalans in Damascus, although he commissioned the altarpiece in Barcelona in 1387. The artist's signature is also preserved on the back of the

¹¹⁸ Carlo Bertelli, "The 'Image of Pity' in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme," in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser et al. (London: Phaidon, 1967; 2nd edition, 1969), 40-55.

¹¹⁹ Collins, "57. Saint Catherine," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 269; Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 121-2.

¹²⁰ Aquest(a) retaula, sia fer.lo honorat, e(n) Be(r)nat M(ar)esa, ciutada de Barch (iino)na. Consol. De. Cathalans. En Domans en l'an M.CCC.LXXXVII (This retable, made for the honorable Bernardo of Maresa, citizen of Barcelona and consul of the Catalans in Damascus in the year 1387). Transcribed by Collins, "57. Saint Catherine," 269.

panel.¹²¹ Three heraldic devices, colored in blue and red and gold like the figure of the saint at center, indicate the kings of Catalonia, the Balearic islands (or perhaps the city of Majorca), and the house of Bernardo Maresa himself (at lower left).¹²²

Saint Catherine's role within the collection of icons at the Sinai monastery continued to evolve over the next couple of centuries. Although the early 13th-century vita icon at Sinai (Figure 3.5), as examined above, did not include a final scene representing the saint's miraculous burial, this subject would become its own form of *loca sancta* image at Sinai. The icon in Figure 3.17 is a panel that once belonged to the collection of Isabella of Castile (d. 1504) and is preserved in the Royal Chapel of Granada today.¹²³ It is only in the 14th century and later that pilgrims mention visiting the site on Jebel Katarina where St. Catherine's body lay before being brought into the monastery church.¹²⁴ Eventually, the angelic burial of St. Catherine of Alexandria became a standard element within the topographical landscape view of Mount Sinai discussed in Chapter 1. While the trajectory of this iconographic development is still unknown, it lies outside the scope of my argument.

Figure 3.18 shows the final merging of the Sinai landscape with icons celebrating St. Catherine's patronage at the monastery now known in both East and West by her name. Painted

¹²¹ MARTIN(us) D(e) VILANOVA PINXIT (Martinus of Villanova painted it). Ibid.

¹²² Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 122. Collins cites Daniel Duelt, who has suggested that the heraldry in the upper right-hand corner may represent Majorca; the first and fourth quarters of the shield have lost a good bit of pigment and are hard to read. The artist's name suggests that he was a Catalan or Majorcan artist trained in the Sienese style. Collins, "57. Saint Catherine," 269. See also Daniel D. Duelt, "El viaje de Santa Catalina del Monte Sinai," in *Mediterraneum: El splendor del Mediterráneo medieval s. XIII-XV*, ed. David Abulafia (Barcelona: Lunweg Editores, 2004), 363-71.

¹²³ Manuel Reyes Ruiz, *Las tablas de devoción de Isabel la Católica: La colección de pintura del Museo de la Capilla Real de Granada* (Granada: Capilla Real, 2004), 39. My thanks to Elena Boeck, who brought this icon and the catalog of Isabella's collection to my attention.

¹²⁴ The chapel built on top of Jebel Katarina today is dated to the 18th century by Denys Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2: 62-3

by the Cretan artist Jeremias Palladas, it is the earliest surviving example of this new portrait type.¹²⁵ The image offers a visual synthesis of Catherine's identity and veneration by both Orthodox and Latin Christians. She is shown wearing the Byzantine *loros*, but has an ermine cloak of Venetian silk draped over her shoulders, as well. The Western attributes of her martyrdom, the palm branch and wheel, accompany her along with books and instruments of learning. Perhaps this final characteristic of her adaptability proves how truly "Sinaitic" St. Catherine of Alexandria had become.

¹²⁵ Signed and dated 1612, the icon is part of the main iconostasis at the front of the monastery church at Sinai. Ševčenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai," 129-30.

CHAPTER 4

The Virgin of the Burning Bush – “The True Beholding”

While Latin pilgrims from the thirteenth century onward increasingly referred to the Sinai monastery by its affiliation with St. Catherine of Alexandria, the original dedication of the monastery and its church was to the Virgin Mary, or the Theotokos, as she was better known throughout the Byzantine east. Papal correspondence with the Sinai abbots during this same period continued to use the Marian designation to refer to the community and its primary patron saint,¹ and it was not until the beginning of the 16th century that the monastery itself seems to have officially adopted the new appellation as the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai.² It is hardly surprising, then, that the number of Marian icons at Sinai, in particular images of the Virgin shown with the Christ child, far outstrips the quantity of panels representing any other saint.³ Of special interest and the focus of this chapter are a subset of Marian images that seem to

¹ David Jacoby, “Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Fifteenth Century,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 83; Anastasia Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th century,” in *Pilgrimage to Sinai: Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 34.

² Drandaki, “The Sinai Monastery,” 34. For the exchange of correspondence between Sinai and Rome, see Georg Hofmann, “Sinai und Rom,” *Orientalia Christiana* 9, no. 3 (1927): 218-99, esp. 258-9 and 270.

³ I am using the handlist of icons dated between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries published by Georgi Parpulov for this statistical analysis, with the understanding that it is not a complete inventory of the monastery’s collection. However, I believe it provides at least a representative sample of the icons produced at or for the Sinai monastery during the Middle Byzantine and Crusader periods. The ongoing digitization projects at Princeton University and the University of

present a localized pictorial identity, one associated with specific iconographic forms such as the Virgin Kyriotissa and celebrating the typological connection between the Burning Bush and Mary's role in the Incarnation. The thirteenth century is also when the epithet "of the Bush" (ἡ τῆς βύτου) appears next to the Virgin and child on a Sinai icon for the first time.⁴

The development and cultivation of a visual presence for the Virgin of the Burning Bush within the collection of icons at Sinai corresponds to the monumental images of Moses and of St. Catherine explored in previous chapters, as well as with the broader devotional interest in Sinaitic saints as represented on the icon panels of this period. Some scholars have focused on the question of competition between cults and iconographies, suggesting that it may have been the introduction of St. Catherine's relics to the sacred topography and liturgical rituals within the pilgrimage church at Sinai that prompted the reassertion of devotion to primarily Orthodox saints – the Virgin, Moses, and other specifically monastic figures.⁵ Did the increased traffic of Crusaders and Latin pilgrims during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and their demands from the monastic community at Sinai influence the changes taking place during this period, particularly after the fall of Constantinople in 1204? Or was the longstanding visual culture of

Michigan based on the archives of the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions will eventually make the entire corpus of Sinai icons available for examination.

⁴ Found on an icon depicting the Virgin and Child with Four Monastic Saints, signed by Peter. See Doula Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons by the Painter Peter," in *Studenica et l'art byzantin autour de l'année 1200/ Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200. godine*, ed. Vojislav Korać (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1988), 329-47, esp. 331-2 and 337-8, fig. 8; idem, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, ed. Konstantinos A. Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 102-24, esp. 113, fig. 45.

⁵ Kristen Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 95-119.

the Sinai monastery, developed in relation to its 6th century mosaics and primary *loca sancta*, that allowed for this localized discourse of image making and pictorial celebration?⁶

As I shall argue in the body of this chapter, within the collective orbit of other saints being depicted at and/or for the monastery between the 11th-13th centuries, the monastic community at Sinai encouraged and cultivated a localized image of the Virgin Mary, giving visual form to her typological association with Moses' theophany at the site of the Burning Bush. The Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου would come to offer the manifestation of theophany in her own right to viewers and worshippers at the monastery. I begin by presenting what I believe are the most significant early examples of icons representing the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai, providing an overview of the corpus to which they belong. I do not agree with scholars who have sought to trace the "origins" of this new iconographic type to an authoritative model, positing the existence of a now-lost icon of the Virgin that would have received special cult within the Chapel of the Burning Bush.⁷ Rather, the prominence of Marian imagery at Sinai should be understood in relation to her religious and cultural significance in Byzantium and the Orthodox East more broadly, as well as more specifically in relation to her theological and typological importance for the holy places of the pilgrimage site and monastery.

⁶ Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 37-71.

⁷ As proposed by Doula Mouriki, a hypothesis repeated by Kristen Collins in "Visual Piety," 100. See Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 338 and "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 113. Although a number of the icons depicting the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου from Sinai were published and discussed by Kurt Weitzmann, he alluded to this model of copying and disseminating a venerated icon only once with regards to the 13th-century Crusader icon of the Virgin and Child flanked by the figures of Moses and Elijah. The imagined prototype was then supplied, so it would seem, by his reconstruction of an early triptych based on the surviving encaustic panel with Elijah represented on it. Weitzmann, "An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah," 722.

Images of the Virgin and child received special deference within the program of church decoration articulated from the end of Iconoclasm into the later Byzantine period by being placed in the apse, at the focal point of architectural space, liturgical movement and ritual performance.⁸ Marian images were often assigned a venerable history as icons painted by the hand of St. Luke and played an important role as protectors of the empire and as miracle-working images responsive to individual needs and salvation. Icon theory, formulated over a century and a half of debates and warring practices during the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy, also substantially shaped the theological import of Marian imagery. Most compelling, perhaps, has been the work by art historian Annemarie Weyl Carr on the non-verbal, visual and material role of Mary. In many ways, her figure as the Mother of God functions as the ultimate icon, presenting Christ and the substance of Christ's Incarnation to the viewer/worshipper.⁹ In the last several decades, Marian scholarship on the medieval period for both the Eastern and Western churches has advanced greatly, although much remains to be done.¹⁰ While aiming to better understand the practices and development of cult at one site in particular – that of the Sinai monastery within a

⁸ Maria Vassilaki, ed., *The Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan: Skira, 2000); Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, Hants, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham, ed., *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Farnham, Surrey, Eng.: Ashgate, 2011).

⁹ An evocative suggestion made by Annemarie Weyl Carr in her essay, "Thoughts on Mary East and West," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 277-92, although she has stated this position elsewhere. See idem, "The Presentation of an Icon at Sinai," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias* ser. 4, 17 (1993-94): 239-48.

¹⁰ In addition to the literature on Marian images and cult in Byzantium, see also R. N. Swanson, ed., *The Church and Mary: Papers read at the 2001 Summer Meeting and the 2002 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Studies in Church History 39 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2004).

specific moment of its own history – I hope also to contribute to the larger study of the history of Marian devotion and iconography.¹¹

In what follows, I argue once more for the crucial role of the Chapel of the Burning Bush at Sinai as established by the beginning of the thirteenth century, if not before. It was the site where pilgrims imitated Moses' obedience to divine command by removing their own footwear to venerate holy ground. But it was also the location where the monastic community gathered to offer prayers invoking the Theotokos as their special patron and protector. This glimpse of the chapel's function and significance as the foremost among several liturgical stations within the church at Sinai comes from the 1214 typikon composed by Abbot Symeon and will be discussed in one of the concluding sections of this chapter.¹² It is the Virgin's role as intercessor that also informs the Deesis-like composition of many icons in which she appears in the company of other Sinaitic saints. The function of the expanded Deesis framing so many of the 11th-15th century icons at Sinai has only occasionally been discussed, yet deserves further attention.¹³ In the selection of icons presented here, Mary as the Virgin of the Burning Bush becomes a prominent focus of veneration, taking her place at the center of cult and *loca sancta* iconography at Sinai.

In the case of a late 13th century diptych (dated to the 1270s/80s), Annemarie Weyl Carr has argued eloquently for the identification of holy figures surrounding St. Procopius and the

¹¹ I am addressing a diverse pilgrimage audience at Sinai, yet I will not be able to take on the full range of important questions relating to the many cross-cultural issues (reception, devotional practice, nuances in theological interpretation) that remain unanswered for the Crusader context more broadly speaking. See the questions raised by Jaroslav Folda in his discussion of how icons might have functioned as Crusader art. Idem, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 218-25 and, at Sinai in particular, 305-7.

¹² The typikon has been partially translated by Nancy Patterson Ševčenko; my analysis of Sinai's liturgical practice in the thirteenth century depends heavily upon her contribution.

¹³ See comments by Paroma Chatterjee, "Archive and Atelier: Sinai and the Case of the Narrative Icon," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 319-44, esp. 335-43.

Virgin Kykkotissa as a collective body of saints standing in for the Sinai monastery.¹⁴ See Figure 4.1. “As a way of imaging Sinai,” Carr writes, “the frame motifs gather most effectively and articulately around Mary. She is the one with whom Sinai identifies.”¹⁵ At the top of the right-hand panel, the Sinaitic character of the diptych’s borders culminates in a pictorialized image of the Virgin of the Burning Bush (Figure 4.2).¹⁶ The half-length figure of Mary, with her hands raised in front of her, is enclosed by a roundel composed entirely of flaming shrubbery. Flanked by her parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, this grouping offers a counterpart to Christ and two archangels shown opposite on the Procopius panel. The visual, spatial, and theological complexity of this icon has been masterfully handled elsewhere;¹⁷ I wish to simply highlight two additional aspects of its program that will introduce the remaining themes of my chapter.

¹⁴ Unlike previous scholars, Carr suggests that the framing saints position the Sinai monastery as the donor of the piece, rather than its recipient. Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus: Holy Mountain, Holy Isle,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 449-78.

¹⁵ Ibid., 470. The program of saints gathered in the diptych’s border and their Sinaitic connections were first outlined by Kurt Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 49-83, esp. 68-9. Weitzmann was most interested in the correspondence between the saints selected for representation and those honored with chapels in and around the monastery church and fortress at Sinai.

¹⁶ This image is frequently cited as the earliest example of the pictorial conflation of the Virgin and the Burning Bush. Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” 67; idem, “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine,” 53 n. 100; Doula Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 337 n. 25; and Maria Aspra-Vardavakis in *Mother of God*, no. 71, 444-47. Cf. Collins, who asserts that the proskyneterion icon with St. Catherine and the Virgin of the Burning Bush with Moses is earlier. Collins, “Visual Piety,” 107.

¹⁷ The diptych has been published extensively. See Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 447-54, figs. 271-88, Appendix no. 110 and idem, “214. Diptych with Saint Prokopios and the Virgin Kykkotissa,” in *Byzantium: Faith & Power (1261-1557)*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 355-6; Mary Aspra-Vardavakis in *Mother of God*, 444-6, no. 71; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 336-7, fig. 205; Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” 118-19, fig. 65; Weitzmann, “Crusader Icons and the *Maniera Greca*,” in *Byzanz und der Westen*, ed. Irmgard Hutter (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 150-2, fig. 8 and idem, “Icon Painting and the Crusader Kingdom,” 66-9, fig. 33-40; George and Maria Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinai* (Athens: Institut français d’Athènes, 1956), I: fig. 188.

First, we see a closely interwoven connection between the newly emerging iconography, which represents the Virgin of the Burning Bush in explicit, often pictorial terms, and Mary's relationship to longstanding themes of Byzantine art and theology celebrating Christ's Incarnation. The small, half-length figure of Mary positioned at the top of the Virgin panel is aligned with the central figure of the Virgin Kykkotissa (characterized by her red veil), anticipating the pairing of mother and child below (Figure 4.1).¹⁸ Yet the visual conflation of Mary's figure with the leaves and flaming tendrils of the Burning Bush makes the typological association between Moses' vision and the miracle of Christ's birth come to life. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa: "From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: The light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth."¹⁹ Although red flames lick the edges of Mary's mantle and circle her halo, the bush appears to offer its own protective mandorla framing the orant figure and Mary remains unperturbed by the surrounding theophany.

Second, the light of the burning bush is associated through text and image with the divine light of Christ. The open gospel book that Christ holds in the upper border of the Procopius panel displays a familiar text from John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me..."²⁰ The figure of Christ therefore anticipates and responds to the image of Mary in the Burning Bush, just as the two bust-length figures offer a focal point for expanding an elaborate visual

¹⁸ According to Carr, the central panel of the diptych actually refers to another important Cypriot icon, that of the Virgin Theoskepaste. See idem, "Sinai and Cyprus," 461-2.

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), II: 21, 59.

²⁰ On this text and its performative aspects, see Robert S. Nelson, "To Say and to See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143-68.

commentary on the central figures of St. Procopius and the Virgin and Child.²¹ While the predominant themes of the diptych revolve around martyrdom and sacrifice, I would like to suggest that the diptych intentionally develops another pictorial (and material) discourse concerned with vision and visionary experience. These successive visions not only include Moses' vision of the Burning Bush or Procopius' vision of Christ crucified, but also the viewer/worshipper's own act of looking at and responding to the holy figures represented.²²

I will return to the issue of light and visual experience in the final section of this chapter, relating the emergent iconography of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου to the distinctive visionary quality of Moses' theophanies at Sinai, in which the prophet, not just once but at two different times, saw God's presence through the manifestation of light. This biblical model of spiritual insight was expanded within the context of Early Christian asceticism and the application of Neoplatonic philosophy to theological writing and scriptural commentaries, as Jaś Elsner and Andreas Andreopoulos have argued in relation to Sinai's 6th-century mosaic decoration. The pursuit of interior illumination within ascetic practice and monastic methods of prayer provide a

²¹ Aspra-Vardavakis relates the figure of Christ with flanking angelic host to Procopius' vision of Christ crucified while on his way to Alexandria to persecute Christians there (this vision, like Saul's encounter on the road to Damascus, results in Procopius' immediate conversion). Idem, *Mother of God*, 444-5. The intimation of Christ's sacrificial death is also conveyed by the languid pose of the infant being supported and held out to the viewer by the Virgin in the opposite panel. Known as Christ Anapeson, the child symbolizes the Eucharistic sacrifice. Carr, "Sinai and Cyprus," 461.

²² The privileging of sight over hearing, an interpretive stance maintained throughout the medieval defense of religious images, has been argued at length by Herbert L. Kessler. For two representative essays, see "The Icon in the Narrative," and "Thou Shalt Paint the Likeness of Christ Himself: the Mosaic Prohibition as Provocation for Christian Images," in *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 1-28 and 29-52, respectively.

foundation for the viewing of icons within a specifically Sinaitic dispensation.²³ But the technologies of icon production, some of which are unique to Sinai, likewise manipulate and enhance the reflective qualities of the panels as a means of bringing light itself to the forefront of viewing practice. In this way, the phenomenology of icons serves theological, devotional, and liturgical ends, securing the mimetic experience sought by pilgrims who made the long and arduous journey to reach the Sinai monastery. By following in Moses' steps, they ultimately shared his vision of divine light through the mediation of Sinai's icons and its pilgrimage art.

Visualizing the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου

A number of scholars have discussed the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου since the first publication of the Sinai icons by George and Maria Soteriou and Kurt Weitzmann and their early acknowledgement of Mary's part in the range of specifically Sinaitic themes depicted therein.²⁴ Theologos Chrestou Aliprantis addressed images with the Mother of God in the Burning Bush as a specific subset in his comprehensive survey of images of Moses on Mount Sinai. His book *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai* (1986) is frequently cited in the literature, yet his interpretation of the theological symbolism being formulated through these Mosaic images has played less of a role in later interpretations.²⁵ Christina Tzvetkova-Ivanova, in a concise but carefully considered

²³ Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Aesthetics of Landscape and Icon at Sinai," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65/66 (2014/15): 192-209. Cf. Elsner and Wolf on Sinai's "culture of localism" and "law of icons," in "The Transfigured Mountain," 39-43, 60-64.

²⁴ Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," 52-55. Also addressed in various publications when dealing with specific icons and by the Soterious in relation to individual panels within the first published corpus. See George and Maria Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinai*, 2 vol. (Athens: Institut français d'Athènes, 1956-58).

²⁵ Theologos Chrestou Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai: Die Ikonographie der Berufung des Moses und des Empfangs der Gesetzestafeln* (Munich: Tuduv-Studien: 1986). Aliprantis divides his survey into two parts, addressing the iconographical development of his two main themes (Moses before the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law) in the first

article published in the *Rutgers Art Review* (2000), provides an overview of the iconographic history of the Virgin of the Burning Bush, focusing on connections between the textual tradition (patristic exegesis, liturgy and hymnography) and the visual expression of Marian typology in Byzantine art, concluding with its reception in Russia.²⁶ She argues for the role of liturgical hymns in establishing the Burning Bush as a frequently-invoked metaphor for Mary's virginity, eventually shifting the nature of this textual link from synecdoche (a metonymic link, in which the Old Testament event provided a foreshadowing of a certain aspect of Mary's character and role in the Incarnation) to metaphor, in which "[t]he Bush stands not only for Mary's virginity but metaphorically for the whole persona of the Virgin."²⁷ Typological images of the Virgin drawn from prefigurations found throughout the Old Testament became widespread in monumental decorative programs of the Palaiologan period (in the 14th century and later). The Virgin of the Burning Bush has also been discussed in this context, further emphasizing the importance of a liturgical basis for interpretation and popular appeal.²⁸

half and the theological symbolism of both image types in the second. While he begins his work with an overview of the history and artistic production at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai and remains concerned throughout with the interpretation of these two primary scenes from the life of Moses in relation to the pilgrimage site, Aliprantis' iconographic survey ranges from Early Christian art (at Dura-Europos and in the catacombs of Rome) to monumental programs of Late Byzantine churches and monasteries, and extending to icons and manuscript painting alongside mural decoration in mosaic and/or fresco.

²⁶ Christina Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush: From Text to Image," *Rutgers Art Review* 18 (2000): 7-26. She begins with several early Byzantine examples including the Sinai icons, although her primary analysis is based upon the form of the Virgin of the Burning Bush found in late-medieval Russian icons of the 16th century. Aliprantis addresses the Virgin of the Burning Bush in Russian art of the 16th-19th centuries in idem, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 31-2.

²⁷ Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary," 13.

²⁸ Sirarpie der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion," in *The Kariye Djami*, ed. Paul Underwood (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966-75), 4: 305-49; Doula Mouriki, "Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρῆ," *Archaiologikon Deltion* 25, part A (1970): 217-51, esp. 221-24.

Finally, Kristen Collins' contribution to the Getty exhibition catalog, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (2006), provided a thoughtful juxtaposition of Marian devotion and the development of iconography relating her cult at Sinai to the *locus sanctus* of the Burning Bush with the introduction of St. Catherine's relics and devotional imagery at the monastery sometime between the 11th and 13th centuries.²⁹ Attentive to the varied responses and expectations of a diverse pilgrimage audience, especially during the period of the Latin Crusades, Collins ultimately agreed with Kurt Weitzmann in tracing the pictorialized form of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου to western influences at the Sinai monastery.³⁰ She states: "The Virgin... wrapped in the flames of the bush constitutes a novel and expressive mode designed to make the Virgin's metaphoric and site-specific associations with the Burning Bush clear to even those viewers not versed in Orthodox theology..."³¹ While this explicitly pictorial expression of the Virgin of the Burning Bush does seem to predominate in examples that were produced or

²⁹ Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai," 95-119.

³⁰ "It thus becomes increasingly likely that this iconographic motif is an invention of the Latin West, and that it was, under the impact of crusader art, adapted by the Byzantines..." Proposed in a recapitulation of Sinai's *loca sancta* images by Weitzmann in "Four Icons on Mount Sinai: New Aspects in Crusader Art," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 21 (1972): 288. With the publication of his intended first volume on the Sinai icons, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 1. From the Sixth to the Tenth Century (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), Weitzmann retracted this position in favor of identifying an earlier version of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου in an icon depicting the Ascension, dated to the 9th or 10th century. As he states, "if the interpretation of our icon is correct, the motif must have originated in the East several centuries earlier than the Crusader icon [indicating the Procopius diptych]." Ibid., 71. Collins responds to this second position in "Visual Piety," 110 and 118 n. 54. She includes the Ascension icon in her discussion of *loca sancta* imagery related to the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai, but tries to distinguish it from the later iconographical developments of the thirteenth century. See also Collins, "5. Ascension of Christ," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 131-33. I do not think this icon depicts the Burning Bush and have excluded it from my analysis altogether.

³¹ Collins, "Visual Piety," 107. And with reference to the Procopius diptych: "The inclusion of an image that links metaphor and site in so explicit a manner supports the idea that this... imagery was influenced by Western viewers or patrons in the Holy Land." Ibid. The same assertion is made regarding the 12th-century icon of Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush now in the Jerusalem Patriarchate (p. 110) and restated in the conclusion (p. 113).

intended for audiences outside the walls of the Sinai monastery, this is not exclusively the case.³² Nor can Crusader or Western viewers/patrons be completely eliminated from involvement in the many more thoroughly Byzantinizing icons at Sinai.

What has also been acknowledged in nearly all these iconographical studies is the evident diversity of pictorial types associated with the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου, each one equally capable of presenting the same or quite similar ideological themes. Yet the implications of this apparent disregard for pictorial consistency in Byzantine art have never been fully integrated within approaches to the topic. My aim in reviewing several significant early depictions of the Virgin of the Burning Bush connected with the Sinai monastery will be to demonstrate the visual flexibility inherent in these diverse examples, each adapted to the expression of one specific Marian type. I suspect modern scholars are much more concerned about which images conveyed exactly what particular shade of theological meaning than were their contemporary Byzantines. Victor Lazarev, a scholar of Marian iconography working in the early twentieth century, offered the following critique of his predecessors – one that too often still holds true. For we have likewise “underestimated the creative element in Byzantine art and [have] deprived it of a quality vital to every art – the power of growth.”³³ Images of the Virgin Mary, or Theotokos, evolved

³² The prosykneterion icon of St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses, dated to the early 13th century, is an important example. It not only brings together these three key figures among the monastery's patron saints, but also appears to be the earliest version of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου that integrates her figure with the flames of the Burning Bush.

³³ Victor Lasareff, “Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin,” *Art Bulletin* 20, no. 1 (1938): 26-65, esp. 43. The foundation for studying Marian iconography according to visual ‘types’ was established by Nikolai Likhachev and Nikodim Kondakov at the start of the 20th century. See Likhachev, *Istoričeskoe značenie italo-grečeskoj ikonopisi, izobraženija Bogomateri* (St. Petersburg: Tipografija M.A. Aleksandrova, 1911); Kondakov, *Ikonografija Bogomateri: svjazi grečeskoj i ruskoj ikonopisi s ital’janskoju rannjago Vozroždenija* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike i A. Vil’borg, 1910); idem, *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, 2 vol. (St. Petersburg: Tipografija imperatorskoj akademij nauk, 1914-15).

not only in form, but also in terms of function, over the course of their history in Byzantium.³⁴

That said, I hope to argue for the intentional cultivation of a site-specific epithet (ἡ τῆς βάρτου) and range of imagery employed at the Sinai monastery to represent the Virgin of the Burning Bush between the 11th and the 13th centuries – a new pictorial “type” that had a significant impact upon Marian iconography throughout the Orthodox world, and which informed the development of *loca sancta* images of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine in the topographical prints and icons circulating by the late 16th century.

Images of Mary as the Virgin of the Burning Bush have been identified in one of two ways when discussed in the collection of icons at Sinai and in Byzantine art more generally – first, through the pictorial conflation of Mary’s figure with the flames of the bush in a narrative context, and second, by means of an accompanying label or epithet. The second case is actually quite rare, and there are a number of icons that have been assigned to the corpus based instead upon the repetition of a recognizable Marian type, most often the Virgin Kyriotissa, but sometimes the Virgin Blachernitissa and other iconographic forms of the Virgin and Child, as well.³⁵ These two distinct categories and means of visualizing the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου will provide the organizing principle for the rest of the images surveyed in this chapter, which are

³⁴ Bissera Pentcheva provides a helpful overview of previous scholarship in the introduction to her book, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 1-4. The social function of medieval cult images was brought to the forefront of scholarly attention by David Freedberg and Hans Belting in their respective magisterial publications, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), published first in German as *Bild und Kult* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990). The impact of their work coincided with a larger methodological shift away from iconographic and stylistic concerns addressing the history of Marian images in Byzantium toward a more functional analysis, exploring specific aspects of public cult and private devotion, as well as changing social practices and beliefs.

³⁵ Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 21-31; Tzvetkova-Ivanova, “The Virgin Mary,” 15-19.

subsequently divided into two main groups. We have already seen examples of the first type in the 13th-century icon of St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses (Figure 4.3) and illustrated by the half-length figure of the Virgin in the border of the Procopius diptych (c. 1270/80). The addition of “naturalistic detail” indicating the flames and foliage of the Burning Bush provides a clear visual link between these examples and the Old Testament narrative that was interpreted as a prefiguration of Mary’s purity and of Christ’s miraculous virgin birth.³⁶ The second type offers a seemingly more straightforward means of identification but, as acknowledged above, bears a troubled relationship to the methods of classifying Marian iconography pursued by early art historical scholarship within the field. Still, a substantial group of non-narrative images representing the Virgin and Child in the collection of Sinai icons can and should be understood as embodying the typological fulfillment of Moses’ vision before the Burning Bush and, therefore, presenting a specifically Sinaitic manifestation of Mary’s patronage and protection at the monastery. I will offer an analysis of the Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου at Sinai after having addressed the importance of maintaining a flexible approach to this emergent Marian iconography, its meaning and function.

The Virgin in the Narrative: Pictorial Conflation with the Burning Bush

Let us now return to the orant figure of the Virgin shown in the border of the Procopius diptych, surrounded by the Burning Bush and red, licking tendrils of flame (Figure 4.2). It is a striking image, even presented in miniature, so perhaps little wonder that it has often been cited

³⁶ Weitzmann’s term, quoting from the first publication of the icon with St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses in “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 53.

as one of the earliest examples of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου in pictorial form.³⁷ This section will consider the Virgin of the Burning Bush from the Procopius diptych in closer detail along with two other icons, one from Sinai and the other from Jerusalem, that form a small group of closely related and nearly contemporary images. Any of these examples might provide a compelling case for the ‘first’ pictorial conflation of the Virgin Mary with Moses’ theophany before the Bush at Sinai.³⁸ All three were produced sometime between the late twelfth and late thirteenth century, and likely predate Marian images represented as an integral part of scenes showing Moses before the Burning Bush in either manuscript illumination or monumental programs of decoration. Two specific comparanda that I have in mind are images showing Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush found in the Lectionary of Hetum II, an Armenian manuscript dated to 1286, and in the fresco decoration at the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, now St. Clement, Ohrid (1295).³⁹ Both demonstrate the dissemination of a pictorial iconography for the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου far beyond Sinai and the borders of the Holy Land by the end of the thirteenth century.⁴⁰ At the beginning of this century, however, it seems clear that this new Marian iconography and its association with Moses’ vision belonged primarily to the site where it was believed this theophany occurred – the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai.

³⁷ Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 477; Maria Aspra-Vardavakis in *Mother of God*, no. 71, 444-47; Doula Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 337 n. 25; Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*,” 53 n. 100 and “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” 67-8.

³⁸ I lean toward preserving the late twelfth/early thirteenth century date for both the Jerusalem panel and the Sinai proskynetarion icon. However, as in my discussion of the topographical view of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine at the end of the 16th century, I believe that seeking a point of origin for new iconographic forms is less useful than careful consideration of their function and what such innovative compositions might offer their makers and viewers.

³⁹ As noted by Der Nersessian, this is the earliest example of the Virgin of the Burning Bush found in monumental programs. Idem, “Program and Iconography,” 336-7.

⁴⁰ The Lectionary of Hetum II is close in date to the Procopius diptych, which, according to Annemarie Weyl Carr, also has close ties to Cilician Armenia.

Like the diptych with St. Procopius and the Virgin and Child, the proskynetarion icon with St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses (Figure 4.3) belongs to the collection of the Sinai monastery. And as we have seen in the diptych, the figure of the Virgin – here, standing full-length and holding a composed Christ child in front of her – is carefully depicted so that her person and the branching flames of the Burning Bush become a single pictorial unit. Collins asserts that the proskynetarion icon is the first surviving example in which the association between Mary and the Burning Bush “was made through images rather than through inscription or placement.”⁴¹ The panel is generally assigned to the thirteenth century, a date affirmed by a number of contemporary scholars.⁴² I agree with Collins that the icon juxtaposing St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses likely predates the figure of the Virgin of the Burning Bush represented on the Procopius diptych, and should be considered alongside the early thirteenth century dates attributed to the vita icon of St. Catherine and to the series of 10 small panels depicting the Kyriotissa (interpreted as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου) with various prophets, patriarchs, and saints (see Figure 4.18, for example).⁴³

⁴¹ Collins, “Visual Piety,” 107.

⁴² Collins, “56. Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 267. The thirteenth-century date is also given by Tzevtkova-Ivanova, “The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush,” 16-7, fig. 4; Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, “St. Catherine of Alexandria and Mount Sinai,” in *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (London: Pindar Press, 2006), 141, fig. 3; and Demetrios Kalomoirakis in *Egeria: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage* (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2008), 270-71, no. 65. Anastasia Drandaki places this icon in the second half of the thirteenth century, so much closer in date to the Procopius diptych. Idem, “The Sinai Monastery from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Pilgrimage to Sinai* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 38 n. 46, fig. 2.3 and “Through Pilgrims’ Eyes: Mt. Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *ΔΧΑΕ* 27 (2006): 499-500, fig. 5. However, Georgi Parpulov reattributes it to the twelfth century in his appendix to “Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 387, no. XII.193.

⁴³ Weitzmann was the first to publish the icon of St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses, but he did not explicitly assign a date to this panel. However, he did closely associate it with the series of 10 small icons, which he dated to the late 12th or early 13th century. Idem,

The icon of St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses (Fig. 4.3) provides a crucial link between the two forms of Marian imagery associated with her new pictorial presence at Sinai, since it represents both a visualized metaphor of the Virgin *as* the Burning Bush (to adopt Tzvetkova-Ivanova's terminology) and identifies the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου as a specific iconographic type, the Virgin Kyriotissa. The Kyriotissa is an epithet for the Virgin that first appears in the eleventh century and usually designates a full-length, standing figure of the Theotokos supporting the Christ child with both hands directly in front of her.⁴⁴ Mary's right hand passes in front of Christ, holding him firmly against her torso, while her left hand rests against his leg. Christ holds a scroll in one hand and gestures outward with the other in blessing. The same pose and posture given to the Virgin in the icon where she is accompanied by St. Catherine and Moses can be found on a number of Sinai icons, dated predominantly to the 13th century. More significantly, the one icon at Sinai that clearly identifies Mary with an inscription ἡ τῆς βάτου, or "of the Bush," also depicts the Virgin Kyriotissa.⁴⁵ I will return to this second major group of images in a later section of this chapter, since the icons of the Virgin Kyriotissa preserved at Sinai evoke particular themes of Deesis and intercession and require a thorough

"Loca Sancta," 53-4, fig. 51. Aliprantis and Mirjana Tatić-Djurić both gave a 10th century date for the panel. In his footnotes, Aliprantis cites Weitzmann (perhaps based on personal correspondence since no additional publications are included) as being of the opinion that the icon dates to the 10th or 11th century. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 149 n. 3.

⁴⁴ The Virgin Kyriotissa is a variant of the Nikopoios, in which Mary supports the figure of Christ within a shield or medallion against her chest. While this type of image can be found as early as the seventh century, the title (like that for the Kyriotissa) dates to the eleventh century. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Virgin Nikopoios," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3: 2176. See also Mirjana Tatić-Djurić, "L'Icône de Kyriotissa," in *Actes du XVe congrès international d'études byzantines: Athènes, Septembre 1976*, II: Art et Archéologie, B: Communications (Athens: Association internationale des études byzantines, 1981), 759-86.

⁴⁵ The Virgin of the Burning Bush with Four Monastic Saints by the painter Peter (c. 1230-40).

analysis on their own terms.⁴⁶ The following discussion will focus on the pictorial nature of the Marian imagery as seen on the Procopius diptych and proskynetarion icon in further detail. Both correspond to the familiar *loca sancta* tradition at Sinai showing Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush, a scene established in the 6th-century mosaics of the monastery church and depicted on numerous Sinai icons, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The “naturalistic detail” of the Burning Bush is a pictorial element that serves to recall illustrations of the scriptural narrative underlying this newly visualized Marian typology, yet it also functions as a highly iconic image in its own right. We have already seen the importance of the Burning Bush as a visual component of the Moses images at Sinai, standing in for one of the monastery’s primary holy places (and defining the very nature of sacred ground). The two early examples of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου as seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.3 carefully integrate the depicted flames of the Burning Bush and the figure of the Virgin.⁴⁷ The strokes of red paint that intimate divine presence define the same pictorial boundaries that Mary occupies; bush and God-bearer have become intricately interwoven and are presented to the viewer as equivalent images. Yet each of the two icons just discussed stands as a unicum, differentiated from one another and from the images of the Virgin of the Burning Bush that spread throughout the Byzantine world by the

⁴⁶ Aliprantis and Tzevtkova-Ivanova both distinguish between the Kyriotissa images representing the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου and the pictorial conflation of the Virgin with the Burning Bush as two distinct variants of the same iconographic type. Although Aliprantis questions the possibility of separating ‘narrative’ and ‘symbolic’ images, he adopts the two categories as a practical means of addressing different visual formulae. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 23; cf.

Tzevtkova-Ivanova, “The Virgin Mary,” 16.

⁴⁷ On the Procopius diptych, the flames not only surround Mary’s bust-length figure, embracing the sweep of her own gesture from elbow to shoulder and mimicking the spread of her open hands, but they also completely encircle the edge of her halo. The branching form of the Burning Bush on the proskynetarion icon begins at Mary’s feet and continues up to her shoulders. Once the flames cross the boundary of her garment, they burst into leaf.

middle of the 14th century.⁴⁸ The bust-length figure of Mary in the frame of the Procopius diptych is unique because she and the bush stand alone, without any further narrative context indicating her origin in Moses' theophanic vision (Fig. 4.2). And while the full-length Virgin Kyriotissa on the proskynetarion icon is accompanied by two diminutive figures replicating Moses' presence on each side of the apparition of Mother and Child, Mary dominates the composition (and the indication of the Burning Bush).⁴⁹ This disparity in scale, more typical of donor figures than accompanying saints, is the reverse of the later narrative scene, in which the Virgin usually appears half-length and dwarfed even by the Burning Bush that contains and supports her manifestation.

Another icon that has played a key role in discussions of the development of the Virgin of the Burning Bush iconography does not belong to the collection at the Sinai monastery, but rather to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem (Figure 4.4).⁵⁰ Attributed to sometime between the late twelfth century and the second half of the thirteenth, it may or may not precede either of the Sinai examples just discussed.⁵¹ Yet it provides an important point of comparison in

⁴⁸ Examples can be found in the frescoes/mural decoration at St. Nicholas Orphanos, Thessaloniki, the Kariye Camii or Church of the Chora, Istanbul, the Protaton Monastery (Church of the Dormition), Mt. Athos, and the Lesnovo Monastery in Macedonia. Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 336-8.

⁴⁹ Aliprantis pointed out that images of Moses before the Burning Bush without the Mother of God were diverse in both composition and iconography, only maintaining two primary elements in representations of the scene between the 4th and the 15th centuries – the figure of the prophet Moses and the miraculous bush that he witnessed. Idem, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 17.

⁵⁰ Close ties between Jerusalem and the Sinai monastery during the 13th century will also be addressed in connection with the series of icons by the painter Peter.

⁵¹ Collins, following the lead of most scholars who published the icon before her, gives it a date in the late 12th century. Collins, "Visual Piety," 108, fig. 88. It was first published by Paul Huber in *Heilige Berge: Sinai, Athos, Golgota* (Zurich: Benziger, 1980), 184-5, fig. 23 and 146. Aliprantis repeatedly identifies this icon as the oldest example that presents an equally narrative and symbolic image of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου. See Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 23, 30, fig. 21. The icon has also been discussed by Miltos Garidis, "Icônes du XIII^e et du XIV^e siècle dans l'aire du Patriarcat de Jérusalem," in *EYΨYXIA: Mélanges offerts à Hélène*

our discussion for the proskynetarion icon of St. Catherine and the Virgin of the Burning Bush in particular, and helps to round out the visual themes shared by this early group. As we see in the detail provided in Figure 4.5, Mary appears at the center of the panel, half-length, and once more completely wrapped in flame. The figure of the Virgin shown here is emphatically identified with the bush, not only through the visual conflation of the two images, but also through the doubled inscription written on either side of the ascending pyre: H BATOC and MP ΘY, the established *sacra nomina* for the Mother of God (Μήτηρ Θεοῦ). Nearly everything is doubled in this scene of Moses before the Burning Bush – the manus Dei and angel both conveying the presence of God as a divine voice, the two figures of Moses both responding to the miraculous vision, as one stoops to untie his sandal and the other raises his hands in astonishment.⁵²

Likewise, the inscriptions double the force of the images represented, including the brief text that quotes Exodus 3:3, ΠΑΡΕΛΘΟΝ ΟΨΟΜΕ ΤΟ ΟΡΑΜΑ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ.⁵³ For the viewer, like the Prophet Moses, is granted a chance to see “this great sight” as mediated by the icon. The theophany depicted is not just a bush that burned without being consumed, but also the Virgin whom the Old Testament event prefigured.

Whenever it was produced, the need to spell out the implications of the pictorial arrangement on the Jerusalem Patriarchate icon suggests that we are looking at a relatively new

Ahrweiler, ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998): 225-38, esp. 226-9; bibliography given on 226 n. 2. Drandaki assigns a date in the second half of the thirteenth century to both this icon and to the proskynetarion icon of St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses. Drandaki, “Through Pilgrims’ Eyes,” 499-500, fig. 6.

⁵² The icon displays an abundance of inscriptions, so that the hand of God at the top of the panel appears with the Greek letters alpha and omega (cf. Revelation 1:8 and 22:13), offering further disclosure to the revelation of the divine name given to Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:14). Moses is labeled twice, as Ο ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ ΜΩΥΣΗΣ and as ΜΩΥΣΗΣ. Garidis points out that this is a corrupted form of the Greek, which should instead read ΜΩΥΣΗΣ. Garidis, “Icônes du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle,” 226-7.

⁵³ “I will [now] turn aside and see this [great] sight.” Garidis, “Icônes du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle,” 227.

composition.⁵⁴ According to Ioli Kalavrezou, “Byzantine artists commonly turned to inscriptions in their paintings, either as epigrams or labels, when a specific or new meaning, not immediately perceivable through the iconography, was to be read in an image.”⁵⁵ And what was the novelty being represented here? It was exactly this conflation of the Virgin Mary and Moses’ theophany, so that the insertion of Marian iconography into the Old Testament scene anticipates the Christological fulfillment of Moses’ encounter with the Burning Bush. Mary, shown with the medallion image of Christ Emmanuel hovering above her chest, becomes a visual manifestation of the Incarnation.⁵⁶ The divine self-disclosure offered within the flames of the miraculously burning bush as a foundational moment in the old dispensation thus includes, in fact presumes upon, the already established preeminence of the new. Moses’ theophany is interpreted as a sign of the eternal presence of Christ, the pre-existing Logos.⁵⁷

The depiction of Mary on the Jerusalem Patriarchate icon does not correspond to either the orant figure on the Procopius diptych or the Virgin Kyriotissa seen in the proskynetarion icon of St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses. Instead, it introduces another

⁵⁴ Not necessarily intended just for a Western audience, Latin pilgrims or Crusaders, who might not be familiar with the typological associations between the Virgin and numerous images drawn from the Old Testament celebrated in patristic writings and Eastern Orthodox hymnography. Cf. Collins, “Visual Piety,” 107, 110, 113.

⁵⁵ Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary became ‘Meter Theou,’” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 170.

⁵⁶ As stated by Aliprantis at the beginning of his section on images of Moses before the Burning Bush with the Mother of God, these are not just a continuation of previously discussed themes, but rather a fully pictorial expression of Christological dogma. Idem, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 21. This theological interpretation is more fully developed in the section “Die Entstehung des Typus ‘Gottesmutter der brennende Dornbusch.’” Ibid., 93-104.

⁵⁷ Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 26. For a similar argument, proposing that images of Moses before the Burning Bush provided a means of visualizing the spoken word of God (thus answering the late medieval desire to encounter the divine through the faculties of sight), see François Boespflug, “Un étrange spectacle: le Buisson ardent comme theophany dans l’art occidental,” *Revue de l’Art* 97 (1992): 11-31. Images of the Burning Bush in the Medieval West frequently showed an adult figure of Christ speaking to Moses and did not reflect the Marian emphasis found in the East. Boespflug, “Un étrange spectacle,” 12; Collins, “Visual Piety,” 113.

Marian type distinguished by the unsupported medallion of Christ Emmanuel that rests before the Virgin's chest. Usually, the Virgin is also shown with her arms raised in an orans posture. The iconography goes by several names (a case of overlapping epithets), and was known as the Virgin Platytera, the Episkepsis, and the Blachernitissa. I will consistently refer to the last of these three, Blachernitissa, when indicating this pictorial type.⁵⁸ In this instance, the figure of Mary on the Jerusalem panel also recalls iconography specifically associated with the Virgin in scenes of the Annunciation.⁵⁹ While one hand is raised before her chest, the other holds a skein of wool (an attribute derived from apocryphal stories about Mary's childhood – it was believed that she served in the Temple and was interrupted while spinning wool for the temple veil at the moment of the Annunciation).⁶⁰ The monochromatic bust portrait of Christ suspended in front of

⁵⁸ The Blachernitissa is a title that properly belongs to several miracle-working icons of the Virgin located at the Blachernai Monastery in Constantinople – thus functioning as a toponym vs. poetic or allegorical description of the Virgin's character. Platytera, on the other hand, means "wider" or "more spacious" and was adopted from the phrase "wider than the heavens" (Πλατυτέρα των Ορανών), which comes from a liturgical hymn praising the Virgin as vessel of the Incarnation – "He made your body into a throne, and your womb He made more spacious than the heavens." See "The Mother of God with the Immanuel," in Konrad Onasch and Annemarie Schrieber, *Icons: the Fascination and the Reality*, trans. Daniel G. Conklin (New York: Riverside Book Company, 1995), 158-9. The orans figure of the Virgin with and without the medallion of Christ appears with the epithet "Blachernitissa" on coins and seals of the 11th century. "Episkepsis" was also applied to this image type. See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Virgin Blachernitissa," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3: 2170-71.

⁵⁹ Recognized by Kristen Collins. As she points out, even the figure of the angel, traditionally found in the Greek manuscript tradition for images of Moses before the Burning Bush, can be read as the announcing angel of the Annunciation. Instead of speaking from the bush and being oriented towards Moses, the angel clearly faces toward and gestures at the Virgin and Child as the fulfillment of his vision. Collins, "Visual Piety," 108. As a point of contrast, see the later Palaiologan icon from Sinai also showing Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush. *Ibid.*, fig. 95.

