

Sinaiticus



The Bulletin of the Saint Catherine Foundation
London * New York * Geneva
2011

ON THE OTHER PAGES

News

Monastery is an oasis of calm in troubled times *Page 2*

South Wing Project news *Page 2*

Oxford Study Day papers published *Page 2*

The Place of Bindings in the study of the book NICHOLAS PICKWOOD *Page 2*

Events

Oxford, Study Day in Memory of Prof. Ihor Ševčenko, 27 November 2010 *Page 4*

Les Activités de l'Association suisse en 2010 *Page 5*

Αθήνα, Δείπνο στο Μέγαρο Υπατία, 25 Νοεμβρίου 2010 *Page 6*

Ομιλία του κ. Νικολάου Καλτσά *Page 7*

Preview

Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th – 9th Century)
12 March – 8 July 2012 *Page 10*

Obituaries

Athina Difonis Carras *Page 12*

John William Georgas *Page 12*

George Embiricos *Page 13*

Articles

Sinai Syriac 30 and Mrs Bensly's Silk Cover
FATHER JUSTIN *Page 14*

Cyprus and the Sinai Icons
ROBIN CORMACK *Page 16*

SAINT CATHERINE'S LOANS KEY WORKS TO 2012 METROPOLITAN EXHIBITION

American Associates plan March gala

The Monastery of Saint Catherine is a major lender to the *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th–9th Century)* exhibition opening at the Metropolitan Museum in New York on 12 March 2012. The *New York Times* in its overview of forthcoming shows calls the exhibition 'potentially one of the most engrossing offerings of the coming year'. The monastery is loaning exceptional icons painted during the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium, the earliest text of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* by the monastery's abbot Saint John Klimacus, manuscripts in Arabic reflecting the political transformation of the region and a copy of the *Achiname* given to the monastery during the first generation of Arab dominance. The monastery itself will figure prominently as one of the great architectural monuments of the early Byzantine period. Father Justin, the Librarian of Saint Catherine's, will write on the monastery for the catalogue.

Byzantium and Islam is curated by Dr Helen C. Evans, the Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator for Byzantine Art at the Metropolitan Museum and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation. American Associates Board member and former Vice President Mary Jaharis has with her husband Michael provided major support for the exhibition, together with the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation and The Hagop Kevoorkian Foundation.

The American Associates plan a gala evening on 20 March 2012 to celebrate the display in New York of important icons, manuscripts and objects from Sinai. The evening will begin with a private view of the exhibition and a reception, followed by dinner in the Metropolitan Museum's spectacular Temple of Dendur gallery. This fundraising event will provide significant support for the Saint Catherine Foundation's ongoing conservation work in Sinai.



MONASTERY IS AN OASIS OF CALM IN TROUBLED TIMES

The monastery remained an oasis of calm throughout the Egyptian events of 2011. Apart from a temporary loss of internet service, Saint Catherine's was largely unaffected by the upheaval in the big cities. At one point, the police presence in South Sinai disappeared. The Bedouin simply took over all the checkpoints and protected the monastery, exactly as they did in the sixth century. This time around, they were armed with Kalashnikovs, but the provision that the Emperor Justinian enacted for the protection of the Sinai monastery is clearly still in place. The friends of Saint Catherine's were reassured to learn that life continued peacefully, and they look forward to a more responsive and representative rule in Egypt.

SOUTH WING PROJECT NEWS

The plans for the building work are undergoing revision, as reported in the 2010 issue of *Sinaiticus*. The recent turmoil in Egypt has delayed the process, but progress is being made. The design revision has been entrusted to Dr Petros Koufopoulos, familiar to readers of *Sinaiticus* as a member of the Board of Trustees of the UK foundation and a distinguished architectural historian with long experience of projects in Sinai. Dr Koufopoulos was responsible for the East Wing Cells renovation and the design of the Sacristy museum, which opened to acclaim in 2001.

OXFORD STUDY DAY PAPERS PUBLISHED

The papers given at the 2010 Study Day in memory of Professor Ihor Ševčenko, *St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai: Its Manuscripts and their Conservation*, have been edited by Professor Cyril Mango and Dr Marlia Mundell Mango and published by the Saint Catherine Foundation. Available direct from the foundation for £10 plus postage and packing, this attractive 88-page publication has 51 black-and-white illustrations. It would be of interest not only to scholars, but also to friends and members of the foundation and monastery.