⁶⁰ Described in the *Protoevangelion of James*. See *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson, 2nd edition (Cambridge, England: J. Clarke & Co.; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991-91), 1: 370-88. On the development of a rich metaphorical discourse comparing the temple curtain to the Virgin's body and Christ's human nature in 5th-century Byzantium, see Nicholas P. Constanas, "Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh," *Journal of Early*

the Virgin also recalls unusual depictions of an embryonic homunculus drawn over Mary's torso in two 12th-century icons of the Annunciation, one of which belongs to the Sinai monastery.⁶¹ This additional narrative layer within the complex imagery of the Jerusalem panel may be explained by the incorporation of the passage from Exodus (3:1-8) in the readings assigned on the Feast of Annunciation.⁶² As celebrated in a hymn written by Proclus of Constantinople in the 6th century, Mary has become "the living bramble bush of nature."⁶³

I will provide further discussion of the importance of this link between Mary's prefiguration in the Burning Bush and the liturgical celebration of her role in the Incarnation through hymns and homiletic illustrations, but want to pause here for a moment in order to address the continuity of the narrative form of imagery introducing the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου with scenes of Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush. The icon of Moses with the

Christian Studies 3, no 2 (1995): 169-94; and in Byzantine art, Maria Evangelatou, "The Purple Thread of the Flesh: The Theological Connotations of a Narrative Iconographical Element in Byzantine Images of the Annunciation," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003) 261-79.

⁶¹ Annie Labatt, "13. Annunciation," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 153, with previous bibliography. The other example is a large panel from Novgorod; for a color reproduction see Onasch and Schnieper, *Icons: the Fascination and the Reality*, 150. Both Annunciation icons are discussed by Evangelatou in "Purple Thread of the Flesh," 262-3, 268 and Bissera Pentcheva, "Rhetorical Images of the Virgin: The Icon of the 'Usual Miracle' at the Blachernai," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (2000): 44-5. Images of the Visitation in Byzantine art were the more usual place for such homunculus imagery to be included over womb of Virgin and her cousin Elizabeth. See Andrea Olsen, "The Genesis and Transformation of the Visitation in Byzantine Art," (PhD diss, John Hopkins University, 2013).

⁶² The Old Testament pericope is actually read twice. Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 317. See also Lucy-Anne Hunt, "The Fine Incense of Virginity: A Late Twelfth-Century Wallpainting of the Annunciation at the Monastery of the Syrians, Egypt," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 19 (1995): 182-232, esp. 196-200. As discussed by Collins, the scene of the Annunciation represented in the western semidome of this church presents Mary and the angel flanked by the standing figures of Old Testament prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel), each holding scrolls with the texts of their prophecies relating to the Incarnation. Moses displays a variant of Exodus 3:2b – "I saw the bush burnt with fire, and it was not consumed." Collins, "Visual Piety," 109, fig. 90.

⁶³ Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary," 13.

Virgin of the Burning Bush from the Jerusalem Patriarchate shows the Old Testament prophet in two different positions as he responds to the theophany before him (Figure 4.4). His gestures and narrative frame that his body, shown twice, provides for the vision of the Burning Bush is nearly identical to the two diminutive figures of Moses that we see on the Sinai proskynetarion icon with St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush, and Moses juxtaposed one with another (Figure 4.3). On the left, Moses kneels and/or raises one foot in order to untie his sandal; on the right, he remains standing with arms upraised in a gesture of surprise and amazement. The exact gestures made by the figure of Moses to the right of the Virgin of the Burning Bush on the proskynetarion icon are hard to distinguish, since the surface of the icon has suffered significant loss and damage in this area.⁶⁴ Based on my own opportunity to examine the panel, I am fairly confident that Moses is depicted standing with one arm bent, bringing his right hand back toward his mouth/chin. The other may have rested at his side. The left side of Moses' body and the beveled edge of the frame lie in such close proximity that it is hard to see how additional narrative elements, like the Tablets of the Law, might be included.⁶⁵ However, this edge is also where the most damage to the painted and gilded surface has occurred. What is clear is that

⁶⁴ When first published by Weitzmann in "*Loca Sancta*," 54, he did not acknowledge/identify the figure of Moses to the right-hand side of the Virgin. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 22-3 and Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush," 16, follow Weitzmann's lead in describing only the figure of Moses removing his sandals between the two main figures of St. Catherine and the Virgin.

⁶⁵ Collins, in the catalog entry for this icon in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 56, 267, leaves the matter open to interpretation, identifying "a second Moses, raising a hand either to receive the tablets of the Law or to shield his face while in the presence of God." Demetrios Kalomoirakis, on the other hand, assumes the second figure of Moses to be receiving the Tablets of the Law. Kalomoirakis, "65. Icon of Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush," in *Egeria: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage*, ed. Maria Kazakou and Vasileios Skoulas (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2008), 270-71. This is possible, but not likely.

Moses turns his face back toward the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου, so that like the second figure of Moses on the Jerusalem panel, he gazes in astonishment upon this miraculous sight.⁶⁶

Although a number of Sinai icons represented Moses in the conflation of two narrative moments, showing the prophet receiving the Tablets of the Law before the Burning Bush, corresponding to the monastery's two primary *loca sancta*, it also was not uncommon for images depicting the life of Moses (especially in the Greek manuscript tradition) to show the prophet more than once in the same pictorial frame. The Byzantine Octateuchs are one example, but the device is also applied to illustrations of Moses before the Burning Bush and receiving the Law in the Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes,⁶⁷ as well as to the lavish visual programs found in 10th-century manuscripts such as the Leo Bible and Paris Psalter.⁶⁸ There are specific precedents in manuscript illumination for the two different postures of Moses before the Burning Bush, where he is first shown looking at the miraculous shrubbery, and second, stooping to remove his sandal in obedience to God's command.⁶⁹ The closest parallel to our examples can be found in the Byzantine Octateuchs, such as the 12th-century Vatican Cod. gr. 746, fol. 157r, where the two registers of the illumination show Moses with his flock, pausing in wonder before the Burning Bush, and then taking off his sandals while the angel of the Lord looks on.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Cf. Garidis, "Icônes du XIIIe et du XIVE siècle," 228.

⁶⁷ Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990), 35.

⁶⁸ David Olster, "Byzantine Hermeneutics after Iconoclasm: Word and Image in the Leo Bible," *Byzantion* 64 (1994): 419-58, esp. 440-43.

⁶⁹ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion," in *The Kariye Djami*, ed. Paul Underwood (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966-75), 4: 336.

⁷⁰ See http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.746.pt.1/0179. The image of Moses with his flock juxtaposed with Moses before the Burning Bush and receiving the law also occurs in two illustrated copies of Cosmas Indicopleustes – Sinai Cod. 1186, fol. 101v (11th century) and Vatican Cod. gr. 699, fol. 61v (9th century). Moses is depicted as a shepherd in rustic garb, holding his staff in one hand, but stands at attention with his right arm raised in acknowledgement of the manus Dei extended from the heavens and the voice of God that

The same twofold approach can be found in later frescoes that represent the episode of Moses before the Burning Bush as part of a larger typological cycle in church mural decoration, representing scenes from the Old Testament as prefigurations of Mary and her role in the Incarnation. One of the surviving, early-14th century frescos in the south ambulatory of St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki is that of Moses before the Burning Bush (see Figure 4.6).⁷¹ Here a bust-length figure of the Virgin orant and the announcing angel both emerge from the shrubbery. Moses is shown twice – standing to the right of the scene with his face lifted toward the angel and raising one hand in amazement, as well as kneeling below the Bush as he unties the straps of his sandal.⁷² The figure of Moses is similarly duplicated in the frescos of the parekklesion at the Church of the Chora (Kariye Camii), Istanbul, dated 1316-21, where the Virgin and Child appear bust-length within a grisaille medallion.⁷³ Moses and the Virgin of the

accompanies his vision of the Burning Bush. Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, fig. 43 and http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.699/0130. For other examples of Moses' two-part response to the Burning Bush including a number of post-Byzantine examples, see Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 25 and 148 n. 25.

⁷¹ Located on the north wall of the south ambulatory, at its western end. See Karin Kirchhainer, *Die Bildausstattung der Nikolauskirche in Thessaloniki: Untersuchungen zu Struktur und Programm der Malereien* (Weimar: VDG, 2001), 212, fig. 71; Chrysanthi Mavropoulou-Tsioumi, *The Church of St. Nicholas Orphanos* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1986), pl. 4; Andreas Xyngopoulos, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου Ὁρφανοῦ Θεσσαλονίκης* (Athens, 1964), fig. 118.

⁷² The two figures of Moses also appear in a scene of the Burning Bush from the domical vault of the east bay in the outer narthex of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (c. 1329). He again loosens his sandal and is shown standing; however, the portion of fresco where the Burning Bush would have been represented is missing, so we do not know whether the Virgin orant or Virgin and Child were also included in this scene. Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 315.

⁷³ See Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1: 226-7, pl. 444-52 and Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 336-8. Moses is shown twice with the Burning Bush at Lesnovo, Macedonia (1349), although this composition is unusual in several respects. Moses appears standing at the right-hand side of the bush, responding to figure of Christ who emerges in place of the angel. Moses then appears to be sleeping, perhaps a motif borrowed from the episode of Jacob's ladder, which is represented in the church narthex along with other Old Testament prefigurations of the Virgin. Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 316. Aliprantis also discusses this scene in

Burning Bush are represented together in several monumental programs of the Palaiologan period between the late thirteenth and mid-fourteenth century.⁷⁴ In these scenes, Mary is most frequently presented as an orant figure – alone and without the Christ child – as in the church of St. Nicholas Orphanos.⁷⁵

The icon of Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush from the Jerusalem Patriarchate anticipates the fully-fledged pictorial narrative that we find in later Palaiologan art, where the figure of Mary becomes a character participating in her own right within the scene of Moses' miraculous vision. There are only one or two Palaiologan icons at Sinai representing Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush;⁷⁶ most examples at the monastery date from the sixteenth century or later, images contemporary with the emergence of the topographical view of the monastery and pilgrimage site explored at the beginning of this thesis. Perhaps the importance of Moses' cult at Sinai and the longstanding visual tradition that focused on his encounter with and response to the Burning Bush precluded the addition of another major figure to the composition.

idem, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 18, 20, fig. 17. However, neither Der Nersessian or Aliprantis make note of the bust-length orant figure of the Virgin also represented at the center of the Burning Bush. See Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 498 n. 46.

⁷⁴ The earliest example that includes the figure of the Virgin in the Burning Bush is at the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, now St. Clement, in Ohrid (1295), although the first surviving typological cycle depicting Old Testament prefigurations of the Virgin is found on the north porch of St. Sophia, Trebizond (c. 1260). Other programs with the Virgin in the Burning Bush include the Protaton, Mt. Athos (early 14th century), Gračanica, Kosovo (c. 1311-21), Staro Nagoričino, Macedonia (1316-19), and Asinou, Cyprus (mid-14th century). Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 314, 336-7.

⁷⁵ Except at the Church of the Chora, noted above, and in Ohrid, where the Virgin and Child appear together in a medallion with the announcing angel. The angel also disappears from most later Palaiologan examples. Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 336-7.

⁷⁶ Such as the icon of Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush reproduced in Collins, "Visual Piety," fig. 95 and Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," fig. 50. The orant figure of the Virgin and the slight, bearded representation of the prophet correspond to several Palaiologan frescoes, most notably the scene of Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Asinou, Cyprus. See Carr, "Sinai and Cyprus," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, fig. 147. The way that the Burning Bush is shown in this Sinai icon is unlike any other I've seen.

The proskynetarion icon at Sinai presents a fascinating hybrid. While it hints at the well-known *loca sancta* images of Moses displayed throughout the monastery and defining its primary sites of pilgrimage,⁷⁷ its main role is asserting the cult status of the two female figures who take pride of place on the small panel. But the new pictorial typology for the Virgin of the Burning Bush is clearly rooted in the iconography used for this Old Testament theophany.

The Importance of Typology and Scriptural Prefigurations

The association between the Virgin Mary and the Burning Bush was established quite early in the textual and liturgical traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church, long before pictorial developments attempted to express the same concept in the art and/or architecture of Byzantium. Forming this typological link belonged to a broader exegetical practice that sought out Marian prefigurations in the persons, objects, and events of the Old Testament.⁷⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, quoted earlier, was the first patristic writer to discuss the Burning Bush as a scriptural prototype foreshadowing Mary's virgin status. But the bush was not the only symbolic emblem adapted to this purpose within Gregory's *Life of Moses*. It was the first of six Old Testament images reinterpreted as prototypes of the Incarnation – others include Moses' rod being changed into a serpent, his hand becoming leprous, the manna in the wilderness, the tabernacle, and the tablets of the Law.⁷⁹ This process of celebrating Mary's role in salvation by accumulating scriptural types was taken even further by liturgical hymns, such as those written by Proclus of

⁷⁷ Whether or not the figure of Moses on the right-hand side of the Virgin is actually shown receiving the Law, the frequent pairing of Moses removing his sandals with this later episode on Mount Sinai would surely be called to mind. Cf. Collins, "56. Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 267 n. 2.

⁷⁸ See Mary B. Cunningham, "The Meeting of the Old and the New: the Typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine Homilies and Hymns," in *The Church and Mary*, 52-62.

⁷⁹ Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush," 11-12.

Constantinople in the 5th century.⁸⁰ The number of metaphors called into service could be expanded ad infinitum.⁸¹ According to Nicholas Conostas, the “nearly exhaustive profusion” of Old Testament typologies in Proclus’ writings was without precedent in early Christian literature, and “would later determine the basic features of all subsequent Byzantine Mariology.”⁸² A primary example is the Akathistos, a hymn composed in the fifth or sixth century in praise of the Virgin Mary.⁸³

The Akathistos is made up of a series of acclamations, each alternate stanza beginning with χαῖρε – “rejoice!” or “hail!” – and thereby elaborating the greeting given to Mary by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation.⁸⁴ The first half of the hymn presents the scriptural events

⁸⁰ Ibid., 12-13; cf. Conostas, “Weaving the Body of God,” cited above.

⁸¹ Beginning with biblical images taken from the whole of scripture, Proclus continued his praise of the Virgin by comparing her to images drawn from every-day life (a harbor, the sea, a ship, a wall, etc.), as well as from the imperial court. Conostas, “Weaving the Body of God,” 177.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Conostas’ argument for Proclus’ influence is supported by Leena Mari Peltomaa, who goes so far as to propose that Proclus may have commissioned the Akathistos hymn during his archbishopric. *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, The Medieval Mediterranean 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 110, 113. Vasiliki Limberis has also argued for a redating of the Akathistos shortly after the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, when the title “Theotokos” receives official sanction. See idem, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). Arguments for the 6th century reflect the close connections between the Virgin Mary and imperial cult during this period, including the construction of churches dedicated to Mary and the establishment of public feasts. The date for the feast of the Annunciation, for example, was confirmed by the emperor Justinian I in a letter of AD 560. An overview of the history and development of the Akathistos hymn in relation to Mary’s civic cult is summarized by Pentcheva in *Icons and Power*, 14-16. For Justinian’s letter, see M. van Estbroeck, “La lettre de l’empereur Justinien sur l’Annonciation et la Noël en 561,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968): 351-71 and idem, “Encore la lettre de Justinien. Sa date: 560 et non 561,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 87 (1969): 442-4.

⁸⁴ The structure of the Akathistos is unique, in that its 24 stanzas are not all of equal length. They alternate between long stanzas (of 24 lines each) and short stanzas (8 lines each). The long stanzas include sixteen lines made up of *chairetismoi*, those phrases beginning with “Hail” (χαῖρε), and conclude with an echoing refrain: “Hail, bride unwedded.” The short stanzas also conclude with one line of refrain, a simple “Alleluia.” As a whole, the hymn is composed as an acrostic, with each stanza beginning with a different letter of the alphabet. This formulation is similar to other kontakia (homiletical hymns) of the sixth century. Egon Wellesz, “The

recording the Incarnation, from the Annunciation to Christ's presentation in the Temple. The second half reflects on this mystery and is more homiletic in character.⁸⁵ Wellesz even describes the form of the Kontakion as a "poetical sermon."⁸⁶ The hymn demonstrates an appropriation of metaphor as rhetorical trope similar to the homilies of Proclus, and employs epithets for the Virgin that express a range of theological implications regarding Mary's role in Christ's Incarnation and the divine plan for human redemption.⁸⁷ Strophe 11, in particular, presents a number of images taken from Exodus, such as the drowning of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, the miracle of water springing from the rock, the pillar of fire and manna in the wilderness. Other Old Testament images prefiguring the Virgin include Jacob's ladder, the budding rod of Aaron, Gideon's fleece, and the Hebrew children saved from the furnace.⁸⁸

The structure and content of the Akathistos support our discussion of the new Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου iconography in two ways. First, the hymn belongs to a longstanding liturgical tradition honoring the Virgin in typological images drawn from throughout scripture. The epithet ἡ τῆς

'Akathistos:' A Study in Byzantine Hymnography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956): 145, 148-9. See also Elizabeth M. Jeffreys and Robert S. Nelson, "Akathistos," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1:44.

⁸⁵ Wellesz, "The 'Akathistos'," 156-7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 145. The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* defines 'kontakion' as "a sermon in verse, usually celebrating major feasts or saints." Kontakia were chanted during Orthros (Byzantine matins) between the 5th and 7th centuries, with a high point of composition in the mid-6th century. They continued to be written until the 9th century, although this form of hymnography was gradually supplanted by the kanon during the course of the 8th century. Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, "Kontakion," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium (ODB)*, 2: 1148. It is significant that although kontakia as a whole were abandoned a part of the liturgy in the 8th century, the Akathistos hymn continued to be sung after this point. Jeffreys and Nelson, "Akathistos," *ODB*, 1: 44. It was used in the celebration of the feast of Annunciation up through the 13th century, developing an extended schedule of performance that lasted throughout the whole season of Lent. Wellesz, "The 'Akathistos'," 143.

⁸⁷ Leena Mari Peltomaa, "Epithets of the Theotokos in the Akathistos Hymn," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 109-16.

⁸⁸ See Egon Wellesz, *The Akathistos Hymn* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1957); also translated by Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 149-58 and Peltomaa, *Image of the Virgin Mary*, 1-19.

βάτου, or “of the Burning Bush,” that comes into use by the thirteenth century on the Sinai icons (and perhaps elsewhere) reflects this exegetical practice. It is important to recognize that the new Marian title associated with Moses’ vision of the Burning Bush is not tied to a single miraculous icon or specially venerated prototype in the way that toponymic names for the Virgin usually were (such as the Virgin Hodegetria, Blachernitissa, or Hagiosoritissa in Constantinople).⁸⁹ Rather, the title is a poetic designation evoking Mary’s role and importance within the divine economy of salvation.⁹⁰ The Virgin “of the Burning Bush” is one of many potential honorific titles illustrating Marian typology. Yet, the fact that this epithet was selected and given visual form at Sinai vs. other scriptural images that similarly foreshadowed Mary’s role in the Incarnation is directly related to the monastery’s celebrated *loca sancta*.⁹¹

Second, the accumulation of typological imagery drawn from scripture in the *chairetismoi*, or acclamations, of the Akathistos hymn are closely linked to the Annunciation (both as understood historically and as regularly celebrated within the liturgical year).⁹² The

⁸⁹ Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Icons and the Objects of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 75-92.

⁹⁰ See Grabar on the differentiation between two forms of Marian epithets (toponymic vs. poetic); cited in note 161 below.

⁹¹ There are a series of Marian images depicted as part of a 14th or 15th century fresco program painted inside the Moses chapel at Sinai, which represents the furnishings of the Tabernacle (stamnos, table of showbread, ark of the covenant, Tablets of the Law, etc.) each with a small medallion containing a circular icon of the Virgin. See Kessler, “The Mosaic Prohibition,” 32-3, fig. 2.3-4; George A. Soteriou, “Toichographiai tes skenes tou martyriou eis parekklesia tou teichous tes Mones Sina,” in *Silloge bizantina in onore di Silvio Giuseppe Mercati*, Studi bizantini e neoellenici 9 (Rome, 1957), 389ff.

⁹² Scholars can only guess as to which church feast the hymn was originally written for. Peltomaa suggests the Nativity was the most likely, even though the oldest sources associate the Akathistos with the Annunciation. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 22. In certain parts of the Orthodox East, an early Marian feast was celebrated in the days leading up to the feast of Nativity that incorporated the Annunciation theme. Robert F. Taft and Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Annunciation,” in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1: 106-7; see also M. Jugie, “La première fête mariale en Orient et en Occident, l’advent primitif,” *Échos d’Orient* 22 (1923): 129-52.

presence of the Virgin Annunciate within the Jerusalem Patriarchate icon makes perfect sense in this expanded liturgical context. The ongoing performance of hymns like the Akathistos also informed the reception and interpretation of any pictorial representation of the Virgin, although, as we shall see, certain Marian types like the Blachernitissa were also more specifically associated with theological doctrines like the Incarnation. The Nativity and Annunciation were moments in the life of Christ that were also interwoven within Orthodox liturgical mystagogy and frequently referenced in the artistic programs decorating the interior of Byzantine churches. The space of the apse, which was the focal point of the sanctuary, functioned symbolically as the cave of Bethlehem;⁹³ this location is where images of the Virgin and Child were routinely given the place of honor within church decorative programs post-Iconoclasm. The angel of the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary might also occupy the spandrels on opposite sides of the triumphal arch at the front of the church, so that the spoken word of Gabriel's announcement and the descent of Holy Spirit animated the interim, creating a liturgical space pregnant with meaning – one that coincided with the presence of Christ in the Gospels and elements of the Eucharist on the altar below.⁹⁴

The typological link between scriptural prefigurations and the person of the Virgin was given visual form within manuscript illumination and on icons before appearing in monumental programs of church decoration. The earliest examples can be found in the 9th-century Marginal Psalters, identifying Mary with Mount Sion (the holy mountain) and with Jerusalem (the holy

⁹³ St. Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 59.

⁹⁴ First recognized by Otto Demus in *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Brothers, 1976; originally printed by Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co in London, 1948), 13-4, 22-6, 30-5. See also Glenn Peers, "Silver Cladding and the Assimilation of Bodies and Faces," in *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), 101-15.

city), as well as with Gideon's fleece.⁹⁵ (See Figure 4.7). However, there are two products of the twelfth century that offer important precedents to what we see happening in our early group of images representing the Virgin of the Burning Bush within a pictorial narrative context. The first is another Sinai icon that presents Virgin and Child at the center of a complex visual, textual, and theological program (Figure 4.8).⁹⁶ The enthroned figure of Mary is flanked by two columns of Old Testament prophets, each of whom display a scroll inscribed with texts foretelling her role in the Incarnation.⁹⁷ Several of the prophets are also accompanied by typological symbols – Moses stands before the burning bush on one side of the panel, while Jacob dreams beneath his heavenly ladder on the other.⁹⁸ Ezekiel and David share another compartment with Isaiah and Daniel placed across from them, each represented with pictorial emblems that point forward to the Virgin and Child seen in the center of the icon,⁹⁹ as are the figures of Balaam, Habakkuk, Solomon, and Gideon in the final pair of compartments.¹⁰⁰

The one figure that engages a response from the Virgin and Child at center is Symeon, who stands with the prophetess Anna at the mid-point of the left hand column. The gazes of both

⁹⁵ Linardou, "The Couch of Solomon," 81-3; der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 311-2.

⁹⁶ Addressed by Hans Belting in *Likeness and Presence*, 290-4, fig. 178, who reads the central figure of the Virgin through many of the same symbols and types that accompany her, and by Annemarie Weyl Carr, "The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaialogikēs Hetaireias* 17 (1993-94): 239-48. See Carr, "244. Icon with the Enthroned Virgin Surrounded by Prophets and Saints," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 372, for further bibliography.

⁹⁷ The text on each of the scrolls has been translated by Doula Mouriki, "Icons from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century," in *Sinai: Treasure of the Monastery*, ed. Konstantinos A. Manafis (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 105 and 385 n. 27.

⁹⁸ It is no accident that both the ladder and the bush, symbols also associated with Sinai and Sinai's saints (Moses and John Climacus), are given the pride of place on this icon. The scroll that Moses holds recites the same verse as found on the icon from the Jerusalem Patriarchate: "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight" (Exodus 3:3). Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 385 n. 27.

⁹⁹ A closed door, building/tower, the live coal carried by a cherub, and the mountain from which a stone has been detached.

¹⁰⁰ A star, a mountain, and next to Gideon, a fleece.

Mary and her son turn toward him and the prophecy he carries.¹⁰¹ Hans Belting interprets this pivotal exchange of glances as a means of drawing together Christ's childhood and the anticipation of his Passion,¹⁰² while the antithesis of human and divine natures are established along the central axis by setting a heavenly vision of Christ in Majesty against his human ancestors and adoptive father.¹⁰³ The posture of the vigorously kicking infant represents the more typical depiction found in images of the Virgin Kykkotissa (vs. the languid Christ Anapeson seen in the Procopius diptych). Here he strains against the thin garment of mortality, one hand tightly grasping Mary's veil, the other accepts a closed scroll – a visual symbol that reinscribes the same metaphors of mortal flesh and living Word used to reflect on the unique relationship that exists between this mother and child.¹⁰⁴ The multitude of texts framing the Virgin on this panel would reward further reading and viewing.¹⁰⁵ However, for our purposes, it offers a glimpse of the

¹⁰¹ Carr develops the relationship between Mary and the prophets surrounding her through themes appropriate to the feast of Christ's Presentation in the Temple based on the exchange of gazes between Mary and Symeon and the correspondence between the posture of the Christ child on this icon with how he is carried by St. Symeon in images of the Presentation. Homilists from the 9th to the 12th centuries had already expanded Symeon's role at the Presentation to include other Old Testament figures and prophets. Idem, "The Presentation of an Icon," 240.

¹⁰² Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 290.

¹⁰³ Joseph stands immediately beneath the enthroned Virgin and Child, holding a scroll that offers his statement of faith in Mary's purity. The text derives from a hymn by Romanos the Melodist written for the birth of the Virgin, also the source of the inscription that runs across the icon just above the heads of this central group of figures: "Joachim and Anna conceived and Adam and Eve were liberated," thus identifying the two couples on either side of Joseph. Carr, "Presentation of an Icon," 240; cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 294. At the top of the icon, Christ is seated on a burnished aureole of light surrounded by the tetramorphs, cherubim, and seraphim. The inscription here reads: ΒΑCΙΑΕΥC ΘΗC ΔΟΞΗC or "King of Glory." John the Theologian and John the Baptist stand in the compartments to either side of the uppermost register, along with the apostles Paul and Peter.

¹⁰⁴ Carr, "Presentation of an Icon," 239; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 290-91.

¹⁰⁵ Carr describes the icon as ceaselessly demanding a kind of "kinetic and participatory contemplation." Idem, "Presentation of an Icon," 248. Her use of the term "kaleidoscopic" echoes Belting's *perigraphē*, or "explanation through circumspection." *Likeness and Presence*, 294. In either case, the image continues to open up possible meanings. "Many scholars have taken up the challenge of explicating this image, but none has begun to exhaust the associative

pictorial and theological complexities already being explored on the icons at Sinai by the late 11th and early 12th centuries. The images of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου that developed in the succeeding centuries continued to evoke these themes, but function even more emphatically as bearers of a site-specific vision in relation to the *loca sancta* at Sinai.

Another important precedent for the development of Marian prefigurations in the extensive typological cycles of the Palaiologan period and for the image of the Burning Bush in particular is the set of two richly illuminated manuscripts produced in Constantinople by the middle of the twelfth century, both copies of the Homilies of James Kokkinobaphos.¹⁰⁶ The scene of Moses before the Burning Bush in the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts appears as the prefatory image to James' third homily on the Presentation of the Virgin (see Figure 4.9).¹⁰⁷ It is one of five full-page miniatures in which Old Testament events are illustrated as the preface to each sermon.¹⁰⁸ The sermons reflect on the early life of the Virgin and have their own illustrations set within the text, so that while Mary does not appear in the Old Testament images, these prefatory images serve as a series of allegorical prefigurations of the Virgin. The

meanings that the image evokes." Carr, "244. Icon with the Enthroned Virgin Surrounded by Prophets and Saints," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 372.

¹⁰⁶ Paris gr. 1208, fol. 73v and Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 54v. The Paris manuscript was likely the first produced, with the author's involvement in planning and execution – including the choice of illustrations. Production of the homilies may be connected with the patronage of Irene Sebastokratorissa, wife of Andronikos Komnenos, Manuel I's brother, with whom James also exchanged correspondence. See Jeffrey C. Anderson, "The Illustrated Sermons of James the Monk: Their Dates, Order, and Place in the History of Byzantine Art," *Viator* 22 (1991): 69-120.

¹⁰⁷ This image has been introduced/discussed by a number of other scholars in relation to the Sinai icons depicting the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου; see Collins, "Visual Piety," 110, fig. 91; Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," 498-500, fig. 4; Tzvetkova-Ivanova, "The Virgin Mary," 17-8; Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 19, figs. 15 and 16.

¹⁰⁸ Der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 312. The first preface shows the Virgin and disciples of Christ at the Ascension, set within an ecclesiastical structure and with two prophets (Isaiah and David) flanking the scene. See Jeffrey C. Anderson, "62. Homilies on the Life of the Virgin by James the Monk," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 107-9.

Kokkinobaphos manuscripts therefore represent a significant development in the pictorial celebration of Mary's role in the Incarnation, as much as in its theological emphasis, and anticipate the rich elaboration of Marian typological images found in the Palaiologan period.¹⁰⁹

If we examine the illustration of Moses and the Burning Bush from the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts more closely, we find the head of Christ Emmanuel at exactly the same place where the Mother of God later appears (or Mary shown together with Christ). The Prophet Moses is depicted twice, first removing his sandal before the bush and then gesturing in response to the angel (also duplicated) while holding the end of his shepherd's staff, which has transformed into a serpent.¹¹⁰ This image corresponds to the scenes of Moses before the Burning Bush already discussed, where the standing figure of Moses is often shown with staff in hand. At the Kariye Camii (1316-21), for example, the scene of Moses before the Burning Bush is followed by Moses hiding his face, represented in the soffit of the arch next to the lunette of the parekklesion's western bay.¹¹¹ Although Moses covers his face with one hand, the other grasps the end of his rod just as seen on the right of the Burning Bush in the Kokkinobaphos miniature.¹¹² Figure 4.9 thus uses the dual images of Moses to focus on two equal presentations

¹⁰⁹ The cycle of typological images associated with Christ, on the other hand, was introduced as early as the sixth century. Der Nersessian provides an overview of this development in "Program and Iconography," 311-16. See also Kallirroe Linardou, "The Couch of Solomon, a Monk, a Byzantine Lady, and the Song of Songs," in *The Church and Mary*, ed. Robert N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004): 73-85, esp. 74 and 81-83.

¹¹⁰ See the full account of Moses' dialogue with God in Exodus 3:1 – 4:17. The rod turned into a snake was one of two signs given to Moses as proofs for the Israelites, demonstrating that he had indeed been sent by God to lead them. As with the Burning Bush, Gregory of Nyssa interpreted these miracles as prototypes of the Incarnation. Idem, *Life of Moses*, II: 27.

¹¹¹ Underwood, *The Kariye Camii*, 1: 227-8, pl. 450-52.

¹¹² For some reason, when Anastasia Drandaki discusses the miniatures from the two copies of the Homilies of James Kokkinobaphos, she states that there is "no surviving Byzantine representation comparable." She introduces the fresco of Moses before Christ and the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Lesnovo (1349), but none of the other Palaiologan examples from monumental programs that also depict two figures of Moses with the Burning Bush (or even

of Christological imagery as opposed to providing visual or devotional access to the Virgin as Mother of God. As Collins points out, the bush stands in for Mary – it still offers the typological metaphor that underlies our Sinai imagery – but the pictorial conflation of the two has not yet occurred.¹¹³ The Virgin “of the Burning Bush” has not yet been realized.

More relevant to creation and reception of images depicting the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου at Sinai, however, are typological images of Mary added throughout the pages of another manuscript, an 11th-century copy of the Christian Topography by Cosmas Indicopleustes.¹¹⁴ These images of the Virgin that accompany or even replace the Old Testament objects described and interpreted by Cosmas in the Smyrna manuscript are not included in other manuscript copies of Indicopleustes’ Christian Topography.¹¹⁵ Three miniatures occur one right after the other and represent the enthroned Virgin and Child, each time identified in relation to objects and events from the Old Testament – first, Noah’s ark, then the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant, and third, the table of showbread “that bore the celestial bread of life.”¹¹⁶ Other illustrations juxtapose the figures of Mary and the Christ child with the sacred furnishings of the

earlier manuscript illuminations that utilize a similar compositional device). The scene at Lesnovo definitely shows Moses’ rod turned into a serpent. However, the frescoes from the Kariye Camii or from St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki would provide a closer match.

¹¹³ Collins, “Visual Piety,” 110.

¹¹⁴ Smyrna, Evangelical School, Cod. B.8, destroyed by fire in 1922. See Josef Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus des Kosmas Indikopleustes und Oktateuch nach Handschriften der Bibliothek zu Smyrna* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1899), and, more recently, Massimo Bernabò, *Il fisiologo di Smirne: le miniature del perduto codice B. 8 della Biblioteca della Scuola evangelica di Smirne* (Florence: SISMEL, 1998).

¹¹⁵ A manuscript at the Vatican dated to the 9th century (Vat. gr. 699) and two other 11th-century copies (Sinai gr. 1186 and Florence, Laur. plut. 9.28). Der Nersessian, “Program and Iconography,” 312-3. Kessler states that the Smyrna manuscript was an 11th-century original repainted during the Palaiologan period. He dates the pictorial cycle to the 12th century; need to find further confirmation on this point? Idem, “The Icon in the Narrative,” 5 n. 16.

¹¹⁶ Smyrna, Evangelical School, Cod. B8, pp. 161-3. Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus*, p. 56-7, pl. XXV-XXVII; Der Nersessian, “Program and Iconography,” 312.

tabernacle.¹¹⁷ And in one of these (Figure 4.10), the Virgin Hodegetria appears directly above the scene of Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush.¹¹⁸

Just as we saw in the icon of Moses with the Virgin of the Burning Bush from the Jerusalem Patriarchate (cf. Figure 4.4), the Smyrna miniature draws a direct parallel through text and image between Moses' vision of God in the Burning Bush and the miraculous nature of Christ's appearing on the earth through the Incarnation. More than this, however, vision plays a central role in the revelation of both old and new theophanies. The square frame and gilding that closely crop the image of Virgin and Child (Fig. 4.10), here presented half-length in contrast to the enthroned figures that appear elsewhere in the manuscript,¹¹⁹ evoke the physical composition of an actual icon panel. The titulus for the scene running along the top of the folio reads: τὸ σινᾶ ὄρος, ἡ ἀληθῆς θεωρία. "Mount Sinai, the true Beholding."¹²⁰ It is not within the flames of the incendiary shrubbery that Moses perceives truth, since the prophet must shield his eyes from divine presence at the same time that he bends over to unlace the straps of his sandals, becoming

¹¹⁷ Such as the seven-branched candlestick, the altar on which Aaron's rod was placed, and the stamnos containing manna. Smyrna, Evangelical School, Cod. B8, pp. 164-5 and 176, in Strzykowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus*, 57, 59, pl. XXVIII. The miniature which groups several of these same objects together includes an image of Mary holding the infant Christ in the lunette of its architectural frame. Smyrna, Evangelical School, Cod. B8, p. 177; Ibid., 59-60. The miniatures from pp. 176-77 are reproduced in Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), fig. 1.9 and fig. 2.2. See also der Nersessian, "Program and Iconography," 313.

¹¹⁸ Strzykowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus*, 58, pl. XXIX.

¹¹⁹ The Virgin and Child enthroned that hovers above the scene of Moses and Aaron with the stamnos of manna (p. 176), as well as the first miniature showing the Virgin as Noah's ark (p. 161) might also intentionally evoke the form of a large icon panel. By contrast, pp. 164-5 show the enthroned figures of Mary and Christ without any additional framing. The enthroned Virgin and Child of pp. 162-3 are set within architectural niches (although still given a gilded background), which provide a nice counterpoint to the final image in the series, where the temple furnishings are set below an arcade with the Virgin and Child superposed in a medallion.

¹²⁰ Strzykowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus*, 58; Kessler, "The Icon in the Narrative," 6; and now Bissera Pentcheva, "The Aesthetics of Landscape and Icon at Sinai," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65/66 (2014-15): 192-209, esp. 206-7.

quite a contortionist in the process. But it is our eyes, to the viewers and readers of the manuscript, that the complete/final vision is manifest by means of the icon of the Hodegetria.¹²¹ Mother and child offer “the true Beholding.” And unlike Moses, who could not see God face to face and still live, the Virgin and her son share the most intimate of gazes.¹²²

Identifying an Iconographic Type? A New Epithet vs. Multiple Marian Images

The previous two sections of this chapter dealt with the emergence of a new pictorial type representing the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου at Sinai sometime during the thirteenth century, based upon the already established *loca sancta* images of Moses before the Burning Bush and a long-standing textual and liturgical tradition that adapted such Old Testament events as prefigurations of the coming of Christ and of Mary’s role in the Incarnation. The title, ἡ τῆς βάτου, or “of the Bush,” that I have been using to indicate the new iconographic type for Mary was a poetic epithet as much as it was a toponym; it refers both to a scriptural event as a prefiguration of the Incarnation and to the *locus sanctus* where Moses saw the miraculous bush. While this Marian image was Sinaitic in that Sinai was the place commemorated as the site of Moses’ theophanic vision, the new visual formulation and means of identifying the Virgin were not based on a specific prototype *other than* the ‘great sight’ seen by the Old Testament prophet, the God-seer’s

¹²¹ Pentcheva discusses the Smyrna image of Moses before the Burning Bush within the context of 11th-century monastic manuscript production in Constantinople, and the developing role of icons as the primary channel for prayer and contemplation. Idem, “Aesthetics of Landscape and Icon,” 205-8, fig. 11.

¹²² Cf. the hymn cited by Kessler, “The Icon in the Narrative,” 5-6, from the canonical office for the Feast of the Council of Nicaea II, also known as the Triumph of Orthodoxy (celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent, originally the feast for Moses and Aaron, Samuel and the prophets). “Moses was deemed worth to contemplate you, Mother of God, mystically manifested in the burning bush; we have been introduced to you more clearly, seeing the image of your form; judged worthy to adore it, we receive directly the grace emanating from the protection which resides in it.” The hymn thus traces the progression of spiritual privilege from Moses’ vision of the Burning Bush to the person of the Virgin and then to Marian images.

ὄραμα. The Virgin of the Burning Bush celebrated in the icons produced at or for the Sinai monastery between the 11th and 13th centuries was a pictorial manifestation of Moses' encounter with God on this mountain, emphasizing the fulfillment of Christian typology as a means of understanding the biblical past and thereby incorporating this sacred history into the liturgical present (as engaged through pilgrimage ritual, personal devotion, and the multi-sensory experience of worship).

This section focuses on identification of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου through the inscribed titulus vs. pictorial means and will emphasize the possibility of a flexible iconographic identity for the Virgin of the Burning Bush on the icons at Sinai. Although “of the [Burning] Bush” only appears with the figure of the Virgin on a single example, it occurs with a specific iconographic type – the Virgin Kyriotissa (see Figure 4.11). This is the same full-length Marian figure holding the Christ child before her as seen on the proskynetarion icon (Fig. 4.3) where the Virgin appears enveloped by the flames of the Burning Bush, physically inserted within the revelation of Moses' mountaintop theophany. There are a significant number of 13th-century icons at Sinai (along with a handful of examples dating from the 10th-12th centuries) representing the Virgin Kyriotissa, which have been addressed as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου in previous scholarship.¹²³ I would like to extend this list to a working total of thirty-two icons, twenty-two of which utilize the iconographic type of the Kyriotissa.¹²⁴ This group of related Marian images provides highly

¹²³ There are a total of 18 icons that have been attributed to this group of images depicting the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai, including the three pictorial examples already discussed (the Procopius diptych, the 13th-century proskynetarion icon, and the Virgin with Four Monastic Saints by the painter Peter). This is the corpus based upon Kurt Weitzmann and Kristen Collins, as counted by Annemarie Weyl Carr. See idem, “Sinai and Cyprus,” 469 n. 67 and “The Murals of the Bema and Naos,” in *Asinou Across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 43 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University, 2012), 230 n. 68.

¹²⁴ For the purposes of clarification, see my handlist of Sinaitic icons provided in Appendix A.

suggestive evidence for a localized connection between the Kyriotissa and Moses' theophany before the Burning Bush, yet her iconographic role was never an exclusive one. As I will argue below, the Virgin Blachernitissa should also be considered a Sinaitic manifestation in the case of certain icons, as well as several important examples of the Virgin and Child enthroned.¹²⁵ While I do not believe that these icons copied a venerated "cult image" on display within the monastery church or one of its chapels, I do want to address this second, and more extensive, corpus of images as material that can further inform our understanding of Mary's intercessory role at Sinai. For the Virgin remained one of the monastery's primary patrons alongside Moses and the developing cult of St. Catherine of Alexandria long after the 13th century (until the present day).

The clearest evidence that the Kyriotissa was venerated at Sinai as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου, "of the Burning Bush," is the identifying titulus provided on an icon signed by the painter Peter.¹²⁶ It is another icon by the same artist that helps to underscore the inherent variability of Marian iconography in relation to this epithet and its typological association.¹²⁷ The first, shown in Figure 4.11, presents the Virgin and Child in the same full-length, frontal postures seen on the Sinai proskynetarion icon, but here flanked by four monastic saints. Two, Anastasios of Sinai

¹²⁵ This diversity of pictorial types for the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου has likewise been acknowledged by Aliprantis and Doula Mouriki.

¹²⁶ First published by George and Maria Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinai*, I: fig. 155, although dated by them to the 13th or 14th century. Weitzmann frequently referred to this icon as the exemplar for the pictorial type of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου, although he never published the panel or discussed it at length. See idem, "Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons," 200 n. 113; "An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah," 720 n. 14; "*Loca Sancta*," 53 n. 99; *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai: The Icons*, 88 n. 3 (B.54).

¹²⁷ For an extensive discussion of both panels, see Doula Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons by the Painter Peter," in *Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200. godine/ Studenica et l'art byzantine autour de l'année 1200*, ed. Vojislav Korać (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1988), 329-47.

and St. John Climacus, are celebrated abbots from the monastery.¹²⁸ However, Doula Mouriki describes all four as some of the “most prominent monastic personalities in the early history of Sinai.”¹²⁹ This icon is the only one in the collection of the Monastery of St. Catherine that specifically labels a Marian image “of the [Burning] Bush” – O [sic] TIC BATOY.¹³⁰ The genitive word βάρου is divided into two parts and rests above Mary’s shoulders on each side of her figure, visually echoing the sacra nomina (Μήτηρ Θεοῦ) that appears in abbreviated form as MHP ΘΥ.¹³¹ In this way, the additional identifying inscription is as deliberate and intentional as

¹²⁸ From left to right, they are George Israelites, Neilos Sinaites, Anastasios Sinaites, abbot, and John Climacus, abbot of Sinai. Each figure is identified by the ample inscriptions in red ink, the letters of which are carefully distributed around the saint’s head and halo (the nimbi are hardly visible except for the negative spaces left by the odd spacing of the inscriptions). Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 331-2.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 338-41. She identifies George Israelites with the hermit Abba Georgios “ta Arselaou,” named after the more remote Wadi Isla in the southwestern ranges of the Sinai peninsula. Abba Georgios provided a miracle of oil at the monastery during a period of great shortage, as recorded in the *Narrations* of Anastasios, Nektarios’ *Epitome* and *Description of Sinai*. Neilos Sinaites was frequently conflated with the more famous, fifth-century Neilos of Ancyra, eparch of Constantinople who ended his life as an ascetic at Sinai. Yet local tradition connects Neilos with the story of the massacre of the Holy Fathers of Sinai and Raithou by Saracen raiders. Anastasios, abbot of Sinai, is difficult to identify because of the number of Sinaitic personalities bearing the same name. Mouriki settles on Anastasios II, patriarch of Antioch (d. 609). However, this Anastasios is no longer believed to be the same as Anastasios of Sinai, the prolific writer and critic of the Monophysite heresy, celebrated in the liturgical calendar on April 21. Cf. Alexander Kazhdan, “Anastasios of Sinai,” in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1: 87-8. John Climacus scarcely needs introduction, since he is likely the most recognizable monastic personality from Sinai and author of the spiritual treatise, “The Heavenly Ladder.” Yet, biographical information from his own life remains scanty. “Compared to the other holy monks on our icon, the portraits of St. John Klimakos are abundant in the Monastery and can also be found in [illustrated copies of the *Ladder*] beyond Sinai.” Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 341.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 337; Collins, “Visual Piety,” 99, fig. 82.

¹³¹ This label becomes standard between the 10th and 11th centuries. Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary became *Meter Theou*,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 165-72, esp. 171. See also Karen Boston’s discussion of the use of IC XC for post-Iconoclastic images of Christ and her emphasis on the hypostatic union in Christ’s person thus being asserted (so that even MP ΘΥ could be interpreted as a proclamation of the two natures brought together in the event of the Incarnation). Idem, “The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts,” in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003): 35-51, esp. 43.

the multiple texts accompanying the narrative scene of Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush on the late 12th or 13th century icon from Jerusalem (Figure 4.4).

Besides the titlature given to the Virgin Kyriotissa, the icon shown in Figure 4.11 also bears the signature and petition of the artist – information that sets it apart since so few artists' names accompany the icons made by them, whether in the collection at Sinai or in Byzantine art more generally.¹³² Tucked in closely near the Virgin's feet is the inscription: ΔΕ[HCIC] ΠΕΤΡΟΥ ΖΟΓΡΑΦΟΥ, or "Prayer of the painter, Peter."¹³³ The same dedicatory inscription appears on an icon (Figure 4.12) that shows the Virgin Blachernitissa with the Prophet Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem (d. 1223).¹³⁴ Doula Mouriki also identified and discussed two other icon panels at Sinai that can be attributed to Peter.¹³⁵ In some ways, what is even more unusual than a signature and artist's name that can be associated with this group of icons, is that their production can also be assigned a date based on criteria other than style. The inscription identifying the figure of the patriarch, Euthymios II, uses the term ὁ μάκαρος, or "blessed," indicating that he was deceased at the time when this portrait was made and thus

¹³² On painters' names at Sinai and the icons by Peter in particular, see also Maria Vassilaki and Robin Cormack, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," in *Byzantium, 330-1453* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), 361-2.

¹³³ Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 332.

¹³⁴ Georgi Parpulov, "53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 259-61; Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 329-31, 335-7. Both the icon showing the Virgin of the Burning Bush with Four Monastic Saints and the icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa with the Prophet Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem were published by George and Maria Soteriou in *Icons du Mont Sinai*, I: fig. 155-6, 158, and II: 134-5, 138-9. However, because the inscription with Peter's signature on the icon with four monastic saints was only revealed after cleaning, the connection between the two panels was not noted by the Soterious. Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 329.

¹³⁵ An icon depicting St. Makarios of Egypt and St. Makarios of Alexandria, unsigned (and as yet uncleaned at the time of Mouriki's publication), and an icon of St. Procopius with a partial inscription preserving the supplicatory formula used by Peter. Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 332-5.

providing a *terminus post quem* for the icon panel (and perhaps for Peter's activity as an artist and icon painter at the monastery).¹³⁶

Euthymios' presence on the icon is explained by the fact that the Greek patriarch died at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai and is buried there. A marble slab with his funerary inscription still stands in the northeast corner of the monastery church.¹³⁷ The tombstone provides the date of death (December 13, 1223) for Euthymios II and the name of the Sinai archbishop in office at the time, a certain Makarios.¹³⁸ The dates for Makarios' term of office (1224-1227) can be obtained from other sources documenting the monastery's history, potentially offering a four-year window in which the icons by Peter were most likely to have been produced.¹³⁹ What this window of time provides in comparison with an emergent iconography for the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου at Sinai is a specific moment when we know that the epithet (and Mary's identification with the Old Testament events commemorated at the

¹³⁶ Parpulov, "53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem," 259; Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 335. Mouriki also proposed that Peter might have been a member of the Patriarch's company, traveling with him from Jerusalem to Sinai. Ibid., 344-5.

¹³⁷ The tombstone is engraved in both Greek and Arabic. The inscriptions have been published in several places. See Parpulov, "53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem," 261 n. 4; Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 335 n. 9. A photograph of Euthymios' funerary marker is available in *Holy Image, Holy Ground*, 261, fig. 133.

¹³⁸ Parpulov, "53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem," 259; Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 335. Mouriki connects the patronage of this Sinai archbishop with the choice of two saints by the same name on another icon attributed to Peter. Ibid., 345-6.

¹³⁹ According to the list of Sinai archbishops included in *Ἐπιτομή τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας* by Nektarios (Venice, 1677; 7th edition printed in Athens in 1980), 222, as cited by Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 346 n. 93. However, the date of Euthymios II's death is questioned by V. Grumel, "La chronologie des patriarches grecs de Jérusalem au XIII^e siècle," *Revue des études byzantines* 20 (1962): 197-201, esp. 197-8. Grumel points out the discrepancy between a date of 1223 and the indiction given in the same inscription as transcribed by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, suggesting that $\varsigma\psi\lambda\beta'$ (6732) should be read as $\varsigma\psi\lambda\theta'$ (6739), thus arriving at December 13, 1230 instead. See Parpulov, "53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem," 261 n. 4. This must also be the reason for the date of 1230-40 given to the icon with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Four Monastic Saints by Collins, "Visual Piety," 101, fig. 82.

monastery and pilgrimage site) was current, in use by the monastic community itself. Peter's inscription for the Virgin Kyriotissa becomes the textual equivalent for the visual motif of overlapping tendrils of flame, a label that captures the same typological significance as the pictorial conflation of Virgin and bush.¹⁴⁰ The close relationship between Sinai and the Jerusalem Patriarchate demonstrated by Euthymios II's choice of burial place also helps to make a stronger case for including the icon of Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush from the treasury of the Orthodox Patriarchate within a group of otherwise Sinai-specific images.¹⁴¹

If the icons by the painter Peter point to the first couple of decades in the thirteenth century as a formative period for the appearance of this new iconography associated with Marian images at Sinai, then the Procopius diptych (Fig. 4.1) represents the endpoint of its pictorial formulation by the last quarter of the same century. By the 1280s, the identity of the Virgin of the Burning Bush was secure enough that this image could circulate beyond the walls of the Sinai monastery, while maintaining its typological and topographical associations with the site of Moses' visionary encounter. The date attributed the diptych representing St. Procopius and the Virgin and Child has been debated upon stylistic grounds. Jaroslav Folda sees a connection with the Veneto-Byzantine Crusader style centered in Acre and attributes it to the 1280s; Doula Mouriki and Maria Aspra-Vardvakis, on the other hand, emphasize its links with Cyprus.

Especially intriguing are the formal relationships noted by Annemarie Weyl Carr between the

¹⁴⁰ The singular instance of the epithet ἡ τῆς βάρτου at Sinai should not raise too much concern. Even the Virgin Kyriotissa is only labeled as such in three surviving examples. And there are two cases in which the titulus was applied to quite different iconographic types. See Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, *Die Kirche der Hagia Triada bei Kranidi in der Argolis (1244): Ikonographische und stilistische Analyse der Malereien*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia* 20 (Munich: Institut für Byzantinistik und Neugriechische Philologie der Universität, 1975), 215 and 785 n. 113.

¹⁴¹ Garidis actually attributes the panel to the painter Peter (as a younger artist), which seems unlikely, but close connections between the Jerusalem icon and Sinai have been argued by others, as well. Mouriki 1990, 103; Collins, "Visual Piety," 108.

modeling, colorism, rich chrysography, and “hard, edgy intensity” of the diptych’s forms and of manuscript painting from the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia in the 1270s.¹⁴² The opulence of a “court style” associated with Armenian art may be applied to Lusignan Cyprus, as well, since the two royal houses were closely linked through intermarriage.¹⁴³

These cross-cultural interconnections become particularly relevant when we turn to two images of Moses before the Burning Bush found in the margins of a lectionary made for the Armenian prince, Hetum II, and dated 1286.¹⁴⁴ The first example (Figure 4.13) illustrates the second part of the lesson for the first Wednesday in Lent, next to the passage from Exodus 3: 2-5 (the story of Moses and the Burning Bush).¹⁴⁵ Moses kneels at the foot of Mount Horeb in order to untie his sandal while looking directly upward. The bust-length figure of Mary appears above him, her hands raised in the orant position and with the youthful face of Christ Emmanuel represented in front of her chest. Mountain and bush merge in a melee of colorful foliate shapes

¹⁴² In particular, the Gospel Book of Queen Keran (Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2563) and the Gospel Book of Prince Vasak (Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2568), both of which are dated to 1272. Carr first makes this argument in “Icon-tact: Byzantium and the Art of Cilician Armenia,” in *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion, and Society*, ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger A. Wieck (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1998), 73-102, esp. 97-8. She summarizes the main points of stylistic connections between the Sinai diptych and Armenian manuscript painting in “Sinai and Cyprus,” 459-61.

¹⁴³ Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus,” 461. The 1270s and 80s were also significant ones for Cyprus’ connections with Jerusalem, since the kings of Cyprus took on the rule of the former Latin Kingdom during this period. Carr suggests that the Procopius diptych may have been made as a gift for Henry II on the occasion of his coronation in Jerusalem on August 15, 1285. *Ibid.*, 469.

¹⁴⁴ Erevan, Matenadaran MS 979, fol. 94v and 228r. See Irina Drampian, *Het‘um B. Ark‘ayi chashots‘ē: 1286 t‘. haykakan nkarazard matyanē/ The Lectionary of King Hetum II (Armenian Illustrated Codex of 1286 A.D.)* (Erevan: “Nairi” hratarakch‘ut‘yun, 2004), 120, 146, ill. 8 and 31 and Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 1: 120-21, 2: fig. 493. For some reason, Der Nersessian gives the folio number for the second images of Moses before the Burning Bush as fol. 229, although Drampian and the digitized manuscript online indicate that it is on fol. 228r.

¹⁴⁵ Drampian, *Lectionary of King Hetum II*, 120, ill. 8; Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia*, 1: 120.

– it is impossible to tell where one begins and the other ends. But the manifestation of mother and child as the focal point of Moses’ miraculous vision is obvious. God the Father, grey-haired and bearded, also appears in a medallion hovering at the very top of this miniature and looks down from heaven as rays of gold light spread around his face.

The second illustration of Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush (Figure 4.14) accompanies the reading from Acts 7: 30-34, when the martyr Stephen recounts the Old Testament miracle in his speech before the council of high priests.¹⁴⁶ The iconography is similar to that used on fol. 94v – Moses again kneels at the foot of the mountain, removing his sandals, while the Virgin and Child appear above him as the fully enfleshed manifestation of his theophanic vision. However, in this image, the Burning Bush itself is more clearly distinguished. It rises up like a golden tree from the summit of Mount Horeb/Sinai.¹⁴⁷ Tongues of red flame and green foliage are intermingled within the gilded form of the blazing shrubbery. Mary appears in the same orant posture as before, but full-length, and with the clipeate portrait of Christ suspended on her chest. The figure type used here is that of the Virgin Blachernitissa.¹⁴⁸

Previous scholars have often alluded to these illustrations of Moses before the Burning Bush in the Lectionary of Hetum II and noted the presence of Mary in relation to other images prefiguring her role in the Incarnation of Christ. However, the images themselves have not been addressed as a significant counterpart to the surviving examples of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου found in the Sinai icons. Both illustrations need to be acknowledged in this context. First of all, as in the border of the Procopius diptych, the Marian imagery employed by the artist/illuminator of the

¹⁴⁶ Drampian, *Lectionary of King Hetum II*, 146, ill. 31; Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia*, 1: 120, 2: fig. 493.

¹⁴⁷ The passage in Acts refers specifically to Mount Sinai, although the Exodus passage indicates Horeb as the site of Moses’ encounter with the Burning Bush.

¹⁴⁸ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia*, 1: 121.

lectionary was intended for a viewership beyond the monastic community and/or pilgrims at Sinai. It was expected to be comprehensible to the Armenian prince for whom it was made, understood as an image combining the site of Moses' vision (here, its evocation through pictorial narrative) with Marian devotion. The Virgin's prefiguration is celebrated as a fully figured conflation of Old Testament anticipation and New Testament completion of prophetic types. Sinai indeed offers "the true Beholding."¹⁴⁹

Besides important visual parallels between the figure of Moses removing his sandals in the destroyed Smyrna manuscript of the Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes (Fig. 4.10) and the doubled figure of the prophet on the panel from the Jerusalem Patriarchate (Fig. 4.4) and the 13th-century proskynetarion icon at Sinai (Fig. 4.3), where he both bends down to unlace his footwear and then stands, gazing in astonishment at the miraculous sight, the Armenian lectionary further demonstrates the variety of Marian iconographic types that might be used and understood as the equivalent of this divine vision. The bust-length, orant figure of the Virgin and Child accompanying the Old Testament passage from Exodus 3 (Figure 4.13) is similar to the Virgin *orans* on the top of the Marian panel paired with St. Procopius (Fig. 4.2). The half-length, orant figure is also how Mary is depicted on at least two later icons in the collection at Sinai,¹⁵⁰ as well as in the fifteenth-century mural decoration of the Chapel of St.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. the manuscript illumination discussed earlier from the Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes, Smyrna, Evangelical School Cod. B8, p. 166.

¹⁵⁰ Collins, "Visual Piety," 115, figs. 95-7. These include the fourteenth century icon of Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush described in note 59 above, and a late 14th/early 15th-century triptych that shows Moses receiving the Law next to the Virgin of the Burning Bush on the left-hand wing, at the top of three registers of standing saints that flank (on the wings) a central panel with the Twelve Feasts. Another image of Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush that I believe reflects the intervention of later overpainting (Palaiologan, maybe 14th C? The figure of Moses is quite similar to the frescoes at Asinou) appears on in the lunette of a triptych wing along with a scene of Elijah being fed by the raven. It has been published by Kurt Weitzmann, "Four Icons on Mount Sinai: New Aspects in Crusader Art," *Jahrbuch der*

James in the northeast corner of the monastery church, where the Virgin's robe is once again overlaid with branches of flame and green foliage suggestive of her conflated identity with the Burning Bush.¹⁵¹ It is in this orant form that the Virgin of the Burning Bush most frequently occurs in monumental programs during the Palaiologan period, once the typological cycle with Marian prefigurations spreads throughout the Byzantine east (cf. Figure 4.6).¹⁵²

The second illustration of Moses before the Burning Bush from the Lectionary of Hetum II, in which Mary appears with the Christ child as the Virgin Blachernitissa (Figure 4.14), deserves closer attention than what it has so far received. For the Blachernitissa type appears as an alternative to the Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου at Sinai, and can be found depicted as such on a number of icons besides the panel by the painter Peter already introduced.¹⁵³ Besides her appearance as the primary subject of a large and striking icon panel that presents the Virgin

Österreichischen Byzantinistik 21 (1972): 286-8, fig. 9 and Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, from the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), fig. 385, both of whom accept the figures of Elijah and Moses as of a piece with the twelve apostles represented below and attribute the triptych to a Crusader artist of the 13th century. This is the only wing of the triptych that survives, and I would propose that the figures of the two Sinai prophets were added to the lunette once the wing was turned around and re-fitted to the central plaque, responding to the Annunciation in the spandrels of the frame (which also looks as if it was retouched at this time). Cf. Weitzmann's comments on the refashioning of the triptych in "Four Icons on Mount Sinai," 287.

¹⁵¹ Collins, "Visual Piety," 115-6, fig. 98. Georgi Parpulov argued for reattributing this fresco to the thirteenth century, although his conclusions have not been widely accepted. See idem, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai," 346-7.

¹⁵² See overview by Sirarpie der Nersessian in "Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion," in *The Kariye Djami*, 4: 305-49, esp. 310-16/18.

¹⁵³ Acknowledged by a number of previous scholars, although the implications of this iconographic diversity has never been discussed. See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Virgin tes Batou," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3: 2177-8; Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 336-7; Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 29-30 and 93-9. Aliprantis subsumes examples of the Blachernitissa under the category of Virgin Platytera. Cf. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Virgin Platytera," in the *ODB*, 3: 2177. The same iconographic type, in which the Virgin is shown in the orans posture with a medallion of Christ Emmanuel before her chest, is also known as the Virgin Episkepsis. Idem, "Virgin Blachernitissa," in the *ODB*, 3: 2170-71.

Blachernitissa at half-length with the medallion portrait of Christ Emmanuel (see Figure 4.15),¹⁵⁴ the Blachernitissa is used at least twice as the counterpoint to Christ on the upper part of icons depicting a collective group of saints.¹⁵⁵ One such example is a pair of early 13th century panels with the Holy Fathers of Sinai and Raithou (Figures 4.16 and 4.17).¹⁵⁶ Christ is shown enthroned and at the center of a Deesis group on one panel,¹⁵⁷ inscribed “The Holy Fathers of Sinai,” while the Virgin Blachernitissa appears on the other with the Fathers of Raithou.¹⁵⁸ As in the icon of the Virgin of the Burning Bush with Four Monastic Saints by the painter Peter, the identity of the majority of holy figures on the two panels is largely monastic and nearly entirely localized, thus supporting a similarly local interpretation for the Blachernitissa iconography.

Although not labeled explicitly as in the case of the Kyriotissa, the presence of Moses next to the Blachernitissa on the icon with Patriarch Euthymios II (Figure 4.12) assures the typological connection between this Virgin and Child and Mary’s prefiguration in the Burning Bush at Sinai. Moses holds the Tablets of the Law in his right hand and gestures toward the Virgin Blachernitissa with his left. Because patristic writers and hymnographers also employed

¹⁵⁴ This icon has been published extensively, since it has been a popular choice within a number of museum exhibitions. For this bibliography see Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 559, fig. 415, Appendix no. 134. Mouriki states that it is the only large icon of this iconographic type preserved at Sinai, which may be true. Idem, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” 117. However, there is a smaller, unpublished icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa at Sinai that may date from this same period, although it is more provincial in style (Princeton no. 500).

¹⁵⁵ Doula Mouriki mentions both in her list of comparanda for Sinai icons depicting the Virgin Blachernitissa. Idem, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 336 n. 19. Another set of paired panels with the Blachernitissa on the top register, opposite Christ, belong to a small diptych of perhaps the 12th century, although dated by Soteriou to the 14th. Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinai*, I: fig. 231; Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 336 n. 19. See Princeton nos. 946-7.

¹⁵⁶ See also Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 112, figs. 43 and 44. The icon of the Holy Fathers of Sinai with Christ enthroned was first published by Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinai*, 1: fig. 153-4.

¹⁵⁷ Flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist, Christ is also accompanied by the figures of Sts. Peter and Paul, Paul of Mount Latros and John Climacus.

¹⁵⁸ She is framed by the archangels Michael and Gabriel, who both turn inward towards her, and by Sts. John Climacus and John of Damascus.

the Tablets of the Law as yet another prefiguration of the Incarnation, this may be the intended emphasis within the image rather than the Burning Bush.¹⁵⁹ However, it is certainly the figure of Mary at center who is the recipient of the patriarch's adoration and worship. A portion of the inscription framing the three central figures of this icon is taken from a hymn celebrating Mary's instrumental role in the Incarnation of the Logos.¹⁶⁰ Whether associated specifically with the Burning Bush or with the Tablets of the Law received by Moses on Mount Sinai's peak, or both, the figure of the Virgin has become a prominent marker of place – in fact, of Sinai's two most venerated *loca sancta*.

The two icons by the painter Peter that I have focused on here both place the figure of Mary at the center of their figural compositions, and it is the presence of Moses and other specifically Sinaitic saints that help to identify her local patronage and importance (besides the presence of a useful inscription labeling the Kyriotissa in particular as the Virgin “of the Bush”). Setting these early examples alongside the manifestation of the Virgin represented twice within Moses' vision of the Burning Bush in the margins of Hetum II's lectionary helps to underscore the flexibility and variability inherent in the development of this iconographic type. We have seen the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου as a simple orant figure, as the Virgin Blachernitissa / Platytera / Episkepsis, with the bust-length portrait of Christ Emmanuel suspended in a medallion above her chest, and as the Kyriotissa, a more naturalistic image of mother and child than the preceding,

¹⁵⁹ Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Icons at Sinai,” 337 n. 22.

¹⁶⁰ Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Icons at Sinai,” 336; Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 30. Georgi Parpulov identifies the hymn to the Virgin as part of the daily commemoration of the dead recited during nocturnes, while the second part of the framing inscription is identified as a troparion in honor of St. Euthymios the Great, patron of the deceased patriarch. Cf. Parpulov, “53. Virgin with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem,” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 259-61.

but still emphasizing the formal, frontal presentation of the infant Christ through the intermediary figure of Mary as Theotokos, God-bearer.

Iconographic studies have argued for a correspondence between both Marian types of the Blachernitissa and Kyriotissa and a special emphasis on her role in the Incarnation. According to André Grabar, the miraculous conception of Christ as represented on twelfth-century icons of the Annunciation was then transferred as a doctrinal concept to images of Mary shown with the medallion of Christ on her breast,¹⁶¹ although the iconography of the Virgin with the clipeate Christ goes back at least as far as the seventh century.¹⁶² Chryssanthi Baltoyanni interprets the orant Blachernitissa as a reference to the specific moment of Christ's Incarnation in symbolic pictorial form, when the Virgin was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation and become the Mother of God.¹⁶³ By point of comparison, Mirjana Tatić-Djurić points to the appearance of the Virgin Kyriotissa, including the Christ child next to the angel Gabriel, in several early scenes of the Annunciation.¹⁶⁴ In her comprehensive survey of this iconographic

¹⁶¹ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 37, 128, and 305; cf. idem, "Iconographie de la Sagesse divine et de la Vierge," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 8 (1956): 254-61, esp. 259.

¹⁶² See discussion by Chryssanthi Baltoyanni, "The Mother of God in Portable Icons," in *The Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 139-53, esp. 139-40. The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai has one 7th-8th century example in its collection, although in quite fragmentary form. It is inscribed HΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ and shows the Virgin holding the clipeate image of Christ before her breast (as opposed to being represented in the orant posture later associated with this type).

¹⁶³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶⁴ One is a fifth-century relief sculpture from Hatchkar de Talin, in Èrévan, which shows the Virgin and Child below the archangel. Tatić-Djurić, "L'Icône de Kyriotissa," 767, fig. 12. Another is the simultaneous representation of the angel with the Virgin and Child in the early ninth-century mosaics on the triumphal arch of the Church of SS. Nereus and Achilleus, Rome. See ibid., fig. 13. The Virgin Kyriotissa was also the Marian image chosen to replace the iconoclast cross in the apse mosaics in the Church of the Dormition, Nicaea, after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. The texts selected for the inscriptions accompanying the Virgin and Child emphasized the birth of the pre-existing Logos (Psalms 2:7 and 109:3). Ibid., 766, 774-5, fig. 8. On the apse program at Nicaea (now destroyed), see Charles Barber, "The Koimesis Church,

type, Tatić-Djurić returns repeatedly to the Incarnation of the Logos as the most significant theological aspect expressed by the Kyriotissa. “L’oeuvre de l’Incarnation du Verbe, dont la Théotokos Kyriotissa est le symbole par excellence, sans en être unique, ...est la plus étonnante des merveilles où la Vierge voyait Dieu plus distinctement que les séraphins.”¹⁶⁵

The dogmatic association between the Virgin Kyriotissa and the Incarnation also makes this Marian type the iconography of choice for many images representing the Old Testament prefigurations celebrated in Byzantine hymnography. The use of the Virgin Kyriotissa for the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai is echoed by other symbolic manifestations – the Kyriotissa as the Ladder of Jacob, the Bed of Solomon, Mount Sion, etc.¹⁶⁶ As discussed in relation to the Akathistos hymn in particular, each of these prophetic announcements resonated within the texts of the liturgy, receiving voiced praise, as well as being venerated in pictorial form.¹⁶⁷ There may be consistent ideological reasons behind the artistic choices being made about how to represent the Virgin of the Burning Bush at Sinai. However, I think it is as important to acknowledge the range of options available and, indeed, demonstrated by the surviving collection of Sinai icons,

Nicaea: The Limits of Representation on the Eve of Iconoclasm,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 41 (1991): 43-60. Barber emphasizes the importance of the Incarnation in understanding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist (and Christ’s Trinitarian essence), using two contemporary exegetical texts by the Patriarch Germanos I of Constantinople that both address the verse from the Psalms included in the apse mosaic. Barber offers an analysis of the Iconoclast response/re-interpretation of the mosaic in his contribution, “Theotokos and Logos: the interpretation and reinterpretation of the sanctuary program of the Koimesis Church, Nicaea,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 51-6.

¹⁶⁵ Tatić-Djurić, “L’Icône de Kyriotissa,” 765. The Virgin Nikopoios and the Blachernitissa (also called the Mother of God of the Sign in later Russian art), both express similar theological concepts. Tatić-Djurić cites a homily discussed by M. Jugie, “L’Homélie de Michel Psellos sur l’Annonciation,” *Échoes d’Orient* XVII (May-Sept. 1916): 139.

¹⁶⁶ Tatić-Djurić, “L’Icône de Kyriotissa,” 763-4, 776, 785.

¹⁶⁷ Additional epithets related to scriptural prefigurations of the Virgin can be found in Sophronios Eustratiades, *Ἡ Θεοτόκος ἐν τῇ ὑμνογραφίᾳ* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1930); idem, *Θεοτοκάριον* (Chennevières-sur-Marne: L’Ermitage, 1931).

as it is to try narrowing down the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου to a specific iconographic formulation. Just as the conflation of Marian imagery with the familiar pictorial narrative of Moses before the Burning Bush was readily expressed in a variety of early forms (and maintained a diverse repertoire throughout its application to monumental programs in the Palaiologan period), so too, the adaptation of existing iconography depicting the Virgin and Child to the epithet “of the Bush” could be applied to a range of potential visual types.¹⁶⁸

Before closing this extended discussion of Marian iconography, it must be acknowledged that perhaps *every* image of the Mother of God seen at the site of Moses’ theophanies could be understood as the fulfillment of his prophetic vision. In the same way that the Transfiguration in the 6th-century apse mosaic did not need to provide a mountain setting to specify the location of this event in the life of Christ, because the ascent had already been shared by its viewers, icons representing the Virgin and Child might be interpreted as the prerogative of the Orthodox worshipper at Sinai, who is granted the opportunity (unlike Moses, at least until the prophet’s appearance with Christ at Tabor) of seeing God face to face. Although the Incarnation was made possible through Mary’s willing obedience and bodily matrix, it is mediated to the present viewer/worshipper through the materiality of the icon. The final section of this chapter will

¹⁶⁸ Just as the Virgin Kyriotissa might appear in the Sinai icons flanked by other specifically Sinaitic saints, we can find at least one or two instances in which a full-length Virgin Hodegetria, bearing the Christ child on one arm, also seems to stand in for the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου. The icon of the Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St. Nicholas, dated by Kurt Weitzmann to the first half of the 10th century, is one example. See idem, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 1: 85-7, B.53, pl. CIX. Another is the Virgin Hodegetria with four standing saints (Sts. Anthony, Peter, Paul, and Euthymios), Moses and Elijah. This has been generally attributed to the Acre school and dated mid-12th century, although I am not convinced that it belongs within the corpus of Crusader icons at Sinai. Weitzmann, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 192-4, fig. 17; Weitzmann et al., *The Icon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 221; Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 333-4, fig. 191, Appendix no. 23; Rebecca Corrie, “Sinai, Acre, Tripoli, and the ‘Backwash from the Levant’: Where did the Icon Painters Work?” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 429, fig. 130.

return to exactly this point, with a brief discussion of some of the technologies used at Sinai to exploit the burnished, reflective properties of its icon panels – techniques that were intentionally directed toward the manipulation of light. Light, more so than color or line or composition, was the active principle of Byzantine viewing practices and motivated devotional response. Light, at Sinai, contained and communicated divine presence just as when God spoke to Moses from a bush that burned but was not consumed.

The Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου

So far I have tried to foreground the flexibility of interpreting various Marian images at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου, or “of the Burning Bush.” It is striking, however, that both early forms of this prefiguration to appear on the Sinai icons – the pictorial conflation of the Virgin with the flames of the bush seen by Moses (on the 13th-century proskynetarion icon in Figure 4.3) and the image of Mary with an accompanying titulus that specifies her poetic epithet (on the icon with four monastic saints by the painter Peter in Figure 4.11) – employ the Kyriotissa as the figural type best suited to their means. The Virgin Kyriotissa appears on a significant number of thirteenth century icons at Sinai, especially those that have been remarked on as part of the exchange of artistic styles and production techniques within the milieu of the Crusades (from Lebanon to Cyprus to Acre to Sinai), and she frequently appears in the company of other Sinaitic saints, like the four monastic figures flanking the young mother and child on the panel painted by Peter. In what follows, I provide an overview of this entire group, adding two unpublished icons that should be considered as part of the corpus, and then address their potential function in relation to the stational liturgies held within the Chapel of the Burning Bush at Sinai during the same period.

The local significance of the Virgin Kyriotissa among the icons at Sinai was pointed out as early as their first publication by George and Maria Soteriou, then argued for at greater length by Kurt Weitzmann in his article “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine.”¹⁶⁹ The addition of icons to this corpus was continued by scholars of the next generation, including Theologos Aliprantis and Doula Mouriki, as well as more recently by Jaroslav Folda in his encyclopedic survey of Crusader art in the Holy Land. While scholarship of the last two decades has been stimulated by the new/unprecedented circulation of Sinai icons beyond the walls of the monastery through generous loans and a pivotal presence within international museum exhibitions (from New York to Athens and from St. Petersburg to London), the basic set of images being addressed in relation to the construction of pilgrimage identity at the Sinai monastery has remained unchanged. New questions have been asked, however, about the audience and implications of this visual identity, pushing beyond the boundaries of style and formal analysis traditional to the disciplinary practice of art history.¹⁷⁰

Building on the observations and approach of previous scholars, my goal in this section is to further situate the function and reception of these Marian images associated with Moses’ vision of the Burning Bush within a liturgical context at the Monastery of St. Catherine during the period in which they were first produced. Kristen Collins and Robert Nelson have offered a similar model in their analysis of a small icon that pairs Moses with the Virgin Kyriotissa (Figure 4.18), which is dated, like other examples of the Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου discussed

¹⁶⁹ See summary of previously identified depictions of the Virgin Kyriotissa as Virgin of the Burning Bush provided by Doula Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 337 n. 24.

¹⁷⁰ And seeking to redefine pilgrimage art by more careful attention to the varied communities and cultural assumptions involved in its production and reception. See Drandaki, “Through Pilgrims’ Eyes;” Collins, “Visual Piety;” and Elsner and Wolf, “The Transfigured Mountain.”

so far, to the early thirteenth century.¹⁷¹ It is one of a series of closely related panels, all of which share the same dimensions (approximately 23 x 19 cm) and basic compositional format. At least ten icons were produced in this manner, each one representing a saint or patriarch standing next to the Virgin and Child. Mary and Christ are represented frontally, in the familiar posture of the Kyriotissa, while the accompanying saint turns toward them in a three-quarters view, indicating the Virgin's privileged status through both gesture and gaze.¹⁷²

The small panels are like repeated refrains, visual *chairetismoi*, that echo a theme similar to the more elaborate program developed on the icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa with Christ in Glory, angels, saints, and prophets (see Figure 4.8). The serialized production of the thirteenth-century icons recalls the individual compartments that frame the Kykkotissa icon. But in this case, each prophet who gestured toward the Virgin and Child at the center of the earlier panel has been separated from the group as a whole and now shares the primary visual field with Mary and

¹⁷¹ Collins and Nelson, "52. Moses with the Virgin and Child," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 257.

¹⁷² The saints paired with the Kyriotissa in this series include: St. Sabas, Daniel the Stylite, Isaiah, Moses, Joachim, Abraham, Simeon, St. George, St. Demetrius, and St. Theodore. See Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai: Appendix," 382, XII.52.1 through XII.52.10. In place of St. Demetrios, Weitzman identified George twice. He also stated that St. Sabas was represented twice and does not include Daniel. Cf. Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta*," 53. Collins and Nelson reproduce the list of names given by Weitzmann. However since many of the prophets and patriarchs are represented with the same face/figure, with the name inscribed above them as the only distinguishing feature of their identity, some uncertainty and/or confusion is understandable. Isaiah, Abraham, and Symeon are virtually identical, each shown as an elderly, white-bearded saint with two long strands of hair falling back over his shoulder. The tunic and folds of the mantle, or himation, are repeated from one panel to another, even when the physiognomy of the saint being represented changes (compare Moses and Isaiah, for example). The icon of St. Sabas and the fragmentary panel with Daniel the Stylite depicted on it were both taken from Sinai to Kiev by the Russian scholar Ouspensky in the nineteenth century. An icon of St. Sabas was then destroyed during WWII. See Weitzmann, "*Loca Sancta*," 53 n. 101. For images of the two panels removed to Kiev, see Oskar Wulff, *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei* (Hellerau bei Dresden: Avalun-Verlag, 1925), figs. 16 and 49. Also reproduced in Olga Ètingof, *Vizantijskie ikony VI – pervoj poloviny XIII veka v Rossii* (Moscow: Indrik, 2005), fig. 56, 60-61, as cited by Georgi Parpulov in his handlist. Idem, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai: Appendix," 382, XII.52.1-2.

her son. Some of the saints represented with the Kyriotissa are the same as on the earlier icon: Moses, Isaiah, Symeon and Joachim, for example. Others are popular monastic or military saints: St. Sabas, George, Theodore and Demetrios.¹⁷³ The panels are so alike, not just in format but even in the exact replication of costume, drapery folds, faces,¹⁷⁴ and the pattern of overlying chrysography,¹⁷⁵ that they have tempted modern scholars to invoke the trope of mass production within the medieval workshop setting.¹⁷⁶

Weitzmann interpreted the series of multiples as a group of votive panels or *loca sancta* souvenirs, presuming that the changing identity of the venerating saints reflected the namesakes of possible donors who had commissioned or paid for the work.¹⁷⁷ Collins and Nelson, on the other hand, focused on the reception and use of these panels by the monastic community rather than visiting pilgrims.¹⁷⁸ The choice of saints paired with the Virgin Kyriotissa might reflect the names chosen by Sinai monks, while contemporary monastic inventories list icons that were kept

¹⁷³ The Princeton archive now online provides digitized images of the previously unpublished icons with St. George, Abraham, and Symeon, as well as the icons that depict Moses with the Virgin Kyriotissa and the prophet Isaiah. The latter was published by Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images, Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), pl. 30 and by Soteriou, *Îcônes du Mont Sinai*, I: fig. 163, as well as in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 132. The icon of Moses was first published along with the icon of Joachim and the Virgin Kyriotissa by Weitzmann in “*Loca Sancta*,” figs. 48-9.

¹⁷⁴ See comments in note 172 above.

¹⁷⁵ Collins draws attention to the correspondence between the chrysography found on the 13th century proskynetarion icon of St. Catherine, the Virgin of the Burning Bush, and Moses and these panels, especially with regards to the Virgin’s mantle and the folds of Christ’s robes. See *idem*, “Visual Piety,” 107.

¹⁷⁶ Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*,” 53. Weitzmann points out the relationship between this series of small icon panels and an iconostasis beam depicting the Ascension at its center. For the iconostasis, see Weitzmann et al., *A Treasury of Icons, sixth to seventeenth centuries. From the Sinai Peninsula, Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia* (New York: Abrams, 1968).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; cf. Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” 109 and 385 n. 42.

¹⁷⁸ Rightly observing that if intended as gifts or souvenirs, why were all of the surviving panels at Sinai rather than being preserved elsewhere. Collins and Nelson, “52. Moses with the Virgin and Child,” 257.

within individual cells “for worship.”¹⁷⁹ Certainly, in either scenario, the multiple icon panels provide a model of veneration and devotion being offered to Mary as the mistress and protector of Sinai’s holy places. The fact that they remain at the monastery underscores the relationship of the Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάλτου to this site of ongoing pilgrimage and suggests the importance of her invocation and presence there not only at the time of production but in the intervening centuries between that time and our own, as well.

The existence of a group of icons consisting of such multiples is interesting in and of itself. As far as I’m aware, it presents a unique case in the surviving corpus of Byzantine art. However, I would like to move past issues of production in order to introduce and then discuss the possible function of other Sinai icons depicting the Virgin Kyriotissa. There are at least four icons from the thirteenth century in the collection of the Sinai monastery that represent a full-length, standing figure of the Virgin Kyriotissa flanked by two or more accompanying saints;¹⁸⁰ two more published examples may date as far back as the 10th and 11th centuries.¹⁸¹ None of these panels offer an identifying inscription labeling the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάλτου, or “of the Bush,” in the same straightforward way as on the icon with the Virgin and Four Monastic Saints by the painter Peter (Figure 4.11). But because Mary is frequently joined on these icons by other holy figures that were especially venerated at the monastery, the correspondence of her presence and depiction as the Virgin Kyriotissa seems to bear out a particular association with the Virgin of the Burning Bush. Mary, along with the Christ child that she holds out and displays to the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Icons of the Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas/Gregory Nazianzus; with John the Baptist and Moses; John the Baptist and St. George; and with Sts. Nicholas and Basil.

¹⁸¹ Icons of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Stephen and Moses and with Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon. Another possible example of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάλτου is a 10th-century icon of the Virgin Hodegetria between John the Baptist and St. Nicholas.

viewer, is presented on all of these examples as an important intercessory figure and a major patron of the Sinai community.

Figure 4.19 is a Crusader icon at Sinai attributed to the Acre school (Franco-Byzantine in style) and demonstrates the continuity between images of the Virgin Kyriotissa and her association with other specifically Sinaitic figures.¹⁸² Here we see Moses and Elijah flanking the Virgin and Child, accompanied by another ecclesiastical figure standing on the far right, who might be either St. Nicholas or St. Gregory Nazianzus.¹⁸³ The two Old Testament prophets have a longstanding presence in the visual culture at Sinai, appearing in its icons from the late 7th century on, and – most importantly – flanking Christ in the Transfiguration mosaic of the apse of the monastery church (c. 548-65), reflecting their association with the holy sites commemorated at Sinai/Horeb. The scrolls and texts that each prophet holds out toward the viewer underscore their privileged access to God not just in their own lifetime, but also in the ascent of Mount Tabor with Christ.¹⁸⁴ I see no need for this little Crusader panel to copy “a venerated Sinaitic

¹⁸² First published by Vladimir N. Benešević, *Monumenta Sinaitica, archaeologica et palaeographica*, Fasc. I (St. Petersburg, 1925), pl. 21. Weitzmann discusses this icon in several different publications: “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai,” *Art Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (1963): 199-200; “An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah at Mount Sinai,” in *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michalowski*, ed. Marie-Louise Bernhard (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966), 720-22, fig. 4; and Weitzmann et al., *The Icon* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 203, 217-8. It is included by Onasch and Schnieper in *Icons: the Fascination and the Reality*, 72 and by Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 328-9, figs. 182, 355 (reverse), Appendix no. 7.

¹⁸³ The facial types of these two saints are quite similar. See Weitzmann, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 199. Folda identifies the figure as St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Idem, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 329, 635 n. 746. Unfortunately, the red paint used in the inscriptions is too abraded on the surface of the icon (esp. uneven due to the use of raised gesso/pastiglia on the background) to make out the name used in the titulus.

¹⁸⁴ Moses holds a scroll with first part of Exodus 24:12 written on it – God’s invitation to ascent Mount Sinai when Moses received the Tablets of the Law. ΗΙΗΕΝ Κ(ΥΠΙΟ)C ΠΙΡΟC ΜΩCΗC ΑΝΑΒΙ ΠΙΡΟC ΜΕ. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me... [on the mountain].’” The inscription displayed by Elijah actually bears the words of his servant Elisha but here placed in his own mouth, a phrase repeated three times before Elijah was taken up to heaven – ΗΙΗΕΝ

icon,” in the composition of its main group by placing the figures of Moses and Elijah on either side of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου.¹⁸⁵ Rather, the deliberate choice of saints emphasizes the Sinaitic character of the Virgin and Child at center, creating a theophanic vision to which the figure of St. Gregory Nazianzus or St. Nicholas bears additional witness. His position, whomever the ecclesiastical saint may be, echoes that of the Patriarch Euthymios II flanking the Virgin Blachernitissa with the prophet Moses on the votive panel signed by Peter.¹⁸⁶

I argue that the shared activity of *seeing* represented (and further elicited) by the icons celebrating the Virgin of the Burning Bush should be the focus of our own scholarly attention. By placing the Virgin and Child at the center of a group of witnessing holy figures, the icons invite our own participation as witnesses to Christ’s Incarnation. Each of the following examples of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου in the icons at Sinai offers another iteration of this basic premise. The point is not that each icon copies a missing or lost prototype, but that each one reenacts the collective recognition of the Virgin’s honorific role in the unfolding revelation of a divine economy. The number or identity of the saints that could be assembled is practically unlimited. As Annemarie Weyl Carr stated in relation to the icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa surrounded by Christ in Majesty, angels, prophets and saints: “Many scholars have taken on the challenge of

HAYOY ZH K(YPIO)C K(AI) ZH ΨYXH COY. “Elijah said... As the Lord lives and as your soul lives...” II Kings 2: 2,4, and 6. Transcribed by Weitzmann, “An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah,” 720-21.

¹⁸⁵ Especially by creating a hypothetical prototype that no longer exists, as argued by Weitzmann in “An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah,” 721; see also Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 329. The monumental icons of Moses and Elijah by Stephanos or their presence in the apse mosaic of the Transfiguration may have been reason enough to bring both Old Testament prophets together in this much smaller, devotional panel. It is also possible that no visual prototype was necessary, since the two prophets were well established in relation to the holy sites commemorated at Sinai – their place in scriptural narrative, liturgical celebration, and physical topography in relation to the monastery and pilgrimage site may all have been sufficient motives for the artist and/or patron of the icon.

¹⁸⁶ The presence of this ecclesiastical figure may reflect the identity of the patron or donor of this icon, as suggested by Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 329.

explicating this image, but none has yet begun to exhaust the associate meanings that the image evokes. This is what icons are for: they open up the meaning of their subjects; they don't tie it down."¹⁸⁷ The potential for expansion on the same visual theme is demonstrated by the series of icons pairing the Virgin and Child Kyriotissa with a number of holy figures. The flanking saints in the Deesis-type compositions offer a similar range of associations, an intercessory theme continually reinvented by each recombination of venerating saints in Mary's company.

The next example of the Virgin Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου that I wish to discuss is a representative of the Veneto-Byzantine style of Crusader painting (like the Procopius diptych), as opposed to the Acre school, and dated to slightly later in the thirteenth century.¹⁸⁸ While the stylistic differences are quite apparent, the subject matter remains consistent and presents the Virgin and Child Kyriotissa at center flanked by two additional saints. Figure 4.20 shows Mary with John the Baptist and Moses, once again supported in her identification as Sinai's Virgin of the Bush due to the affiliations of both accompanying figures.¹⁸⁹ This time, Moses cradles the Tablets of the Law rather than an open scroll, providing a visual anchor to Sinai's *loca sancta*. John the Baptist is shown bare-chested and draped in his prophet's mantle,

¹⁸⁷ Carr, "244. Icon with the Enthroned Virgin Surrounded by Prophets and Saints," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, 372.

¹⁸⁸ The Acre group is typically identified by brightly highlighted faces, bulging eyes, halos with dotted pearl-like borders, and the gilded gesso relief, also called pastiglia, that covers the surface of the background and frame. These features can be found on a number of icons at Sinai besides the panel with the Virgin Kyriotissa, Moses, Elijah, and St. Gregory Nazianzus or St. Nicholas. For example, see Robin Cormack, "9. Virgin Hodegetria," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 145. Icons produced by the Veneto-Byzantine school are characterized by highly burnished, gilt backgrounds and a much more polished, linear approach to the faces/figures. Whereas the drapery tends to become flattened through the use of stylized patterning and crisp edges, the smooth modeling of the faces creates a highly volumetric effect.

¹⁸⁹ First published by Weitzmann, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," 65-6, fig. 32. See also Weitzmann et al., *The Icon*, 228; Onasch and Schnieper, *Icons: the Fascination and the Reality*, 72; Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 336-7, 343, fig. 192, Appendix no. 43.

as he appears in the upper right-hand corner of the Procopius diptych where he is also paired with Moses on either side of the Virgin of the Burning Bush (cf. Figure 4.1).¹⁹⁰

Like the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist was an important ascetic exemplar for the monastic tradition. The chapel in the southeast corner of the monastery church at Sinai was dedicated to him in the Medieval and Early Modern period.¹⁹¹ Here, he is the one who gestures toward the Virgin and Child at center, while the text carried on his scroll bears John's declaration, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."¹⁹² This was the scriptural passage (John 1:29) frequently displayed by John the Baptist in Byzantine iconography, since it offered his testimony identifying Christ at his baptism and the beginning of his earthly ministry, yet the Baptism was a moment paralleled at the Transfiguration, in which Jesus's status as the Son of God was also announced to his disciples.¹⁹³ On the icon panel, it

¹⁹⁰ The decorative border running along the beveled edge of the frame on this panel, with gilded diamonds and white, pearl-like dots, is also a common device on the Veneto-Byzantine Crusader icons and has a similar counterpart on the diptych pairing St. Procopius with the Virgin and Child Kykkotissa.

¹⁹¹ John the Baptist is also one of the Sinai saints represented in a large vita icon w/ donor figure. Weitzmann's working definition of 'Sinaitic' saints seems to be whether or not they have a chapel in or around the monastery dedicated to them; this is a bit simplistic... Joan Mary Braun's dissertation traced the references to names of chapels in pilgrim accounts from the 4th to the 19th century, demonstrating how variable some of these could be. The larger, more primary spaces like the chapel dedicated to John the Baptist, were more stable in their identification. See Idem, "Literary Sources," Appendix VII, 320-24.

¹⁹² Ἴδε ὁ Ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ αἰρῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου.

¹⁹³ The same text accompanies the figure of John the Baptist on an encaustic icon of the 6th century, originally from the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai and now in the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum, Kiev, Ukraine. See Thomas F. Mathews, "2. Saint John the Baptist," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 125 and the analysis offered by Kathleen Corrigan, "The Witness of John the Baptist on an Early Byzantine Icon in Kiev," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988): 1-11.

functions like the texts held out by Moses and Elijah in the previous example, directing our attention to the theophany visually manifested at the center of the composition.¹⁹⁴

John the Baptist appears with the Virgin Kyriotissa and St. George on another icon that I bring into consideration within this group (see Figure 4.21).¹⁹⁵ Although neither of the flanking holy figures hold scrolls offering further commentary, John the Baptist and St. George both gesture toward the Virgin and Child at center in the same way as the individual saints paired with the Kyriotissa in the series of 10 small icons. Their three-quarters-turned figures and supplicating gestures are familiar with respect to another pictorial source, as well – the composition known as the Deesis. In art historical scholarship, this term has been adopted for a triadic composition showing Christ with the Virgin and John the Baptist represented on either side, their hands extended toward him in a position of intercession and/or entreaty.¹⁹⁶ Examples from the corpus of Byzantine art are nearly infinite in number, but for a close comparison with our icon, see Figure 2.16. This is a Crusader icon from Sinai discussed in Chapter 2, which depicts an enthroned figure of Christ directly above the figure of Moses at the center of the lower

¹⁹⁴ For further discussion of this theme on the early Sinai icons, see Kathleen Corrigan, “Visualizing the Divine: An Early Byzantine Icon of the ‘Ancient of Days’ at Mount Sinai,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 285-303.

¹⁹⁵ Published by Soteriou, *Ikônes du Mont Sinai*, II: fig. 177, but not included by Weitzmann or Folda in further discussions of the Crusader icons at Sinai. Parpulov reintroduces the panel in his handlist of Sinai icons from the 11th to the 14th centuries and places it among the thirteenth-century production of Acre painters. Idem, “Mural and Icon Painting: Appendix,” 393, XIII.250.

¹⁹⁶ For a brief overview, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Deesis,” in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1: 599-600. The attendant scholarship is vast. On the use of the term in art historical scholarship, see Christopher Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” *Revue des études byzantines* 26 (1968): 311-36, esp. 312-13. For a critique of the narrowness with which the term had been used to designate pictorial subject matter and an overview of prior scholarship up to that point, see Anthony Cutler, “Under the Sign of the Deësis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 145-54. A more recent contribution to the debate is the brief article by Charalambos Pennas, “An Unusual ‘Deesis’ in the Narthex of Panagia Krena, Chios,” *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaïologikēs Hetaireias*, ser. 4, 17 (1993-94): 193-8, addressing a 12th-century fresco on the eastern wall of the narthex of the Panagia Krena church.

register.¹⁹⁷ The upper register shows exactly three figures – Mary, Christ, and John the Baptist – in the usual form of the Deesis. John the Baptist, in particular, is quite similar in dress and posture to the saint as he is depicted with the Virgin and St. George in Figure 4.21.¹⁹⁸ And it is the presence of John the Baptist in so many of the Sinai icons depicting the Kyriotissa between flanking saints that helps point toward understanding these compositions as a type of Deesis focused on the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου.

I will now briefly address the remaining examples of the Kyriotissa as the Virgin of the Burning Bush in the Sinai icons, those known to me and those identified as such by other scholars, before concluding this section by turning to the evidence of the 1214 typikon for prayers and petitions offered to the Virgin in the Chapel of the Holy Bush. In this specific

¹⁹⁷ Toward whom Moses gestures, indicating Christ as his successor – a second Moses and the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Moses holds the same scriptural passage on this panel as seen in the icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas/Gregory Nazianzus (Exodus 24:12). For a transcription of the text and an analysis of the relationships between these figures, see Christopher Walter, “Further Notes on the Deësis,” *Revue des études byzantines* 28 (1970): 169-71. The icon was first published by Weitzmann, “Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons,” 194, fig. 18, and is identified with the softer, more painterly approach of the Franco-Byzantine style based at Acre. See also Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 331-2, fig. 187, Appendix no. 33.