The authors of the papers include Cyril Mango (*Ihor Ševčenko and the Sinai Monastery*), Peter Grossmann (*The Monastery that Justinian Built*), Nigel Wilson (*Libraries in Byzantium and the West*), Lukas A. Schachner (*Book Production in Early Byzantine Monasteries*), Nancy P. Ševčenko (*Manuscripts Copied at Sinai before the Fourteenth Century*), Georgi R. Parpulov (*The Greek and Latin Manuscripts of Mount Sinai and the Scholarly World*), Sebastian Brock (*The Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic Manuscripts at Sinai*), R.W. Thomson (*The Georgian, Caucasian Albanian and Armenian Manuscripts at Sinai*), C.M. MacRobert (*Slavonic Manuscripts at Sinai*), Olga B. Strakhov (*Ihor Ševčenko and the Origin of the Glagolitic Script*) and Nicholas Pickwoad (*The Saint Catherine's Monastery Library Conservation Project and the Slavonic Manuscripts*).

The proceeds from the sale of the publication will benefit the Ševčenko Memorial Fund for the conservation of the Slavonic manuscripts at Sinai.

THE PLACE OF BINDINGS IN THE STUDY OF THE BOOK

Professor NICHOLAS PICKWOAD reports here on the Place of Bindings conference convened in Oxford on 9 and 10 June 2011 by the Ligatus Research Centre of the University of the Arts London, the Centre for the Study of the Book at the Bodleian Library, Oxford and CERL (the Consortium of European Research Libraries), with support from the Saint Catherine Foundation and Spiro and Dorothy Latsis.

The Place of Bindings conference grew out of the survey of the manuscripts and printed books in the library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine. Our work in the library had underlined the importance of the bindings on the books for our understanding of the collection as a whole and to the history of the book in the widest sense, including provenance, status, use and trade in books across the world.

The conference was specifically intended to explore not only the current resources available to researchers, but also how to bring the study of bookbinding further into mainstream academic research. For too long, many have seen bookbinding studies as a pleasing but not necessarily very important adjunct to historical bibliography, concerned almost entirely with the extensively decorated and necessarily expensive bindings that constitute a tiny minority, perhaps no more than one per cent, of the bindings used to carry and make accessible to their readers written or printed texts.

One of the prerequisites for any such expansion of interest in bindings is the creation of a consistent and extensive vocabulary to describe bindings, especially those that have little or no decoration. It is in answering this need that the surveys in the monastery came into play, as the work involved the development of a consistent language to allow us to describe the technical features that we found in the bindings. A substantial grant from the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) which allowed us to transfer the survey data recorded on paper forms into a database and to scan the 30,000 slides and as many drawings and diagrams so that they can be viewed with the data online, also gave us the opportunity to turn this initial vocabulary into an XML-based glossary of terms. We felt that this work could help to provide one of the fundamental requirements for the development of bookbinding studies into an academic discipline, and conference was the place where our work and that of others working in the same field could be put on display and the way forward debated.

The first day of the conference was devoted to papers by well-known scholars in the field from America, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden, as well as the United Kingdom, describing either resources available on the web or in book form or current research projects, including a paper by Dr Thanasis Velios on the Ligatus Glossary Project and the work done by Nikolas Sarris in his successful doctoral thesis on the finishing tools found on the bound manuscripts in the monastery library. The day ended with a guest lecture by the famous binding historian



Left to right: Federico Macchi, Andreas Wittenberg, Athanasios Velios, Peter Gumbert, Martin Doerr, Andrew Honey, Nicholas Pickwood, Helena Stromquist, Anthony Hobson, Mirjam Foot, Paul Needham, John Goldfinch. *Kneeling:* Maria-Cristina Misiti, Maria-Luisa Vidriero, Nikolas Sarris.