¹⁹⁸ The hair and facial features closely resemble one another, as well as John’s costume (the long pink tunic and dark mantle draped over his shoulders). The modeling of the faces and hands of all three saints on the Kyriotissa icon seem as though they may have been touched up later. The drapery and highlighting of the Virgin’s robe in particular must be overpainted; perhaps the reason this icon was not included in discussions of Crusader art by Weitzmann and others? The paper given by Anastasia Drandaki at the recent Princeton conference held in conjunction with digitization project of their photo archive from the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions to Sinai offered a fascinating glimpse of the afterlives of many Middle Byzantine and Crusader icons at the monastery in terms of later use. Overpainting was a means of repairing and restoring venerated figures that had become damaged over time or by structural deficiencies, such as the crack that runs down through the center of this icon like so many other panels at Sinai. Drandaki demonstrated how the central figure was often the focus of repainting in order to maintain the icon’s devotional function. Idem, “All in Good Taste: The Weitzmann Archive and Historic Renovations and Restorations of Sinai Icons,” presented at Princeton University as part of *A New Look: Sinai and its Icons in Light of the Digitization of the Weitzmann Archive*, organized by the Department of Art and Archaeology, April 17-18, 2014.

liturgical setting, the implications of Mary's intercessory role combined with her prefiguration through the Old Testament story of Moses and the Burning Bush make perfect sense. Site and sight become intertwined in a pictorial form that carefully blends pilgrimage devotion and icon theory, standard Orthodox practice and mystical fervor. In this context, the repeated appearance of John the Baptist in the company of the Virgin Kyriotissa is significant not just because of his place in the traditional Deesis composition, but also because his role as witness to the Incarnate Christ anticipates that of the desert monks and ascetics who had chosen to imitate his lifestyle of renunciation and taken up his model of repentance.¹⁹⁹ John the Baptist was their precursor as much as forerunner to the Savior. In this way, the Sinaitic images of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου are directed toward the monastic community gathered at the foot of Jebel Musa perhaps even more so than toward Sinai's pilgrims and occasional visitors.

The Baptist appears in one possibly early manifestation of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου along with St. Nicholas as a second flanking saint (Figure 4.22).²⁰⁰ Weitzmann assigns this panel to the first half of the 10th century, along with an icon depicting the Virgin Kyriotissa between Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon (Figure 4.23).²⁰¹ Although Weitzmann introduced his discussion of Sinai *loca sancta* images with the icon of the Virgin and Child flanked by Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon in his seminal article, "*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine," I would suggest that identification of these figures with the specifically local patronage of the

¹⁹⁹ The number of monastic saints and exemplars included in the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου corpus should also be taken into consideration.

²⁰⁰ Although here Mary is shown as the Virgin Hodegetria, supporting the Christ child on her left arm and gesturing toward him with her right hand. This was by far the most popular Marian type in Byzantium, from the 9th century through the end of the empire, and associated with a miraculous icon at the Hodegon Monastery in Constantinople.

²⁰¹ Both were published in the first volume of Sinai icons by Kurt Weitzmann. Idem, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons, I. From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 85-88, B.53 and B.54, pl. CIX and XXXIII.

Virgin associated with her prefiguration in the Burning Bush developed at a later stage in their reception and use, rather than providing the motivation for their composition.²⁰² This icon of the Kyriotissa has been firmly mounted into the north wall of the chapel of John the Baptist at Sinai, one of two side chapels at the eastern end of the monastery church that enclose the space of the Chapel of the Burning Bush.²⁰³ Thus, the physical proximity of the panel to the *locus sanctus* commemorating Moses' vision and the site of its relics offers a definite connection between the Virgin Kyriotissa represented here and the later association of this figure type with the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου. However, the date at which the icon was fixed into the chapel wall is unknown and may have occurred at any point after its original production or arrival at the monastery.²⁰⁴

The figures of Sts. Nicholas and Basil accompany another Virgin Kyriotissa on an icon dated to the late 13th century by Jaroslav Folda and shown in Figure 4.24.²⁰⁵ This panel and another 13th-century icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa between St. Stephen and a youthful figure identified as the Prophet Moses (Figure 4.25) are the last two published examples of this

²⁰² John the Baptist and St. Nicholas are preeminent saints throughout the Byzantine world, not only significant in their veneration at Sinai, although both have chapels dedicated to them within the monastery walls. The same is true for St. Panteleimon. Cf. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 88.

²⁰³ Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 87.

²⁰⁴ The icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon is published next to an icon of St. Zosimos and St. Nicholas that Weitzmann suggests was painted by the same artist (as well as the icon depicting the Virgin Hodegetria). Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 83-5, 88, B.52, pl. XXXIII. All three panels are approximately the same height. The gazes of Zosimos and St. Nicholas are both turned to their left, making it likely that the panel belonged to a larger set with a prominent holy figure as the recipient of their attention and perhaps a companion piece with another church father and monastic saint flanking the central image. Ibid., 85. Either of the Marian panels could have served as the focus of the additional saints.

²⁰⁵ Attributed to the Veneto-Byzantine group of the 1280s. Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 459, fig. 314, Appendix no. 93.

compositional type,²⁰⁶ in which the Virgin Kyriotissa is shown full-length and standing between two or more flanking saints. My own research in the Weitzmann archive at Princeton University has not led to any significant additions; there are a couple of unpublished icons with the Virgin and Child flanked by two accompanying saints in a similar manner but these seem to be later than the thirteenth century, if not post-Byzantine in date.²⁰⁷ However, if the Marian types used to represent the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου is expanded beyond just the standing Kyriotissa, the number panels from the Middle Byzantine and Crusader period that might be considered in relation to Mary's Sinaitic role becomes much more significant in relation to the collection of icons as a whole. Since I addressed the iconography of the Virgin Blachernitissa above, I include here examples of the Virgin and Child enthroned, as well as one or two icons depicting the standing Virgin Hodegetria to complete this survey of representative types.

There are five icons at Sinai dating between the 11th-13th centuries that show the Virgin and Child enthroned, in which Mary holds the infant Christ in same pose as in full-length, standing figure of the Kyriotissa. Each of these might be considered within the larger group of images representing the Virgin of the Burning Bush; some have already been proposed as such

²⁰⁶ First published by Soteriou, *Ikônes du Mont Sinai*, 1: fig. 197. Discussed by Weitzmann, "A Group of Early 12th-Century Sinai Icons Attributed to Cyprus," in *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice*, ed. Giles Robertson and George Henderson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), 47-63, pl. 24a-b and, briefly, Titos Papamastorakis, "The 'Crusader' Icons in the Exhibition," in *Pilgrimage to Sinai*, ed. Anastasia Drandaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004), 46-62, fig. 3.4, both of whom date the panel between the 12th-13th centuries. Folda lists the icon as unpublished for some reason, and does not identify the saint standing on the right-hand side of the Virgin and Child, although the titulus is legible and clearly transcribed by Soteriou. He offers a date of c. 1275/80 for the panel, noting that the incising and punch work decorating the gold ground, frame, halos and dado zone on the icon may have been a later addition. Reminiscent of Islamic metalwork, the technique was little used before 1300. See idem, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 459, 462, fig. 310, Appendix no. 95.

²⁰⁷ One of these might be Palaiologan. It depicts the Virgin Kyriotissa with Sts. George and Niketas (Princeton no. 619). Another unpublished icon of the Virgin and Child Kyriotissa flanked by Joachim and Anna is definitely post-Byzantine in date (Princeton no. 1080).

by other scholars. The majority correspond to the standing figure of the Virgin Kyriotissa flanked by two or more saints and build upon similar themes of intercession and petition, for example – a thirteenth century Crusader icon that presents the Virgin and Child enthroned with the Archangel Michael and John the Baptist.²⁰⁸ This panel is quite closely related to the traditional Deesis composition discussed above, but substitutes the Mother and Christ child as a unit for the usual figure of the enthroned, adult Christ. It may further emphasize the Virgin's metaphorical role as the throne assumed by Christ in his Incarnation. Several other examples also relate the enthroned Kyriotissa to the prophetic metaphors popular in Marian hymnography; one includes the bust-length portraits of David and Habakkuk in the spandrels above the main figures of the Virgin and Child.²⁰⁹ Another shows the Kyriotissa enthroned between Moses and Aaron, suggesting a Sinai-specific identity (see Figure 4.26). The figures of two smaller saints placed in the frame of this icon, the prophet Samuel and St. Abramios, further accompany the central Marian group.²¹⁰ A similar symmetrical composition is found in the icon of the Virgin and Child enthroned flanked by Theodosius the Coenobiarch and St. Theognius (Figure 4.27).²¹¹ The last

²⁰⁸ See Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 343, fig. 200, Appendix no. 48.

²⁰⁹ This panel preserves the central portion of a triptych and has been much discussed in the literature because of the kneeling donor figure. The beard and turban on this gentleman suggest that he was an East Christian, likely Melkite, rather than a Byzantine Orthodox or Latin patron (although the style of the work is associated with Crusader Acre). Reconsidering the Virgin and Child enthroned as a Marian image with Sinaitic associations might also lend additional nuance to examples of this devotional image as found in manuscript illuminations. The small Greek Psalter dated c. 1274 at the Sinai monastery with a donor portrait of its owner, the nun Theotime, kneeling before the enthroned Kyriotissa, offers a tantalizing comparison with the Melkite donor on the triptych in their shared veneration of Sinai's Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου. See *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 202 (pp. 343-4).

²¹⁰ This icon has been dated much earlier than some of our other examples of the Kyriotissa at Sinai, to the 11th or first half of the 12th century. It is cited as another variant of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου by Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 337 n. 24.

²¹¹ Dated by Parpulov and Weitzmann to the 11th century, although clearly overpainted at a later time. The modeling of the faces on both this icon and the one with Moses, Aaron, Samuel and St.

two examples have been dated to the eleventh century and may represent an earlier form of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου, in which the enthroned Virgin and Child preceded the popularity of the full-length, standing Kyriotissa.²¹²

One of the most interesting icons including the Virgin Kyriotissa as an enthroned figure places her in the upper left-hand corner of the panel along with three narrative scenes. These depict the Death of Moses, the Feast of Herod (with the presentation of John the Baptist's head), and John the Baptist preaching in the Wilderness (see Figure 4.28).²¹³ Weitzmann proposed that the icon must belong to a former diptych, seeking to redress what he felt was an unbalanced composition.²¹⁴ However, as we saw in the icons that framed the Virgin Kyriotissa with two standing saints, John the Baptist focuses his gaze and his gesture directly on the figures of the enthroned mother and child. In this panel, too, his scroll bears the words of his testimony,

Abramios remind me of the series of small panels pairing the Virgin Kyriotissa with patriarchs and saints, esp. the examples with Isaiah and St. George. Perhaps 12th century rather than earlier?²¹² Another enthroned figure of Mary with the Christ child on her lap that might be considered within this group is the central Marian image on the 11th-12th century panel that presents four miraculous icons of the Virgin (recognized by their Constantinopolitan epithets) with scenes from the life of Christ. It is the first panel in a series of six, including four calendar icons and a Last Judgment. Although the central image of the Virgin is simply labeled MP ΘΥ without further identification, she is the one who receives the adoration of the kneeling donor – the monk Ioannis, whose dedicatory inscription can be found on the reverse of the icon. If the hexptych was indeed given to Sinai, “the famous church where he [the humble monk John] found everlasting grace,” this enthroned figure may be Sinai's Mary – the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου. The suggested link between the Virgin of the Burning Bush and the central Marian image on this icon was made by Demetrios Kalomoirakis in *Egeria: Medieval Mediterranean Places of Pilgrimage*, 215-7, cat. no. 12, although without further discussion. It is also identified as such by Annemarie Weyl Carr in “Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage,” 77. See Nicolette S. Trahoulia, “The Truth in Painting: A Refutation of Heresy in a Sinai Icon,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 52 (2002): 271-85; Baltoyanni, “The Mother of God in Portable Icons,” 144-7; and George Galavaris, *An Eleventh Century Hexptych of the Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai* (Venice: Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice; Athens: Mount Sinai Foundation, 2009).

²¹³ Weitzmann, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 190-2, 198, fig. 15; Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 331-2, fig. 186, Appendix no. 52.

²¹⁴ Weitzmann, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 190.

“Behold the Lamb of God...”²¹⁵ The intersecting diagonals between the figure of the prophet/Prodomos and the Virgin with the infant Christ and that of the two more properly narrative scenes seem sufficiently complete as a visual program, even if unusual. The scene of Herod’s banquet and the angelic burial of Moses’ body counterpoise and commemorate the deaths of two important Sinaitic figures.²¹⁶ Although Weitzmann argued for Mount Nebo, the burial place of Moses, as the original site for which the icon would have been intended,²¹⁷ the fact that what appears to be a burning bush is represented behind the figure of John the Baptist in the lower right-hand corner of the panel makes the Sinai monastery just as likely and/or appropriate as patron or recipient.²¹⁸ The panel raises more questions at this point than what I can answer, but deserves further attention, especially in relation to the Sinaitic saints and *loca sancta* brought together in its unusual composition.

Mary’s Intercessory Role and Liturgical Context at Sinai

This section develops the relationship between the Deesis-like compositions of the Virgin Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου at Sinai and Mary’s role as intercessor, represented at the center of these icons as the primary patron and protector of the monastic community and its sacred history. For we see a complex dynamic played out in the newly pictorialized Marian

²¹⁵ ΗΔΕ Ο ΑΜΝΟC ΤΟV ΘV Ο ΕΙΡΟΝ [ΤΗΝ ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑΝ ΤΟV ΚΟCΜΟV]. Weitzmann, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 191.

²¹⁶ The scene of Moses’ burial is particularly interesting, since it anticipates the visual formula employed in later topographical prints and icons at Sinai for the burial of St. Catherine.

²¹⁷ Suggested as the destination for the icon by Weitzmann, who maps the sacred topography of the church on Mount Nebo (with a chapel dedicated to the Theotokos and a baptistery on site) over the choice of scenes illustrated here. Idem, “Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons,” 191-2.

²¹⁸ This detail is hardly noticeable in the black and white image published by Weitzmann; I did not pick up on the presence of the bush until viewing the color image made available through the Visual Resources Collection in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University (<http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6242>). In color, it is hard to ignore!

prefigurations of Old Testament prophetic images and events, in which the person of the Virgin offers a focus for devotion and prayer, but also provides an important witness of Christ's theophanic presence. These dual concepts likewise inform the grouping of figures known to modern scholars of Byzantine art as the Deesis – Christ presented as the focus of adoration and guarantor of human salvation between his mother, the Theotokos, and John the Baptist. The initial selection of these three figures expressed the privileged status of Mary and John as the first human witnesses to Christ's divinity.²¹⁹ The medallion portraits identified as John the Baptist and the Virgin that occupy the spandrels of the triumphal arch in the mosaic program of Sinai's monastery church provide an early example of this witnessing function (Figure 2.3); both figures accompany the Agnus Dei at the summit of the arch, and the manifestation of Christ's transfigured glory within the apse.²²⁰

However, after the ninth century, the composition known as the Deesis became more frequently associated with themes of intercession, especially as it became adapted to imagery of the imperial court – Christ was usually shown enthroned between the Virgin and John the Baptist as if they were high-ranking courtiers, the first in rank among a heavenly throng of saints, prophets and apostles.²²¹ In this context, the Deesis was the pictorial counterpart to liturgical prayers of intercession, and it formed the center of larger visual programs representing the Last Judgment where the Virgin and John the Baptist offered their petitions on behalf of

²¹⁹ Walter, "Two Notes on the Deësis," 327.

²²⁰ Ibid., cf. extended analysis of the mosaic program in Elsner, "The Viewer and the Vision: the Case of the Sinai Apse," *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 81-102. The encaustic icon of John the Baptist once in the collection at Sinai and now in Kiev, mentioned in note 193 above, would provide another early example of this basic triad.

²²¹ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Deesis," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1: 599-600.

humankind.²²² The literal meaning of the Greek, δέησις, is “entreaty” or “petition,” and during the Byzantine period could be applied within a juridical context as well as a religious one.²²³ As we have seen, the term was also used by donors addressing their prayers to Christ or to the saints.²²⁴ The painter Peter had signed his name within the formulaic expression, ΔΕ(ΗCIC) ΠΕΤΡΟΥ ΖΩΓΡΑΦΟΥ, “prayer of the painter Peter.”²²⁵

Thus, while Byzantines might use the word δέησις to indicate Christ with the Virgin and John the Baptist, they also used it for images of the Virgin praying and for either the Virgin or a donor figure in the act of presenting a petition.²²⁶ The traditional formula associated with the Deesis has also been challenged in scholarly literature as various “substitutions” within the canonical grouping of Christ, the Virgin, and John the Baptist repeatedly demonstrate the mutable character of the figures used to express a basic set of related concepts.²²⁷ While John the Baptist was the figure most frequently replaced by the addition of other saints (St. Nicholas being the most common),²²⁸ sometimes both he and the Mother of God were replaced by flanking angels, and even Christ could be removed from the center of the composition, allowing

²²² Carr, “Deesis,” in the *ODB*, 1: 599-600. The incorporation of the Deesis into scenes of the Last Judgment occurs during the eleventh century, at the same time that architecture of the templon began to evolve into the form of the iconostasis recognizable today. The subject of the Great Deesis became an important component of the iconostasis from at least the 13th century on. See Christopher Walter, “Bulletin on the Deësis and the Paraclesis,” *Revue des études byzantines* 38 (1980): 261-69, esp. 263 and 268-9. With regards to the Deesis as the primary decorative program on the chancel screen and then iconostasis of Byzantine churches, see Walter, “Further Notes on the Deësis,” no. 3, 171-81.

²²³ Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” 317-8.

²²⁴ See Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” 316-9, for the distinction between petitions addressed directly to Christ by the donor or by a holy figure like the Virgin or another Christian saint on behalf of the faithful.

²²⁵ Mouriki, “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons,” 330.

²²⁶ Carr, “Deesis,” in the *ODB*, 1: 599; Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” 323.

²²⁷ On this point, see Cutler, “Under the Sign of the Deësis,” cited above.

²²⁸ Charlambos Pennas, “An Unusual ‘Deesis,’” 194.

the Virgin to take his place.²²⁹ It is this third major variant of the Byzantine Deesis that applies to the substantial number of Sinai icons depicting the Virgin Kyriotissa flanked by two or more additional saints. Understanding their compositional type as not just “Deesis-like,”²³⁰ but as visual ensembles that intentionally draw upon established themes of witnessing to Christ’s divinity and of liturgical supplication, can further develop our own understanding of the significance of the Kyriotissa as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου at Sinai.²³¹

The frequency with which John the Baptist appears on icons with the Virgin Kyriotissa helps to reaffirm the interpretation of these panels in terms of Deesis compositions and an important intercessory role assigned to Mary during this period of the monastery’s history. That role can be further elucidated by returning to the liturgical typikon written for the Sinai monastery under Abbot Symeon in 1214.²³² This document was discussed in both preceding chapters as an important source confirming the introduction of the relics of St. Catherine of Alexandria into the main sanctuary of the monastery church, as described by the pilgrim Theitmar in 1217, and with regards to the liturgical use of the Chapel of the Burning Bush. The main purpose of the typikon was to order liturgical services and the manner of celebrating feast days throughout the calendar year for the monastic community at Sinai. However, for modern

²²⁹ Cutler, “Under the Sign of the Deēsis,” 151.

²³⁰ Terminology applied quite often to the formal description of these panels in previous scholarship. For example, Weitzmann’s publication of the icon depicting the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas/Gregory Nazianzus in “An Encaustic Icon with the Prophet Elijah,” 720, says the main group is “laid out like a Deesis.”

²³¹ In this way acknowledging the “substitution” as “a representation in its own right, part of a set meaningful on its own terms, to be understood in a way other than that which reduces the Deēsis to a proscribed set of figures.” Cutler, “Under the Sign of the Deēsis,” 146.

²³² The original manuscript survives at the monastery (Sinai Ms. 1097). It has not been edited, although sections were transcribed by Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgičeskich rukopisej* (Kiev and St. Petersburg, 1895-1917), III: 394-419, and selections from this transcription have been translated into English by Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon* of Symeon of Sinai,” in *Metaphrastes, or, Gained in Translation: Essays and translation in honour of Robert H. Jordan*, ed. Margaret Mullett (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2004), 274-86.

scholars it provides a fascinating glimpse of Sinai's sacred topography – as organized and experienced in temporal sequence and as mapped onto the physical layout of the monastery church, its chapels and subsidiary spaces.²³³

As Nancy Ševčenko has noted, the Chapel of the Bush was the most important of all the liturgical stations mentioned in the *typikon* (see Figure 2.8).²³⁴ It was the concluding visit during each Agrypnia (the monastic all-night vigil), where the monastic community gathered with heads uncovered.²³⁵ After completing the stichera of the Holy Bush (a type of hymn used primarily in Vespers and Matins), everyone stood inside the chapel and recited together: Δέσποινα, πρόσβευε τοῦ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς, or “Lady, intercede for us for our salvation,” before the final prayers were said and dismissal given by the priest.²³⁶ The monastic community celebrated a Great Agrypnia September 4 for Moses' feast day and again on January 14 in memory of the Fathers of Sinai and Raithou, whose relics were kept in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist.²³⁷ They visited the Chapel of the Burning Bush during both major celebrations and, in addition to singing hymns addressed to the Prophet Moses, directed their prayers and petitions within this space to the person of the Theotokos as the primary recipient honored there.²³⁸

Another significant commemoration was observed on May 1, “the remembrance of the great earthquake.”²³⁹ The quake took place in 1211 and supposedly lasted the whole of a day,

²³³ The passages selected for translation by Ševčenko respond to these scholarly interests, focusing on the celebration of great feasts, the saints that receive special veneration, and liturgical stations visited within the monastery church.

²³⁴ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 285.

²³⁵ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 285.

²³⁶ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 276.

²³⁷ This is the space to the south of the main apse in the monastery church; now dedicated to the holy fathers instead of to John the Baptist. Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 285 n. 61.

²³⁸ On the feast of Moses, Δέσποινα, πρόσβευε was repeated along with a theotokion, or hymn specifically addressed to the Virgin Mary. Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 279.

²³⁹ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 276.

“demolishing our monastery to no small extent and obliterating the cells, the towers and the wall.”²⁴⁰ The monks had to flee into the desert because of the damage exacted, and in memory of the traumatic event developed an extensive liturgical program that was to be observed on the anniversary of the earthquake year after year.²⁴¹ An all-night Agrypnia dedicated specifically to the Theotokos was celebrated after a day of fasting in order to offer thanks for their preservation. “[God] did not neglect the appeal of us sinners, through His ineffable compassion and incomparable goodness, moved to pity by the entreaties of His servant the prophet Moses, and not rejecting the prayers of His supremely glorious and all-holy Mother.”²⁴² This commemoration was one of the longest services included in the Sinai typikon; like other Agrypnia, it included a visit to the Chapel of the Burning Bush, where stichera of the Holy Bush were chanted and the prayer “intercede for us for our salvation” offered to the Virgin. Then a final petition (deesis) was made by the priest, asking that the monastery might be spared from other potential harm, whether through famine and pestilence, earthquake, flood, or fire.²⁴³

The liturgical rubrics provided by Abbot Symeon in his typikon for the Sinai monastery supply us with an intimate glimpse of the actual prayers and petitions being made on behalf of this community, entreaties specifically addressed to the saints which we have also seen depicted on the Sinai icons. Additional manuscript copies of Symeon’s typikon in the Sinai library demonstrate that it continued to be used throughout the course of the thirteenth century and perhaps even later.²⁴⁴ While the Prophet and God-Seer, Moses, is understandably one of the most

²⁴⁰ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 282.

²⁴¹ Although the damage to the monastery as described in the typikon must have been extensive, Ševčenko notes that architectural histories of Sinai have not registered this level of destruction. Idem, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 284.

²⁴² Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 277.

²⁴³ Ševčenko, “The liturgical *typikon*,” 283.

²⁴⁴ Sinai Ms. 1101 is dated 1311; Sinai Ms. 1103 is another later copy. Ibid., 274 n. 1.

prestigious patrons of the monastery, the typikon establishes the equal standing and veneration attributed to the Virgin and Mother of God. It was she who was credited with the monastery's preservation during a terrifying natural disaster as the direct result of her intercession, and the community continued to request her prayers on their behalf each time they gathered in the holiest of Sinai's sacred places – the Chapel of the Bush.

Recognizing the icons of the Virgin Kyriotissa as a form of pictorial Deesis further contributes to our understanding of Marian cult at Sinai and the importance of her role within the larger pattern of Sinai "localism." The figures of Moses and of John the Baptist are perhaps obvious companions.²⁴⁵ So, too, the number of monastic exemplars gathered into her company – from St. John Climacus to the Fathers of Sinai and Raithou.²⁴⁶ It is hardly necessary to invent a hypothetical prototype of the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου represented in some now-lost cult image once kept within the Chapel of the Burning Bush. Rather, the *locus sanctus* itself was sufficient to evoke the Marian typology understood as the Christian fulfillment of Moses' vision; the Virgin and her Sinaitic manifestation was a dynamic presence within the monastic community, responsive to their changing needs and yet a constant participant in the unfolding sequence of liturgical celebrations during the church year.

Divine Light and the Phenomenology of Sinai Icons

²⁴⁵ Note the architectural relationship between the chapel dedicated to John the Baptist in the southeast corner of the monastery church and the Chapel of the Burning Bush; described in the 1214 typikon as a threshold before going into the Chapel of the Bush during the Great Agrypnia for the Prophet Moses (when all the major relics of the monastery were visited in sequence, from the larnax of St. Catherine to the Holy Fathers in the Chapel of the Prodomos to the Chapel of the Bush itself). The passage from the Chapel of John the Baptist to the Holy Bush is made "through the Beautiful Gate." Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 279, 285.

²⁴⁶ Theodosius the Coenobiarch, represented with the enthroned Virgin and Child, also had relics in the monastery church, mentioned at the celebration of his feast day on January 11 in the typikon. Ševčenko, "The liturgical *typikon*," 280.

I conclude with a brief coda, coming back to the issue of light as a theological concept and a material condition intrinsic to the production and reception of icons at Sinai (and important to the aesthetics of Byzantine religious art more broadly, from mosaics to metalwork and enamels). These aspects were introduced with our first example of the Virgin of the Burning Bush in the upper border of the Marian panel belonging to a diptych that pairs St. Procopius with the Virgin and Child Kykkotissa (Figure 4.1). Surrounded by incandescent foliage of the Burning Bush, Mary as the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου provides the counterpart to a bust-length figure of Christ placed directly above Procopius, who holds out Gospel text – “I am the light of the world.” I have already alluded to the interwoven sequence of visions and visionary experience represented in the two icons, from Procopius’ vision of Christ effecting his conversion like that of the Apostle Paul on Damascus road to Moses’ vision of the Burning Bush manifest through its typological fulfillment by the Virgin and Child. An awareness of light as an integral part of the viewing experience is further highlighted by the gilded background of the icon panels and the extensive use of chrysography across the clothing/drapery of the holy figures represented, thereby incorporating their bodies into reflective field of the icon’s surface.²⁴⁷

The material aspects of gold and the signifying potential of its presence on Byzantine icons (as well as in other visual media: mosaics, manuscript illumination, etc.) have gathered increasing scholarly attention over the last several decades – from the pioneering work of Rico Franes and Liz James introducing the phenomenology of Byzantine art to Bissera Pentcheva’s

²⁴⁷ Jaroslav Folda’s new book, *Byzantine Art and Italian Panel Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, avail. July 2015), will address the reinvention of chrysography in Byzantine art after 843 and its impact in 13th-century Italy, transforming the meaning of images depicting the Virgin and Child. The volume includes a chapter on the methods and materials of chrysography contributed by Dr. Lucy J. Wrapson, research conservator and art historian.

comprehensive exploration of synaesthetic response.²⁴⁸ The observations made by these scholars apply in particular way to the icons at Sinai when certain technical processes used to manipulate the reflective qualities of burnished gold are taken into consideration.²⁴⁹ A number of icons from the 12th and 13th centuries at Sinai display these burnished halos and radiated disks scattered throughout the gilded background as a decorative motif distinctive to the monastery's collection.²⁵⁰ The icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa (Figure 4.15) is a particularly striking example of this technique.²⁵¹ It can also be seen in the Annunciation icon discussed in relation to the Jerusalem panel with Moses before the Burning Bush and the icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa

²⁴⁸ See Rico Franes, "When all that is Gold does not Glitter: On the strange history of looking at Byzantine art," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 13-24; Liz James, "Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 522-37; and Bissera Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 631-56; idem, "Moving Eyes: Surface and Shadow in the Byzantine Mixed-Media Relief Icon," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 55/56 (2009): 222-34; and idem, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), esp. 121-43. Glenn Peers has addressed similar themes throughout his work. See Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), esp. 101-31 and "Byzantine Things in the World," in *Byzantine Things in the World*, (Houston, TX: Menil Foundation, 2013), 41-85. The contribution by Henri (Rico) Franes in this catalog recapitulates some of the ideas published earlier in "When all that is Gold." See Franes, "Partial Transmission," in *Byzantine Things in the World*, 175-87.

²⁴⁹ The material and symbolic qualities of gold are also addressed by Dominic Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and by Erik Thunø, "The golden altar of Sant' Ambrogio in Milan: Image and Materiality," in *Decorating the Lord's Table: On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, ed. Søren Kaspersen and Erik Thunø (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006), 63-79.

²⁵⁰ Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 105.

²⁵¹ As Mouriki notes, the Blachernitissa is one of three Sinai icons in which the small, shining disks are so abundantly distributed. See also Elka Bakalova, "212. Icon with the Virgin Blachernitissa," in *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, 352-3. On this panel, they not only freely cover the background, but also form rows framing the border of the icon and the edge of Mary's halo. A similar approach can be seen on the pair of sanctuary doors depicting the Annunciation from the early 13th century and icons of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 117, 386 n. 87. For the sanctuary doors, see *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 22.

with Christ in Majesty, angels, prophets, and saints.²⁵² These reflective patterns were created by a compass equipped with a small brush.²⁵³ The circular tooling could easily have been applied at a later stage in the icons' existence, and so do not offer firm evidence for workshop production at the Sinai monastery.²⁵⁴ They do, however, represent a particular mode of reception, an aesthetic concern applied to a range of examples from single icon panels to iconostasis beams, to the decoration of sanctuary doors.²⁵⁵

The material and phenomenal effects of such variegated, reflective surfaces is similarly pursued in the use of pastiglia and gilded gesso on a number of Crusader icons associated with production at Acre, some of which have been preserved in the collection at Sinai.²⁵⁶ The primary example of this technique in our corpus of icons depicting the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρτου was the small panel of the Virgin shown between Moses and Elijah with an ecclesiastical saint (either St. Nicholas or St. Gregory Nazianzus) in Figure 4.19. The silver leaf applied to the raised patterns of the background and halos has darkened over time, but would have enlivened the surface of the icon much like the burnished disks on the Blachernitissa icon. In variable lighting conditions, responding to the changes of natural light and the flickering, unsteady illumination of candles

²⁵² For the icon of the Annunciation, see *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 13.

²⁵³ Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 105.

²⁵⁴ A word of caution from Rebecca Corrie in "Sinai, Acre, Tripoli, and the 'Backwash from the Levant'," 418. As she states, the golden disks appear on images representing a range of styles and dates, thus "not proof of Sinai production."

²⁵⁵ Cf. the list of burnished gold icons at Sinai provided by Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Aesthetics of Landscape and Icon at Sinai," 201-2.

²⁵⁶ See comments offered by Robin Cormack, "9. Virgin Hodegetria," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 145; Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 327, 392-30. Both scholars note the distinctive pattern of small dots and foliate spirals that seem limited to production by the Acre group, perhaps the hallmark of a single atelier. Corrie points out that the pastiglia was likely the work of a specialist and not characteristic of a single painter. The aesthetic interest in tightly spiraled, all-over foliate ornament was widespread in the cultures of the medieval Mediterranean and may reflect a larger hybrid visual culture, not just Crusader art. Corrie, "Sinai, Acre, Tripoli, and the 'Backwash from the Levant'," 435-6.

and lamps, the raised patterns would create strong contrasts between light and shadow and momentary flashes reflected from the irregular surface.²⁵⁷ The use of raised, gilded gesso was fairly common on Cyprus, as well, and has been discussed as a means of imitating the metal revetment used to further enrich and embellish Byzantine icons.²⁵⁸ The darkened surface that appears on the two panels by the painter Peter is deceptive; originally they were covered with gold and silver (the metals have since tarnished).²⁵⁹ Finally, the icon depicting the Virgin Kyriotissa flanked by St. Stephen and Moses (Figure 4.25) is another example of this intentional manipulation of the icon's material and reflective properties. The entire panel is covered with incised lines and decorative punchwork, producing a richly patterned and variegated surface.²⁶⁰

While the material qualities and even the decorative vocabulary invested in the examples listed above are in no way unique to the collection of icons at Sinai, they resonate in a particular way with the cultivation of spiritual vision rooted in the monastery's *loca sancta* – their scriptural history, pictorial tradition, and the correlation of devotional practice and pilgrimage ritual at the site to the model demonstrated in these biblical theophanies. The new iconography for the Virgin of the Burning Bush that emerged at Sinai between the 11th and 13th centuries

²⁵⁷ A visual effect emphasized by Pentcheva in relation to the material and haptic nature of precious-metal and enameled relief icons in Byzantium. Idem, "The Performative Icon," 631-2 and 639-48; *The Sensual Icon*, 123-38.

²⁵⁸ See Mojmir S. Frinta, "Raised Gilded Ornament of the Cypriot Icons, and the Occurrence of the Technique in the West," *Gesta* 20, no. 2 (1981): 333-47 and "Relief Imitation of Metallic Sheathing of Byzantine Icons as an Indicator of East-West Influences," in *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Penelope C. Mayo, ACTA 7 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1983), 147-67.

²⁵⁹ Mouriki, "Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," 331. In "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," 113, Mouriki clarifies that the effect of a gold background on these icons was created by the use of a deep brown varnish over silver leaf, a technique perhaps brought with the painter Peter from Jerusalem.

²⁶⁰ Like the burnished halos, radiated disks, and even the gilded gesso/pastiglia, the incised decoration was probably a later addition to the icon. See Weitzmann, "A Group of Early 12th-Century Sinai Icons Attributed to Cyprus," in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, 255-6; Papamastorakis, "The 'Crusader' Icons," 56; and Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 462-3.

offered another means by which to access divine presence, acknowledging Mary's role in the Incarnation of Christ and as the first to witness God in human form. Yet the typological link to Moses' miraculous vision became an invitation for others to see the Virgin and Child as the Christological fulfillment of events at Sinai, as well. We have already seen how many of the accompanying figures and inscriptions with the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου call attention to "this great sight" (Exodus 3:3) and to the very process of looking and beholding.

If icons of Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου were being produced as a response to and fulfillment of Moses' vision of divine light at Sinai, then the phenomenology of visual experience was an intrinsic part of the icons' message. Encountering the devotional image within a context of scintillating, flashing light reflected off its gilded surface allowed for each viewer to gain access to his own visual perception of theophany.²⁶¹ An inner vision of divine, uncreated light was the ultimate goal in monastic prayer and of ascetic discipline. Such union with God was described by John Climacus, abbot of Sinai, in the final chapters of his spiritual treatise, constructed as a series of steps or rungs leading toward Christ in "The Heavenly Ladder." A singular icon of the late 12th century giving visual form to this monastic exercise of prayer is yet another example of the burnished and radiated haloes of this Sinai aesthetic (see Figure 1.15).²⁶² On the mountain rising above the monastic community gathered in the lower right-hand corner, witnesses to the spiritual feats of their brethren, we also see the red flames of the Burning Bush – identifying τὸ Σινᾶ ὄρος, the place of "True Beholding." What we find in the Sinai icons of the thirteenth century is a new way of achieving this vision, through the Virgin ἡ τῆς βάρου.

²⁶¹ An early 11th-century saint's life describes exactly this kind of flashing visage as the moment of recognition upon viewing an icon of the saint. In the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 21, eloquently discussed by Paroma Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 56-62.

²⁶² Also discussed by Pentcheva in relation to Climacus' definition of true prayer identified by the illumination and purification of fire. Idem, "Aesthetics of Landscape and Icon," 203-5.

CHAPTER 5

Rocks as Relics: Material Traces of Sinai's Past in the Physical Landscape

In this final chapter, I turn to the physical landscape and actual terrain of the pilgrimage site at Sinai. While the desert of the South Sinai Peninsula was first inhabited by monks and holy men sometime in the fourth century, it was the patronage of the Byzantine emperor, Justinian I (r. 527-65), that provided a decisive formulation of the monastery's physical characteristics and its built environment (Figure 5.2). Sinai's holy places would be defined by this architectural intervention for centuries to come. The monastery's imposing fortress walls, the centrality of its main basilica, and the network of paths connecting chapels and dependencies in the surrounding area, were all established in their basic form by the end of the 6th century. As depicted in bird's-eye views of the Sinai landscape during the early modern period, these elements of the built environment structured pilgrims' experience of and attention to the rocky terrain around them as bearer of religious meaning and historical significance; they anchored ritual and qualified expectations for encountering the sacred.

The period between the 4th and the 6th centuries is also when the intersection of imperial patronage, pilgrimage, and monasticism all helped give shape to a Christian Holy Land – the territory of Byzantine Palestine became invested with new meaning and significance as the places and events of scripture were sought out and identified within contemporary locales (see Figure 5.10). Although much more remote and difficult to access than Jerusalem, for example,

Mount Sinai belonged to the same developing network of travel, hospitality, and access to the sacred past. The emergence of Early Christian pilgrimage and the special sanctity accorded to places connected with the life of Christ, along with other persons and events in salvation history (Old Testament and New), has been rigorously studied and debated in recent scholarship. But the phenomenon was questioned even from its inception, with church fathers like Jerome asserting that God was not defined by or limited any one place but rather could be worshipped anywhere.

The tension between the veneration of sacred places and the universality of Christian experience, especially as mediated through liturgy, worship, and prayer, provides an important backdrop to the line of inquiry pursued in this chapter. My argument focuses on the materiality of Sinai's physical landscape, the built environment that shaped human response to the mountain itself and its surrounding terrain, and on the rocks and stones that constituted the actual topography of the peninsula's high mountain region – the places identified by these monks, holy men, and pilgrims of the Early Christian period with events in the life of Moses and the Israelite journey from Egypt to Canaan. In what follows, I will be addressing three specific ways in which the physical topography, rocks and stone at Sinai visibly manifested the events of its sacred past.

After providing an overview of monastic settlement and early pilgrimage at Sinai in the context of a developing Christian Holy Land between the 4th-6th centuries, I turn to the extensive scriptural narrative mapped onto its desert terrain. Egeria's pilgrimage account is one of our earliest and most important sources, although the recent edition of translated texts on the Late Antique Sinai brought together by Daniel F. Caner is an invaluable supplement and expands number and range of historical documents available for this period.¹ My discussion focuses on identification of Jebel Musa as the site of divine revelation and of the giving of the Law,

¹ Daniel F. Caner, *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai*, Translated Texts for Historians 35 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

examining the status and nature of this holy mountain through the patterns of monastic settlement, the descriptions of early pilgrims, and sources related to Justinian's building program there. What both the archaeological record and travel narratives attest to is the importance of a visual encounter with the landscape, as the terrain itself became a proof text for the passages of scripture that accompanied these early travelers and directed their gaze.

The landscape at Sinai was itself transformed by devotional vision. Specific landmarks and natural formations were interpreted according to the events associated with Sinai's *loca sancta*. The second part of this chapter addresses the identification of dendrite markings in the red granite at Sinai as impressions left in the rock and stone by the divine light encountered by Moses in the Burning Bush (Figure 5.15). Geological phenomena became relics, preserving the trace of divine presence. The dendrite stones are still easy to find in the area around the Monastery of St. Catherine, on Jebel Musa and Jebel Katarina. Bedouin guides point them out to visiting tourists, offering samples of rock for sale as keepsakes and souvenirs. Medieval pilgrims also collected the stones, tokens of the miraculous rather than curious mementos. Several accounts suggested that the dendrite rocks had healing powers, although their association with the Burning Bush sometimes shifted to an emphasis on the place of St. Catherine's burial depending on the loyalties of visiting pilgrims and the focus of their veneration. The stones are even recorded in 14th-century Jewish texts contemporary with their emergence in Christian pilgrimage literature, testifying to the circulation of stones brought from Mount Sinai to Europe.

For a chapter devoted to the material nature of Sinai's physical landscape, these case studies are also heavily dependent upon texts as a means of accessing past interpretations of the Mount Sinai, which in many ways are frequently treated as the least material aspect of historical study. The final section acknowledges this by addressing a group of texts whose physical

presence carved into the desert rocks signified more than the actual words and meaning conveyed by their brief, formulaic inscriptions (Figure 5.21). These texts were written in Nabataean between the second and third centuries AD, although their authors had been forgotten by the time that Christian monks and holy men occupied the peninsula. When Egeria saw the rock graffiti on her route inland from the coast of the Red Sea, she interpreted the letters as Hebrew in origin. A later 6th-century account makes the same assumption, stating that the Israelites first learned to write by copying the divine Law given to them on two stone tablets at Mount Sinai, tracing and retracing the words of God as they wandered in the desert.

Thus, like the Burning Bush, the Tablets of the Law could also be seen and read in the stark landscape of the Sinai wilderness. I will be comparing the addition of pilgrim voices to this desert palimpsest and wish to acknowledge the reciprocal nature of experience and interpretation that come to characterize Sinai's commemorative landscape. Visitors brought with them expectations based upon readings of scripture, biblical commentaries, and the accounts of previous travelers. These helped to shape their understanding of what they saw. And yet through a physical encounter with the holy places at Sinai, visualizing the figures and events of its sacred past, touching and tasting phenomena unique to this desert environs (such as manna), pilgrims were themselves transformed. Their own experience, memories, and interpretations became added in turn to the accumulating layers of meaning at the site – continuous strata in the ongoing development of Sinai's sacred topography.

Monastic Settlement and Imperial Patronage at Sinai

The presence of monks and holy men in the South Sinai was established sometime during the second half of the fourth century.² In fact, it was the monks who arrived as the first pilgrims.³ The first known Christian traveler to reach Mount Sinai was a monk named Julian Saba in AD 362.⁴ An ascetic from Syria, Saba set out with a handful of followers and, once they reached “the mountain of their yearning,” built a small church there.⁵ His feat was still remembered by Theodoret of Cyrrhus nearly a century later,⁶ but it was also celebrated in two contemporary hymns by Ephraim the Syrian that marked the occasion of Saba’s death.⁷ Although Julian Saba and his companions were credited with building the first church on Sinai, they did not linger at the holy site but instead returned to Syria after making their discovery.

² Monastic tradition pushes this date back into the third century, although scholarly consensus and archaeological evidence point to the fourth. See Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert A City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (London and Oxford: Mowbrays, 1977; copyright 1966), 168-78 and Uzi Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period: the Archaeological Remains* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000), 21, 63, 166-8.

³ A practice that continued through the sixth century and into the beginning of the seventh, at least according to collection of monastic stories in John Moschus’ *Spiritual Meadow*. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 23.

⁴ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 18.

⁵ It seems that this church was the same one seen by Egeria and visited by the anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza (known as the Piacenza Pilgrim) in c. 570, who describes it as “a small oratory, more or less six feet wide and six feet long.” PP, *Itin.* 37, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 258. See also Sophia Kalopissi-Verti and Maria Panayotidi, “Excavations on the Holy Summit (Jebel Mūsā) at Mount Sinai: Preliminary Remarks on the Justinianic Basilica,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 73-105, esp. 76-7, 87 and Petros Koufopoulos and Marina Myriantheos-Koufopoulou, “The Architecture of the Justinianic Basilica on the Holy Summit,” in *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 107-17, esp. 108-10.

⁶ Saba’s story is one of the thirty biographies included in Theodoret’s *Religious History*, II.13, celebrating the feats of exemplary ascetics. This text is an important source for early Syrian monasticism. See Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 232-3.

⁷ Julian Saba died in AD 367. The hymns are attributed to Ephraim, Deacon of Edessa (363-73), but may have been composed by his disciples as late as the mid-fifth century. Hymns 19 and 20, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 203-10. Julian Saba is also praised in Hymn 14 attributed to Ephraim the Syrian. See Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 28.

Theodoret explains that it was another monk, Symeon the Elder, who after having made an expedition to Mount Sinai with his followers founded two “philosophical retreats,” one on the mountain’s ridge and another at its foot.⁸ Whether these early visitors reached the same range of peaks identified today as Mount Sinai, or Jebel Musa (the “mountain of Moses” in Arabic), cannot be verified one way or the other, although the dual sites of monastic discipline and training mentioned in Theodoret’s account of Symeon the Elder coincide quite nicely with the layout of Justinian’s building program and the evidence of monastic remains in the area.⁹ There is evidence both on Sinai’s summit and within the walls of the Justinianic monastery of earlier structures built in a local style of masonry that may reflect 4th century building activity; these will be discussed in what follows below.

By the time that the pilgrim Egeria arrived in AD 383-4, the South Sinai was well populated by monastic settlements, from Ras Safsafa (the slope adjacent to Jebel Musa) and the Wadi ed-Deir to the citadel at Pharan with its lush oasis, and eventually from Wadi Sigilliya to Jebel Umm Shomer (see Figure 5.1). Egeria’s travel narrative provides a clear sense of the biblical terrain mapped out far beyond just the identification of Mount Sinai, and of the custodial role of the monks and holy men that she met, who were caretakers and guides to the holy

⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Religious History*, VI.7-13; translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 233-6. Symeon the Elder died c. 375-80. As Caner points out, Theodoret’s language reflects his Hellenistic training and rhetorical style – the use of *philosophia* to describe ascetic practice was one such example, as well as Theodoret’s assumption that Symeon and his disciples were in pursuit of stillness or tranquility (*hēsychia*) as their primary goal. Ibid, 232.

⁹ While Dahari and others emphasize that there were no monastic cells on the very summit of Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa), the adjacent slopes of Ras Sufsafeh were one of the most densely populated areas, with many more monastic settlements than in the valley below. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 38-46, 152-3; Israel Finkelstein, “Byzantine Remains at Jebel Sufsafeh (Mt. Horeb) in Southern Sinai,” in Yoram Tsafrir, ed., *Ancient Churches Revealed* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 334-40 and idem, “Byzantine Monastic Remains in the Southern Sinai,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985): 39-75, esp. 42-60.

places.¹⁰ There were five primary monastic centers located in the southern peninsula – Jebel Musa, Jebel Serbal, Jebel Umm Shomer, the oasis of Feiran, and el-Tur/Raithou on the western coast along the Gulf of Suez.¹¹ Christian occupation in the South Sinai reached its height during the 6th and 7th centuries, at which point archaeologists estimate the total number of monks at about 600.¹² This number is fairly conservative, based upon the architectural remains that have been identified and surveyed and it represents a sparse population density that was “unparalleled throughout the Christian world.”¹³ But it also reflects the harsh ecological demands of a desert climate, where necessary food production utilized what little soil and water was available. The South Sinai is remote enough that importing food from Egypt or Palestine would be too difficult and expensive to depend upon on a regular basis.¹⁴

Uzi Dahari and others have noted a distinct correlation between areas utilized for monastic settlement and the geological makeup of Sinai’s granite massifs. Studies of high mountain agriculture in the South Sinai offer an intriguing link between longstanding patterns of human habitation in the region and the physical characteristics of the actual terrain. The presence

¹⁰ See Blake Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 119-43; Hagith S. Sivan, “Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the Emergence of Christian Palestine in the 4th Century,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 54-65; and Sivan, “Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences: Some Reflections on Egeria and her Circle,” *Classical Quarterly*, new series, 38, no. 2 (1988): 528-35.

¹¹ Aviram Perevolotsky and Israel Finkelstein, “The Southern Sinai Exodus Route in Ecological Perspective,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11, no. 4 (July/August 1985): 26-35, 38-41; cf. Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 21-2. Wadi Sigilliya is located about 6 miles southwest of Pharan on the slopes of Jebel Serbal. The only inscription to be found on site that identifies a location by name was discovered in Wadi Sigilliya and refers to the settlement as Sengis. See Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 156-7, which presents a table with 17 historic names for the areas of monastic settlement and/or seclusion.

¹² Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 150; cf. comments offered by Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 24 n. 99.

¹³ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 152.

¹⁴ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 158.

of younger, red granite as well as older, gray granite among the igneous plutonic rock in the Sinai allows for a significant increase in available water for certain areas, since the non-porous quality of red granite produces increased runoff and water accumulation in the wadis and narrow valleys surrounding these peaks.¹⁵ According to Aviram Perevolotsky and Israel Finkelstein, “the wadis of the red granite area enjoy an actual water economy equivalent to approximately 15 inches of precipitation, while only about two inches fall directly on the rock surfaces.”¹⁶ The “overwhelming majority” of monastic settlements in the South Sinai are located in the mountain valleys and wadis composed of red granite, thus taking advantage of the increased water for their agricultural efforts and sustenance.¹⁷ These same ecological conditions support many Bedouin families living in the Sinai today.¹⁸

The ability of the Sinai monks to transform their desert surroundings into gardens and orchards was something that Egeria also commented on.¹⁹ The holy men frequently offered samples of their produce as “blessings,” tokens of hospitality that reflected their own hard work and labor.²⁰ The arrangement and distribution of individual cells and monastic dwellings that

¹⁵ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 158-9.

¹⁶ Perevolotsky and Finkelstein, “The Southern Sinai Exodus Route.”

¹⁷ The available water and alluvial soil in these areas can support orchards and gardens with enough caloric yield to maintain the needs of an adult male during the span of a full year at about 330 square meters/person. Dahari estimates that the average agricultural plot cultivated by Christian monks in the Byzantine period was 323 square meters, thereby providing sufficient food for their own needs. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 159-60, 162.

¹⁸ See Avi Perevolotsky, “Orchard Agriculture in the High Mountain Region of Southern Sinai,” *Human Ecology* 9, no. 3 (1981): 331-57.

¹⁹ On the spiritual typology of the desert and the inverse notion of the garden or experience of paradise created through monastic cultivation of virtue, see Claudia Rapp, “Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination,” in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, ed. Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 93-112.

²⁰ Egeria, *It.* III.6, “As we were coming out of the church the presbyters of the place gave us ‘blessings,’ some fruits which grow on the mountain itself. For although Sinai, the holy Mount, is too stony even for bushes to grow on it, there is a little soil round the foot of the mountains...

Egeria encountered in the area around Mount Sinai were similar to the scattered *lavra* arrangements of Syria-Palestine and some of the famous early monastic sites in Egypt (Kellia and Scetis, for example).²¹ Archaeological remains also suggest that Sinai monks deliberately sought solitude and isolation in the midst of their harsh and rugged environs.²² As monastic settlements spread outward from Mount Sinai and its holy sites, they became smaller and farther apart, avoiding main pilgrimage routes and the popular grazing areas used by indigenous Bedouin.²³ Still, by the mid-sixth century, the South Sinai ranked alongside the Judean desert of Palestine and the Egyptian Thebaid as one of the most significant centers of anchoretic monasticism in the Roman Empire.²⁴

The presence of hermits and anchoretic holy men at Sinai never completely disappeared. However, the fortress walls that Justinian built for the main settlement in Wadi ed-Deir offered a structural permanence and level of protection that would outlast Byzantine control and centuries of continuously shifting political boundaries in the region (see Figure 5.2). Besides Justinian's patronage at the main monastic center, situated at the foot of Jebel Musa, he also constructed two basilicas commemorating Sinai's primary *loca sancta*. One marked the site of the Burning Bush, enclosed by the monastery's new defensive walls, and the other was placed on the mountain's

and in this the holy monks are always busy planting shrubs, and setting out orchards or vegetable-beds round their cells. It may look as if they gather fruit which is growing in the mountain soil, but in fact everything is the result of their own hard work." Trans. in John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 110.

²¹ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 22-3.

²² Dahari described a total of 41 monastic settlements in the central area surrounding Mount Sinai (a settlement thus defined as any site, which contained both a chapel and hermit cells, and ranging in size from two monks to fifteen or more). He surveyed 137 hermit cells and/or one-room dwellings, 31 two-room houses (likely occupied by an older ascetic and his novice/disciple), and 24 buildings with three or more rooms. The number of monastic remains intended for single occupancy is far greater than the number of communal dwellings. See Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, esp. 150, 152, 154.

²³ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 151.

²⁴ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 24.

summit, where Moses received the Law.²⁵ It was this instance of imperial support given to the monastic community at Sinai in the middle of the sixth century that marked a significant turning point in the history of the pilgrimage site. Justinian's building program not only established conditions of physical safety and security for the Sinai fathers, but also provided lasting monumental form.²⁶ These structures, and their relationship to the surrounding mountain topography, would define the experience of pilgrims and travelers for years to come.

The architecture, organization and layout of Justinian's monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai have been treated extensively in the existing literature.²⁷ I am limiting my discussion to the historical context and sources describing Justinian's patronage rather than addressing specific aspects of the monastery's architectural form. As will be developed in the next section, the monastery and its pilgrimage churches reshaped Sinai's commemorative topography, focusing devotion and ritual experience on the sacred peak and the site of the Bush, as well as on the progress required of pilgrims between the two sites as they ascended Mount Sinai (see Figure 5.5). Egeria described the work of climbing these mountains as "endless toil, since you do not go

²⁵ There has been some dispute about the churches built by Justinian, since Procopius only describes one, dedicated to the Mother of God, but is vague about its relationship to the monastery built at the foot of Mount Sinai rather than on its peak. There are remains of a 6th-century basilica on Sinai's summit, as well as the 6th-century church that survives within the monastery walls. See recent reports from the Greek archaeological team cited in note 5 above in contrast with Dahari's earlier conclusions. Idem, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 30-7.

²⁶ As argued by Coleman and Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73-89.

²⁷ Especially in the work of George H. Forsyth and Peter Grossmann. See Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: the Church and Fortress of Justinian," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968): 1-19 and with Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: the Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973); Grossmann, "Neue baugeschichtliche Untersuchungen im Katharinenkloster im Sinai," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 3 (1988): 543-58; idem, "Architecture," in Konstantinos A. Manafis, ed., *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 29-39; and idem, "Early Monks at Mount Moses and Justinian's Monastery," *Pegaso* 1 (2001): 177-202.

up them gradually... but you go all the way straight up, as if up a wall.”²⁸ That path she took to the top of Jebel Musa was most likely an approach from the mountain’s south side, since her route ended at the site of the Burning Bush.²⁹ Later pilgrims ascended from Justinian’s monastery on the Path of Steps (Figure 5.6), a further intervention in the landscape that probably also dates to the 6th century.³⁰

From the summit, Egeria was able to take in a panoramic view of the entire area – from Egypt and Palestine to “the vast lands of the Saracens.”³¹ Therefore, besides the interest that Egeria’s account demonstrates in visiting the holy places of scripture and interacting with the monks and holy men who guarded them, it also provides a glimpse of the extent to which Early Christian pilgrimage offered a new vantage point for defining history and identity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Understanding Justinian’s patronage at Sinai also belongs within the broader context of his efforts to secure the borders of a shrinking Christian empire.³² While projects of urban redevelopment, building up military fortifications, and restoring infrastructure (especially cisterns and aqueducts for the storage and transport of water) were all acts of public largesse expected of rulers since the Roman period, the standard for building Christian churches – both in the capital city and at prominent pilgrimage shrines – was set by Constantine I (r. 306-337; sole

²⁸ Egeria, *It.*, III.1, trans. in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 220.

²⁹ See Egeria, *It.*, II.3, where she plots out the intended route of their party beforehand.

³⁰ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 47.

³¹ Egeria, *It.*, III.8, trans. in Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 110-11. Wilkinson identifies the “lands of the Saracens” as Arabia Felix and Arabia Petraea. *Ibid.*, 111 n. 1. Caner suggests that Egeria simply meant all the land south-east of what she already described, and translates her phrase *fines Saracenorum infinitos* as “the unbounded bounds of the Saracens.” Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 221-222 and 222 n. 68. The play on *fines/infinitos* suggests that we have moved beyond the limits of the oecumene into a vast unknown.

³² Even though Justinian’s campaigns reclaimed territories in Italy and North Africa for the Byzantines, many of these gains were short-lived. After his reign, northern Italy was taken by the Lombards. By the middle of the seventh century, the eastern provinces were lost and by the end of that century, the growing Umayyad Caliphate had also conquered North Africa.

ruler from AD 324). Like Constantine, Justinian was not shy when it came to promoting an imperial self-image, or asserting his piety by means of the art and architecture commissioned during his reign.³³ And his churches spanned the empire. Justinian not only built the impressive basilicas of Hagia Eirene and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but also funded churches located in such prominent cities and pilgrimage sites as Ephesus, Antioch, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.³⁴

At Sinai, inscriptions on the wooden beams supporting the roof of the monastery church (see Figure 5.3) provide evidence of Justinian's patronage and a range of likely dates for the building project between the death of the Empress Theodora and Justinian's own (c. 548-65).³⁵ Justinian is also mentioned on the engraved lintel placed in the north-west wall, above the main gate of the monastery,³⁶ and in a bilingual inscription (probably 18th century in date) displayed on the north-east façade, where the modern entrance is located.³⁷ Construction of the Sinai

³³ Joseph D. Alchermes, "Art and Architecture in the Age of Justinian," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 343-75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 355-61; see also Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed., revised with Slobodan Ćurčić (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England and New York: Penguin, 1986), 225-7 and Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1976), 35-8.

³⁵ See Ihor Ševčenko, "Inscriptions," in George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 19-20 and *idem*, "The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in the Light of Its Inscriptions," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 255-64, esp. 262, nos. 4 and 5. The relationship between the date of the mosaic program on the eastern wall of the monastery church and that of the basilica itself is more complex. See the overview of scholarship and historical evidence as provided by Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 27-9.

³⁶ "This is the gate of the Lord: Let the Righteous Pass through It [Psalm 118:20]. In the age of Justinian, Sole Ruler, Who Loves Building Buildings." Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 25; Ševčenko, "The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery," 262, no. 1.

³⁷ Engraved in Arabic and Greek. The Arabic text is longer than the Greek and may be based on earlier records of the monastery; it is surprisingly precise in relation to the dates given (referring to the completion of the monastery in the thirteenth year of Justinian's reign, AD 557). Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 28-9; Ševčenko, "The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery," 258-9, 263, no. 17. Ševčenko was quite skeptical with regards to the historical accuracy of this plaque, describing it as "the only epigraphic disappointment at the monastery." *Ibid.*

monastery received further documentation by Justinian's court historian Procopius in his panegyric, *On Buildings*, which praised the emperor's public projects throughout the eastern Mediterranean.³⁸ Aspects of Procopius' account (which will be discussed in greater detail below) are misleading with regards to the geographical location of the monastery,³⁹ and perhaps in emphasizing the defensive or strategic value of the building campaign, as well.⁴⁰ Certainly, it is important to keep in mind that Procopius was writing based in Constantinople rather than from first-hand experience and observation. Information about Sinai available from the imperial archives may have been limited.⁴¹ In addition, our own access to Procopius' text (and using it as a straightforward historical source) is affected by the constraints of genre and the potential subtleties of his rhetorical allusions.⁴²

The tenth-century *Annales ecclesiastici* by Eutychius (Sa'īd ibn Batrīq), patriarch of Alexandria, offers another version of the monastery's history and may reflect more local sources

³⁸ *De Aedificiis*, V.viii.1-9; Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 273-6 offers a reprint of the translation by H.B. Dewing and Glanville Downey in *Procopius: Volume VII*, Loeb Classical Library 343 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 355, 357.

³⁹ Stating, for example, that Sinai was located close to the Red Sea. *De Aedificiis*, V.viii.1; Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 273 and 275.

⁴⁰ Caner proposes that the garrison of troops that Procopius assigns to the monastery were more likely based in Pharan by comparison with the account given by the Piacenza Pilgrim, thus indicating another layer of potential geographical ambiguity in Procopius' report. Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 38 and 276 n.15. However, for the extensive fortifications built by Justinian, see comments by Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-700*, 2nd ed., (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 119-22.

⁴¹ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 274, based on Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 96-97 contra Philip Mayerson, "Procopius or Eutychius on the Construction of the Monastery at Mount Sinai: Which is the More Reliable Source?" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 230 (1978): 33-38.

⁴² For this literary re-reading of Procopius, see in particular the arguments of Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 51-61.

than Procopius, although it is much further removed in time.⁴³ According to Eutychius, Justinian's patronage was a generous response to a monastic embassy seeking protection from the threat of Saracen raids.⁴⁴ The monastery's fortifications and its location at the foot of Mount Sinai were carefully described in relation to the site of the Bush. The monks had already erected a tower at this site in the effort to safeguard themselves; this was enclosed within the monastery, while Justinian's church was placed on the mountain's summit.⁴⁵ (Here Eutychius directly contradicts Procopius' account, which says the church was placed "not on the mountain's summit, but much lower down.") The threat of Saracen raids that underlies Eutychius' account, motivating the monks and hermits of Sinai to send a petition for aid to Constantinople, was quite real during certain periods of the monastery's history. He states, "Whenever something befell the monks that they feared, they used to gather and take protection in that tower."⁴⁶ And while an existing tower might have offered temporary shelter for some (or those who could reach it in time), it certainly was not large enough to accommodate the total number of monks and holy

⁴³ Ibid., 277-82. Solzbacher proposed that the monastery itself was the source of Eutychius' account. See Richard Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen. Studien zum Frühchristentum auf der südlichen Sinaihalbinsel – Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn islamischer Herrschaft* (Altenberge: Telos Verlag, 1989), 255.

⁴⁴ Caner points out that there were several other sixth-century descriptions of monastic embassies going to the emperor for aid and military defense that may have inspired Eutychius' account. In fact, the arrangements made by Justinian on Sinai directly follow the story of the Palestinian hegoumen/abbot St. Sabas and his appeal for a desert fortress. The anecdote about Justinian's architect mishandling the construction of the Sinai monastery parallels a similar incident described by Eutychius at a church in Bethlehem. Idem, *History and Hagiography*, 278-9.

⁴⁵ Procopius, *De Aedificiis* V.viii.6. Cf. the longer explanation in Eutychius, *Annales*: "He [the messenger sent by Justinian] was concerned to build the monastery on top of the mountain, abandoning the site of the tower and the Bush, but he decided against it for the sake of the water, because there was no water on top of the mountain. So he built the monastery over the Bush on the site of the tower with the tower inside the monastery, the monastery being between the two mountains, in the pass... he built the monastery on that pass only for the sake of the Bush, the distinguished antiquities, and the water. He built the church on the mountain top above where Moses took the law." Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 281.

⁴⁶ Eutychius of Alexandria, *Annales*, trans. in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 280.

men living in scattered cells and settlements around Jebel Musa. A petition sent on behalf of the monastic community to Constantinople is plausible history, if not fully confirmed.

Egeria's pilgrimage account does not mention a tower at the site of the Burning Bush, just a church and garden.⁴⁷ Although in Eutychius' history, the large tower ("standing to this day"), placed above the Bush, also contained a church dedicated to the Lady Mary inside it.⁴⁸ So perhaps the two accounts can be reconciled, if the church and tower are one and the same thing.⁴⁹ The tower mentioned in the *Annales* seems to correspond with foundations of a square, two-story structure identified in the center of the monastic compound at Sinai.⁵⁰ (See Figure 5.4) It forms the substructure of a building used as the abbot's residence today.⁵¹ Part of what complicates the effort to reconstruct the early site of the monastery is that no archaeological excavations have

⁴⁷ Egeria, *It.*, IV.7

⁴⁸ Eutychius of Alexandria, *Annales*, trans. in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 280.

⁴⁹ The Piacenza pilgrim, who visited Sinai c. 570 and thus after the Justinianic building project had gotten underway, describes neither, although he does mention the fortified monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is possible that he never went inside the monastery walls. His account focuses on the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the Sinai fathers, capable of translating Latin, Greek, Syriac, Egyptian and Bessan (perhaps Georgian?), and simply states that the monastery held the monks' provisions. It also enclosed the spring where Moses saw "the sign of the Burning Bush." Some scholars have taken the Piacenza pilgrim's account as evidence that the monastery church at the site of the Bush was not yet completed. The oratory that the PP describes at the top of Mount Sinai corresponds better with the small, 4th-century church incorporated into the north aisle of the later basilica than the Justinianic structure. PP, *It.*, 37, in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 256-8. The date of the Piacenza pilgrim's account and his visit to the Sinai monastery is also a matter of debate. Caner, following Solzbacher, prefers a date closer to 551 than 570. See *ibid.*, 252 n. 1.

⁵⁰ The masonry techniques used for this building are quite different from the ashlar granite used for Justinian's buildings and fortress walls. Instead, they reflect local styles also seen in the 4th and 5th-century structures at Pharan, where large undressed boulders were selected due to a smooth surface available on at least one side of the stone. Joints in the construction were filled with smaller stones and a mortar of clay and sand. Peter Grossmann, "Early Monks at Mount Moses," 179-82; *idem*, "Architecture," 29-30 and "Neue baugeschichtliche Untersuchungen," 556-8. Dahari agrees that this structure predates the Justinianic walls and fortress. *Idem*, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 59.

⁵¹ The base of the earlier structure measures 12 x 12 m (33 x 33 ft), with walls that are 1.2 m (4 ft) thick. There is evidence of an upper story; Grossmann believes it could have supported three levels. *Idem*, "Architecture," 30.

been made in or around the Justinianic church at the heart of the complex – it is still an active place of worship, pilgrimage, and liturgical celebration. Trying to discern pre-Justinianic structures beneath the main altar and sanctuary would disrupt the ongoing religious life of the monastic community at Sinai so dramatically that such work may never be approved.

In this case, it seems appropriate to consider likely parallels between factors determining the site for the monastery basilica and similar construction of a second sixth-century church on the mountain's summit, which was built up around a smaller and earlier structure already placed at Sinai's peak. Because the Justinianic church on the summit of Jebel Musa was destroyed sometime before the eleventh century with smaller chapels then raised above the ruins,⁵² archaeologists have had access to a large area once covered by the original basilica (the current church was constructed in 1933-34).⁵³ There is clear architectural evidence of a pre-Justinianic structure that once occupied the same site (Figure 5.7). Measuring approximately 2.14 x 2.8 m and built of rubble masonry and clay mortar, it was incorporated into the northeastern corner of the sixth-century church.⁵⁴ Whether or not this oratory was the same one built by Julian Saba in

⁵² In the early eleventh century, Symeon of Trier speaks of a ruined monastery at the top of Mount Sinai, while the adjacent mosque that now shares the summit with the reconstructed Christian chapel was built with material from the ruined basilica. The mosque dates from sometime in the eleventh or early 12th century. Kalopissi-Verti and Panayotidi, "Excavations on the Holy Summit," 82-3, with additional bibliography cited there.

⁵³ The Hellenic Archaeological Mission to South Sinai conducted four expeditions between 1998-1999, with two further investigations conducted under the direction of Nikolaos Fyssas in early 2008. Peter Grossmann (1986) was the first scholar to provide a ground-plan of the early basilica, while Uzi Dahari (2000) offered both a plan and isometric reconstruction. Kalopissi-Verti and Panayotidi, "Excavations on the Holy Summit," 80-81. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 28-37, argues that the church on top of Jebel Musa should be identified as the one dedicated to the Theotokos by Justinian and described by Procopius, rather than identifying it with the main church inside the monastery below. He holds this position alone. Cf. Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 30 n. 122, 273 n. 2.

⁵⁴ See Kalopissi-Verti and Panayotidi, "Excavations on the Holy Summit," 87.

AD 362/3,⁵⁵ it certainly corresponds with how early pilgrim accounts such as that of Egeria and the anonymous Piacenza Pilgrim describe Sinai's peak. Both mention a small church placed on top of the mountain where Moses received the Law.⁵⁶ (See Figure 5.9).

To sum up, Justinian's role and the importance of his architectural patronage for the monastic community at Mount Sinai in the middle of the sixth century are supported by surviving structures, archaeological evidence, and a number of historical sources (even when these do not all agree on certain details). The imposing walls of the fortified monastery still define the first impressions of tourists and pilgrims visiting the site today. Once admitted inside, it is the lavishly decorated interior of Justinian's three-aisled basilica, dedicated to the Theotokos, or Mother of God, that remains the focus of attention. Moses' well and a living bramble said to be a descendant of the Burning Bush are both pointed out in the vicinity of the church, while many of the monastery's art treasures (icons, metalwork, liturgical textiles, illuminated manuscripts and historical documents) are no longer kept in the church itself but are displayed in a small, state-of-the-art museum nearby.

Both the monastery church and the defensive walls are constructed from local red granite, with large dressed stones providing a smooth and uniform exterior surface.⁵⁷ The slightly

⁵⁵ Suggested by Grossmann, "Architecture," 36-7; Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 18, 204 n. 3, 220 n. 58; Kalopissi-Verti and Panayotidi, "Excavations on the Holy Summit," 87-8; and Koufopoulos and Myriantheos-Koufopoulou, "Architecture of the Justinianic Basilica," 108-10.

⁵⁶ Egeria, *It.*, III.3-5 and PP, *It.*, 37. In her characteristically discursive fashion, Egeria explained: "It is not huge, since this place (I mean, the mountain's summit) is not exactly huge. Nevertheless, the church has a huge charm of its own." Egeria, *It.*, III.3 in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 220. The Piacenza pilgrim estimated the size of the church to be "more or less six feet wide and six feet long." PP, *It.*, 37 in *ibid.*, 258.

⁵⁷ Forsyth describes the construction method used for the defensive walls as an exact match to the ἔμπλεκτον work described by Vitruvius (Book II, viii.7), in which the two wall faces are filled by rubble stonework suspended in an abundant mortar – almost a flux of concrete. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 7 n. 6. For detailed drawings and a careful description

trapezoidal walls of the monastery enclosure run parallel to the valley floor, positioned so as to avoid flash floods moving through the Wadi ed-Deir.⁵⁸ The southwest wall, facing the slopes of Jebel Musa, is the best preserved and thicker by nearly one-third in comparison with the width of the other three sides (perhaps to withstand rocks and boulders falling from the mountainside).⁵⁹ The main gate, now sealed, was located in the northwest wall facing the er-Raha Plain, but would have provided entry more or less on axis with the western façade of the Justinianic basilica. While a small service door still offers access from this side of the monastery, the main entrance is now in the northeast wall along the center of the wadi.⁶⁰

The placement of the church inside the monastery is oriented true east and occupies the lowest available terrain; its proximity to the surrounding fortress walls is awkward at best (Figure 5.4).⁶¹ This structural conflict may have become exaggerated during the process of building; adjustments within the plan of the monastery church suggest that it was made larger through the addition of side chapels and pastophoria, the two chambers flanking the apse at the church's eastern end, after the walls and church were both already begun.⁶² But the symbolic

of the fortress walls, see Yoram Tsafrir, "St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai: Drawings by I. Dunayevsky," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28, no. 4 (1978): 218-29.

⁵⁸ Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 6. The walls vary somewhat in height and range in length from 80.5 and 87.5 m (264 and 187 feet) on the southwest and northwest sides to 73.5 and 74.8 m (241 and 245 feet) on the southeast and northeast. They enclose a total area of 6,030 square meters (1.5 acres). Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 25n. 101.

⁵⁹ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 25.

⁶⁰ Perhaps due to the advent of modern photography, as well, this face of the monastery has become the most familiar. The more gentle slopes of Jebel ed-Deir on the opposite side of the valley allow for easy ascent by foot and a raised point of view.

⁶¹ Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 8; cf. Grossmann, "Early Monks at Mount Moses," 189.

⁶² See Grossmann, "Early Monks at Mount Moses," 189-90 and "Architecture," 34-6.

Grossmann contradicts some of Forsyth's chronology with regards to the stages of construction for the monastery church. Forsyth believed that the narthex, side chapels and pastophoria were all of a piece with the original plan of the church. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 11 n. 13. Grossmann states that the narthex and the chapel of the Burning Bush were both

importance of its location at the site of the Burning Bush was sufficient to override usual concerns for symmetry and axial alignment. Not only is the basilica off-center with regards to the surrounding walls of the monastery, but even the main door in its western wall is set closer to the south aisle and not centrally aligned with the apse (compare Figures 5.4 and 2.7). This last architectural detail was likely necessary in order to adjust for the considerable slope of the ground inside the monastery walls.⁶³ Both are rather significant compromises, especially when compared with the rigorous axial alignment of courtyards, basilical structures, and martyria at other major pilgrimage sites in Palestine and Syria (the architectural predecessors for Justinian's project emphasized by Forsyth and Grossman).⁶⁴

What these architectural anomalies help to signal is not just the difficulty of working on the rugged, uneven terrain of particularly remote site, but the utmost importance attributed to placing the monastery church at that specific location. Indeed, Justinian's church must have been intended to correspond with the venerated site where Moses saw the Burning Bush, even if the living specimen of the bush seen by Egeria at the end of the 4th century was no longer growing at that spot. (It is notable that the Piacenza pilgrim doesn't mention seeing the bush, when the rest of his account includes all possible manifestations of the sacred past made available in the 6th-century landscape. He only specifies the spring of water that identifies the site at the foot of the

post-Justinianic additions to the church. However, he sees the masonry style of the chapel as demonstrative of the same techniques seen in the 6th-century church and fortress walls, arguing that it must have been added before the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614. Grossmann, "Early Monks at Mount Moses," 192-3 and "Architecture," 36. Forsyth believed the chapel of the Burning Bush was medieval in date, added sometime before the 13th century. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 5.

⁶³ When a narthex was added even later to the basilica's western façade, it required steps to reach the entrance on the north side. Grossmann, "Early Monks at Mount Moses," 191 and "Architecture," 36.

⁶⁴ In particular, compare Sinai with Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem or the Holy Sepulchre and Anastasis Rotunda in Jerusalem, both built by Constantine I. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai," 17-9, figs. 45 and 46.

mountain, “where Moses saw the sign of the burning bush.”⁶⁵) If a watchtower did survive adjacent to the Justinianic church within the defensive walls of the monastery, it must have been a distinct architectural structure at the site, separate from an older chapel dedicated to the site of the Bush. This chapel is what determined the footprint of the Justinianic basilica.⁶⁶

There are two additional early texts that I have not made much use of here, although they have been employed as historical sources by other scholars with varying degrees of investment in their accuracy and importance.⁶⁷ One is known as the *Narrations* of Pseudo-Nilus, sometimes attributed to Nilus of Ancyra (d. circa 430);⁶⁸ the other is the *Ammonius Report*.⁶⁹ These are both accounts describing the deaths of Sinai monks at the hands of barbarian invaders – either identified as Saracens and Blemmyes or left unnamed – at different points in late antiquity. The texts themselves were probably written between the late fourth and the late sixth centuries and

⁶⁵ PP, *It.*, 37, trans. in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 257. See also Blake Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 119-43, esp. 132-7.

⁶⁶ Forsyth argues that the surviving bush would have been presented in an outdoor courtyard beyond the main apse of the basilica, comparing the form of the Justinianic basilica at Sinai with pilgrimage churches in Cilicia (St. Thekla at Meriamlik and Korykos) that enclose a small terrace or court beyond the main apse. Idem, “The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai,” 5 and 18. Since no archaeological work can or has been done in this area of the monastery, disputing his theory is really a moot point. However, since the two sixth-century sources that we do have (Procopius and the Piacenza pilgrim) emphasize the importance of the summit of Mt. Sinai over the relics of the Burning Bush, there may not have been a surviving tree or shrub at the site by this point in the monastery’s history. Eutychius’ account definitely shifts in emphasis by placing the site of the Bush at the center of his narrative. This may be more reflective of 10th-century developments than of the founding moment marked by Justinian’s patronage. And, until we know more about the architectural history of the Chapel of the Burning Bush and when it was added to the eastern end of the monastery church, the role of the bush itself during this period remains an open question.

⁶⁷ From Mayerson and Grossmann, who have carefully examined the texts for what historical data might be gathered as supporting evidence in relation to other sources from the period, to scholars who have too quickly accepted the narratives as the eyewitness accounts they claim to be. See Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 52 n. 229.

⁶⁸ Translated with introduction by Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 73-135.

⁶⁹ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 141-71.

thus correspond to the period under investigation in the first part of this chapter.⁷⁰ However, while each may lend some insights within the context of early monastic settlement and the monks concerns for safety and imperial protection, they are both complicated by issues of genre and hagiographical intent.⁷¹

The same criticism might be made against some of the other historical sources utilized in this section (especially with regards to the 10th-century date for Eutychius of Alexandria's *Annales*). Yet the general precariousness and uncertainty surrounding the early monks in their remote location is similarly reflected in the two pilgrimage accounts that do so much to inform our understanding of the physical topography and scriptural narrative mapped onto the desert landscape around Mount Sinai in this period. Egeria traveled with a military escort between

⁷⁰ See Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 51-63 for the relationship between these two texts and the history of the Sinai martyrs they both relate.

⁷¹ The *Narrations* of Pseudo-Nilus is a magnificent example of the ancient Greek novel, set within the world of Early Christian pilgrimage and monasticism at Sinai. It relates the first-person narrative of a father (unnamed) and his son, Theodulus, who are visiting Sinai when barbarian nomads attack and kill a number of monks. The son is captured and the rest of the story follows father and son during the time of their separation until reunited in Elusa. The tale ends with their return home and fulfilling vows of asceticism. Rudolf Solzbacher characterizes the story as a "theological romance." Idem, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen* (Altenberge: Telos Verlag, 1989), 216-22. Cf. Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 73-83, esp. 81 and idem, "Sinai Pilgrimage and Ascetic Romance: Pseudo-Nilus' Narrationes in Context," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Linda Ellis and Frank Kidner (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 135-48. As for the *Ammonius Report*, it is a much shorter account, also told from the point of view of a pilgrim (an Egyptian monk named Ammonius) who was supposedly at Sinai when the monastery was attacked by Saracen raiders, killing 40 of the Sinai fathers. Ammonius also relates the martyrdom of 40 monks at Raithou, slaughtered on the same day by a group of Blemmyes invading from the sea. Certain details within the narrative seem to reflect a later period in the monastery's organization than when it is supposed to be set (mid-sixth century rather than 4th), while other aspects of its composition are likely signs of forgery (claims to eye-witness reportage, the detailed information given by a second such witness, and the larger conceit that the text was discovered by another intermediary and translated from a foreign language to make it accessible). Whatever the historical accuracy of the account, it offers a similar devotional tone as that of Pseudo-Nilus' *Narrations*, and does offer traces of an early liturgical commemoration of local martyrs at Sinai. See Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 141-9.

Clysma and Arabia on her return trip from Sinai to Egypt, mentioning that each of these staging posts was outfitted with soldiers and officers.⁷² The Piacenza pilgrim described a similar garrison at Pharan that patrolled the desert every day “as a guard for the monasteries and hermits, on account of attacks by Saracens.”⁷³ Even the route and the timing of his journey to Mount Sinai was determined in relation to a yearly Saracen festival that allowed for safe passage.⁷⁴

The blending of these two projects – history and hagiography – in the texts surviving from this early period at Sinai is important in and of itself,⁷⁵ as Daniel Caner has acknowledged in his treatment of the early martyr tradition at Sinai. Caner argues convincingly for the way in which creating a local martyr cult helped to buttress the Christian identity being constructed for this region during Late Antiquity.⁷⁶ An important component in the developing concept of sacred place, the cult of martyrs offered a Christian fulfillment of the Old Testament landscape at Sinai – one focused on the heroic figures of the desert ascetics and holy men who made this forbidding world their own.⁷⁷ The setting of the monastic project in the Egyptian desert, and at Sinai in

⁷² Egeria, *It.*, VII. 2-6 and IX.3 in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 227-8, 230. Egeria had earlier described the fort at Clysma, “put there to maintain defense and authority, in case of a raid by Saracens,” in the portion of her travelogue preserved by Peter the Deacon’s *De locis sanctis* (Y6). Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 213. See also *ibid.*, 43-4.

⁷³ PP, *It.*, 40 in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 260 and *ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁴ PP, *It.*, 39 in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 259 and *ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁵ “Our challenge is not just to distinguish the one from the other, but to appreciate why history and hagiography evolved here together at once.” Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 1.

⁷⁶ See Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 63-9. This local cult was then adopted within the larger empire. Relics of the Sinai fathers were taken to Constantinople during the reign of Justin II (r. 565-78) and their commemoration on January 14 incorporated into the hagiographical notices of the Synaxarion in the 10th century. *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁷ The virtues of fortitude and perseverance were especially necessary to endure the rigors and isolation of desert monasticism. Although Procopius may have been speaking with tongue in cheek (and was certainly aware of his borrowing from Plato) when he described Sinai as populated by monks “whose life is a kind of ‘careful rehearsal of death’,” he landed squarely on a central aspect of ascetic discipline, the aim of true repentance. *De Aedificiis*, V.viii.4; Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 66.

particular, allowed these monks to succeed the children of Israel within the history of Christian salvation, to actualize this spiritual inheritance in their own day.⁷⁸

Therefore, alongside the impact and material significance of Justinian's imperial patronage in shaping the actual topography of Sinai as a monastery and pilgrimage site, the role of the Sinai monks who first settled this desolate, empty region must also be recognized. Hagith Sivan and others have specifically addressed the relationship between the Early Christian pilgrimage and monasticism in the formation of a Holy Land during the fourth century.⁷⁹ The next section of this chapter turns to the network of holy sites on and around Jebel Musa identified as the setting for various events from the story of Exodus and the Israelites' journey through the Sinai wilderness. The pilgrimage accounts of Egeria (late 4th century) and of the anonymous Piacenza pilgrim (mid-6th century), introduced above, provide the main sources for understanding how the physical landscape was seen and interpreted, alongside the contribution of archaeological evidence and material cues from the built environment at Sinai.

Sinai's Physical Topography: Seeing a Scriptural Past

The way in which distinctive features of the physical terrain in the South Sinai Peninsula and human experience of that landscape intertwined was carefully controlled and directed through an interpretive framework first established by the patterns of monastic settlement in the region. The role of monastic guidance was sometimes offered through the personal escort that Egeria and other visiting pilgrims received. But it was also mediated by the built environment

⁷⁸ Rapp, "Desert, City, and Countryside," 94, 97-102.

⁷⁹ As argued persuasively by Hagith Sivan, "Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the Emergence of Christian Palestine in the 4th Century," 54-65. See also E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312-460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

and material culture at Sinai, which not only commemorated the sites where biblical events were believed to take place in this desert terrain but also, by enshrining them and setting them apart from the other rocks and mountains, caves and springs, provided a specific way of looking at and interacting with the holy places thus identified. This section turns from the history of early monasticism on the Sinai Peninsula and imperial patronage supporting the foundation of the Sinai monastery and its pilgrimage churches located at Jebel Musa to a closer look at the network of *loca sancta* and physical landmarks that made scriptural history visible as a sacred landscape for the first time between the fourth and the sixth centuries.

The South Sinai is not unique in this respect; it participates in the larger cultural project of transforming Byzantine Palestine into a Christian Holy Land, filled with meaningful signs and sites of divine intervention within human history and the potential for personal participation and redemption within the new dispensation. The tipping point in this process was the imperial patronage of Constantine I the Great, and his mother, St. Helena,⁸⁰ who established the first pilgrimage churches at sites associated with the life of Christ in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, at Golgotha, the Mount of Olives, and at the Old Testament site of Abraham's encounter with the Lord beneath the Oak at Mamre.⁸¹ But the development of, and underlying impetus for, Early Christian pilgrimage was a complex phenomenon, still debated by scholars today.⁸² The privilege of worshipping in the very places where the events of Christian salvation had occurred offered a

⁸⁰ Kenneth G. Holum, "Hadrian and St. Helena: Imperial Travel and the Origins of Christian Holy Land Pilgrimage," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, 66-84.

⁸¹ See Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 11-22.

⁸² For an overview of the topic, see Sabine MacCormack, "*Loca Sancta*: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, 7-40; Robert A. Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 3 (1994): 257-71; and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

unique convergence of past and present within ritual experience. As Jonathan Z. Smith explains in his juxtaposition of sacred space as defined by Jewish Temple ritual and the development of Christian holy places, while Temple worship was posited on relations of difference (sacred vs. profane), “[t]he Church of the Holy Sepulchre (unlike the Temple) could not have been built anywhere else and still be the same. Its *locus* had to correspond fully to the *topos* of the gospel narratives... It is its locative specificity and thick associative content, rather than its arbitrariness, that guarantees the site’s power and religious function.”⁸³

It was the resonance between the Jerusalem liturgy, especially the hymns and readings, with the place where these events were commemorated that so impressed Egeria. Her comment on the passages of scripture used in Jerusalem and always *apta diei et loco* (appropriate to the day and place)⁸⁴ clearly informed her own pilgrimage practice, as she applied the same method of regular reading and liturgical celebration to her experience of sites at Sinai and elsewhere.⁸⁵ Renewed interest in the scriptural topography of Palestine between the fourth and the sixth centuries takes us from the scholarly research of Eusebius, whose *Onomasticon* lists more than 1,000 place-names assembled from scripture and, when possible, identifies each of these with their corresponding contemporary locales,⁸⁶ to the liturgical space of the Church of St. George in Madaba, Jordan, where a mosaic map of the Holy Land covered the floor (see Figures 5.9 and

⁸³ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 86.

⁸⁴ Egeria, It., 47.5; cf. Smith, *To Take Place*, 88-95.

⁸⁵ “In this manner, story and text, liturgical action, and a unique place are brought together in relations of equivalence.” Smith, *To Take Place*, 89.

⁸⁶ Eusebius, *Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture, Including the Latin Edition of Jerome*, trans. with commentary by R. Steven Notely and Ze’ev Safrai, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series IX (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2005).

5.10).⁸⁷ The Madaba map depended extensively upon Eusebius' *Onomasticon* for the names and information given in its numerous inscriptions and presents a pictorial counterpart to the site-specific intertextuality of scripture, liturgy, and devotional reading practices mentioned above.

Although surviving in fragmentary form, the original mosaic covered the entire width of the 6th-century sanctuary before the apse and would have depicted the Holy Land reaching from Tyre and Sidon in the north to the Egyptian delta in the south, and from the shores of the Mediterranean in the west to the Transjordanian desert in the east.⁸⁸ It shares an eastern orientation with the church itself and places Jerusalem (shown disproportionately larger in scale than the rest of the towns and depicted landmarks) at its center. An impressive monument of both visual and literary compilation, the mosaic map expresses the fully realized sacred topography of Syria-Palestine (and Egypt).⁸⁹ It answers the "need for the construction of a spatial and temporal understanding of Judaeo-Christian history within the spatial and temporal coordinates of the Roman world,"⁹⁰ but also makes this claim under the roof (so to speak) of a growing ecclesiastical elite. While the Madaba map is covered with names and narrative details evoking a biblical past, as well as the emblems of churches and shrines commemorating these holy sites in the recognizable terrain of the present, it does not include monasteries.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map with Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1954); Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba: An Introductory Guide* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992); and Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, ed., *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997: Travelling Through the Byzantine Umayyad Period* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1998).

⁸⁸ The main section of preserved mosaic measures 10.5 x 5 m. Its original extent would have been closer to 15.6 x 6 m total. Donner, *The Mosaic Map*, 16-7.

⁸⁹ On the sources of the mosaic map, see Donner, *The Mosaic Map*, 21-7 and various contributions to Piccirillo and Alliata, ed., *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997*.

⁹⁰ Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?," 263.

⁹¹ Donner, *The Mosaic Map*, 31.

The development of a visible, sacred landscape at Sinai takes place within the same period bookended by these two, contemporaneous projects of Eusebius and the Madaba mosaic, both similarly concerned with making the scriptural past accessible in the present world of Late Antique/Early Byzantine Palestine. However, rather than being achieved through primarily literary or pictorial means, the realization of Sinai's history remains firmly on the ground. Its sacred past was commemorated in the physical rocks and stone of the actual terrain of Jebel Musa and the surrounding area, whether recognized in naturally occurring landmarks or enshrined by chapels, niches, and other such artifacts of human intervention. My approach to the following material is influenced by the work of Simon Coleman and Jaś Elsner on this early period of the Sinai monastery, especially their emphasis on the importance of material form in relation to pilgrimage ritual and its capacity for shaping religious experience.⁹² I also draw upon Cynthia Hahn's analysis of the construction of sanctity in Early Medieval saints' shrines,⁹³ and Jonathan Z. Smith's discussion of the experience of place and time mediated by Early Christian liturgical ritual in Jerusalem and beyond.⁹⁴ Even when not acknowledged explicitly, these scholars and their approaches have been foundational for my own work.

By the time Egeria, a noblewoman from Galicia or Spain, reached Mount Sinai in the course of her pilgrimage through the Holy Land in the late fourth century, monastic settlement was already concentrated around specific sites as nodal locations of the sacred – places identified

⁹² Simon Coleman and John (Jaś) Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73-89.

⁹³ Her work clearly articulates the stages of access performed by the architecture and layout of saints' shrines in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the Early Medieval West, and the way in which the built environment can instruct proper veneration of the holy persons and/or sites thus presented. Cynthia Hahn, "Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early Medieval Saints' Shrines" *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1079-1106.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

with events from the Old Testament narrative of the life of Moses and the Israelite's exodus from Egypt before they reached the Holy Land. Although some portion of Egeria's account has been lost, the record of her journey begins in dramatic fashion with her arrival at the mountain of God in the Sinai desert. Here she encountered a number of monks and holy men, admired the produce of their gardens, and worshiped at the various locations they point out to her in connection with events from the scriptural past.⁹⁵ Egeria saw a small chapel on the site of the Burning Bush, one on the peak of Mount Sinai, and another at Elijah's cave on Horeb.⁹⁶ She also mentions a number of sites associated with the Exodus story that were not set apart by architectural landmarks. Instead, these were natural features of the rugged landscape that set the stage for re-imagining events from that distant period. Examples include the Plain of er-Raha where the Israelites camped while Moses ascended the holy mountain, the Graves of Craving, etc. Some biblical sites were distinguished by the presence of "large stones" – these include such locations as the place where Aaron and 70 elders waited on top of Mount Sinai as Moses spoke with God, where the golden calf had been made by the Israelites, and where Moses destroyed it.⁹⁷ Egeria even makes some of her own amateur archaeological observations; she takes note of 'small round houses' made of stone where the Israelites camped, their foundations still intact (she comments on similar structures in the desert near Mount Nebo).⁹⁸

Egeria's itinerary was established by the holy men who served as her guides, but also by the biblical narrative that she followed so diligently. As in other places she visited, her own questions would prompt the local inhabitants to find and identify sites in relation to what she

⁹⁵ Egeria, *Travelogue*, I-IX, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 211-31 and in Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 107-18.

⁹⁶ Egeria, *It.*, III.5, IV.2, IV.6-7.

⁹⁷ Egeria, *It.*, IV.4, V.3 (also II.2) and V.5

⁹⁸ Egeria, *It.*, V.5 and X.4

read in scripture. Her amazement at the Jerusalem liturgy (which was so suitable both to the place and time) seemed to inform her own practices of reading and reflection as she explored the length and breadth of Palestine in turn.⁹⁹ The scope of her pilgrimage is captured in the panoramic gaze that she describes from the top of Mount Sinai. From Sinai, she sees “Egypt and Palestine, the Red Sea and the Parthenian Sea..., as well as the vast lands of the Saracens – all unbelievably far below us.”¹⁰⁰ The importance of viewing applied, therefore, not just to specific places associated with the events recorded in scripture, but to the physical terrain as a whole.¹⁰¹

Egeria’s appreciation of her vantage point from Sinai’s summit is reflected in her experience at Mount Nebo, as well. Like Moses before her, she looks out on “most of Palestine, the Promised Land and everything in the area of Jordan as far as the eye can see.”¹⁰² Her panoramic view imitates the scriptural passage in Deuteronomy 34:1-3, where the Lord shows Moses the land promised to Abraham’s descendants before his death, since Moses was not allowed to cross the Jordan River along with the Israelites. But Egeria’s gaze was not just an echo of biblical models, although this precedent should be acknowledged. It was also a constitutive performance, creating the Holy Land that Egeria and other pilgrims came to see. Egeria’s glimpse of the holy places she visits from the peaks of Sinai and Nebo belongs to a much larger reorientation of the Early Christian world in a way that echoes Eusebius’ intellectual project and the Madaba mosaic map as totalizing sacred geography.

Blake Leyerle has detailed the cartographic nature of Early Christian travel narratives between the fourth and the sixth centuries, and the emerging attentiveness to details in the

⁹⁹ Smith, *To Take Place*, 88-95.

¹⁰⁰ Egeria, *It.*, III.8

¹⁰¹ Blake Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 119-43.

¹⁰² Egeria, *It.*, XII.5

surrounding landscape as significant/signifying components. Even the anonymous *Itinerarium Burdigalense* (AD 333), the earliest account of Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, works to redefine the bounds – and center – of the late Roman Empire according to a Christian theological framework.¹⁰³ The descriptive content focuses on the region of Palestine rather than the many miles covered before and after this portion of the journey. The interweaving of topography and theology in the anonymous Bordeaux pilgrim’s account holds true as the primary interpretive force driving Egeria’s pilgrimage narrative, as well as for other surviving examples of the genre. By the middle of the sixth century, the Piacenza pilgrim’s interest in landmarks and material objects that could be associated with an authorizing scriptural narrative also extended to accounts of regional produce, local history and customs. The sacred topography suddenly gains texture. As stated by Leyerle, “the terrain, in all its variety, had become holy and potentially powerful; it had therefore also finally become visible.”¹⁰⁴

It might be argued that the primary landmark within the rugged terrain of the South Sinai was the peak of Jebel Musa, the mountain itself, around which the rest of these biblical sites accumulated based upon their appearance in scripture. While Egeria’s approach was defined by her first glimpse of the mountain of God, many later pilgrims only realized their arrival at Sinai (distinguishing this peak from the many others already circumnavigated en route) by catching

¹⁰³ “The very terrain has become holy by its scriptural associations in a manner more topographical than theological, and yet in which a complex theology is implicit.” Elsner, “The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine’s Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 192. See also Glenn Bowman, “Mapping History’s Redemption: Eschatology and Topography in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 163-87.