Anthony Hobson, a few weeks short of his ninetieth birthday, in which he looked back at the early history of the study of bindings, in which his father G. D. Hobson had been such a prominent figure. It was a fascinating account from a man who has a longer perspective on the subject than almost anyone else. This day was very well attended and it was quickly apparent after the conference was announced that the hall originally booked was too small, and we moved to the larger, new and very elegant T. S. Eliot Lecture Theatre, which was made available to us by Merton College at a very favourable rate, allowing us to accommodate over 150 delegates.

The second day took the form of a discussion by an international group of 45 invited delegates, including all the speakers from the day before. Librarians, cataloguers, book historians, binding historians, book conservators, bookbinders and antiquarian booksellers were all included. The day started with five short papers calculated to stoke the debate, and the exchanges continued all day, with breaks only for coffee, lunch and tea. Everything was recorded, with three rapporteurs taking notes, and we are currently editing the discussions and papers for publication later this year. The subjects under discussion included the value of studying bindings, how they should be described and catalogued, and how library staff and scholars might be trained to understand them better. During the debate it was agreed that we should send out a questionnaire to all those present on both days, asking each respondent to list the ten questions they would most like answered by a description of a binding and then in each case the reason why they would like that question asked. This format was suggested by Martin Doerr of the Institute of Computer Science of the Foundation for Research and Technology (FORTH-ICS) at the University of Heraklion, Crete, as it would elicit more interesting answers. This was the case, and the

responses have been analysed by our new research assistant, Aurélie Martin.

After two days packed with information and debate, the delegates left Oxford feeling that we had made a good start in establishing the Place of Bindings in academic research.

Sinaiticus: the Bulletin of the Saint Catherine Foundation
 Edited by Earleen Brunner, Anna Baddeley, Heather Ravenberg
 Designed by Emilia López (www.emilialopez.com)
 © Saint Catherine Foundation 2011

The Saint Catherine Foundation and its related associations in Switzerland and the United States support conservation work at the Monastery of Saint Catherine. The monastery's library is the present focus of conservation activities. To safeguard this historic archive, the foundation is raising funds for the renovation of the Library building and for the conservation and boxed storage of the manuscripts and early books.

SAINT CATHERINE FOUNDATION
 14 Cleveland Row, London SW1A 1DP,
 UK
 Telephone +44 20 7396 5420
 Fax +44 20 7396 5440
 Registered charity number 1053138

AMERICAN ASSOCIATES OF THE SAINT CATHERINE FOUNDATION
 485 Madison Avenue - Suite 200, New York, New York 10022,
 USA
 Telephone +1 212 541-6950
 Fax +1 212 757-7213

ASSOCIATION SUISSE DES AMIS DE LA FONDATION SAINTE-CATHERINE
 Case postale 53, 1216 Cointrin-Geneva, Switzerland

secretary@saintcatherinefoundation.org
www.saintcatherinefoundation.org

EVENTS

OXFORD

STUDY DAY IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR IHOR ŠEVČENKO

27 NOVEMBER 2010

IOANNOU CENTRE FOR CLASSICAL AND BYZANTINE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Oxford academics and friends and members of the foundation and the monastery gathered at the Ioannou Centre on Saturday, 27 November to pay tribute to the late Prof. Ihor Ševčenko of Harvard University. A member of the Board of Directors of the American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation, Prof. Ševčenko was past Visiting Fellow of both All Souls and Wolfson colleges, Oxford and member of the Editorial Board of *Oxford Studies in Byzantium*. The day of lectures organised in his memory commemorated his considerable contribution to Sinai studies.

The first speaker of the day, Prof. Dr Peter Grossmann of the German Archaeological Institute of Cairo, has long been associated with Sinai, where he continues to work. His talk on *The Sinai Monastery that Justinian Built* distilled decades of research on site. Prof. Cyril Mango spoke about *Ihor Ševčenko and the Sinai Monastery*, a connection that began with Prof. Ševčenko's participation in the Princeton-Michigan-Alexandria Expedition to Sinai in 1956 and continued to the end of his life. Dr Lukas Schachner discussed *Book Production in Early Byzantine Monasteries*, while Nigel Wilson focused on *Byzantine Libraries* and Dr Nancy Ševčenko presented *Manuscripts Copied at Sinai*. The final four talks showed the great diversity of the manuscript collection at Sinai. Dr Georgi Parpulov concentrated on the *Greek and Latin Manuscripts at Sinai*. Dr Sebastian Brock drew attention to the *Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic Manuscripts*. Prof. Robert Thomson took as his subject the *Georgian, Caucasian Albanian and Armenian Manuscripts*, and Dr C.M. MacRobert introduced the *Slavonic Manuscripts*, which figured so prominently in the work of Prof. Ševčenko. Prof. Nicholas Pickwoad, leader of the Saint Catherine's Library Conservation Project, explained the programme of manuscript conservation underway at Saint Catherine's, with particular reference to the Slavonic holdings.

Ihor Ševčenko remained very much at the centre of the proceedings, as Dimitris Dondos, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, announced the establishment of a fund to conserve the Slavonic manuscripts in memory of a great scholar and friend of the monastery. He read Father Justin's poignant tribute to Prof. Ševčenko, who won both the affection and respect of all at Saint Catherine's.

Reception: St Giles House, St John's College

The organisers of the Study Day, Prof. Cyril Mango and Dr Marlia Mundell Mango, members, respectively, of the foundation's UK and US Boards, and Dimitris Dondos, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the UK charity, welcomed the speakers and attendees to the magnificent hall of St Giles House, where a reception honouring Ihor Ševčenko brought the Study Day to a bittersweet conclusion. The conversation turned on the subjects of the various papers presented earlier and the launch of the fund to conserve Sinai's early Slavonic manuscripts, so dear to the professor. Fortified by drinks and a stimulating day, the guests made their way into the cold November night.



Prof. Cyril Mango pays tribute to Prof. Ševčenko, whose image fills the screen.



The Study Day participants taking a coffee break at the Ioannou Centre, the venue of the conference.

LES ACTIVITÉS DE L'ASSOCIATION SUISSE EN 2010

Le mercredi 27 octobre 2010 s'est tenue au siège de l'UNESCO à Paris une conférence sur le thème de *Sainte Catherine, patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO, 35 siècles d'histoire*. Organisé par l'UNESCO et par le Centre du patrimoine mondial, cet événement était placé sous l'égide de l'Association Internationale des Amis des Musées d'Égypte (AME International) et de la Délégation Permanente de l'Égypte auprès de l'UNESCO.

Une quarantaine d'ambassadeurs étaient présents, dont Son Excellence le Docteur Rodolphe Imhoof, Ambassadeur, Délégué de la Suisse auprès de l'UNESCO (et Représentant auprès du Conseil Permanent de la Francophonie). Le modérateur de cet événement était Madame Sonia Ramzi, ancien Chef de la Promotion du Patrimoine Mondial de l'UNESCO et Présidente de l'AME. La conférence a réuni plusieurs personnalités et s'est déroulée devant une assemblée attentive d'environ quatre cents personnes. Le Délégué Permanent de l'Égypte auprès de l'UNESCO, Monsieur Mohamed EL Zahaby, a pris la parole, suivi du Représentant de la Direction Générale de l'UNESCO, Monsieur Francesco Bandarin (Sous-Directeur Général pour la Culture), ainsi que par Monsieur Alkiviades Prepis, expert International du Conseil des Monuments et des Sites (ICOMOS).

Un film sur le monastère a été projeté. Monsieur Odon Vallet, Professeur et historien, a ensuite présenté un remarquable exposé sur *Sainte-Catherine, 35 siècles d'histoire*. Monsieur Atef Abdellatif est intervenu sur le thème du *Développement Culturel et Economique du site de Sainte-Catherine*.