¹⁰⁴ Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography,” 138.

sight of the monastery walls and its garden emerging from the desert rock and sand.¹⁰⁵ Sinai's location was not preserved in Jewish tradition as a site of pilgrimage, so that monastic settlement around the granite massif provides an excellent example of the Christian invention of tradition.¹⁰⁶ It also took some time to resolve the question of whether Sinai and Horeb were two distinct peaks or the same mountain; both were sites of Old Testament theophanies as discussed in previous chapters – where Moses encountered the Burning Bush, where he received the Tablets of the Law, and the place of Elijah's retreat into wilderness where he also spoke with God after encountering a series of natural phenomena (wind, earthquake, fire).

The connection between Sinai's peak and manifestation of divine presence through awe-inspiring meteorological effects is maintained in the early textual tradition and seems to reflect a rhetorical device that helps to confirm identification of holy site (especially when its location could not be confirmed by other sources). Pilgrimage narratives from the fourth through the sixth centuries, from Egeria's account to that of the Piacenza pilgrim, also attest to the mountain's sacred character, emphasizing that none of the monks was allowed to actually live on its summit.¹⁰⁷ Procopius offers the most vivid description of the reasoning behind this custom, stating "it is impossible for a human to spend a night on the peak, since constant crashes of thunder and other terrifying manifestations of divine power are heard... striking terror into a man's body and soul."¹⁰⁸ Procopius' report was not based on his own experience, since he never visited the South Sinai in person. Rather, it provides a specifically literary echo of scriptural

¹⁰⁵ The Piacenza pilgrim likewise emphasizes seeing the mountain before he encounters the procession of monks and hermits who came out to meet his company. PP, *It.* 37.

¹⁰⁶ Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 1-2; Sivan, "Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the Emergence of Christian Palestine," 56, 58-9.

¹⁰⁷ *It. Eg.* III.5; PP, *Itin.* 37; see Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V.viii.7; translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 276.

precedents such as the inscription that traverses the length of the sixth-century bronze cross at the monastery and quotes Exodus 19:16-18:

And it came to pass on the third day; about dawn there were voices and lightnings and dark clouds on Mount Sinai, and the voice of the trumpet sounded loud, and all the people in the camp were terrified. And Moses led forth the people out of the camp to meet God, and they halted at the foot of the mount. And the whole mountain Sinai was issuing forth smoke, since God had descended upon it in fire.¹⁰⁹

The bronze cross in Figure 5.11 is one of the few early treasures of the monastery, other than its icons, to have survived the intervening centuries. During the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expeditions, it was discovered attached to the top of an iconostasis in the Chapel of the Forty Martyrs, to the south side of the apse inside the monastery's basilica. Kurt Weitzmann proposed that it might have decorated the top of the original iconostasis in the main sanctuary,¹¹⁰ a hypothesis that seems to be supported by the engraved figures of Moses shown on the end of each arm of the cross.¹¹¹ The two images show Moses removing his sandals and receiving the Law and echo the same scenes included in the 6th-century mosaic program on the eastern wall of the monastery church.

The votive inscription on the cross follows the passage from Exodus with a prayer taken from the Orthodox liturgy: "Thine own of thine own we offer unto Thee, O Lord," before concluding with a petition on behalf of the donor.¹¹² It is an appropriate dedication both for a templon barrier, delimiting the boundary of the altar within the space of a church, and for the

¹⁰⁹ Translated in Weitzmann and Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Sinai," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 392.

¹¹⁰ Following an initial suggestion made by George Forsyth. Ibid., 390.

¹¹¹ Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "35. Cross with Scenes of Moses," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 211-13.

¹¹² "For the salvation of Theodora the Christ-loving and for the repose of Proclo and Dometia. Amen. O Lord, remember the engraver." Weitzmann and Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross," 392.

monastery also nestled at the foot of the mountain, the place to which Moses led the people of God (cf. Exodus 19:17). The early prohibitions against living on Mount Sinai itself, or spending the night there, were another way of making it sacred ground, setting it apart from the surrounding peaks that might otherwise seem indistinguishable from God's holy mountain.¹¹³

The practice itself reiterates Old Testament strictures. In Exodus 19, before and after the selection of verses inscribed on the bronze Moses cross, the Israelites were told to "set limits around the mountain and keep it holy" (vv. 12, 23). It was the observance of this critical distance as much as the admonition that reinforced the mountain's sanctity, a standard applicable to the 6th century or to the 21st, although our own boundaries are instituted and maintained by other means.¹¹⁴ Most recently, the Monastery of St. Catherine and the surrounding area have been added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2002.¹¹⁵ The St. Katherine Protectorate in the South Sinai was established earlier as one of Egypt's National Parks in 1988, with accompanying legal restrictions on the kinds of activity and development permitted within the area. The Protectorate includes St. Catherine's Monastery and the high mountains of the South Sinai massif, covering a

¹¹³ A single, isolated hermit's cell was found on the south slope of Jebel Musa, about 250 meters below the summit. This may have belonged to the monk who was charged with the upkeep and maintenance of the chapel on top of Mount Sinai, as described by Egeria (*It.* III.4). Otherwise, the peak remains clear of any Byzantine dwellings. Most of the monastic remains are concentrated on/around the nearby slopes of Ras Sufsa, identified as the biblical Mount Horeb. See Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 29, 37 and Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 20-21, esp. 21 n. 82.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Hobbs ends his book, *Mount Sinai* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), on this note as a rather urgent call for intervention in the face of repeated proposals to build a cable car for tourists on Mount Sinai. Thankfully, renewed efforts to manage the St Katherine Protectorate since 1996 and Sinai's nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2002 have laid these development plans to rest.

¹¹⁵ "St. Catherine Area," World Heritage List no. 954. See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/954/> (accessed 3/19/2015).

total of 5,750 square kilometers.¹¹⁶ These modern examples of protective designations are an equivalent to the earlier customs reported by Egeria, Procopius, and the Piacenza pilgrim.

The challenge of distinguishing Jebel Musa from the peaks surrounding it was also noted by the pilgrim Egeria. Even her attempt to describe the mountain tends to circle around its subject in repeating phrases: “It looks like a single mountain as you are going round it, but when you get into it there are really several peaks, all of them known as ‘the Mount of God,’ and the principal one... in the middle of them.” “The one in the middle where God’s glory came down was the highest of all, so much so that when we were on top, all the other peaks we had seen and thought so high looked like little hillocks far below us.” “Another remarkable thing – it must have been planned by God – is that even through the central mountain, Sinai proper..., is higher than all the others, you cannot see it until you arrive at the very foot of it to begin your ascent.”¹¹⁷ Yet her account is astonishingly accurate considering the physical characteristics of Jebel Musa, identified as the biblical Mount Sinai, and its relationship to the adjoining slopes of Ras Sufsafah, which abuts “the central mountain, Sinai proper.”¹¹⁸ The shoulder, or ridge, of related peaks that make up Ras Sufsafah actually stands between Jebel Musa and the Monastery of St. Catherine, located in the wadi below, so that Sinai’s peak is indeed hidden behind the initial row of imposing precipices lining the valley.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ No. 8, “Saint Katherine Protected Area in South Sinai,” on the list of Protectorates posted by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency within the Ministry of Environment, http://www.eeaa.gov.eg/english/main/protect_desc.asp (accessed 3/19/2015). See also Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 295.

¹¹⁷ Egeria, *It.*, II. 5-7, passim. Translated by John Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 108.

¹¹⁸ Egeria, *It.*, II.7 in Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 108.

¹¹⁹ Sometimes labeled Jebel Sufsafah, I prefer to use the Arabic word “Ras” (meaning “head,” “peak,” or “summit” but also applied to a “promontory, headland, or cape”) which is also found in the archaeological literature, in order to distinguish between the more multiform ridge of this

Egeria's experience and expectations were constantly mediated by the holy men who traveled with her. Regarding the nature of Sinai's terrain, she states: "I realized it was like this before we reached the Mount of God, since the brothers had already told me, and when we arrived there I saw very well what they meant."¹²⁰ Her first approach was from the "Graves of Craving" (ancient beehive tombs) along the Wadi er Raha (El Raha), a plain which stretches out to the northwest of Ras Sufsa and the foothills of Jebel Musa. As her guides recommended, Egeria and her company said a prayer when they first caught sight of the holy mountain.

In the meantime we were walking along between the mountains, and came to a spot where they opened out to form an endless valley – a huge plain, and very beautiful – across which we could see Sinai, the holy Mount of God.... When we arrived there our guides, the holy men who were with us, said, "It is usual for the people who come here to say a prayer when they first catch sight of the Mount of God," and we did as they suggested.¹²¹

The prayer niches discovered by Israel Finkelstein between 1976-77 along one of the paths leading from Wadi ed-Deir, in which the Monastery of St. Catherine is situated, to the top of Jebel Musa (Figure 5.12) offer an intriguing counterpart to the attentiveness that Egeria demonstrates throughout her narrative to the importance of seeing and reflecting on the biblical landscape around her. The niches were built from fieldstones to the height of 0.75-1 meter and are rectangular or apsidal in shape, remaining open on one side, as in Figure 5.13.¹²² All of them face in a general eastward direction. Several of the semicircular niches overlook magnificent

mountain abutting Sinai and to use "Jebel" for Jebel Musa and Jebel Katarina, both of which have a much more distinctive summit.

¹²⁰ Egeria, *It.*, II.7; Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 108.

¹²¹ Egeria, *It.*, I.1-2; Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 107.

¹²² Their average size is 2 x 2.5 m. The walls measure between 0.5-0.75 m in width and were laid without mortar. They are made either from single stones throughout, or two rows of stones containing fill between them. Israel Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches in Southern Sinai," *Israel Exploration Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1981): 81-91.

views, while others are directed toward the top of Mount Sinai. The very first glimpse of the mountain's peak along this route is marked out by one such structure.¹²³

Perhaps the most intriguing find is a prayer niche located almost exactly where Egeria describes her first glimpse of Mount Sinai.¹²⁴ Placed on top of Naqb el-Hawa, about six kilometers northwest of Ras Sufsafeh, it commands a view from the watershed where it opens out onto the er-Raha plain with Sufsafeh rising up in the background. Until paved roads for automobile access became the primary means of access to the Sinai monastery, Naqb el-Hawa was still the route used by pilgrims and travelers to cross from the Feiran Oasis (the town of Pharan in the Byzantine period). Sections of paving along the path and partial retaining walls can still be seen along this route.¹²⁵ Thus, even after Egeria and other pilgrims who might have used the tiny alcove of rock to commemorate their first glimpse of the holy mountain passed by, this prayer niche demonstrates a careful response to the natural environs and the human effort to magnify and impart meaning to specific elements of the surrounding landscape. A handful of prayer niches that have been discovered in the vicinity of other monastic settlements in the South Sinai likewise privilege a clear line of vision toward Jebel Musa, helping to focus the attention of fellow monks and ascetics on this holy summit, not just that of visiting pilgrims.¹²⁶

¹²³ Views of Jebel Musa are noted from the following niches along Sikket Shu'eib as it ascends to the Valley of Elijah: 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11. Niche 14 is one of two similar structures that are not located along the path with nos. 1-12, but is part of a monastic complex to the south of Jebel Sufsafeh, directly beneath the peak of Mount Sinai. The mountain is visible from this niche, as well. Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," 84-86.

¹²⁴ Niche no. 15. This was first discovered by A. Perevolotsky of the Tzukei David Field School, and later surveyed by Finkelstein in 1978. Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," 87.

¹²⁵ Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," 87.

¹²⁶ Niches 15-18 are all located in the greater vicinity surrounding Jebel Musa. Additional prayer niches have been found in the monastic remains around Jebel Serbal and Jebel Umm Shomer, although these are too far removed from the settlements around Jebel Musa to refer devotion to its peak. Rather, they may have functioned similarly in relation to their own local topography. Of no. 20, a prayer niche along a path leading from Wadi Muwajed to a monastic complex known as

The regular pauses that Egeria describes as part of her pilgrimage experience, when she read from passages of scripture appropriate to the sites visited and seen, may reflect a more long-standing ritual practice utilized by monastic guardians and later pilgrims at Sinai. The prayer niches work to inscribe this pattern of viewing on the desert landscape, joining inner and outer forms of reflection (spiritual insight blended with more general appreciation for Sinai's rugged terrain/grand vistas) as they create a local geography imbued with meaning due to its relationship with biblical past. While archaeologists admit the difficulty of establishing a precise dating for the prayer niches due to a lack of other datable finds, the structures have been assumed contemporary with the period when monastic settlement was at its greatest extent/florescence in region.¹²⁷ And because many fewer pilgrimage accounts to Sinai survive from this early period, we have fewer comparanda to work with in establishing what may or may not have been a "typical" pilgrimage experience in the 4th-6th centuries.

For example, the abundance of narrative detail given by Egeria throughout her account and her concern to match each location with its corresponding passage in scripture offers a stark contrast to the rather cursory description of Sinai and its holy sites provided by the anonymous Piacenza Pilgrim (c. 551-570).¹²⁸ This later traveler mentions some of the same primary landmarks seen by Egeria – the rock that was struck by Moses to provide water, Mount Sinai/Horeb and the small chapel on the mountain's peak, the cave of Elijah and the site of Burning Bush – but he seems to have been just as interested in the Saracen idol that was

el-Fra'iyeh, Finkelstein comments that it stands at the top of the ascent, from which there is an impressive view. Another, no. 21, marks the first glimpse of a complex situated at Farsh Habash. Idem, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," 89-90.

¹²⁷ Archaeological surveys also show that after the seventh century, monks did not inhabit the slope of Ras Sufsafeh in the same numbers as before and the primary path of pilgrimage shifted from Sikket Shu'eib to the Path of Steps on the northeast part of the mountain. Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," 91 n. 12.

¹²⁸ PP, *It.*, 33-42 in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 252-62.

worshipped on same slopes as he was in the Christian holy site (even though the Piacenza pilgrim participated in the fulfillment of some vow or devotional experience by cutting off his beard once he reached the top of Mount Sinai).¹²⁹ Still, the Piacenza pilgrim's arrival at the monastery coincides with a number of elements found in Egeria's account, as well. He emphasizes their arrival at the mountain of God in conjunction with a procession of monks and hermits that come out to greet them.¹³⁰ Like Egeria, his experience of the site was mediated by and highly contingent upon the presence of these desert ascetics and holy men. The monks at Sinai, now protected by the high walls of Justinian's fortress monastery, remained the primary guardians and interpreters of this landscape and its *loca sancta*.

Material Impressions of the Past: Rocks as Relics

From this broader panorama of the Sinai landscape and its sacred topography, I will be turning toward two much more narrowly defined case studies that address rock and stone not just as material links with the past, but also as a medium capable of bearing signifying traces from scriptural history. The vast expanses of rock that form the geologic strata of the peninsula – sandstone, red and gray granite (plutonic and igneous stone created by hundreds of thousands of years of intense heat and pressure) – become contact relics shaped by the singular events taking place on their surface. To borrow a term from linguistic theory; these rocks serve as indexical

¹²⁹ PP, *It.*, 37-8.

¹³⁰ “As we headed on from there to ascend Sina, behold!, a great number of monks and hermits beyond counting came out to meet us, carrying crosses and singing psalms. They lay down on the ground and made obeisance to us, and we did likewise, weeping.” PP, *It.*, 37.

signs, pointing back to the moment in which they participated as mute witnesses, yet still bearing the imprint of that defining instance.¹³¹

Some of the holy sites in the larger area surrounding Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine would fall into this category. The rock struck by Moses to bring forth water, which still carried the marks of twelve gushing springs (one for each of the tribes of Israel), is one example. Another is the mold for the Golden Calf pointed out in the rocks at the mouth of Wadi ed-Deir, where the outline of a horned bovine head can be made out by the discerning eye. Other imprints accumulated at the pilgrimage site over the centuries, from the cleft of the rock where Moses hid himself as God's glory passed by to the form of St. Catherine's body on top of the mountain peak where she rested. Even the angels attending her burial were substantial enough to leave marks in the stone, one guarding her head and the other her feet. Eventually, the print of Mohammed's camel could also be found at Sinai, commemorating the Prophet's night journey.

The two examples I have chosen to explore in greater detail are both material traces of Sinai's sacred past that were not limited to a specific location or landmark. Although each one derives its significance from the primary holy sites commemorated by the monastery and its 6th-century churches at the foot of Horeb/Sinai and on its peak, where Moses saw the Burning Bush and received the Tablets of the Law, the physical evidence of and for these events permeated the surrounding landscape. The Burning Bush was identified with the branching patterns of dendritic pyrolusite, an oxidized form of manganese deposits, which can still be observed in fragments of Sinai's red granite on and around Jebel Musa and Mount St. Catherine today (Figure 5.14). The Law, engraved by the very finger of God on stone tablets, was seen by early pilgrims in the

¹³¹ See Robert S. Nelson's discussion of the categories defined by Charles Saunders Peirce in his article, "Byzantine Art vs. Western Medieval Art," in *Byzance et le monde extérieur*, ed. Michel Balard et al., (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2005), esp. 255-70, 261.

Nabataean inscriptions distributed across the entire South Sinai Peninsula (Figure 5.21). Unable to decipher the Semitic script, later travelers presumed that it must represent the beginnings of the Hebrew alphabet, given to the Israelites at Sinai, and believed that the Jews, in their desert wanderings, copied these divine commandments over and over again at each camp and resting place. Like the other material impressions and markers of the biblical narrative preserved in the rocks and stones of Sinai, however, the dendrite samples and inscriptions invited touch and participation in this sacred past/timeless present. Just as pilgrims had crawled into the rock which once sheltered Moses' body or chipped away pieces of the stone where St. Catherine lay, individuals could also collect relics of the Burning Bush by means of the miraculously imprinted stone and add their own names and prayers to the desert graffiti along the routes they traveled.

The Burning Bush offers a particularly elusive and ephemeral physical link to Moses' first encounter with God at Sinai/Horeb over the course of our monastery's history. Although the location of the main church and fortress in Wadi ed-Deir depended upon the site of Moses' theophanic vision in relation to the nearby slopes of Jebel Musa, the presence of the bush itself as a living relic and marker of the past was only occasionally available and shown to visiting pilgrims. This should come as no surprise, considering the brief lifespan of flora and fauna in a harsh desert environment, especially when compared to its more durable elements of rock and stone. Eventually the desire for access to the Burning Bush merged with the physical landscape, memorialized in the branching patterns of manganese dendrites found in abundance in the local red granite. Interpreted as fossilized plant forms or the imprint of Moses' vision caused by the intensity of divine light, these stone were collected by pilgrims as a kind of substitute relic for the Burning Bush. Their very existence at Sinai was understood to be miraculous, thus rewarding those who reached the mountain with another form of divine revelation and self-disclosure.

Egeria was the only medieval pilgrim who seems to have found an actual bush at the spot of Moses' first theophany. It stood in front of a small church at the head of the valley and was surrounded by monastic cells. She describes the plant as "alive and sprouting," sending out green shoots into the monastery garden.¹³² Egeria's party arrived late in the day after descending from the peak of Mount Sinai, so they did not celebrate a Eucharistic liturgy (as was their custom at the various *loca sancta* visited on their route) until the following morning. Instead they "had a prayer in the church, and also in the garden by the Bush, and as usual the appropriate passage was read from the Book of Moses."¹³³ After Egeria's pilgrimage in AD 383-4, no other visitors to Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine mention seeing a living bramble at the site of its commemoration until the eighteenth century.¹³⁴ This newly-introduced descendent of the Burning Bush was carefully tended within the monastery walls, where it still flourishes today.

Richard Pococke, who reached the Sinai monastery in 1738, was the first modern traveler to mention seeing this later representative of its miraculous forebear. After describing the well of Moses and the chapel of the Holy Bush inside the convent, Pococke says: "In a garden near, the fathers have planted a bramble, such as are common in Europe, ... though such brambles do not grow in these parts; but they tell you formerly they did."¹³⁵ Karl Ritter, who visited in 1864, also

¹³² *It. Eg.* IV.6-7.

¹³³ *It. Eg.* IV.8.

¹³⁴ The 12th-century guidebook, *On the Holy Places*, by Peter the Deacon, mentions the bush at Sinai, although his text is adapted from various sources including Egeria's travel account. It is also mentioned in the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1335): "They also show the bush which burnt and was not consumed, in which our Lord spake to Moses; and they have many other relics." Translated and edited by Thomas Wright, *Early Travels in Palestine* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), 158. The author of this account was also a masterful compiler of previous source material and likely never visited Mount Sinai in person. Several other details (like the bloody piece of cloth preserved from St. Catherine's martyrdom) in Mandeville are found nowhere else.

¹³⁵ Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries* (London: W. Bowyer, 1743-45), v. 1, 143. Marie-Joseph de Geramb, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Mount Sinai*

pointed out the presence of “another bush” growing in the court directly behind the choir of the main church, explaining that it was believed to have sprung up from the roots of original Bush.¹³⁶ Photographs of the Burning Bush taken at the monastery in the 1960’s and 70’s show a handful of long, green branches reaching upwards for the sun (see Figure 5.17).¹³⁷ The plant has evidently flourished in the intervening years (cf. Figure 2.25); it now is thick with foliage and kept trimmed just above the heads of passing tourists. The wire netting that keeps it in place, as well as the supporting stone wall enclosing its roots, are both filled with tiny pieces of paper – prayers that have been tucked into the available cracks and left behind by numerous visitors, tourists and pilgrims (Figure 2.26).

Monastic tradition asserts that the bush is found nowhere else and impossible to transplant; it will only grow on Sinai’s sacred soil.¹³⁸ Leaves are sometimes given to pilgrims to carry away as souvenirs of their visit, and at least on the occasion of my first trip to the monastery, they were also available for purchase in the small monastery gift shop, pressed and preserved between two layers of cellophane.¹³⁹ The Latin name given to the specimen found within the Sinai monastery is *Rubus sanctus*, a subspecies of *Rubus ulmifolius* and member of the

(Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1840), v. 2, 243, refers directly to Pococke’s account but in order to contradict the “most ridiculous imposture” asserted by the monks.

¹³⁶ Karl Ritter, *The Comparative Geography of Palestine and the Sinaitic Peninsula*, trans. William L. Gage (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1870), v. 1, 234. All of the above (Pococke, Geramb, and Ritter) are cited in Braun, “Literary Sources,” 246.

¹³⁷ See for example, the tipped-in color illustration on p. 28 in Heinz Skrobucha, *Sinai* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); cf. photos from the Alexandria-Michigan-Princeton expedition.

¹³⁸ Continuity with the site where the Chapel of the Burning Bush is located is also important. The roots belonging the original bush are supposed to rest beneath the altar of this chapel. It is said that the surviving plant was moved when this area was enclosed (sometime in the tenth century), so that it could receive adequate sun and water. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 103-5.

¹³⁹ This was in August 2006. Since then, the gift shop has been moved from the tiny alcove next the main tourist entrance (through the gate in the northeast wall) to a new structure built in the gardens at some point between 2007-2010. I did not see any of the leaves of the Bush for sale in the new gift shop in March or December 2010.

Rosaceae family.¹⁴⁰ It is endemic, unique to the high mountain climate and environmental conditions of the South Sinai.¹⁴¹ Joseph Hobbs claims to have located several other examples thriving outside the monastery walls, although he acknowledges that *R. sanctus* is quite rare and appears to be limited to the area immediately surrounding Jebel Musa.¹⁴² A number of biblical scholars have tried to identify an exact plant species with the bush mentioned in Exodus 3: 2-4. The Hebrew word, *seneh* or *s'neh*, only means a thorny bramble, as does the Greek “batos” (βάτος) into which it was translated.¹⁴³

Curiously, only one pilgrim specifically noted the absence of the Burning Bush at Sinai during the intervening centuries between Egeria's visit and the modern replanting of the *Rubus sanctus*. This was Magister Thietmar, whose pilgrimage account at the beginning of the

¹⁴⁰ The two brambles are closely related. Because they demonstrate a high degree of morphological variability and exist in a number of hybrid biotypes, the taxonomy is often confused. Both are Mediterranean species, although *R. sanctus* is found further east than *R. ulmifolius* with a distribution that reaches from Syria, Iran, and Caucasian countries to the Crimea and northwestern Himalaya. See E. Monasterio-Huelin and H. E. Webert, “Taxonomy and nomenclature of *Rubus Ulmifolius* and *Rubus Sanctus* (Rosaceae),” *Edinburgh Journal of Botany* 53, no. 3 (November 1996): 311-22.

¹⁴¹ Joseph Hobbs describes the presence and ecological history of Central Asiatic steppe vegetation in the high mountain region of the South Sinai in some detail, noting that *Rubus sanctus*, like many of Sinai's endemic plant species, evolved from the remnants of trees and shrubs native to Central Asia that had expanded their range during cooler, wetter times and then retreated as the climate grew hotter and dryer. In this instance, it is the black volcanic peaks of the South Sinai that offer ideal conditions for the vegetation suited to the Central Asiatic steppes – snow tends to remain longer here than on the mountains composed primarily of red granite, and the small rocks and soil created through erosion help to absorb and retain moisture. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 18.

¹⁴² Where the bush is known better by its Arabic name, ‘*allayg*. These sites include the swimming hole at al-Galt al-Azraq, a place higher up in Wadi Tala’, and outside the retreat of St. John Climacus in Wadi Itlaah. Ibid., 105.

¹⁴³ The *Acacia nilotica*, common throughout the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, and as far as the shores of the Dead Sea, is a popular choice. See Harold N. Moldenke and Alma L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, MA: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952), 23 and 206-7. Cf. Michael Zohary, who pursues a purely linguistic identification for the Hebrew *sneh*, puts forward the identification of the *Cassia senna*, a shrub that goes by the name *sene* in all Arabic-speaking countries, as the burning bush of Moses' encounter. Idem, *Plants of the Bible: A Complete Handbook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 140-41.

thirteenth century anticipates many of the details that become familiar in later travel narratives (in particular, the prominence of St. Catherine's tomb and the veneration of her relics at Sinai).¹⁴⁴ His description of the chapel of the Burning Bush (Figure 5.18) is the earliest documentation that we have for this enclosed space behind the main sanctuary of the monastery church.¹⁴⁵ As Thietmar explains, "The bush, however, has been carried off and divided among Christians for relics..."¹⁴⁶ In its place, a golden replica made "in the likeness of the real bush," was displayed instead.¹⁴⁷ This replica, with the figure of Moses flanking it on either side, has attracted a good deal of art historical interest in the effort to determine what exactly Thietmar may have seen.¹⁴⁸ For our purposes, it is the absence of the "real bush" that is most significant – an absence merely amplified by the images that replace it. Thietmar's account also makes note of the importance of the Bush's value as a relic, so much so that it has been completely broken up and dispersed.

In the same passage, Thietmar briefly mentions the existence of rocks with plant-like patterns found in them (see Figure 5.15), stating: "In this place there are... dug up stones which have on them a kind of painted likeness of the bush, and which are effective against various kinds of illnesses."¹⁴⁹ Thietmar does not specify the medical uses for which the stones might be applied. They were probably as varied as the prophylactic properties of other samples of earth,

¹⁴⁴ Thietmar's account has recently been translated in full by Denys Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187-1291*, Crusade Texts in Translation 23 (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 95-133.

¹⁴⁵ Forsyth dates the architectural intervention to the medieval period, while Peter Grossman believes the chapel was built in the sixth century based upon the similarity of masonry techniques between this addition and the Justinianic basilica. Both architectural historians agree that the area was not originally enclosed.

¹⁴⁶ Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, 125.

¹⁴⁷ Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, 125.

¹⁴⁸ Discussed at length in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁹ Thietmar's account again provides the first reference to dendrite stones at Sinai; they become more common in pilgrimage narratives of the fourteenth century and later. See Susan Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee' (Ex. 3.12): *Lapis Sinaiticus* in Jewish and Christian Traditions," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, no. 1 (2003): 1-20, esp. 5-6.

oil, and water acquired from holy sites throughout the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁰ Or, perhaps the stones provided remedies for the same list of ailments that their prototype, the bramble (ὁ Βάτος) did. In the medical treatise by the second-century Greek writer Dioscurides, *De Materia Medica*, the humble blackberry (Figure 5.16) is described as suitable to heal snakebite, strengthen the gums or heal thrush when chewed, and when the leaves are applied as a plaster, they “keep in check shingles, treat head scurf, prolapses of the eyes, callous lumps, and hemorrhoids.” Stomach and heart ailments round out the list of possible remedies. “But its juice, extracted... and condensed in the sun, will accomplish everything better.”¹⁵¹ Hippocrates had recommended the stems and leaves, soaked in white wine, as an astringent poultice for wounds and an aid for the difficulties of childbirth.¹⁵²

The geological term for the stones with “a kind of painted likeness of the bush” indicated by Thietmar is dendritic pyrolusite.¹⁵³ The branching, tree-like growths are formed by manganese oxide stains within the seams of plutonic red granite at Sinai. Known as “Ikna” granite, this geological stratum covers about 80% of the South Sinai Peninsula. It is overlaid in

¹⁵⁰ See Gary Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1982; revised ed. published by Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Translated by Lily Y. Beck, *De Materia Medica/Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus* (Hildesheim and New York: Olms-Weidmann, 2005); see also Kim E. Hummer and Jules Janick, “*Rubus* Iconography: Antiquity to the Renaissance,” *ISHS Acta Horticulturae* 759 (2007): 89-106, esp. 92.

¹⁵² Hummer and Janick, “*Rubus* Iconography,” 90.

¹⁵³ A.C. Bishop, A.R. Woolley, and W.R. Hamilton, *The Cambridge Guide to Minerals, Rocks, and Fossils*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50-51, s.v. “Pyrolusite” and Frederick H. Pough, *A Field Guide to Rocks and Minerals*, 5th edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 152-3 and pl. 23, Oxides, s.v. “Pyrolusite.”

some areas by younger, darker igneous rocks (diorite, syenite, rhyolite, and ignimbrite).¹⁵⁴

Pyrolusite, on the other hand, is the most common secondary ore of manganese, created under oxidizing conditions such as in shallow marine sediments or deposits from cold ground water in bogs. It is the mineral usually responsible for dendritic markings in other stones, where the fern-like patterns are often mistaken for fossilized plants.¹⁵⁵ This descriptive language of various plant forms often characterizes the dendrite rocks at Sinai – pilgrims and travelers see palm trees, grass, or shrubs that have since turned to stone petrified within its rocky soil.

Another frequent trope found in the accounts of these distinctive rocks at Sinai is the comparison of their shape and appearance with the work of human artists. Thietmar described them as another kind of representation of the bush, “as though painted,” perhaps drawing an implicit comparison between the naturally occurring forms of the Burning Bush/its relics and the more elaborate substitution made from sheets of gold (“in the likeness of a real bush”) that he saw in the monastery’s chapel.¹⁵⁶ Baron Ogier VIII d’Anglure (1395) claimed that the images found in the Sinai stones surpassed human ingenuity. As it seemed to him, the flowering form of the Bush was “so clear and precise that no painter could match it.”¹⁵⁷ The marvelous stones were instead a testament to divine activity at Sinai, preserving the imprint of Moses’ original theophany in the substance of its very rock and stone.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 6. For a useful overview of the geological history of the Sinai Peninsula, see Jill Kamil, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai: History and Guide* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1991), 7-13.

¹⁵⁵ Pough, *A Field Guide to Rocks and Minerals*, 153, 50.

¹⁵⁶ Denys, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, 125.

¹⁵⁷ Susan Weingarten, “‘And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,’ (Ex. 3.12): *Lapis Sinaiticus* in Jewish and Christian Traditions,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, no. 1 (2003): 1-20, esp. 7 n. 32. Compare with translation by Roland A. Browne, *The Holy Jerusalem Voyage of Ogier VIII, Seigneur d’Anglure* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975).

¹⁵⁸ Baron Ogier recites a Jewish legend (according to Braun, “Literary Sources,” 250-51) that provides a mechanism for distributing these dendrite forms across the mountain’s surface. After

Following Thietmar's initial observation of the dendrite stones at the beginning of the thirteenth century, references to these rocks at Sinai become more frequent in pilgrim accounts of the 14th and 15th centuries, then continue from the end of the sixteenth century up through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as well as being included in modern publications about the monastery). Susan Weingarten has traced the literary mention of Sinai's dendrite stones through both Christian pilgrim narratives and Jewish sources, where a parallel textual tradition also begins in the fourteenth century. Whereas the Christian references are eyewitness accounts given by travelers visiting Mount Sinai and making note of the stones as a phenomenon they had seen and encountered themselves, the Jewish tradition is primarily textual, although based upon a description of the miraculous stones brought back from the pilgrimage site to Europe.¹⁵⁹ Later accounts recite the same passage, creating a chain of literary transmission as opposed to a continued emphasis upon visiting Mount Sinai as a special place of divine revelation.¹⁶⁰

The oldest Jewish source regarding the Sinai stones appears in a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*, I: 66, written by Moses ben Joshua Narboni (d. 1362), and shares a number of features with medieval Christian accounts.¹⁶¹ Narboni saw some of the miraculous stones that a student, who belonged to a respected Barcelona family, brought him to

the presence of God had departed from the Burning Bush, it sprung into flower. Moses was amazed at this miracle, picked some of the flowers from the bush, and scattered them on Mount Sinai. Where the flowers fell, they became part of the rock and "are still there to this day exactly represented." Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,'" 7 n. 32.

¹⁵⁹ Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,'" 7-8.

¹⁶⁰ See Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,'" 8-11. Weingarten begins her article with a brief overview of souvenirs and ex-votos associated with holy places in various pilgrimage traditions, from ancient Greek healing cults to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic examples. Ibid., 1-4. This informs her reading of the Christian pilgrimage texts in relation to Sinai (p. 5) and the renewed interest in holy places/connection with the land among the modern Jewish population of Israel with which she concludes (pp. 18-20).

¹⁶¹ Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,'" 7-8; see also Raphael Jospe, "The Rock and the Bush," *Judaism* 38, no. 2 (1989): 197-202; first published in Hebrew in *Cathedra* 48 (1988): 3-8, with an English summary on p. 194.

examine.¹⁶² “And I saw in it the Bush painted, perfectly painted, a Divine painting in a colour contrasting with the colour of the stone. And I broke the stone in half and found the Bush painted on the face of each piece inside it and thus many times... and still the Bush was in them.”¹⁶³

Narboni was amazed that however much he broke the stone, the form of the bush remained. This observation was also made in several pilgrimage accounts of the stones at Sinai. According to Giorgio Gucci (1384), “near the summit you find stones, in which the palm is figured in whatever way you break them.”¹⁶⁴ And the Baron d’Anglure (1395), quoted above, also emphasized “they are... exactly represented, so that wherever you break or chip the rock, you will be sure to find the imprint of the flower.”¹⁶⁵

Alongside the frequent conceit of describing the dendrite stones as though painted by the hand of God, several Christian pilgrims attribute the appearance of the branching patterns and leaf-like forms to the imprint of divine light. Thus Gucci, mentioned above, explains the marks he saw in the rock (like fossilized palm trees) as the result of the rays extending from God’s

¹⁶² Only one or two other Jewish writers claim to have seen the dendrite stones. The kabbalist Abraham b. Eliezer Halevi describes them in a letter of 1528 and seems to have one in his possession. He is “afraid to send it by the hand of a non-Jew,” and mentions that the stones have become more important now that caravans “have ceased to go to Mount Sinai.” See Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 9, esp. n. 39. Samuel ibn Seneh Zarza was a 14th century scholar who attempted to locate the stones described first by Narboni, asking after them in Barcelona from Narboni’s students (who confirmed their existence) and then tracing them to Perpignan, where “many of them testified before me that they had seen these stones.” Ibid., 10; Jospe, “The Rock and the Bush,” 198-9.

¹⁶³ Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 8. Narboni recounts his personal experience as a gloss on Maimonides’ interpretation of Exodus 32:16, “[t]he tablets were the work of God.” Maimonides took this to mean that the tablets were a natural creation, like the earth or heavens, produced without artifice. Jospe, “The Rock and the Bush,” 197.

¹⁶⁴ *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, translated by T. Bellorini and E. Hoad, preface and notes by Bellarmino Bagatti (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1948), 63.

¹⁶⁵ Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 7.

glory on the mountaintop after Moses asked to see God face-to-face.¹⁶⁶ The dendrites captured these rays of light within the very stones where divine presence was manifest, providing an enduring record of this theophany for later eyes to see. Carlier de Pinon, a Frenchman who visited Sinai at the end of the sixteenth century, noted the stones covered with black veins, “like bushes” or fossilized plants. But he attributed the view that these marks bore the imprint of divine presence to the Sinai monks rather than his own beliefs.¹⁶⁷ According to them, the entire mountain burned with divine glory (“la montaigne estoit ardant par la presence divine”).¹⁶⁸

The fossilized forms of plant life imitated by the branching, mineral crystals found in the Sinai stones could be variously interpreted, depending on inclination and devotional focus of visiting pilgrims. Several accounts mention the rocks in relation to St. Catherine rather than Moses’ theophanic visions. The samples they found were located on Jebel Katarina and thus specifically associated with her martyrdom by comparing the dendrite patterns to palm leaves or ferns. Niccolò da Poggibonsi made this point in his account of 1346-50: “When you get half way up the mount you find the stones of St. Catherine, with the palm-tree...”¹⁶⁹ Leonardo Frescobaldi, who traveled in the same company with Giorgio Gucci in 1384, noted the same location of these fossilized palms,¹⁷⁰ and even in 1625, the term “rocks of St. Catherine” was still used by Yves de Lille to indicate the dendrite stones.¹⁷¹

Most of these medieval and early modern travel accounts, unlike the Jewish textual tradition, focus on the presence of the dendrite stones at Sinai. Few pilgrims indicate that they

¹⁶⁶ Bellorini and Hoad, *Visit to the Holy Places... by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, 116.

¹⁶⁷ Carlier de Pinon was reminded, rather, of a type of grass that could be found locally as well as back in Europe. His observations are cited by Skrobucha, *Sinai*, 55.

¹⁶⁸ Carlier de Pinon, *Voyage en Orient*, ed. E. Blochet (Paris: E. Leroux, 1920), 220.

¹⁶⁹ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage beyond the Seas, 1346-50*, translated by T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945), 112; cited by Braun, “Literary Sources,” 249.

¹⁷⁰ Bellorini and Hoad, *Visit to the Holy Places... by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, 63.

¹⁷¹ Braun, “Literary Sources,” 249.

actually collected the stones or took samples away with them.¹⁷² Rather, the miracle consisted in seeing the imprinted forms of fossilized plants, perhaps even the shadow of the Burning Bush, witnessing this trace of divine presence, in the place itself. As Giorgio Gucci put it, “and in the vicinity, we found very many devout and notable things.”¹⁷³ His company of Tuscan pilgrims was much more interested in chipping away pieces of stone from the rock where St. Catherine’s body lay than in taking with them pieces of the fossilized palm trees also found there.¹⁷⁴ Frescobaldi asserted that the stone sanctified and impressed by the saint’s relics could cure fever.¹⁷⁵ The healing properties of these chips of rock are reminiscent of Thietmar’s original statement, that the relics of the Burning Bush were “effective against various infirmities.”¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Sebald Reiter (1479-80) said that pilgrims who carried these stones away with them would “experience many wonders.”¹⁷⁷ The removal of stone fragments from the peaks of Mount Sinai and/or Mount St. Catherine and the small, intimate nature of such pilgrimage souvenirs make tracing their later history past the point of origin a challenging project.¹⁷⁸ Even the Sinai stones described by Moses ben Joshua Narboni were quickly lost within a generation.¹⁷⁹ In this

¹⁷² Braun includes the description of an anonymous French pilgrim who traveled to Sinai between 1419-25, which suggests that the dendrite stones were given as gifts by the monks to visiting pilgrims. In this account, they are also associated with the place of St. Catherine’s burial. See idem, “Literary Sources,” 249.

¹⁷³ Bellorini and Hoad, *Visit to the Holy Places... by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, 111.

¹⁷⁴ As Gucci vividly described the process, they acquired their souvenirs “by force and great pain.” Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁵ Bellorini and Hoad, *Visit to the Holy Places... by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, 63.

¹⁷⁶ Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187-1291*, 125.

¹⁷⁷ Braun, “Literary Sources,” 251.

¹⁷⁸ It would be fascinating to look for records of dendrite stones from Sinai that might belong to the relic collections recorded in various medieval church treasuries, although whether or not a relic of the Burning Bush should be interpreted as a piece of rock or plant matter is another question. I have begun correspondence with Branislav Cvetkovic at the Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade, in regards to his research on the Tersatto reliquary, and hope to pursue this aspect of research for future publication.

¹⁷⁹ See note 162 above.

way, the distribution of relics of the Burning Bush once more turns the stones into ephemeral objects, unbound from time and place.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, both Jewish and Christian literary traditions shifted to more scientific modes of description and classification when introducing the dendrite rocks found at Sinai, dismissing any mention of the miraculous origins once attributed to them.¹⁸⁰ This was when the term “dendrite” first appeared in relation to the mineral formation, used by Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, a physician and naturalist from Zurich, in his encyclopedic biblical treatise – *Physica Sacra* (first printed in four volumes between 1731-35).¹⁸¹ Scheuchzer also illustrates the branching patterns characteristic of Sinai’s red granite, using the dendrite stone and three perfectly delineated and differentiated botanical specimens of raspberry brambles to frame the scene of Moses before the Burning Bush.¹⁸² (See Figure 5.19) Here, the sacred past is carefully set apart from the rational scientific analysis that removes the possibility of divine intervention from the present. And by the nineteenth century, most travel accounts expressed outright skepticism when mentioning the phenomenon.¹⁸³ These writers were less interested in explaining the geological origins of the leafy patterns seen in the stones at Sinai than they were in criticizing the backward superstitions of the Greek Orthodox monks and Bedouin who promoted such legends. John Lloyd Stephens, for example, received a number of precious souvenirs from the monastery’s superior when he visited Sinai in 1835, including “some shells and petrifications,”

¹⁸⁰ Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 11-14.

¹⁸¹ Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 13.

¹⁸² Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Physica sacra* (Augsburg and Ulm, 1731-35), vol. 1, 117, tab. cxvii. It is not the first illustration of the dendrite stones from Sinai, however. I have also found the fern-like patterns copied in a printed engraving that accompanies the pilgrimage account of Hans Jacob Breüning von Buchenbach, *Orientalische reyss... in der Turkey,... in Griechenland, Egypten, Arabien, Palestina, das Heylige Gelobte Land vnd Syrien...* (Strassburg, 1612), p. 194.

¹⁸³ Weingarten, ““And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,”” 14-16.

engravings of Mt. Sinai, a small box filled with manna, and a pilgrim's ring. The shells and stones were thrown away as soon as he was out of the superior's sight.¹⁸⁴

Many of these items can still be acquired as mementos from the Monastery of St. Catherine today. As seen in Figure 5.20, the Bedouin tour guides offer boxes filled with pieces of the dendrite rocks for sale on top of Mount Sinai (displayed next to polished 'eggs' of granite and alabaster, probably mass produced in Cairo or Luxor). But the stones are also easily picked up from ground around monastery and on the paths leading up both Jebel Musa and Jebel Katarina. Unlike the fate of the original Burning Bush described by Magister Thietmar, which was "carried off and divided among Christians," these rocks will persist at Sinai as long as its mountains do. Even their division and subdivision into smaller and smaller pieces preserves the mineral imprint of leafy foliage. However, whether these images can be read as relics of the Burning Bush when removed from their place of origin, depends solely upon the viewer who carries them away.

Inscriptions in Stone: (Re)tracing a Desert Palimpsest

In this section, I explore the role of various inscriptions found in the rocky terrain of the South Sinai Peninsula. Many of these were left behind by pilgrims and travelers passing through on their way to or from Mount Sinai. Some predated the Christian era, such as the Egyptian stelae at Serabit El Khadim or the Nabataean inscriptions in Wadi Mukattab and elsewhere. Others represent the Arabic population as the dominant presence in the peninsula after the 7th century, following the route of the Darb El Hadj leading from Egypt to Mecca across the Sinai Peninsula. My focus will be on some the earliest of these examples and the most numerous,

¹⁸⁴ Described in *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and the Holy Land* (New York: Harper, 1837), 301; cf. Weingarten, "'And This Shall Be a Token to Thee,'" 15.

prayers and invocations written in Nabataean script that can be found in wadis and next to watering holes, including the most out-of-the-way and remote locations (see Figure 5.21). I am most interested in the reception of these inscriptions rather than the history of their production, although the mysterious texts inspired imitation and lead to a reiterative practice. The simple presence of earlier writing on the rock walls and boulders of resting places attracted additional inscriptions in the same location, whether or not the content of adjacent/earlier texts could be read and deciphered by those who were supplementing them with declarations of their own.

In particular, I wish to examine these layered inscriptions, a kind of desert palimpsest written in stone, with regards to the longstanding belief that the Nabataean inscriptions represented a proto-Hebrew alphabet and were written by the Israelites as they wandered through the desert wilderness. Noted by early travelers such as Egeria and Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Nabataean inscriptions were interpreted according to the scriptural narrative from Exodus that gave the local terrain meaningful form. Because it was thought that the Jews received written language at the same time as God gave the Law to Moses at Sinai, the practice of inscribing these texts thus retraced the letters first inscribed by God on the stone tablets (Exodus 31:18; 32:16).¹⁸⁵ Cosmas explained it in the following way:

When they received the Law from God in writing and were taught letters for the first time, God used the desert like a quiet school, allowing them to hew the letters on stone for forty years. For that reason one can see, at all the stopping-places in that desert (I mean, the [desert] of Mount Sinai), that all the rocks of the area that have broken off from the mountains have been inscribed with carved Hebrew letters. I can attest this myself, having travelled in those places on foot.¹⁸⁶

And again:

¹⁸⁵ Only the first set of stone tablets were said to be written by the finger of God. After Moses broke the tablets in anger because of the golden calf, he was required to supply the second set of stone tablets and rewrote the words of God's covenant (Exodus 34: 1, 4, 27-8).

¹⁸⁶ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, V.53, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 250-51.

But as for the Israelites themselves, once they had acquired letters for the first time, they constantly put them to use with prolific writing, so that all those places are still full of carved Hebrew letters, preserved to the present day for the sake of unbelievers, I think. Whoever wishes can go and look in those places, or may ask and learn that we have told the truth.¹⁸⁷

Egeria's observations were more succinct, since she did not attempt to explain the writing that she saw; it was simply accepted as further visual evidence for the Hebrews' ancient presence in and their passage through the same desert region that she also traveled.¹⁸⁸

Cosmas, on the other hand, provided the additional testimony of "certain Jews, who had read them," in order to verify his claims.¹⁸⁹ He also speculated on a chain of linguistic transmission that began with the art of writing given to Moses at Sinai before being passed on to all nations through the Greek and Phoenician alphabets.¹⁹⁰ Cosmas' theory was not original to him or even to the sixth century in particular. Clement of Alexandria refers to the same idea by quoting Eupolemus' *On the Kings in Judea*, stating that: "Moses was the first wise man, and the first that imparted grammar to the Jews, that the Phoenicians received it from the Jews, and the

¹⁸⁷ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, V.54, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 251.