Le Professeur Charles Méla, Président de l'Association suisse, est intervenu en conclusion sur *Le monastère de Sainte-Catherine et la conservation de la bibliothèque*, avec projection d'un film, afin de présenter l'action de la Fondation de Sainte-Catherine et de ses deux Associations, américaine et suisse, en vue de préserver la riche bibliothèque du monastère. Préparé par des études menées depuis 1999 par l'Université des Arts de Londres pour la conservation des manuscrits, un programme d'action a été mis en œuvre en 2002. Un travail considérable a été accompli sur le plan scientifique : expertise, recensement des pièces, découvertes relatives aux reliures et aux outils de finition employés sur place au XVI^e siècle. La numérisation du fichier a été réalisée. Des restaurations de documents, comme *l'Achtnamé*, ont été menées à bien. Un prototype de boîte métallique pour mettre les manuscrits à l'abri des dégradations et des sinistres a été créé. Sur les lieux eux-mêmes, tout un travail d'assainissement (eau, cuisine, cellules des moines) a été mené à bien. La bibliothèque du monastère a été vidée, tous les livres ont été emballés, pour que les travaux de réfection puissent commencer. M. Dimitri Dondos était venu spécialement de Londres pour représenter la Fondation. Me Nicolas Gagnebin, Secrétaire de l'Association suisse, était également présent es qualités.

Une importante activité culturelle sous forme d'expositions, de conférences et de publications, pour encourager les donations destinées à la fabrication des boîtes, s'est maintenue à Genève, depuis l'année 2000. La première Conférence fut donnée par Madame le Recteur Hélène Ahrweiler le 21 mars 2000 à l'Aula de l'Université de Genève sur *L'importance du Sinai dans l'histoire des trois monothéismes*. Mme Hélène Ahrweiler a accepté de revenir le 18 mai 2010 pour une nouvelle conférence sur *Byzance, premier empire européen*, qui a été publiée.

PROFESSEUR CHARLES MÉLA
Président de l'Association suisse



Des amis et des membres de l'Association suisse autour de Madame Hélène Ahrweiler (cinquième de gauche) après la conférence.



L'invitée d'honneur Madame Hélène Ahrweiler, professeur honoraire de la Sorbonne, ancien recteur de l'Université de Paris, avec le Professeur Charles Méla, Président de l'Association suisse, pendant le dîner.

ΑΘΗΝΑ ΔΕΙΠΝΟ ΣΤΟ ΜΕΓΑΡΟ ΥΠΑΤΙΑ 25 ΝΟΕΜΒΡΙΟΥ 2010

Την 25η Νοεμβρίου 2010, ημέρα της Αγίας Αικατερίνης, το Ίδρυμα The American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation διοργάνωσε εκδήλωση για τους Έλληνες φίλους του. Η Α.Υ. Πριγκίπισσα Αικατερίνη της Σερβίας καλωσόρισε τους προσκεκλημένους στο Μέγαρο Υπατία, ένα κτίσμα ορόσημο των αρχών του 20ου αιώνα, το οποίο βρίσκεται στο κέντρο της Αθήνας.

Στους χώρους του Μεγάρου παρατέθηκε επίσημο δείπνο για τους παλαιούς και νέους φίλους του Ιδρύματος οι οποίοι στηρίζουν τις εργασίες συντήρησης της Ιεράς Μονής στο όρος Σινά. Με την ευγενική χορηγία των οικογενειών Ρουτζούνη και Γιαβρόγλου τα έσοδα της βραδιάς διατέθηκαν εξ ολοκλήρου για το έργο της συντήρησης της Βιβλιοθήκης της Μονής.

Αποκορύφωμα της βραδιάς αποτέλεσε η εξαιρετική ομιλία του Δρ. Νικολάου Καλτσά, διευθυντή του Εθνικού Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου της Αθήνας, με θέμα τη Μονή και τους πνευματικούς θησαυρούς της. Περίληψη της ομιλίας παρουσιάζεται στη σελίδα του παρόντος τεύχους του *Sinaiticus*.



Α.Υ. Πριγκίπισσα Ειρήνη, Εριέττα Λάτση



Ντίνα Πριτσιβέλη, Βαγγέλης Χρόνης, Αθηνά Βασιλοπούλου



Λίνα και Καδιώ Λαμπροπούλου



Οι προσκεκλημένοι της εκδήλωσης, στη διάρκεια του δείπνου. Τρίτος από δεξιά ο Δρ. Νικόλαος Καλτσάς, Διευθυντής του Εθνικού Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου Αθηνών.

ΜΙΑ ΜΑΤΙΑ ΣΤΟΥΣ ΘΗΣΑΥΡΟΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΟΜΙΛΙΑ ΔΡ ΝΙΚΟΥ ΚΑΛΤΣΑ ΜΕΓΑΡΟ ΥΠΑΤΙΑ, ΑΘΗΝΑ 25 ΝΟΕΜΒΡΙΟΥ 2010

Ανάμεσα στα ξακουσμένα σε όλο τον κόσμο μοναστήρια της Ορθοδοξίας, ξεχωρίζει το πιο ξακουστό και περιλάλητο, το αρχαιότερο εν λειτουργία μοναστήρι της Αγίας Αικατερίνης. Ζει, ανασαίνει και ανθεί, χτισμένο μέσα στην έρημο, στο νότιο άκρο της χερσονήσου του Σινά ή αλλιώς της Πετραίας Αραβίας, ανάμεσα στους γρανιένιους λόφους, όπου κατά την Παλαιά Διαθήκη ο Μωυσής στη διάρκεια του ταξιδιού του από την Αίγυπτο προς τη Γη της Επαγγελίας, άκουσε τη φωνή του Θεού και παρέλαβε τις πλάκες με το Νόμο.

Οι πρώτοι ερημίτες και ασκητές είχαν εγκατασταθεί στην περιοχή ήδη από τον 4ο αιώνα, αφότου δηλαδή επικράτησε μια σχετική ελευθερία στους χριστιανούς μετά τους τελευταίους διωγμούς τους από τον αυτοκράτορα Διοκλήτιανό.

Ωστόσο, η ιστορία της Μονής αρχίζει με την οικοδόμηση του καθολικού και των οχυρωματικών τειχών από τον αυτοκράτορα Ιουστινιανό, ο οποίος, σύμφωνα με τον Προκόπιο, ανταποκρίθηκε στην παράκληση μιας ομάδας Σιναϊτών ασκητών που του ζήτησαν να προστατεύσει τον τόπο από τις βαρβαρικές επιδρομές. Η Μονή αφιερώθηκε στη Θεοτόκο.

Θα παραμείνει κάτω από την πολιτική και διοικητική επιρροή και εξουσία του Βυζαντίου για μικρό σχετικά χρονικό διάστημα, καθώς η Πετραία Αραβία σύντομα κατακτάται από τους Μωαμεθανούς και τους Άραβες.

Παρ' όλα αυτά, θα διατηρήσει την αυτονομία της και παρά την απομόνωσή της θα συνεχίσει αδιάκοπα την πνευματική της ζωή.

Η ανεύρεση των λειψάνων της Αγίας Αικατερίνης, μάρτυρος από την Αλεξάνδρεια, και η μεταφορά τους στο μοναστήρι κάπου τον 8ο ή 9ο αιώνα, σηματοδοτεί την απαρχή μιας νέας εποχής για τη Μονή. Από δω και πέρα, το καθολικό αφιερώνεται στην Αγία και η Θεοτόκος τιμάται ιδιαίτερα και ξεχωριστά στο παρεκκλήσι της Αγίας Βάτου.

Τον 11ο αιώνα ο Σιναΐτης μοναχός Συμεών ο Πεντάγλωστος μεταφέρει λείψανα της Αγίας στη Δύση και, παρά το οριστικό σχίσμα των εκκλησιών, ο Πάπας Ονώριος αρχικά και στη συνέχεια και άλλοι Πάπες δείχνουν ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον για τη Μονή. Ηγεμόνες από τη Δύση στέλνουν πλήθος αφιερωμάτων, η Μονή αποκτά παγκόσμια ακτινοβολία, αλλά και τα πρώτα της μετόχια στη Νορμανδία.

Η λατρεία της Αγίας Αικατερίνης εξαπλώνεται σταδιακά και γίνεται μια από τις σημαντικότερες σε ολόκληρο το δυτικό κόσμο. Τον 12ο αιώνα ιδρύεται το Τάγμα των Ιπποτών της Αγίας Αικατερίνης με σκοπό την προστασία του τάφου της και των προσκυνητών της και στη Γαλλία συγκροτείται η Αδελφότητα της Αγίας Αικατερίνης.