¹⁸⁸ "The mountains have been carved out all around their sides. These vaults have been made in such a way that if you wanted to hang a curtain, they would make most beautiful bedchambers; and each bedchamber has been decorated with Hebrew letters." Attested in *De locis sanctis* (Y 14) by Peter the Deacon, whose abridgements were based on a complete version of Egeria's travelogue no longer extant. Translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 216. Whether Egeria was describing Wadi Mukattab or Wadi Shallal (the latter suggested by Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen*, 125), she takes for granted the link between what she sees and the scriptures that served as her guidebook.

¹⁸⁹ "This was also what certain Jews who had read them told us, saying that what was written went thus: 'Departure of so-and-so, from the tribe of so-and-so, in the year such-and-such, in the month such-and-such,' just as some of us also often write in lodging places." Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, V.53; trans. in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 251.

¹⁹⁰ "The Hebrews were the very first to be instructed by God. After receiving letters through those stone tablets and studying them for forty years in the desert, they passed them on, around that time, to their neighbors, the Phoenicians, and first to Cadmus, King of Tyrians. From him the Greeks received them, and thereafter all the nations in succession." *Ibid.*, V.54.

Greeks from the Phoenicians.”¹⁹¹ However, in Cosmas’ account, we also find a concrete link posited between the divine letters and tablets of stone given at Sinai and the remaining physical trace of this grammatical pedigree that could be seen and verified in the strange inscriptions.¹⁹²

This explanation of the Nabataean inscriptions had a surprisingly long afterlife and was revived in the scholarly debates of 18th-century travelers, specifically by the enthusiastic Robert Clayton, Bishop of Clogher, who translated and published the diary of the Franciscan ‘Prefetto’ of Egypt, *A Journal from Grand Cairo to Mount Sinai, and back again* (London, 1753). The Prefetto and his party saw the same group of inscriptions in the Wadi Mukattab as Egeria and Cosmas Indicopleustes had centuries earlier (Figure 5.22). “And though we had in our company persons, who were acquainted with the Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Armenian, Turkish, English, Illyrican, German, and Bohemian languages, yet none of them had any knowledge of these characters.”¹⁹³ In a footnote to the Prefetto’s diary, Clayton suggested that the inscriptions were written in ancient Hebrew, “which the Israelites having learned to write at the time of the giving of the law from *Mount Sinai*, diverted themselves with practising it on these mountains during their forty years abode in the wilderness.”¹⁹⁴ He expanded this proposal in his remarks “On the Origin of Hieroglyphics” appended to the translation of the Prefetto’s travel diary, where he cited the commandment given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6: 6-9.

But after the delivery of the law upon *Mount Sinai*, and the Israelites were ordered to write some of the words of the law on the posts of their doors, and on their

¹⁹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I.23.153 (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>); noted by Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 251 n. 30.

¹⁹² The nature of his eyewitness account is emphasized in both passages quoted at length above. Cosmas says in V.53, after his initial description of the carved letters, “I can attest this myself...” and in V.54, “Whoever wishes can go and look...”

¹⁹³ Robert Clayton, *A Journal from Grand Cairo to Mount Sinai, and back again / Translated from a manuscript, written by the Prefetto of Egypt...* (London: W. Bowyer, 1753), 45.

¹⁹⁴ Clayton, *A Journal from Grand Cairo*, 46.

gates, everyone who had the least genius would endeavor to learn and to practice the art of literary writing. And accordingly we find from the aforementioned Journal, that in the wilderness of *Kadesh*, where, soon after the giving of the law, the children of Israel wandered for forty years, there are whole mountains which are engraved, with inexpressible labor, with characters at present unknown, but which, there is great reason to suspect, were the ancient Hebrew characters...¹⁹⁵

Because Joshua inscribed a copy of the Mosaic law on large stones at Mount Ebal after the Israelites crossed the Jordan River,¹⁹⁶ Clayton developed at length the possible transfer of ‘literary writing’ from the Israelites to the Canaanites, thus to Cadmus of Tyre and from the Phoenicians to the Greeks.¹⁹⁷ His commentary therefore reiterated the theories stated by Cosmas Indicopleustes, although any connection between the two was unacknowledged.¹⁹⁸

The Bishop of Clogher was so excited by the possibility of recovering what he believed was ancient Hebrew that he dedicated his translation of the Prefetto’s *Journal* to the London Society of Antiquaries, asking them to “make some enquiry” into the Sinai inscriptions by outfitting “a suitable person” to make copies of as many of the inscriptions as possible so that they might be accessible for further study.¹⁹⁹ Clayton even offered to help finance the expedition.²⁰⁰ While the immediate collection of Sinai inscriptions never took shape quite as he

¹⁹⁵ Clayton, *A Journal from Grand Cairo*, 69-70.

¹⁹⁶ Joshua 8:30-35. This passage provides a specific biblical example of the words of the law being written on stone. In this way, Joshua renewed the Sinai covenant with the people of Israel after Moses’ death and at the beginning of their conquest of the Promised Land.

¹⁹⁷ Clayton interspersed scriptural references with quotations from classical authors such as Lucan and Diodorus. See idem, *A Journal from Grand Cairo*, 70-73. He then returns to the question of literary writing in Egypt and an overview of Egyptian religious customs/mythology.

¹⁹⁸ N.N. Lewis and M.C.A. MacDonald point out that the first printed edition of Cosmas’ work appeared at the beginning of the 18th century in the volumes edited by Bernard de Montfaucon, *Cosmae Indicopleustae... Christiana Topographia*, in *Collectio Nova Patrum et Scriptorum Graecorum* (Paris: C. Rigaud, 1707), II: 113-345. Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” *Syria* 80 (2003): 41-110, esp. 42.

¹⁹⁹ Clayton, *A Journal from Grand Cairo*, 3-4.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 4. Minutes of the Society of Antiquaries from April 30, 1752 include a letter from Robert Clayton to the Archbishop of Canterbury that allows for the payment of 100£/year for a total of five years “paid in such a manner as the Society shall direct.” Lewis and MacDonald,

envisioned, Clayton's efforts did stimulate scholarly interest in their origins and significance across Europe.²⁰¹ It was the cumulative, if piecemeal, work of various travelers and scholars who passed through Sinai and took note of the inscriptions they saw there that finally allowed the mysterious script to be deciphered and identified.²⁰²

It was in 1840 that Eduard Beer, a professor at the University of Leipzig, successfully identified the characters of the alphabet being used in the Sinai inscriptions and offered a translation of the texts.²⁰³ He also pointed toward their source in the region of Arabia Petraea, proposing a connection with the Nabataean kingdom based in the Negev.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, Beer

"W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script," 43 n. 10. The amount of 500£ was also specified by Carsten Niebuhr, who visited Sinai in 1762. Jane Taylor, "Language, Script and Graffiti," in *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 148.

²⁰¹ The Society of Antiquaries declined taking part, although they did extend membership both to Robert Clayton and to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lewis and MacDonald, "W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script," 43 n. 11. It was the king of Denmark, Frederick V, who finally supported an expedition to Arabia between 1761-67 with a primary objective of recording and deciphering the Sinai inscriptions. This failed to take place, except for twenty texts copied by the team's astronomer and surveyor, Carsten Niebuhr. See his *Travels through Arabia, and other countries in the East performed by M. Neibuhr,...*, trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I: 197, 200-202. It took nearly a century for another such expedition to be organized and this, too, hardly counted as a success. Lewis and MacDonald, "W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script," 43-4.

²⁰² The gradual process of documenting the Sinaitic inscriptions and identifying their origins over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries has been summarized by Jane Taylor in several publications and by N.N. Lewis and M.C.A. MacDonald. See Taylor, "Language, Script and Graffiti," in *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 148-71; idem, "The Writing on the Rocks," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, no. 620 (9-15 January 2003), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/620/heritage.htm>; and Lewis and MacDonald, "W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script," *Syria* 80 (2003): 41-110.

²⁰³ Eduard Friedrich Ferdinand Beer, *Inscriptiones Veteres litteris et lingua hucusque incognitis ad Montem Sinai magno numero servatae quas Pocock, Niebuhr, ... alique descripserunt* (Leipzig, 1840). The publications consulted by Beers are listed in his introduction. See *ibid.*, x-xi. Taylor, "Language, Script and Graffiti," 149-50; Lewis and MacDonald, "W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script," 46-7.

²⁰⁴ At the time, there were no known samples of Nabataean script with which to compare the texts from Sinai, although the first publication of inscriptions from Petra became available in

died just one year after producing these startling conclusions, at the age of 36, and did not get to see his scholarly insights fully validated and confirmed. The paleographic connection between the Sinai inscriptions and the Nabataean capital at Petra was conclusively demonstrated by M. A. Levy in 1860.²⁰⁵ To date, almost 3,000 Nabataean inscriptions from the South Sinai have been published, although the total number is estimated between 7,000 and 10,000 inscriptions.²⁰⁶

The Nabataean script is related to other Semitic languages, with certain letters indeed resembling Hebrew, others Arabic. Like both of these, Nabataean is written from right to left. Its origins do not lie in the Arabian peninsula, however, but in Syria, where the Phoenician script (alphabetic and written from right to left) had been adopted by the Aramaeans sometime in the 11th or 10th century BC. By the 8th century BC, the Aramaeans had developed their own script. Aramaic eventually became the lingua franca of the entire Middle East,²⁰⁷ becoming more widespread during the Persian period until Greek replaced it as the primary language of

1855. Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 46 n. 40. As argued by Lewis and MacDonald, the situation may have been remedied earlier if the research notes and inscriptions copied by William John Bankes during his travels in the Near East between 1815-19 had been more widely circulated. Bankes produced a near-perfect copy of the Turkmaniyya tomb inscription at Petra and clearly recognized the correspondence between this elegant script and the Sinai rock graffiti. See *ibid.*, 47, 49-50.

²⁰⁵ M. A. Levy, “Über die nabathäischen Inschriften von Petra, Hauran, vornehmlich von Sinai-Halbinsel und über die Münzlegenden nabathäischer Könige,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 14 (1860): 363-484, 594. Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 47.

²⁰⁶ Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 168; Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 7. The most comprehensive publication is the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, pars II: Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens* (Paris: E Republicae Typographeo, 1902). More Nabataean inscriptions were discovered in the Sinai during the 1960s and 1970s by Israeli archaeologists, not included in CIS II. The greatest concentration was found in Wadi Haggag. See Avraham Negev, *The inscriptions in the Wadi Haggag, Sinai*, Qedem 6 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977).

²⁰⁷ As the Assyrian Empire expanded westward, they adapted Aramaic as a language for bureaucracy and official government communications among their new provinces. The alphabetic script was more convenient and easily adapted to writing with pen and ink on papyrus than cuneiform, which depended upon using a stylus and damp clay tablets. Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 151.

governance in the 4th century BC.²⁰⁸ Variants of the Aramaic script emerged in distinct geographical regions alongside new centers of power, however. The Nabataeans did not speak Aramaic at first – rather, they used a dialect of the Arabic language current in the northern Arabian peninsula where they originated as a people. There was no written form of Arabic at this point and no universal Arabic language. Instead, the Nabataeans spoke Arabic and wrote in Aramaic. Written Arabic probably developed as direct descendant of Nabataean script sometime in the fourth century AD.²⁰⁹

The content of these thousands of inscriptions found scattered across the Sinai Peninsula is fairly simple and repetitive; most consist of formulaic petitions that give little more than a name, patronymic, and the request to be remembered and blessed.²¹⁰ The first word recognized by scholars in the mysterious Nabataean script was *šlm*, the Aramaic-Hebrew-Arabic word for “peace.”²¹¹ These three letters are the most commonly occurring combination in the inscriptions,

²⁰⁸ Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 151.

²⁰⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Arabic alphabet” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/31666/Arabic-alphabet>), last updated 11/25/2014. An exact date for the beginnings of Arabic script and final stages of the transition from Arabic-in-the-Nabataean-script to Arabic-in-the-Arabic-script remains unclear. Because the Nabataeans spoke Arabic and wrote in Aramaic, Arabic words and structures increasingly crept into their official written forms of communication. Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 152. It was the widespread adoption of Islam in the Arabic speaking world during the early seventh century that lent special urgency to creating a written form of the language in order to collect/codify the revelations given to the Prophet Mohammed in the Qur’an. See “Arabic and Islam” from *Arts of the Islamic World*, in Curriculum Resources for Educators, The Metropolitan Museum of Art online (<http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/publications-for-educators/art-of-the-islamic-world/unit-two/arabic-and-islam>).

²¹⁰ The most common phrases are “Remember so-and-so the son of so-and-so,” and “May so-and-so the son of so-and-so be secure” or “May so-and-so be secure in well-being.” Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 63-8, *passim*, and Ze’ev Meshel, “Were the Sinai Rock Inscriptions Really Inscribed by ‘Nabateans?’” in *Sinai: Excavations and Studies*, BAR International Series 876 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), 143-51, esp. 148.

²¹¹ Also translated “be secure.” Cf. Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 63-8, *passim*.

followed by the word *dkyr*, “let be remembered.”²¹² The work of collecting and publishing the Nabataean inscriptions in the South Sinai in the last century has allowed for an impressive body of analysis regarding the personal names, use of titles, and family relationships revealed in the accumulation of prayers and petitions written across the desert.²¹³ The character of the texts is primarily religious and, considering the limited range of dates between which the Nabataean inscriptions were created,²¹⁴ existed as a rather brief and locally circumscribed phenomenon.²¹⁵

Therefore, the interpretation first supplied by Cosmas Indicopleustes, although he was mistaken about the identity of the authors of Sinai’s desert graffiti, was actually not too far afield: “This was also what certain Jews who had read them told us, saying that what was written went thus: ‘Departure of so-and-so, from the tribe of so-and-so, in the year such-and-such, in the month such-and-such’, just as some of us also write in lodging places.”²¹⁶ His Jewish translators may have recognized aspects of the general formula being employed (especially since Nabataean belongs to the greater linguistic family of Semitic languages), but as Comas pointed out, the practice of leaving one’s name behind in lodging places or at stops and resting points along a

²¹² Both words were translated by E.F.F. Beer in the process of identifying the Nabataean script, although *šlm* had already been noted by Edward Wortley Montagu on his trip to Sinai in 1766. Lewis and MacDonald, “W.J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 44.

²¹³ Because the inscriptions usually contain both the writer’s name and that of his father, including even his father’s father at times, some genealogies can be established going back for several generations. Avraham Negev, *Nabatean Archaeology Today* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986), 116. See also idem, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm*, Qedem 32 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1991).

²¹⁴ There are only seven texts that provide dates as part of the inscription. These range between AD 150-267. Meshel, “Sinai Rock Inscriptions,” 150; Negev, *Nabatean Archaeology Today*, 115. See also Avraham Negev, “New Dated Nabatean Graffiti from the Sinai,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 17, no. 4 (1967): 250-55.

²¹⁵ The work that Avraham Negev has done on personal names reveals a distinctive subset of local names commonly used in the Sinai but not found elsewhere. Geographical names are also limited, whereas occupations noted in the inscriptions are often consistent with the known resources available to and supporting an indigenous population.

²¹⁶ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography* V.53, translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 251.

route of travel was a common one. The Piacenza pilgrim similarly acknowledged writing the names of his parents on a bench when he visited the house in Cana, where Christ's first miracle was supposed to have taken place.²¹⁷

The majority of the Nabataean inscriptions in the South Sinai have been dated between the second and third centuries AD, after the Nabataean kingdom itself ceased to exist.²¹⁸ The belated appearance of this graffiti raises a number of questions about who actually wrote the Sinaitic inscriptions – were they Nabataeans or local nomadic peoples who adopted the Nabataean script and language? Because the first inscriptions recorded by western scholars were found along the routes they traveled through the South Sinai, it was frequently assumed that the authors of the Nabataean inscriptions were pilgrims, merchants, and/or miners passing through the desert.²¹⁹ Master road builders, the Nabataeans may have been the first to cut passable tracks across the Sinai Peninsula (such as the main east/west route from Raithou and the Feiran Oasis to Aila, on the Gulf of 'Aqaba).²²⁰ And it seems likely that the Nabataeans were drawn into to the South Sinai for the same reason as the Egyptians before them, seeking access to valued deposits

²¹⁷ PP, *It.*, 4; translated by John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, 2nd edition (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 2002), 131.

²¹⁸ The Nabataeans rose to power in the second century BC through their control of overland trade routes bringing frankincense and myrrh across the Negev. Their capital was at Petra, the rock-cut city that was as famous then as now for its monumental tombs and temples. Annexed in AD 106 by the emperor Trajan, the Nabataean empire became part of the Roman province of Arabia. Its borders were then transformed at the end of the fourth century into the territory known as *Palaestina salutaris* or Third Palestine. Caner, "Introduction," in *History and Hagiography*, 6-8.

²¹⁹ Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 7. For a brief overview of scholarly viewpoints, see Avraham Negev, "New Dated Nabatean Graffiti from the Sinai," *Israel Exploration Journal* 17, no. 4 (1967): 250-55, esp. 253-55.

²²⁰ "Besides adorning their spectacular capital at Petra..., Nabataean rulers used their profits to build roads (notably, the Petra-Gaza road) and fortify nearby promontories in order to facilitate trade across the Negev desert; indeed most of the Negev towns known to late antiquity... were originally Nabataean military outposts or caravanserais." Caner, "Introduction," in *History and Hagiography*, 6-7.

of copper and turquoise.²²¹ For example, Wadi Mukattab, or the “Valley of Writings,” which was the most well-known site for Nabataean inscriptions from the 17th century onward, lies directly en route from the Oasis of Feiran to a turquoise mine in the Wadi Maghera.²²²

However, because the Nabataeans never really established permanent settlements in the South Sinai, the argument for use of the Nabataean script by nomadic groups who were indigenous to the Sinai Peninsula is much more attractive than assigning the vast number of extant inscriptions to an occasional, outside cultural presence.²²³ Jebel Serbal and Jebel Moneijah, both in close proximity to Pharan, functioned as important religious centers supporting Nabataean temples on their peaks. So it is also possible that the Sinai inscriptions reflected pilgrimage to local cults over a discrete period of time.²²⁴ There is no clear historical evidence explaining why the Nabataean graffiti stops after the 3rd century.²²⁵ Most scholars

²²¹ As argued by Beno Rothenberg, “An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 102 (1970): 4-29, esp. 20-21. See also Negev, “New Dated Nabatean Graffiti from the Sinai,” 254-55.

²²² Rothenberg, “An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai,” 21.

²²³ By contrast with the relative abundance of Nabataean archaeological remains in the northern Sinai, the citadel at Pharan was the only permanent settlement located in the southern part of the Peninsula. Pottery finds date the Nabataean presence there no earlier than the first or second century AD. Only two military outposts have been excavated in the South Sinai. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 6-7. For more on the Nabataeans in the Sinai Peninsula, see Javier Teixidor, “Les Nabatéens du Sinai,” in *Le Sinai durant l’antiquité et le Moyen Age: 4,000 ans d’histoire pour un desert*, ed. Dominique Valbelle and Charles Bonnet (Paris: Errance, 1998): 83-7.

²²⁴ Taylor highlights the religious syncretism that is revealed in the names of deities appended to the personal names given in various Sinai inscriptions. Some of these gods seem to have been recipients of worship at Jebel Moneijah, where a number of inscriptions were carefully carved. Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 168-70. For Meshel, the absence of traditional Nabataean gods (as well as the rarity of official titles or kings’ names) in the inscriptions further distances the writers from Nabataean culture and identity. Meshel, “Sinai Rock Inscriptions,” 150.

²²⁵ Caner, “Introduction,” in *History and Hagiography*, 7.

presume a variety of possible identities for their authors rather than admitting to the unknown.²²⁶

As Lewis and MacDonald state, “the Sinaitic inscriptions were written by a mixture of travellers, pilgrims and local inhabitants of Sinai in the early centuries AD.”²²⁷

Ze’ev Meshel in particular has attributed the inscriptions to the presence of indigenous shepherds, the Bedouin of the past, rather than interpreting them as evidence for Nabataean occupation of the region. As he points out, there is a significant difference between the distribution of pre-Christian graffiti in comparison with later inscriptions (Greek, Coptic, Aramaic, Armenian, etc.).²²⁸ While these other languages are clearly concentrated along the main routes to and from Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa) and the Monastery of St. Catherine, the Nabataean inscriptions are not limited to this network of roadways (see Figure 5.23). Instead, they are located “in remote wadis, on rock outcrops and summits, near isolated water sources, on sandstone as well as hard igneous rock...”²²⁹ It is also common to find the inscriptions surrounded by drawings of animals such as camels or other quadrupeds (horses, donkeys, goats, and gazelles) that were familiar companions of the nomadic groups living in the South Sinai, as in Figure 5.24. These drawings, and perhaps the inscriptions as well, could easily have been produced in response to their daily life and surroundings.²³⁰

Although the authors, whoever they were, of these simple blessings eventually ceased using the Nabataean script to offer their petitions for peace and good memory on Sinai’s rocks and stones, this impulse to memorialize one’s own name (and transitory existence) within the

²²⁶ It is strange that for inscriptions which give little information beyond personal and family names, with the intent of memorializing these individuals, absolutely nothing is known about the people who wrote them.

²²⁷ Lewis and MacDonald, “W. J. Bankes and the Identification of the Nabataean Script,” 46.

²²⁸ Meshel, “Sinai Rock Inscriptions,” 144.

²²⁹ Ibid. Also acknowledged by Avraham Negev, *Nabataean Archaeology Today*, 115.

²³⁰ Meshel, “Sinai Rock Inscriptions,” 148; Taylor, “Language, Script and Graffiti,” 167.

desert landscape did not stop with the advent of Christian monasticism and pilgrimage in this region. Instead, Christian travelers rewrote the meaning of the Nabataean texts with the addition of their own.²³¹ I suspect these later inscriptions were not intended to efface previous texts, but represented a desire to associate their prayers and petitions with those already inscribed in the desert. In discussing the surprising distribution of Nabataean inscriptions in the most remote locations of the Sinai wilderness, Meshel clarifies that while Nabataean inscriptions can be found alone, without inscriptions in other languages nearby, the addition of later Christian writing almost always appears in concentrations where the Nabataean inscriptions are also present.²³²

The archaeological evidence therefore suggests an intentional layering of texts, one on top of another, in the application of Sinai's rock graffiti over the centuries. Bridging centuries, the inscriptions claim the importance of physical proximity and can be read as the material trace of earlier inhabitants/travelers, long after the language and script become indecipherable. They also reflect the physical conditions of their environment – not just in their accumulation along well-traveled routes and/or popular resting places in the wadis of the South Sinai, but also in adhering to the sides of the rocks and mountains most often in shade (where nomadic shepherds and travelers might gain protection from the forceful heat of the sun).²³³ This practical aspect of locating the Sinai inscriptions has been noted by archaeologists in their survey work, but also by earlier travelers. When John Lewis Burkhardt copied several of the inscriptions that he came

²³¹ The notion of “Kulturkampf” introduced by Beno Rothenberg as a “war of symbols” between the Nabataean and Hebrew inscriptions in the eastern Sinai seems to have been overdetermined. Idem, “An Archaeological Survey in South Sinai,” 19-20. Avraham Negev responded to Rothenberg's assertions, stating that “in no case do the Byzantine-Christian inscriptions overlap or cover Jewish inscriptions or Symbols.” Instead, the two types of inscriptions are more likely to be contemporaneous with one another. Negev, *Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag*, 73-4.

²³² Meshel, *Sinai: Excavations and Studies*, 144-5. As Rothenberg states, “the Nabataean inscriptions are the oldest and also the most conspicuous along the whole road.” Rothenberg, “An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai,” 19.

²³³ Negev, *The Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag*, 78.

across in 1816, he described the cliffs of Wadi Mukattab as “so situated as to afford a fine shade to travellers during the mid-day hours.”²³⁴ (Cf. Figure 5.22)

What I propose is that alongside early documents like Egeria’s pilgrimage account and the unique philosophical/cosmological treatise of Cosmas Indicopleustes, which both interpreted a then-unknown and misrecognized Nabataean script as ancient Hebrew, the physical proximity of later inscriptions adhering next to the earliest samples of desert graffiti offers its own material evidence for a continued Christianizing interpretation of the strange letters in later centuries. Granted, we do not have other texts or historical sources confirming this association between the time of Egeria and of Cosmas and later European travel accounts from the 17th and 18th centuries; the entire medieval period exists as a lacuna with regards to Nabataean inscriptions in the South Sinai Peninsula.²³⁵ But the texts that record an ongoing practice of pilgrimage graffiti placed in juxtaposition to these early, unreadable inscriptions should be able to speak for themselves, giving voice in a multitude of names and languages to their value and importance. It was enough that the Nabataean texts offered a physical trace of past human activity/presence. As

²³⁴ John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: J. Murray, 1822), 621.

²³⁵ Taylor and Lewis and MacDonald all point to the Prefetto of Egypt as the first modern account of the Sinai inscriptions, after introducing their history of the Nabataean graffiti with Cosmas Indicopleustes. There were at least a few earlier mentions of the inscribed rocks found in/around Wadi Mukattab. Raymond Weill attributes to Pietro della Valle, who passed through the Sinai Peninsula between 1615-16, the distinction of first noting these inscriptions so many centuries after Cosmas’ *Christian Topography* of the 6th century. Weill, *La presque île du Sinai: étude de géographie et d’histoire* (Paris: H. Champion, 1908), 288; cited in Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai*, 89. Weill also lists a number of other travelers in the 17th and early 18th centuries, who were attentive to the strange inscriptions (Monconys, Neitzschitz, Thévenot, and Morrison), although more as a matter of curiosity than representatives of a sustained scholarly or archaeological interest. Weill, *La presque île du Sinai*, 289, 293. The shift in how these inscriptions were treated really occurs with Egmond van der Nijenburg, who copied a number of examples of Nabataean graffiti during his travels through Sinai in 1721, and with Robert Clayton’s translation of *A Journal from Grand Cairo to Mount Sinai and back again* (1753), which publicized the Prefetto’s pilgrimage account from 1722. [R. Pococke arrives sixteen years later than the Franciscan superior, but mentions this account in his own, published 1743-1745, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*, p. 147.]

such, even though inscrutable, they conveyed meaning and could be incorporated into a Christian re-reading of Sinai's landscape according to the Exodus narrative.

This section has focused on the history of reception and Christian interpretation of Nabataean inscriptions from the South Sinai Peninsula in relation to the scriptural past sought by so many of its travelers and pilgrims after the initial monastic settlement of Jebel Musa and surrounding areas in the 4th century. I have so far only alluded to the presence of later Christian inscriptions added to the same rocks and stones occupied by this Nabataean graffiti as evidence for the continued visual significance and material meaning of the Nabataean writing in later periods. But the later inscriptions themselves have much to add to our understanding of pilgrimage and travel through the Sinai. These can be found along the major pilgrimage routes leading to Mount Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine from both eastern and western sides of the peninsula and, in some cases, help to clarify which roads were most popular and/or well-traveled over specific periods of time. I conclude by gesturing toward the number of languages and cultural identities that have accumulated in Sinai's desert graffiti and a brief acknowledgment of what their voices add to this history.

Inscriptions from the Early Christian and Byzantine periods include texts in Greek, Arabic, Coptic, Syriac, Hebrew, Thamudic, Latin, Armenian and Georgian.²³⁶ There have also been a substantial number of signatures left by many modern travelers passing through the same network of roads and wadis, written in Russian, German, English, French, and Danish. Some

²³⁶ For an overview of inscriptions found along the road systems of the South Sinai, see Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 12-15 and Rothenberg, "An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai", 22-9.

rocks carry inscriptions in seven or more languages.²³⁷ Although the Greek inscriptions are the most numerous, these have not received any systematic study as yet.²³⁸ Michael E. Stone's survey of the Armenian language inscriptions, a total of 113 (along with 20 Georgian examples), has led to a reconsideration of the eastern route approaching the Sinai monastery from Jerusalem to Aila (Elat).²³⁹ Until the publication of this epigraphic evidence, it was the western route from Palestine to Mount Sinai that was assumed to be the preferred one, based on early pilgrimage accounts such as that of Egeria.²⁴⁰ The concentration of Armenian inscriptions in Wadi Haggag (73 in all, as compared to five examples of Armenian graffiti identified on the western approach to Mount Sinai),²⁴¹ might also indicate that this stopping point was a site of interest on its own merits.²⁴² The inscriptions also help to confirm the report of hundreds of Armenian pilgrims visiting the Sinai monastery given by Anastasius of Sinai during the 7th century.²⁴³

²³⁷ Rothenberg, "An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai," 19. And in support of the preceding argument – "However, the Nabataean inscriptions are the oldest and also the most conspicuous along the whole road." Ibid.

²³⁸ Philip Mayerson, "The Pilgrim Routes to Mount Sinai and the Armenians," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32, no. 1 (1982): 44-57, esp. 46 n. 4; Michael E. Stone, "Sinai Armenian Inscriptions," *Biblical Archaeologist* 45, no. 1 (1982): 27-31, esp. 31.

²³⁹ Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Inscriptions from Sinai: Intermediate Report* (Sydney: Maitland Publications, 1979); Stone, "Sinai Armenian Inscriptions," cited above; and Mayerson, "Pilgrim Routes to Mount Sinai," also cited above. The inscriptions have been published as Michael E. Stone, ed., *The Armenian Inscriptions from the Sinai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Avraham Negev made the same observation based on more general evidence, stating that "the western routes leading from Egypt to the same Holy Mountain, crossing the large wadies Mukattab and Feiran are almost void of Christian inscriptions, although Nabatean graffiti entirely cover the rocks there." Negev, *The Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag*, 79.

²⁴⁰ This route followed the coast of the Mediterranean from Palestine to Pelusium, then turned southward to Clysma and traced the eastern shore of the Red Sea. It was a longer route, with some 25 stations along the way. The eastern route was more direct and shorter overall, with 18 stations. See Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 9-11.

²⁴¹ Stone, "Sinai Armenian Inscriptions," 28-9; cf. Mayerson, "Pilgrim Routes to Mount Sinai," 45, whose numbers are derived from the *Intermediate Report* published by Stone in 1979.

²⁴² Avraham Negev proposes that Wadi Haggag and the spring at Ain Huderah were an alternate identification for the biblical site of Hazeroth (where Aaron and Miriam opposed Moses and

Finally, Arabic rock inscriptions in the South Sinai have been collected and analyzed more recently by the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan as part of the archaeological data collected in the area of Rāya/al-Tūr on the Red Sea.²⁴⁴ Al-Tūr (Raithou) was an important port for trade and pilgrimage from Late Antiquity onward; while the adjacent site of Rāya (8 km south of the city) flourished between the 8th and 12th centuries in particular. The MECCJ surveys have focused on the nearly 2,000 inscriptions found at Mt. Nāqūs, where the legend of a buried monastery and musical sand attracted a number of scholars and tourists in the 19th century.²⁴⁵ The greatest number of Arabic inscriptions at this site, however, date to the 9th and 10th centuries, corresponding with the period in which Rāya served as one of the most important international ports in the Arab Islamic world.²⁴⁶ While the majority of Arabic inscriptions at Mt. Nāqūs were Muslim, Arabic inscriptions found elsewhere in the South Sinai were predominantly Christian in origin, especially in the Wadi Mukattab.²⁴⁷ This concentration offers a glimpse of routes traveled and preferred by a completely different demographic from those of the Armenian Christians.

Miriam was struck with leprosy; see Numbers 11:35-12:16 and Numbers 33:17-18). Idem, *The Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag*, 1, 76-77.

²⁴³ Anastasius of Sinai, *Tales of the Sinai Fathers*, I.4 [Nau 38], translated in Caner, *History and Hagiography*, 176-7. See also Stone, "Sinai Armenian Inscriptions," 30; Mayerson, "Pilgrim Routes to Mount Sinai," 57.

²⁴⁴ Mutsuo Kawatoko and Risa Tokunaga, "Arabic Rock Inscriptions of South Sinai," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 217-27. For a full description of the archaeological work being done by the MECCJ, see Kawatoko, ed. *Archaeological Survey of the Rāya/al-Tūr Area on the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, 2004* (Tokyo: The Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, 2005).

²⁴⁵ Kawatoko and Tokunaga, "Arabic Rock Inscriptions," 218.

²⁴⁶ The Arabic texts fall into three categories; invocations ("O God, forgive..."), professions of faith, and commemorations of visits. Ibid., 221. Besides 966 Arabic inscriptions, the survey counted 432 in Greek, 8 in Coptic, 71 in Latin, 1 in Nabataean, 11 in Russian, 6 in Modern Hebrew, along with a number of tribal marks and drawings (including 90 crosses). Ibid., 219.

²⁴⁷ At this site, 77 out of a total of 112 Arabic inscriptions were incised by Christians. See figure 9 for a table displaying the number of Arabic inscriptions found at various sites in the South Sinai (equaling a total of 249 inscriptions outside the Rāya/al-Tūr area). Ibid., 224-5.

CONCLUSION

“Perhaps... you can’t go back in time, but you can return to the scenes of a love, of a crime, of happiness, and of a fatal decision; the places are what remain, are what you can possess, are what is immortal. They become the tangible landscape of memory, the places that made you, and in some way you become them. They are what you can possess and what in the end possesses you.”

– Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Over the course of my dissertation research, I have had the privilege of visiting the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai three times. Each trip was unique – made at different seasons of the year, for varied lengths of time, and with distinct research aims and goals in mind. But the memory of my first trip, and of arriving at this remote and mysterious place that held out all the promise of discovery, adventure, the possibility of pursuing a Ph.D. in conjunction with its storehouse of Byzantine icons, that memory is indelibly seared into my psyche. The journey I took hardly compares to the two weeks or more required of a medieval traveler, but it was demanding enough (especially navigating a new country and one in which I did not know the language) that reaching the Sinai monastery felt like quite an accomplishment in and of itself.

First, we had to make the right connection from the Cairo airport to Sharm el Sheikh. Then, find a taxi and negotiate our fare for the two and a half hour drive into the heart of the South Sinai Peninsula. The drive was quite the rite of passage. It was August, in Egypt. The taxi didn’t have air conditioning, and we didn’t have sufficient water along because we had just tumbled out of the airport with our luggage and a destination. The heat and sun and glare were relentless. Especially because the only thing we saw along our route was rock and sand. At one point, there was a dead camel on the side of the road. It seemed ominous. There was only one road, however, so we figured we had to be going in the right direction.

Eventually, after interminable security checkpoints and constantly showing our American passports, we arrived. We had made it! There was another checkpoint at the entrance to the drive leading up to the monastery guesthouse. This was where the taxi dropped us off, and the last leg of this adventure involved dragging our rolling suitcases through gravel and dust until we reached our destination. My open-toed sandals never quite recovered from that part of the trip. They always smelled like camel sweat and droppings when I tried wearing them later. I have perhaps dramatized the stages of our journey, but I did not exaggerate the disorientation and physical discomfort that characterized the experience. It was truly liminal, in every sense of Victor Turner's analytical term.¹

It also gave me a much deeper appreciation for the concerns and uncertainties of travel that attended each of the pilgrim narratives I read as I continued to develop my project later.² I could identify with their doubts about the sameness of the barren mountain terrain, wondering if they were going in circles or if the guide they had paid was really taking them in the place they wanted to go. I was struck most of all by how similar Mount Sinai was to all of the surrounding peaks. Except for finding the monastery nestled at the mountain's foot and other traces of human use and habitation (the chapels and network of paths described by medieval and early modern pilgrims), Sinai could be anywhere and everywhere. What set it apart was the human history produced there in conjunction with the landscape.

For this reason, among others, the quote from Maurice Halbwachs' essays on collective memory that I included as one of the epigrams in my Introduction has been a persistent leitmotif

¹ Defined in his foundational study of pilgrimage. See Victor Turner, "The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (1973): 191-230.

² For an excellent introduction to selected pilgrim narratives in translation, see *Traveling Through Sinai: From the Fourth to the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Deborah Manley and Sahar Abdel-Hakim (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2006).

in the way I have approached, questioned, and thought about the material presented in this dissertation. Halbwach's "spatial image" is "the tangible landscape of memory" described by Rebecca Solnit.³ Both indicate the intersection of meaning and experience, whether socially or individually constructed, that defines our understanding of the world. Although the epigram, (which I first encountered out of context, as such in the preface to Jonathan Z. Smith's first chapter in *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*), was a constant companion, it was not until the end of the dissertating process that I returned to Halbwachs' own discussion of Christian topography in the Holy Land as an exercise in collective memory.⁴ I was startled to find that the three discrete periods I had mapped out in my case studies regarding pilgrimage art at Sinai were exactly the same moments of rupture that Halbwachs identified in the production of new systems of localization in Christian Jerusalem – the Early Christian period, the Latin Crusades, and the Turkish occupation of the 16th century. The correspondence shouldn't have been so surprising. Sinai and Jerusalem have shared more of their history than Sinai and Constantinople, for example (although, I would argue that these moments were significant for all three locations in the Eastern Mediterranean world). And it was another diachronic study of Jerusalem pilgrimage that had been inspirational for my decision to focus on Sinai by itself.⁵

Something that Halbwachs only alludes to, but which I hope my own analysis of pilgrimage art at Mount Sinai is successful in addressing, is the importance of landmarks, buildings, and material objects in preserving a connection with the past, even when that past is invented or imaginary. He describes "the resistance of things, sometimes of rites, of mechanical

³ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 117.

⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, "II. The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land," in *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 193-235.

⁵ Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

or material formulas, of ancient commemorations fixed in the stones of churches or of monuments...” While I have argued for the continual reinvention of Sinai’s identity as a sacred place between the 6th and the 16th centuries, I believe it is this stubborn persistence of the material that makes the art and architecture of the pilgrimage site such a tantalizing means for trying to access its past. “They are what you can possess and what in the end possesses you.”

APPENDIX A: FIGURES

Please note: In order to avoid any possible copyright violations, accompanying images have been omitted from this section.

Figure 1.1 El Greco, View of Mount Sinai from the Modena Triptych (1569/70).
Tempera on panel; 37 x 23.8 cm
Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy
(Gardner von Teuffel, “El Greco’s View of Mount Sinai,” fig. 2)

Figure 1.2 El Greco, Modena Triptych, (1569/70); front and back panels.
Tempera on panel; 37 x 60 cm (opened)
Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 61, 280)

Figure 1.3 El Greco, Modena Triptych, (1569/70); view of interior panels.
Tempera on panel; 37 x 60 cm (opened)
Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy
(Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, fig. 3)

Figure 1.4 Reliquary Box with Stones from the Holy Land
and Scenes from the Life of Christ (6th century).
Painted wood, stones, wood fragments, plaster; 24 x 18.4 x 3 cm
Museo Sacro, Vatican Museums
(Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven*, no. 13)

Figure 1.5 Domenikos Theotokopoulos, or El Greco, View of Mount Sinai (c. 1570-72).
Oil and tempera on panel; 41 x 47.5 cm
Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion
(Gardner von Teuffel, "El Greco's View of Mount Sinai," fig. 1)

Figure 1.6 Giovanni Battista Fontana, View of Mount Sinai (Venice, 1569); engraving.
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Res. Ge DD 626.52
(Vassilaki, "Three Questions," fig. 4)

Figure 1.7 El Greco, Saint Luke Painting an Icon of the Virgin (1560-67).
Tempera on panel; 41.6 x 33 cm
Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece
(Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 40)

Figure 1.8 Albrecht Dürer, Adam and Eve (1504); engraving.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 68.187
(Vassilaki, "Three Questions," fig. 9)

Figure 1.9 Christ Crowning the Christian Knight (1555); woodcut.
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
(Mayer, “Notes on the Early el Greco,” pl. 1B)

Figure 1.10 Giovanni Battista Fontana, The Last Judgment (1555-80); engraving.
The British Museum, London, no. 1862,0712.464
(Vassilaki, “Three Questions,” fig. 2)

Figure 1.11 Saint Roch and Scenes from His Life (1516); woodcut after Titian.
The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1860,0414.140
(Pon, “A Document for Titian’s *St. Roch*,” fig. 130)

Figure 1.12 View of Mount Sinai, exterior right wing of Vatican Triptych (late 16th C).
Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, inv. no. 40079
(slide images courtesy of the Vatican Museums)

Figure 1.13 Vatican Triptych (late 16th C), view of front and back panels.
Tempera and gold on panel; 16 x 36 cm (opened)
Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, inv. no. 40079
(slide images courtesy of the Vatican Museums)

Figure 1.14 Vatican Triptych (late 16th C), view of interior panels.
Tempera and gold on panel; 16 x 36 cm (opened)
Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, inv. no. 40079
(slide images courtesy of the Vatican Museums)

Figure 1.15 The Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus (late 12th century)
Tempera and gold on wood; 41.3 x 29.9 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 247)

Figure 1.16 Michael Damaskenos, Icon of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (1591).
Tempera and oil on wood; 119 x 91 cm
Collection of Ecclesiastical Art, Heraklion, Crete
(Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 39)

Figure 1.17 Wilfrid Blunt panel with View of Mount Sinai (late 16th/early 17th C).
Private Collection, Athens, Greece
(Cueto, “Mount Sinai and El Greco’s Spirituality,” fig. 3)

Figure 1.18 View of Mount Sinai, from Wilfrid Blunt panels (late 16th/early 17th C)
Tempera on panel; 20.7 x 13.5 cm
Private Collection, Athens, Greece
(Vassilaki, “Three Questions,” fig. 6)

Figure 1.19 Annunciation (c. 1600?); frame added later.
Tempera and gold on wood; 27 x 19.1 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1871.111
(<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/254>)

Figure 1.20 Sts. Catherine and Mercurios (c. 1600?); frame added later.
Tempera and gold on wood; 25.6 x 18.6 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1871.112
(<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/255>)

Figure 1.21 Triptych with scenes of the Transfiguration, Anastasis, and View of Mount Sinai (c. 1600?).
Tempera and gold on wood; 22 x 16.7 cm (left wing),
25 x 16.8 cm (central panel), 20.6 x 15 cm (right wing)
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1871.113.a-c
(<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/256>)

Figure 1.22 View of Mount Sinai from Yale Triptych (c. 1600?).
Tempera on wood; 20.6 x 15 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven 1871.113c
(<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/256>)

Figure 1.23 Pierre Belons du Man, “Portrait” of Mount Sinai, illustrating *Les Observations de plusieurs singularitez & choses memorables, ... en Grèce, Asie, Iudée, Égypte, Arabie...* (1554). (Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, 2: fig. 1, 339)

Figure 1.24 Johannes Helfferich, View of the Sinai Monastery, woodcut illustrating *Kurtzer und wahrhafftiger Bericht von der Reise aus Venedig nach Hierusalem...* (1577). (Kühnel, “Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters,” fig. 18)

Figure 1.25 Georgios Klontzas, Spada Triptych (c. 1570s); front and back panels.
Tempera and gold on wood and gesso; 53 x 75 cm (open)
Private Collection, United States
(Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Holy Image, Holy Space*, no. 69, 154)

Figure 1.26 Georgios Klontzas, View of Mount Sinai from the Spada triptych (c. 1570s).
Tempera and gold on wood and gesso; 53 x 29.5 cm (closed)
Private Collection, United States
(Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Holy Image, Holy Space*, no. 69, 155)

Figure 1.27 Georgios Klontzas, Yorkshire Triptych (1580s); front and back panels.
Tempera on wood; 56.5 x 61 cm (opened, with Neo-Gothic frame)
Marianna Latsis Collection, Athens, Greece
(Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 32)

Figure 1.28 Georgios Klontzas, Yorkshire Triptych (1580s); view of interior panels.
Tempera on wood; 56.5 x 61 cm (opened, with Neo-Gothic frame),
25.5 x 19 cm (closed, without frame)
Marianna Latsis Collection, Athens, Greece
(Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, no. 32)

Figure 1.29 Sinai Monastery, verso of icon with Christ the Great Hierarch (17th C?).
Weitzmann archives no. 294, Visual Resources Collection of the
Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University
(cf. Chatzidakis, “To topio tou Sina,” fig. 37)

Figure 1.30 Central panel of triptych with Christ the Great Hierarch and
Sinai topographical landscape carved in upper portion of frame (17th C).
(Manafis, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 102)

Figure 1.31 Christopher Führer von Haimendorf, View of Mount Sinai (1570).
(Gardner on Teuffel, “El Greco’s View of Mount Sinai,” fig. 4)

Figure 1.32 Bernhard Walter von Waltersweyl, View of Mount Sinai (1609).
(Kühnel, “Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters,” fig. 10)

Figure 1.33 Erhard Reuwich, View of Mount Sinai, detail from the Map of Jerusalem illustrating Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam...* (1486).
(Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters," fig. 17)

Figure 1.34 Nikodimos Rokou, View of Mount Sinai (1688).
Woodblock engraving; 22.8 x 31.5 cm
(Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, no. 380)

Figure 2.1 Map of Pilgrimage Routes to Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine.
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 71)

Figure 2.2 Justinianic church and bell tower (19th C).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Photo by author)

Figure 2.3 Mosaic program of the apse and eastern wall (c. 548-65).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, plate CLXXIV)

Figure 2.4 Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush, mosaic from the eastern wall of the monastery church (c. 548-65).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Weitzmann in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 8)

Figure 2.5 Moses receiving the Law on Mount Sinai,
mosaic from the eastern wall of the monastery church (c. 548-65).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Weitzmann in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 10)

Figure 2.6 Plan of the Justinianic church at Sinai (c. 548-65)
Location of the Chapel of the Burning Bush indicated with the letter I.
(Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai," fig. 2)

Figure 2.7 Plan of the Sinai monastery with orientation of church determined by the site of the Burning Bush; sixth-century elements shown in black.
(Forsyth, “The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai,” fig. 1)

Figure 2.8 View of the altar inside the Chapel of the Burning Bush at Sinai.
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 70)

Figure 2.9 Apse mosaic of the Transfiguration (c. 548-65).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(ARTstor, Art History Survey Collection)

Figure 2.10 Apse mosaic in the monastery church at Sinai (c. 548-65),
detail of Christ from the Transfiguration.
(Weitzmann in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 1)

Figure 2.11 Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush (early 13th C).
Tempera and gold leaf on textile and wood, 100.5 x 65.7 x 3.1 cm
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 51)

Figure 2.12 Moses receiving the Tablets of Law (early 13th C).
Tempera and gold leaf on textile and wood, 87.6 x 65.1 cm
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 131)

Figure 2.13 Icon of the Prophet Moses (c. 1250-75).
Tempera and gold on wood, 34 x 24 cm
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 236)

Figure 2.14 Icon of Christ Pantokrator (13th C).
Tempera and gold on wood, 43 x 30 cm
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 217)

Figure 2.15 Deesis with St. Euthymios, Moses, and the Archangel Michael (13th C).
Tempera and gold on wood; 27 x 19.1 cm
(Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, fig. 2.7)

Figure 2.16 Modern chapel located on the top of Jebel Musa (March 2010).
(Photo by author)

Figure 2.17 Icon of Elijah (c. 1050-1100 or early 13th C) by Stephanos.
Tempera and gold on textile and wood, 129.2 x 69.2 x 3.5 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 28)

Figure 2.18 Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush
(c. 1050-1100 or early 13th C) by Stephanos.
Tempera and gold on textile and wood, 134 x 69.9 x 4.1cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 29)

Figure 2.19 Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush
with donor figure of the monk, Peter (12th or 13th C).
(*Time Magazine* (13 April 1959): 92)