Φιλοσοφικές σχολές την ανακηρύσσουν προστάτιδά τους, ενώ η μορφή της περιλαμβάνεται στο ρεπερτόριο των μεγάλων ζωγράφων, όπως του Τζιουζέπε Ριμπέρα και του Καραβάτζιο.

Η Μονή κατάφερε να διατηρήσει την υπόστασή της ως σήμερα, καθώς έχαιρε του σεβασμού όλων, παρά τα όποια ποικίλα προβλήματα αντιμετώπιζε η περιοχή.

Η σημασία και η μοναδικότητά της οφείλεται σε πολλούς λόγους.

Εκτός από όσα αναφέρθηκαν παραπάνω, θα πρέπει να σημειωθεί ότι διαθέτει την αρχαιότερη εν λειτουργία μοναστική βιβλιοθήκη με ένα μεγάλο αριθμό πολύτιμων εικονογραφημένων χειρογράφων, πολλά από τα οποία ιστορήθηκαν μέσα στην ίδια τη Μονή.

Επίσης, είναι γενικά αποδεκτό ότι οι φορητές εικόνες της αποτελούν παγκοσμίως μία από τις πλουσιότερες συλλογές του είδους όχι μόνο αριθμητικά, αλλά και καλλιτεχνικά και κυρίως για το γεγονός ότι καλύπτουν, χωρίς διακοπή, ένα μεγάλο χρονολογικό φάσμα, αντιπροσωπεύοντας όλες τις τεχνοτροπίες και τις σχολές της βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής από τον 6ο ως τον 18ο αιώνα.

Αξιοσημείωτο είναι το γεγονός, ότι στην περίοδο της εικονομαχίας η απαγόρευση της λατρείας των εικόνων δεν ίσχυσε για το Σινά, αφού από το 640 η περιοχή ήταν ισλαμική. Από τον πλούτο αυτόν θα αναφέρουμε ενδεικτικά ορισμένες μόνο εικόνες επισημαινώντας και τη θέση που κατέχουν στη βυζαντινή ζωγραφική.

Μία από τις πρωιμότερες και σημαντικότερες του 6ου αιώνα είναι η εικόνα του Χριστού Παντοκράτορα που κρατεί ευαγγέλιο. Η ομοιότητα του εικονογραφικού τύπου με το Χριστό σε χρυσά νομίσματα του 7ου αιώνα οδήγησε στη διατύπωση της άποψης ότι μπορεί το έργο να είναι δώρο του ίδιου του Ιουστινιανού ή της αυλής του προς τη Μονή. Σίγουρα πάντως θεωρείται έργο που φιλοτεχνήθηκε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη από έναν μεγάλο καλλιτέχνη.

Αυτοκρατορικό δώρο στη Μονή ήταν πιθανότατα και μια άλλη εικόνα του 6ου ή του 7ου αιώνα, και αυτή δημιουργία ενός εργαστηρίου της πρωτεύουσας, που παριστάνει την Παναγία ένθρονη, με τον Χριστό στην αγκαλιά της, να πλαισιώνεται από τους δυο στρατιωτικούς Αγίους, τον Άγιο Γεώργιο και τον Άγιο Θεόδωρο τον Στρατηλάτη. Στην εικόνα αυτή, μια από τις σημαντικότερες για τη μελέτη της βυζαντινής τέχνης, διαπιστώνεται η συνύπαρξη της υπερβατικότητας και του κλασικισμού.

Η βυζαντινή τέχνη δεν είναι ιδεαλιστική. Ενδιαφέρεται να αποδώσει τις εσωτερικές δυνάμεις των προσώπων και όχι με φυσικό τρόπο τα χαρακτηριστικά τους τα οποία τονίζει υπερβολικά, ιδιαίτερα τα μάτια. Για το λόγο αυτό είναι μια τέχνη εξπρεσιονιστική. Στη συγκεκριμένη εικόνα οι μορφές της Παναγίας, του Χριστού και των Αγίων αντιπροσωπεύουν αυτήν την εξπρεσιονιστική τάση. Αντίθετα οι δύο άγγελοι που στέκονται πίσω τους, παριστάνονται με ιδεαλιστικό τρόπο και θυμίζουν αντίστοιχες μορφές από την αρχαιότητα.