Figure 2.20 Moses before the Burning Bush (13th C),
detail of anonymous donor figure.
(Photo by author)

Figure 2.21 Vita Icon of Moses (early 13th century).
Tempera and gold on wood, 142 x 90 x 2.8 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Drandaki, *Pilgrimage to Sinai*, fig. 2.1)

Figure 2.22 Detail of donor figure, Neilos Vooueri, archbishop of Sinai, from the Vita Icon of Moses (early 13th century).
(Photo by author)

Figure 2.23 The Heavenly Ladder of St. John Climacus (late 12th C).
Tempera and gold on wood, 41.3 x 29.9 x 2.1 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, no. 247)

Figure 2.24 The Burning Bush at the Sinai Monastery (August 2006).
(Photo by author)

Figure 2.25 Prayers written on pieces of paper and tucked into crevices of
a stone wall enclosing the Burning Bush at Sinai (March 2010).
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.1 The Limbourg Brothers, Burial of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai,
from the *Belles Heures* of Jean, duc de Berry (1405-8/9), fol. 20r.
(Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai," fig. 76)

Figure 3.2 The Tomb of St. Catherine at Sinai, from a German translation of Niccoló da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'oltramare* (c. 1467).
British Library, London; MS Edgerton 1900, fol. 125v

(<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=10931>)

Figure 3.3 Tomb of St. Catherine inside the main altar.
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, plate LXXXV)

Figure 3.4 View inside the main altar of the monastery church at Sinai,
with the tomb of St. Catherine located in the south aisle on the far side.
(Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, plate LXXXIV)

Figure 3.5 Vita Icon of St. Catherine of Alexandria (early 13th C).
Tempera and metal leaf on wood; 75.3 x 51.4 x 2.5 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 55)

Figure 3.6 Wooden proskynetarion displaying the vita icon of St. Catherine
in the north aisle of the monastery church at Sinai.
(Evans and White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 56)

Figure 3.7 Procession with relics of St. Catherine on her feast day in 1995.
(Evans and White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 83)

Figure 3.8 Crucifixion with Deesis and Saints (c. 1100).
Tempera and gold on panel; 28.2 x 21.6 cm
(Paliouras, *The Monastery of St. Catherine*, fig. 106)

Figure 3.9 Crucifixion with Deesis and Saints (c. 1250s).
Tempera and gold on wood; 37.5 x 27.3 x 2.3 cm
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 15)

Figure 3.10 Icon of Sts. Catherine and Marina (11th or 12th century).
Tempera and gold on panel; 28 x 22 cm
(Collins, "Visual Piety," fig. 83)

Figure 3.11 Icon of Sts. Catherine and Marina (13th century).
Tempera and metal leaf on wood; 33 x 25 cm
(Collins, "Visual Piety," fig. 84)

Figure 3.12 St. Catherine painted on the reverse of a mosaic icon (late 13th-early 14th C)
depicting the Akra Tapeinosis or Man of Sorrows, now at Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
Tempera and gold on silk; 13 x 19 cm
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 131, reverse)

Figure 3.13 Martinus of Villanova, altar panel depicting St. Catherine (1387).
Tempera and gold over red bole on panel; 127.3 x 56.5 x 4.1 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 57)

Figure 3.14 Icon of St. Catherine with marble Rococo frame
in the narthex of the monastery church at Sinai.
(Evans and White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 59)

Figure 3.15 Saint Catherine and Scenes from her Life (late 13th C).
Tempera on wood, cabochons; 100 x 115 cm
Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa, Italy
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 296)

Figure 3.16 Interior of St. Catherine's chapel on Jebel Katrin
(Paliouras, *Monastery of St. Catherine*, fig. 183)

Figure 3.17 The Virgin of the Burning Bush with scenes from the Life of Moses and the Burial of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (15th C), from the collection of Isabella I of Castile, d. 1504. Sacristy Museum of the Royal Chapel, Granada (Reyes Ruiz, *Las Tablas de Devoción*, 39)

Figure 3.18 Saint Catherine of Alexandria by Jeremias Palladas (1612).
Iconostasis in the monastery church at Sinai
(Collins, “Visual Piety,” fig. 77)

Figure 4.1 Diptych with St. Procopius and the Virgin Kykkotissa (last quarter of the 13th C).
Tempera and gold on wood; left panel: 50.9 x 39.9 cm, right panel: 50.5 x 39.9 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 214)

Figure 4.2 Detail from the Procopius Diptych,
Virgin of the Burning Bush in upper border of Kykkotissa panel
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 87)

Figure 4.3 St. Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush (13th century)
Tempera and metal leaf on wood; 31.8 x 29 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 56)

Figure 4.4 Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush (late 12th or possibly 13th century)
Tempera on wood; 72.5 x 39.5 cm
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem, Israel
(Huber, *Heilige Berge*, pl. 146)

Figure 4.5 Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush, detail
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem, Israel
(Huber, *Heilige Berge*, pl. 23)

Figure 4.6 Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush (early 14th century)
Fresco, north wall of the south ambulatory
Church of St. Nicholas Orphanos, Thessaloniki, Greece
(Xyngopoulos, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου Ὁρφανοῦ*, fig. 118)

Figure 4.7 Daniel Prophecies about the Great Mountain, from the Chludov Psalter (9th C)
Tempera and gold on parchment; MS gr. 129, fol. 64r
State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia
(Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, fig. 100)

Figure 4.8 Virgin and Child Enthroned with Christ in Majesty, Prophets and Saints (c. 1100)
Tempera and gold on wood; 48.5 x 41.2 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, no. 244)

Figure 4.9 Moses before the Burning Bush, from the Homilies of James Kokkinobaphos
(mid-twelfth century)
Tempera and gold on parchment; Vat. Gr. 1162, fol. 54v
Vatican Library, Rome, Italy
(http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1162/0102)

Figure 4.10 Mount Sinai: “The True Beholding,”
from Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography* (11th C)
Tempera and gold on parchment; Cod. B8, p. 166
Evangelical School, Smyrna, Turkey
(Paliouras, *The Monastery of St. Catherine*, p. 166)

Figure 4.11 Virgin ἡ τῆς βάτου and Four Monastic Saints (c. 1230), by Peter
Tempera on wood; 38 x 39.5 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, fig. 82)

Figure 4.12 The Virgin Blachernitissa with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem (c. 1224), by the painter Peter
Tempera and metal leaf on linen and wood; 45.4 x 37.5 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 53)

Figure 4.13 Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush,
from the Lectionary of Hetum II (1286)
Tempera and gold on parchment; Mat. MS 979, fol. 94v
Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia
(Drampian, *Lectionary of King Hetum II*, ill. 8)

Figure 4.14 Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush,
from the Lectionary of Hetum II (1286)
Tempera and gold on parchment; Mat. MS 969, fol. 228r
Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia
(Drampian, *Lectionary of King Hetum II*, ill.31)

Figure 4.15 The Virgin Blachernitissa with Christ Emmanuel (13th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 99.2 x 67 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Evans, *Byzantium: Faith & Power*, no. 212)

Figure 4.16 Christ Enthroned with the Holy Fathers of Sinai (early 13th C)
Tempera on wood; 57.2 x 42.5 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Mouriki in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 43)

Figure 4.17 Virgin Blachernitissa with the Holy Fathers of Raithou (early 13th C)
Tempera on wood; 58.2 x 40.8 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Mouriki in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 44)

Figure 4.18 Moses and the Virgin Kyriotissa (late 12th/early 13th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 23.2 x 19.1
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 52)

Figure 4.19 Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas
or St. Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 1250s)
Tempera, metal leaf, and gesso on wood; 32.3 x 25.7 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Weitzmann et al., *The Icon*, p. 217)

Figure 4.20 Virgin Kyriotissa with John the Baptist and Moses (c. 1270s)
Tempera and gold on wood; 41.6 x 33 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Weitzmann et al., *The Icon*, p. 228)

Figure 4.21 Virgin Kyriotissa with John the Baptist and St. George (13th C?)
Tempera and gold on wood; 39 x 32 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1332>)

Figure 4.22 Virgin Hodegetria with John the Baptist and St. Nicholas (10th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 21 x 16.2 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1371>)

Figure 4.23 Virgin Kyriotissa with Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon (10th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 20.6 x 16.2 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1632>)

Figure 4.24 Virgin Kyriotissa with Sts. Nicholas and Basil (c. 1280s)
Tempera and gold on wood; size unknown
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1567>)

Figure 4.25 Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Stephen and Moses (11th or 12th century,
punchwork and tooling added in the last quarter of the 13th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 67 x 55 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Drandaki, *Pilgrimage to Sinai*, fig. 3.4)

Figure 4.26 Virgin Kyriotissa enthroned between Moses and Aaron, with Samuel and St. Abramios in the frame (11th or first half of the 12th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 33 x 32 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1339>)

Figure 4.27 Virgin Kyriotissa Enthroned between Sts. Theodosius the Cenobiarch and Theognius (10th or 11th C?); overpainted
Tempera and gold on wood; 22.9 x 21.3 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<https://sinai.princeton.edu/items/show/1437>)

Figure 4.28 Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa Enthroned, the Death of Moses,
the Feast of Herod, and John the Baptist in the Wilderness (13th C)
Tempera and gold on wood; 41.9 x 30.9 cm
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(<http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6242>)

Figure 5.1 Map of the Sinai Peninsula in the Byzantine Period (4th-7th C).
(Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai*, 13)

Figure 5.2 St. Catherine's Monastery below Jebel Musa in Wadi ed-Deir.
(Evans and White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 10)

Figure 5.3 Inscription from ceiling beam no. 8, Βασιλέως Ἰουστι νιανοῦ.
Main church of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai
(Grossmann in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, no. 14)

Figure 5.4 Plan reconstructing the Justinianic monastery at Sinai.
(Grossmann in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery*, 31)

Figure 5.5 View from the south side of the monastery looking toward the Path of Steps.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.6 The Path of Steps ascending Jebel Musa.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.7 Plan of excavations on the top of Mount Sinai, illustrating locations of the modern chapel, Justinianic basilica and pre-Justinianic structures (Koufopoulos and Myriantheos-Koufopoulou, “Architecture of the Justinianic Basilica,” Plan 4)

Figure 5.8 View of the peak of Jebel Musa from Jebel Katarina.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.9 Plan of the Church of St. George, Madaba, with location of the 6th-century mosaic map indicated. (Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba*, 79)

Figure 5.10 Madaba Map (c. 543); mosaic.
Church of St. George, Madaba, Jordan
(ARTstor, Eric Lessing/ART RESOURCE, NY)

Figure 5.11 Bronze Moses Cross (6th C).
The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
(Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, no. 35)

Figure 5.12 Map of Byzantine Monastic Remains on Jebel Sufsafeh, including chapels and prayer niches (numbered 1-14).
(Finkelstein, "Byzantine Prayer Niches," fig. 1)

Figure 5.13 Prayer niche on Jebel Sufsafeh (6th C?).
(Finkelstein in *Ancient Churches Revealed*, 338)

Figure 5.14 Samples of dendritic pyrolusite in the rocks at Sinai.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.15 Fern-like markings of manganese dioxide inclusion
in the red “Ikna” granite on Jebel Katarina, Sinai, Egypt.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.16 Ὁ Βάτος, or *Rubus fruticosus* (blackberry),
from Dioscurides, *De Materia Medica* (c. 512).
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Med. gr. 1, fol. 83
(Hoffman, “Translating Image and Text,” fig. 1)

Figure 5.17 The Burning Bush in the Sinai Monastery (c. 1970).
(ARTstor, Eric Lessing/ART RESOURCE, NY)

Figure 5.18 Interior of the Chapel of the Burning Bush at Sinai.
(Evans and White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 60)

Figure 5.19 Engraved plate depicting Moses before the Burning Bush,
from Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Physica sacra*, or *Geestelyke natuurkunde*
(Amsterdam: Petrus Schenk, 1735-38), I: 179, tab. cxvii
(Bridwell Library Special Collections, Dallas, TX)

Figure 5.20 Dendrite stones and polished granite “eggs” for sale on Jebel Musa.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.21 Nabataean inscription from the South Sinai.
(Meshel, “Sinai Rock Inscriptions,” fig. 2)

Figure 5.22 Sketch of the Nabatean inscriptions in Wadi Mukkatab,
from Leon de Laborde, *Journey through Arabia Petraea* (1836).
(Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom*, 149)

Figure 5.23 Distribution of main concentrations of rock inscriptions in South Sinai.
(Meshel, "Sinai Rock Inscriptions," fig. 6)

Figure 5.24 Rock drawings of human figures, camels, dogs, and ibexes.
(Meshel, "Sinai Rock Inscriptions," fig. 10)

APPENDIX B: HANDLIST OF SINAITIC ICONS

St. Catherine

Vita Icon of Saint Catherine; 75.3 x 51.4 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.128 (12th century)
- Chatterjee in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 328, fig. 88
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 42, fig. 6
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 38
- Papamastorakis 2007, "Pictorial Lives," pp. 33-6, figs. 1-3
- Chatterjee in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 55 (early 13th C)
- Drandaki 2006, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," pp. 501-2, fig. 8 (early 13th C)
- Ševčenko 2006, "Monastery of Mount Sinai and Cult of St. Catherine," pp. 123-4, fig. 67
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 159
- Ševčenko in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 201 (early 13th C)
- Athens 2004 (*Proskynema sto Sina*), no. 4
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 66
- Ševčenko 2003, "St. Catherine and Mount Sinai," fig. 1
- St. Petersburg 2000 (*Sinai, Byzantium, Russia*), no. S60
- Ševčenko 1999, "The Vita Icon," pp. 153-4, fig. 6
- Vokotopoulos 1995 (*Vyzantines eikones*), no. 61
- Belting 1994, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 377, 380, fig. 227
- Krüger 1992, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franziskus*, pp. 65-7, figs. 116, 222
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), pp. 114-5, p. 173 fig. 46
- Weitzmann 1984/86, "Icon Programs," pp. 95, 97, fig. 25
- Weitzmann 1984, "Crusader Icons and the Maniera Greca," pp. 154-5, fig. 13
- Galey 1980, p. 94, fig. 70
- Stubblebine 1966, "Byzantine Influence," pp. 91-2, fig. 10
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 166 (12th - 15th C)

Icon of Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses; 38.1 x 29 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.193 (12th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 69, fig. 19
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 65 (13th century)
- Collins in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 56 (13th century)
- Drandaki 2006, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," pp. 499-500, fig. 5
- Ševčenko 2006, "St. Catherine and Mount Sinai," p. 141, fig. 3
- Drandaki 2004, "Sinai Monastery from the 12th-15th C," pp. 36, 38, fig. 2.3
- Tzevetkova-Ivanova 2000, "Virgin Mary of the BB," pp. 16-7, fig. 4
- Weitzmann 1974, *Loca Sancta Arts*, pp. 53-4, fig. 51

Icon of Saints Catherine and Marina; 28 x 22 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.65 (11th century)
- Collins in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 83, p. 102 (11th/12th centuries)

- Baddeley and Brunner 1996, p. 106 (late 10th/early 11th century)
- Weitzmann 1980, *Ikonen aus der Katharinenkloster*, pl. 7
- Weitzmann 1978, "Malerei des Halberstädter Schrankes," fig. 11
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 50 (11th century)

Icon of Saints Catherine and Marina; 34.6 x 24 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.103.3 (13th century)
- Collins in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 84 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 195, App. no. 90/1418 (1260s)
- Hunt 1991, "A Woman's Prayer," p. 98, fig. 6
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 235
- Weitzmann 1978, "Malerei des Halberstädter Schrankes," fig. 13
- Weitzmann 1966, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," p. 73, fig. 50
- Skrobucha 1966, *Sinai*, p. 67
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 183 (13th century)

Icon of Saints Catherine and Marina

- Parpulov 2010, (XIII).1 (uncertain date)
- Folda 1992, "The Saint Marina Icon," fig. 111; App. no. 168

Triptych of Virgin Galaktotrophousa w/ Sts. Catherine and Marina and donors; 20.8 x 13.6 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIV.100.1, XIV.100.2, XIV.100.3 (Gothic; 14th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 209, App. no. 70/822

Icon of Saint Catherine; c. 50 x 28 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.200 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 292, App. no. 53/581 (second half of the 13th century)

Icon of Saint Catherine; c. 71 x 39 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.132 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 371, App. no. 44/460 (1260s?)

Diptych with St. Procopius and the Virgin Kykkotissa; 50.9 x 39.9/50.5 x 39.9 cm (each wing)

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.320.1 (Procopius), XIII.320.2 (Virgin and Child) (13th century)
- Carr in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), fig. 144 (c. 1270)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 167
- Folda 2005, figs. 271-2, App. no. 110/1783
- Folda in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 214
- Aspra-Vardavakis 2002, "Observations on a 13th-C Sinaitic Diptych," pl. I, figs. 3, 6, 9
- Aspra-Vardavakis in Athens 2000 (*Mother of God*), no. 71
- Hutter 1999, "Magdalen College 'Musterbuch,' pp. 123-5, figs. 16-7
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), pp. 118-9, 190-1, no. 65
- Carr 1996, "Byzantium and Cilician Armenia," pp. 97-8
- Carr 1995, "Images of Medieval Cyprus," p. 96
- Belting 1994, pp. 336-7, fig. 205
- Weitzmann 1984, "Crusader Icons and Maniera Greca," pp. 150-2, fig. 8

- Weitzmann 1982, "Icons of the Period of the Crusades," pp. 205, 277
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 227 (detail only)
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th-14th C*, pp. 112-3, pl. 37 (detail)
- Weitzmann 1966, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," pp. 66-9, figs. 33-40
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 188 (13th century)

Triptych of the 12 Feasts with saints (including Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush, Aaron, Elijah, St. Catherine, and John Climacus); 25 x 15 cm (wings), 25 x 30 cm (center panel)

- Parpulov 2010, XIV.50.1, XIV.50.2, XIV.50.3 (14th century)
- Collins, "Visual Piety," in Los Angeles 2006, (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 96-7 (end of the 14th/beginning of the 15th century)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 220 (Palaiologan)

Icon of the Crucifixion with busts of saints in frame (St. Catherine); 28.2 x 21.6 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.30 (11th century)
- Corrie in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), p. 157, fig. 106 (c. 1200)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 155
- Baltoyanni 2003, *Eikones ho Christos*, no. 56
- Romanini, *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, v. 10, 696
- Carr in New York 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium*), no. 245 (c. 1100)
- Athens 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium at Sinai*), no. 5
- Derbes 1996, *Picturing the Passion*, pp. 28-30, fig. 13
- Vokotopoulos 1995, *Vyzantines eikones*, fig. 29
- Belting 1994, p. 271, pl. 164
- Fisher 1994, "Image and Ekphrasis," pp. 44-55
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 108 (12th century)
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th-14th C*, no. 26
- Weitzmann et al. 1968, *Icons from Southeastern Europe and Sinai*, p. 21
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 64 (1080-1200)

Icon of the Crucifixion w/ busts of saints in frame (Moses, Elijah, St. Catherine); 37.3 x 26.7 cm/37.5 x 27.3 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.247 (13th century)
- Corrie in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 15 (c. 1250s)
- Folda 2005, fig. 152, App. no. 104/1732 (c. 1250)
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, pp. 211, 212-14 (details)
- Weitzmann 1966, "Icon Painting," pp. 56-8, figs. 9, 11; reprinted in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (1982)
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," pp. 180-1, fig. 1 (detail only)

Icon of the Crucifixion with busts of saints in frame and donor figure; c. 50 x 35 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.248 (13th century; overpainted)
- Folda 2005, fig. 365, App. no. 30/261 (points out relationship to App. no. 104/1732)

Vita Icon of Saint Nicholas with expanded Deesis in the frame (Moses, Aaron, Elijah, and St. Catherine); 44.1 x 33.7 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.347.2 (13th century)
- Chatterjee in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), fig. 94, pl. XVIII
- Chatterjee in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 17 (early 15th century?)
- Ševčenko 1983, p. 59, fig. 42
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 170 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of Great Deesis w/ Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, John Climacus, the holy fathers of Sinai and Raithou, St. Catherine and others; 69.7 x 51.1 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.67 (13th century)
- Romanini, *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, v. 8, 305
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 203, fig. 76 (2nd half of the 15th century)
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 145 (12th century)
- Papaioannou 1976, *The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai*, back cover
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 221 (Palaiologan)

Icon of St. Catherine by Martinus of Villanova (1387); 127.3 x 56.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIV.150 (14th century)
- Collins in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 57
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 67
- Baddeley & Brunner 1996, p. 57 (detail)
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 200, fig. 73
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 111 (detail)
- *L'Illustration* 177, no. 4576 (15 November 1930), p. 338
- Benešević 1925, I: fig. 1

Elijah

Icon of the Prophet Elijah by Stephanos; 129.2 x 69.2 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.200.1 (11th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 41, fig. 5 (perhaps 11th C)
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 33 (beginning of the 13th C)
- Parpulov in Los Angeles 2006, no. 28 (c. 1050-1100)
- Piatnitsky 2004, "Dve sinaiskie ikony," pp. 134-9, 161
- Piatnitsky in St. Petersburg 2000 (*Sinai, Byzantium, Russia*), no. S58
- Lidov 1999, *Vizantiiskie ikony Sinaiia*, no. 26
- Mouriki 1995, "Portraits de donateurs," p. 120, no. 15
- Vokotopoulos 1995, *Vyzantines eikones*, no. 56
- Garidis 1993-94, "Melchitikes araboorthodoxes eikones," pp. 370-71, figs. 6-9
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), pp. 109-10, 164, fig. 34
- Weitzmann 1984/86, "Icon Programs," pp. 102-6
- Galey 1980, figs. 55-6; Galey 2003 (2nd ed), p. 122
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th – 14th C*, pp. 36, 96-7, no. 29
- Weitzmann 1978, "Malerei des Halberstädter Schrankes," fig. 21
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 74 (1080-1200)

- Sotiriou 1953, "Helleno-aravikai eikones," pp. 154-5
- Rabino 1938, pp. 59-60, 115 and p. 111, nos. 145, 146
- Rabino 1935, "Souvenirs epigraphiques," pp. 48, 99
- Amantos 1928, p. 45

Icon of Elijah in the Wilderness; cf. with Elijah in spandrels, paired w/ Moses before BB

- Parpulov 2010, XII.22 (12th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 367, App. no. 35/331

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas or Gregory Nazianzus; 32 x 25.5 cm/32.3 x 25.7 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.204 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, figs. 182, 355, App. no. 7/54 (c. 1250)
- Onasch 1997, p.72
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, pp. 217-8
- Weitzmann 1966, "An Encaustic Icon," pp. 720-2
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," pp. 199-200
- Benešević 1925, I: cols. 39ff, pl. 21

Virgin Hodegetria with four saints, Moses and Elijah in spandrels; 31 x 24.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.239 (13th century; overpainted)
- Corrie in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 429, fig. 130 (c. 1250)
- Folda 2005, fig. 191, App. no. 23/205 (1250s – early 1260s)
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 221
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," p. 192, fig. 17

Outer wing of triptych; Elijah and Moses before Virgin of the BB, 12 Apostles; 20.5 x 14 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.219 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, p. 547, fig. 385, App. no. 72/886
- Weitzmann 1972, "Four Icons on Mount Sinai: New Aspects in Crusader Art," fig. 9

Moses

Icons of Moses receiving the Law before the Burning Bush by Stephanos; 132.5 x 69.9 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.200.2 (11th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 41, fig. 4 (perhaps 11th C)
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 34 (13th century)
- Vassilaki in London 2008 (*Byzantium*), no. 316 (late 12th/early 13th C)
- Parpulov in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 29 (c. 1050-1100)
- Piatnitsky 2004, "Dve sinaiskie ikony," pp. 134-9, 161
- Piatnitsky in St. Petersburg 2000 (*Sinai, Byzantium, Russia*), no. S59
- Mouriki 1995, "Portraits de donateurs," p. 121, no. 16
- Vokotopoulos 1995, *Vyzantines eikones*, nos. 57-8

- Garidis 1993-94, "Melchitikes araboorthodoxes eikones," pp. 370-1, figs. 6-9
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 110
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 135 (12th – 13th century)
- Weitzmann 1984/86, "Icon Programs," pp. 102-6
- Weitzmann 1978, "Malerei des Halberstädter Schrankes," figs. 22-3
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 75 (1080-1200)
- Sotiriou 1953, "Helleno-aravikai eikones," pp. 153-4
- Rabino 1938, pp. 59, 115, and p. 111, nos. 142, 144
- Rabino 1935, "Souvenirs epigraphiques," pp. 48, 98
- Amantos 1928, pp. 44-5

Icon of Moses removing his sandals before the Burning Bush; 100.5 x 65.7 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.90.1 (11th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 58, fig. 17 (13th century)
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 35 (beginning of the 13th C)
- Gerstel in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 51 (early 13th C)
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 68
- Athens 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium at Sinai*), no. 10
- Ševčenko in New York 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium*), no. 250 (early 13th C)
- Mouriki 1995, "Portraits de donateurs," p. 111
- Vokotopoulos 1995, *Vyzantines eikones*, fig. 55
- Garidis 1993-94, "Melchitikes araboorthodoxes eikones," pp. 370-72, figs. 10, 11
- Mouriki 1991-92, "A Pair of Moses Icons," pp. 171-84, figs. 1, 3, 5, 8
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), pp. 110-11, fig. 36, p. 166
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th – 14th C*, pp. 36, 75, pl. 18
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 160 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of Moses receiving the Law; 87.6 x 65.1cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.90.2 (11th century)
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 69 (beginning of the 13th C)
- Gerstel in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 131, p. 255
- Mouriki 1991-92, "A Pair of Moses Icons," figs. 2, 4, 6-7
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 167

Vita Icon of Moses; 142 x 90 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.126 (12th century)
- Papamastorakis 2007, "Pictorial Lives," figs. 4-8
- Athens 2004 (*Pilgrimage to Sinai*), fig. 2.1
- Ševčenko 1999, "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," fig. 19
- Baddeley & Brunner 1996, p. 50
- Mouriki 1995, "A Moses Cycle," figs. 1-16
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 137
- Weitzmann 1984/86, "Icon Programs," fig. 28
- Weitzmann 1975, "Study of Byzantine Book Illumination," figs. 20, 21a-b

Icon of Moses receiving the Law with the Burning Bush and donor figure of the monk Peter

- Parpulov 2010, XII.105.1 (12th century)
- Étingof 2005, *Vizantijskie ikony*, fig. 64
- Skrobucha 1966, *Sinai*, p. 21
- *Time Magazine* 73, no. 11 (15 April 1959), p. 92
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 161 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of Moses receiving the Law (post-Byzantine); 77 x 51 cm

- Parpulov 2010, (XIII).200 (uncertain date; overpainted)
- Weitzmann 1984/86, "Icon Programs," fig. 33 (1841)

Icon of the Prophet Moses (cf. Christ Pantokrator); 34.3 x 23.8 cm/34 x 24 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.275 (13th century)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 149 (detail)
- Folda 2005, fig. 212, App. no. 88/1412
- Ševčenko in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 236
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th – 14th C*, p. 110
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 195 (13th century)

Icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem by Peter; 45.4 x 37.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.20 (13th century)
- Parpulov in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 53 (c. 1223)
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 175, fig. 48
- Mouriki 1988, "Four 13th-Century Sinai Icons," figs. 1-4, 16, 18
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 158

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas or Gregory Nazianzus; 32 x 25.5 cm/32.3 x 25.7 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.204 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, figs. 182, 355, App. no. 7/54 (c. 1250)
- Onasch 1997, p.72
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, pp. 217-8
- Weitzmann 1966, "An Encaustic Icon," pp. 720-2
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," pp. 199-200
- Benešević 1925, I: cols. 39ff, pl. 21

Icon of Moses, John the Baptist, and Elijah

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.210 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 376, App. no. 55/589

Icon with Virgin Kyriotissa enthroned, the Burial of Moses, Herod's Banquet, and John the Baptist in the Wilderness; 41.9 x 30.9 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.222 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, pp. 331-2, fig. 186, App. no. 52/574
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," fig. 15

Moses & Aaron

Icon of the Virgin enthroned between Moses and Aaron; 33 x 32 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.140 (11th century)
- Weitzmann 1975, "Icons attributed to Cyprus," pl. 23; reprinted in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (1982) (first half of the 12th century)
- Stubblebine 1966, "Byzantine Influence," fig. 2 (detail)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 157 (13th century)

Icon of Moses and Aaron receiving the Law with donor Theodosius Salustius; 36.5 x 26 cm

- Parpulov 2010, (XIII).40 (uncertain date)
- *Calendar* 2001, no. 8; 1998, no. 6
- Mouriki 1995, "Portraits de donateurs," p. 114 (detail)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 162 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of Moses and Aaron; 20 x 16 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.244 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 213, App. no. 12/76
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," p. 198
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 179 (13th century)

Icon of Moses and Aaron; 37.5 x 20 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.130.1 (unpublished; belongs to a series of 8 icons of identical size and attributed to the same artist (others show John the Baptist, Matthew and Mark, Peter and Paul, Sts. Euthymius and Theodosius, Sts. Arsenius and John of Damascus, the Transfiguration, and the Crucifixion)

Triptych of Crucifixion with Moses and Aaron on wings; 42 x 29 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.266.3 (Moses), XIII.266.2 (Aaron) (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 211, App. no. 13/78
- Weitzmann 1984, "Crusader Icons and Maniera Greca," p. 153, fig. 11
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 193 (13th century)

Triptych wings with Moses and Aaron

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.106 (13th century; overpainted)
- Folda 2005, fig. 311, App. no. 115/1857

Sanctuary doors with Moses and Aaron

- Parpulov 2010, (XII).90 (uncertain date)
- Ševčenko in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 23 (c. 1200-1250)
- Lidov 1999, *Vizantiiskie ikony Sinaiia*, no. 25
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 165, fig. 35
- Chatzidakis 1979, "L'Évolution de l'icone," pp. 355-6, pl. 64, figs. 18-9

Moses as flanking figure

Icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa with Christ in Majesty, Prophets and Saints; 48.5 x 41.2 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.255 (11th century)
- Father Justin in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 279, fig. 75
- Collins 2006, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity," pp. 108-9, fig. 89
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 77
- Papamastorakis in Athens 2000 (*Mother of God*), no. 28 (mid-12th century)
- Athens 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium at Sinai*), no. 4
- Carr in New York 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium*), no. 244 (c. 1080-1130)
- Corrie 1996, "Coppo di Marcovaldo and the Bare-legged Christ Child," pp. 45-52, pl. 3
- Cutler & Spieser 1996, *Byzance médiéval*, figs. 305-36
- Vokotopoulos 1995, *Vyzantines eikones*, figs. 22-3
- Belting 1994, pp. 290-96, pls. 174, 176
- Carr 1993-94, "Presentation of an Icon," pp. 239-48
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 105, p. 151 pl. 19
- Etinhof 1988, "A Byzantine Painting in the Hermitage," pp. 141-59
- Babić 1988, "Il Modello e la replica," pp. 63-5
- Lazarev 1986, fig. 328
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 17, pl. p. 48
- Maguire 1980-81, "Iconography of Symeon," p. 267, pl. 12
- Galavaris 1980, "*Majestas Mariae*," pp. 9-10
- Sotiriou 1956, nos. 54-56 (1080-1200)

Icon of the Deesis and three standing saints (St. Euthymios, Moses, and Michael); 27 x 19.1 cm/27.2 x 19.1 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.251 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 187, App. no. 33/293
- Dodd 2001, *Frescoes of Mar Musa al-Habashi*, pl. 82
- Walter 1970, "Further Notes on the Deësis," fig. 1
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," p. 194, fig. 18

Icon of the Deesis with two standing saints (including Moses)

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.150 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 369, App. no. 38/366

Triptych with 12 Apostles on wing, Prophets Elijah and Moses in lunette; 23.5 x 14 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.219 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 385, App. no. 72/886
- Weitzmann 1972, "Four Icons: New Aspects in Crusader Art," pp. 287-8, fig. 9; reprinted in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (1982)

Virgin Hodegetria with four saints, Moses and Elijah in spandrels (15th C?); 31 x 24.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.239 (13th century; overpainted)

- Corrie in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 429, fig. 130 (c. 1250)
- Folda 2005, pp. 333-4, fig. 191, App. no. 23/205 (1250s – early 1260s)
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 221
- Weitzmann 1963, “13th-C Crusader Icons,” p. 192, fig. 17

Vita Icon of Saint Nicholas with expanded Deesis in the frame (Moses, Aaron, Elijah, and St. Catherine); 44.1 x 33.7 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.347.2 (13th century)
- Chatterjee in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), fig. 94, pl. XVIII
- Chatterjee in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 17
- Ševčenko 1983, p. 59, fig. 42
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 170 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of Great Deesis w/ Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, John Climacus, the holy fathers of Sinai and Raithou, St. Catherine and others; 69.7 x 51.1 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.67 (13th century)
- Romanini, *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, v. 8, 305
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 203, fig. 76 (2nd half of the 15th century)
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 145 (12th century)
- Papaioannou 1976, *The Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai*, back cover
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 221 (Palaiologan)

Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush

Wing of triptych; Elijah and Moses before Virgin of the BB, 12 Apostles; 20.5 x 14 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.219 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 385, 547, App. no. 72/886
- Weitzmann 1972, “Four Icons on Mount Sinai: New Aspects in Crusader Art,” fig. 9

Icon of Moses before the Burning Bush w/ Virgin Orans; 22.9 x 17.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.86 (13th century)
- Collins, “Visual Piety,” in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 95 (14th-15th C)
- Weitzmann 1974, “*Loca Sancta* Arts,” fig. 50 (Palaiologan)

Triptych of the 12 Feasts with saints (including Moses and the Virgin of the Burning Bush, Aaron, Elijah, St. Catherine, and John Climacus); 25 x 15 cm (wings), 25 x 30 cm (center panel)

- Parpulov 2010, XIV.50.1, XIV.50.2, XIV.50.3 (14th century)
- Collins, “Visual Piety,” in Los Angeles 2006, (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 96-7 (end of the 14th/beginning of the 15th century)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 220 (Palaiologan)

Icon of Moses before the Virgin of the Burning Bush (late 12th C); **Jerusalem Patriarchate**

- Collins 2006, “Visual Piety,” 108, fig. 88
- Drandaki 2006, “Through Pilgrims’ Eyes,” 499-500, fig. 6 (2nd half 13th C)

- Garidis 1998, "Icônes du XIIIe et du XIVe siècles," 226-9, fig. 1
- Boespflug 1992, "Un étrange spectacle," 12, fig. 1
- Aliprantis 1986, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, 23, 30, fig. 21
- Huber 1980, *Heilige Berge*, 184-8, figs. 23, 146
- Wessel and Brenske 1980, *Ikonen*, 30

Virgin of the Burning Bush; Kyriotissa

Icon of Saint Catherine with the Virgin of the Burning Bush and Moses; 38.1 x 29 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.193 (12th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 69, fig. 19
- Kalomoirakis in Athens 2008 (*Egeria*), no. 65 (13th century)
- Collins in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 56 (13th century)
- Drandaki 2006, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes," pp. 499-500, fig. 5 (2nd half 13th C)
- Ševčenko 2006, "St. Catherine and Mount Sinai," p. 141, fig. 3
- Drandaki 2004, "Sinai Monastery from the 12th-15th C," p. 38, fig. 2.3
- Tzevetkova-Ivanova 2000, "Virgin Mary of the BB," pp. 16-7, fig. 4
- Aliprantis 1986, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai*, fig. 45 (10th C)
- Tatić-Djurić 1981, "L'icône de Kyriotissa," fig. 17 (10th C)
- Weitzmann 1974, "Loca Sancta Arts," pp. 53-4, fig. 51

Icon of the Virgin H THS BATOU and four monastic saints by Peter; 38 x 39.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.21 (13th century)
- Collins, "Visual Piety," in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 82 (1230-40)
- Baddeley & Brunner 1996, p. 105
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 172, fig. 45 (3rd decade of the 13th century)
- Mouriki 1988, "Four 13th-Century Sinai Icons," figs. 7-10, 17, 19
- Sotiriou 1956, nos. 155-56 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Sabas; 23 x 17 cm [**Kiev**; now destroyed?]

- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.1 (12th century)
- Étingof 2005, *Vizantijskie ikony*, figs. 60-1

Icon of Daniel the Stylite [**Kiev**; broken panel w/out figure of the Virgin]; 22 x 10 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.2 (12th century)
- Étingof 2005, *Vizantijskie ikony*, fig. 56

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with the Prophet Isaiah; 23 x 19 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.3 (12th century)
- Collins 2006, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity," fig. 81 (13th century)
- Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), p. 257, fig. 132
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th – 14th C*, pl. 30
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 163 (12th – 15th C)

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses; 23.1 x 18.6 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.4 (12th century)
- Collins and Nelson in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 52 (13th century)
- Weitzmann 1980, *Ikonen aus der Katharinenkloster*, pl. 11

- Weitzmann 1974, "*Loca Sancta Arts*," fig. 48
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Joachim; 23 x 19 cm
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.5 (12th century)
 - Weitzmann 1974, "*Loca Sancta Arts*," fig. 49
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Abraham
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.6 (12th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Simeon
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.7 (12th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. George
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.8 (12th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Demetrius? [damaged]
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.9 (12th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Theodore
- Parpulov 2010, XII.52.10 (12th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Moses, Elijah, and St. Nicholas or Gregory Nazianzus; 32 x 25.5 cm/32.3 x 25.7 cm
- Parpulov 2010, XIII.204 (13th century)
 - Folda 2005, figs. 182, 355, App. no. 7/54 (c. 1250)
 - Onasch 1997, p.72
 - Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, pp. 203, 217-8
 - Weitzmann 1966, "An Encaustic Icon," pp. 720-2
 - Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," pp. 199-200
 - Benešević 1925, I: cols. 39ff, pl. 21
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with John the Baptist and Moses; 41.6 x 33 cm
- Parpulov 2010, XIII.323 (13th century)
 - Folda 2005, fig. 194, App. no. 43/428
 - Onasch 1997, p. 72
 - Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 228
 - Weitzmann 1966, "Icon Painting," pp. 65-6, fig. 32
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with John the Baptist and St. George; 39 x 32 cm
- Parpulov 2010, XIII.250 (13th century)
 - Sotiriou 1956, no. 177 (13th century)
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Sts. Nicholas and Basil
- Parpulov 2010, XIII.114 (13th century)
 - Folda 2005, fig. 314, App. no. 93/1454
- Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with St. Stephen and Moses; 67 x 55 cm
- Parpulov 2010, XI.155 (11th century)
 - Folda 2005, fig. 310, App. no. 95/1482 (c. 1275/1280)
 - Papamastorakis in Athens 2004 (*Pilgrimage to Sinai*), fig. 3.4 (12th-13th century)
 - Weitzmann 1975, "A Group of Early 12th-C Sinai Icons," pl. 24a-b (12th C; tooling added in last quarter of the 13th)

- Sotiriou 1956, no. 197 (13th century)

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa with Panteleimon and Hermolaos; 20.6 x 16.2 cm

- Weitzmann, Sinai Icons, B.54 (10th C)
- Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta Art," fig. 47

Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (?) with John the Baptist and St. Nicholas; 21 x 16.2 cm

- Weitzmann, Sinai Icons, B.53 (10th C)

Virgin Hodegetria with four saints, Moses and Elijah in spandrels (15th C?); 31 x 24.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.239 (13th century; overpainted)
- Corrie in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 429, fig. 130 (c. 1250)
- Folda 2005, pp. 333-4, fig. 191, App. no. 23/205 (1250s – early 1260s)
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 221
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," p. 192, fig. 17

Virgin of the Burning Bush; orant figure

Diptych with St. Procopius and the Virgin Kykkotissa; 50.9 x 39.9/50.5 x 39.9 cm (each wing)

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.320.1 (Procopius), XIII.320.2 (Virgin and Child) (13th century)
- Carr in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), fig. 144 (c. 1270)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 167
- Folda 2005, 447-54, figs. 271-88, App. no. 110/1783
- Folda in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 214
- Aspra-Vardavakis 2002, "Observations on a 13th-C Sinaitic Diptych," pl. I, figs. 3, 6, 9
- Aspra-Vardavakis in Athens 2000 (*Mother of God*), no. 71
- Hutter 1999, "Magdalen College 'Musterbuch,' pp. 123-5, figs. 16-7
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), pp. 118-9, 190-1, no. 65
- Carr 1996, "Byzantium and Cilician Armenia," pp. 97-8
- Carr 1995, "Images of Medieval Cyprus," p. 96
- Belting 1994, pp. 336-7, fig. 205
- Weitzmann 1984, "Crusader Icons and Maniera Greca," pp. 150-2, fig. 8
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, pp. 205, 277
- Weitzmann et al. 1982, *The Icon*, p. 227 (detail only)
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th-14th C*, pp. 112-3, pl. 37 (detail)
- Weitzmann 1966, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," pp. 66-9, figs. 33-40
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 188 (13th century)

Icon of Moses before the Burning Bush w/ Virgin orans; 22.9 x 17.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.86 (13th century)
- Collins, "Visual Piety," in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), fig. 95 (14th-15th C)
- Weitzmann 1974, "Loca Sancta Arts," fig. 50 (Palaiologan)

Virgin of the Burning Bush; Blachernitissa

Icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa with Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem by Peter;
45.4 x 37.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.20 (13th century)
- Vassilaki and Cormack in London 2008, fig. 53 (c. 1223)
- Parpulov in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 53 (c. 1223)
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 175, fig. 48
- Mouriki 1988, "Four 13th-Century Sinai Icons," figs. 1-4, 16, 18
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 158

Diptych wing with Virgin Blachernitissa and saints; 34 x 25 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.88.1 (12th century)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 231 (11th-C/Palaiologan)

Icon of Virgin Blachernitissa; 99.2 x 67 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.101 (13th century)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, pp. 176-77
- Cormack in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), p. 253, fig. 130 (1260/70)
- Folda 2005, fig. 415, App. no. 134
- Bakalova in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 212
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 76
- Papamastorakis in Athens 2004 (*Pilgrimage to Sinai*), p. 54
- Baltoyanni in Athens 2000 (*Mother of God*), pp. 140, 142, fig. 86
- Piatnitsky in St. Petersburg 2000 (*Sinai, Byzantium, Russia*), pp. 239-41, no. S57
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 186, fig. 61 (last quarter of the 13th C)

Virgin of the Burning Bush; enthroned

Virgin Kyriotissa enthroned w/ Moses and Aaron, Prophet Samuel and Abramios; 33 x 32 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.140 (11th century)
- Weitzmann 1975, "Icons attributed to Cyprus," pl. 23; reprinted in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (1982) (first half of the 12th century)
- Stubblebine 1966, "Byzantine Influence," fig. 2 (detail)
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 157

Virgin Kyriotissa enthroned w/ Theodosius the Cenobiarch and Theognius; 22.9 x 21.3 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XI.70 (11th C)
- Weitzmann 1976, fig. 23 (detail)

Icon with miraculous images of the Virgin and scenes from the Life of Christ; 49 x 36 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.75.1 (12th century)
- Galavaris 2009, *An Eleventh Century Hexaptych*, figs. 1-2
- Trahoulia 2002, "The Truth in Painting," figs. 1-4
- Baltoyanni in Athens 2000 (*Mother of God*), figs. 82, 87-8, 90

- Cutler & Spieser 1996, *Byzance médiéval*, fig. 310
- Weitzmann 1971, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, fig. 302
- Weitzmann 1967, "Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting," pl. 36 (11th century)
- Sotiriou 1956, nos. 146, 147 (11th century?)

Icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa enthroned with donor, Prophets David and Habakkuk in the spandrels (central panel of triptych); 43 x 31 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.146.1 (13th century)
- Corrie in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), p. 434, fig. 136
- Folda 2005, fig. 210, App. no. 51/573
- Papamastorakis in Athens 2004 (*Pilgrimage to Sinai*), fig. 3.5
- Mouriki 1995, "Portraits de donateurs," p. 117 (detail only)
- Chatzidakis 1979, "L'Évolution de l'icone," fig. 15 (back)
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," pp. 198-9
- Sotiriou 1956, nos. 171-2

Virgin and Child enthroned w/ the Archangel Michael and John the Baptist; c. 34 x 25 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.103.6 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 200, App. no. 48/544

Virgin and Child enthroned with the Death of Moses, Feast of Herod, and John the Baptist

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.222 (13th C)
- Folda 2005, 331-2, fig. 186, App. no. 52/574
- Weitzmann 1963, "13th-C Crusader Icons," 190-2, 198, fig. 15

John Climacus/Heavenly Ladder

Icon of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus; 41.1 x 29.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.92 (12th century)
- Elsner & Wolf in Gerstel & Nelson 2010 (*Approaching the Holy Mountain*), fig. 8
- Vassilaki in London 2008 (*Byzantium*), no. 323 (late 12th century)
- Pentcheva in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 48 (late 12th century)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 107
- Evans 2004, *Saint Catherine's Monastery: A Photographic Essay*, p. 69
- Archbishop Damianos in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), fig. 11.3
- Athens 1997 (*Glory of Byzantium at Sinai*), no. 7
- Corrigan in New York 2004 (*Glory of Byzantium*), no. 247 (late 12th century)
- Vokotopoulos 1995 (*Vyzantines eikones*), fig. 28
- Belting 1994, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 273-4
- Mouriki in Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 107, p. 155 pl. 24
- Paliouras 1985, fig. 144 (12th – 13th century)
- Coche de la Ferté 1981, *L'Art de Byzance*, pl. 132
- Weitzmann 1978, *The Icon: 6th – 14th C*, pl. 25
- Weitzmann et al. 1968, *Icons from Southeastern Europe and Sinai*, p. 19
- *National Geographic*, 125 no. 1 (January 1964), p. 115

- Gerster 1961, *Sinai, Land der Offenbarung*, p. 144

Icon of St. John Climacus; 23.5 x 18.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.76 (13th century)
- Pentcheva in Los Angeles 2006 (*Icons from Sinai*), no. 47 (15th century)
- Rossi 2006, *Treasures of the Monastery*, p. 153
- Ševčenko in New York 2004 (*Faith & Power*), no. 239 (15th century)
- Galey 1980, fig. 87; Galey 2003 (2nd ed.), p. 134
- Gerster 1961, *Sinai, Land der Offenbarung*, p. 140
- Sotiriou 1956, no. 238

Icon of St. John Climacus

- Parpulov 2010, XIII.350 (13th century)
- Folda 2005, fig. 401, App. no. 117/1901

Holy Fathers of Sinai & Raithou

Icon with the Holy Fathers of Sinai and Deesis; 57.2 x 42.5 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.135.1 (12th century)
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 173, fig. 43 (early 13th C)
- Galey 1980, fig. 57; Galey 2003 (2nd ed.), pp. 92-3, 123
- Sotiriou 1956/58, no. 153-4

Icon with the Holy Fathers of Raithou and the Virgin Blachernitissa; 58.2 x 40.8 cm

- Parpulov 2010, XII.135.2 (12th century)
- Manafis 1990 (*Sinai: Treasures*), p. 172, fig. 44 (early 13th C)

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