Οι δύο επόμενες εικόνες μας μεταφέρουν σε μια εντελώς διαφορετική τεχνοτροπία, καθώς προέρχονται από εργαστήρια της Παλαιστίνης.

Στην πρώτη με θέμα τη Σταύρωση, έχουμε την παλαιότερη παράσταση του Χριστού νεκρού πάνω στο σταυρό. Η δεύτερη απεικονίζει την Ανάληψη και παριστάνει τον Χριστό μέσα σε δόξα του βαστούν τέσσερις άγγελοι και κάτω την Παναγία με τους Αποστόλους.

Με τη λήξη της εικονομαχίας, το Μάρτιο του 843, με τις προσπάθειες της εικονόφιλης αυτοκράτειρας Θεοδώρας και το θρίαμβο των εικόνων, διαμορφώνεται και το τυπικό της λατρείας τους και οριστικοποιείται το θεματολόγιό τους και η θέση τους μέσα στην εκκλησία.

Από τις εικόνες που τοποθετούνται στο προσκυνητάρι την ημέρα της αντίστοιχης εορτής, ξεχωρίζουν οι εικόνες με τον Νιπτήρα και αυτή με τον Άγιο Νικόλαο. Από την μεγάλη συλλογή εικόνων-μηνολογίων που κατέχει η Μονή, ενδιαφέρουν έχει το μηνολόγιο του ΙΙου αιώνα που αποτελείται από τέσσερα φύλλα και έχει Αγίους για κάθε ημέρα του έτους.

Η βυζαντινή ζωγραφική παρουσιάζει ιδιαίτερη άνθιση και ακμή την εποχή των Κομνηνών και χαρακτηρίζεται από κλασικιστικές ιδιαίτερα ψηλές και λιγνές μορφές με ενδύματα που αφήνουν να διαγράφεται κάτω από αυτά το σώμα. Πάμπολλες είναι οι εικόνες της Κομνηνείας περιόδου στη Μονή του Σινά, οι περισσότερες αντιπροσωπευτικά δείγματα της υψηλής ποιοτικά τέχνης της βασιλεύουσας. Ενδεικτικά, μπορούν να αναφερθούν η εικόνα με την ένθρονη Παναγία Βρεφοκρατούσα και τον Χριστό σε δόξα, να περιβάλλονται από Αγίους και Προφήτες και η εικόνα με τον εν Χώναις θαύμα, ένα αριστούργημα της Κομνηνείας ζωγραφικής με μια εκπληκτική χρωματική αρμονία και μορφές ραδινές, που χαρακτηρίζονται από εκλεπτυσμένες κινήσεις, χειρονομίες και στάσεις.

Κορυφαίο έργο της ίδιας περιόδου μπορεί να θεωρηθεί η εικόνα του Ευαγγελισμού. Το εξαιρετικό καλλιγραφικό σχέδιο και η εξαύλωση των μορφών, ιδιαίτερα του Αρχαγγέλου που στροβιλίζεται σε ένα μοτίβο που αποτελεί επιβίωση παραστάσεων επιτηδευμένων μορφών της αρχαιότητας ή μορφών σε χορευτική κίνηση, εξυψώνουν το έργο και το κατατάσσουν ανάμεσα στις ωραιότερες δημιουργίες της βυζαντινής τέχνης. Για να πάρουμε μια ιδέα του πώς αυτή η συστρεφόμενη γύρω από τον άξονά της μορφή του Αρχαγγέλου Γαβριήλ, επιβιώνει και σε άλλα έργα ως μοτίβο κλασικό, αρκεί να παρατηρήσουμε τις τοιχογραφίες δυο μνημείων σε απομακρυσμένες μεταξύ τους περιοχές. Η μία τοιχογραφία βρίσκεται στον Άγιο Γεώργιο στο Κουρμπινοβο, στην περιοχή των Σκοπιών και η άλλη στην Παναγία του Άρακος στην Κύπρο.

Στον 13ο αιώνα ανήκουν οι εικόνες του Προφήτη Ηλία, του Μωυσή μπροστά στη Φλεγόμενη Βάτο, και του ίδιου να παραλαμβάνει τον Νόμο, της Αγίας Αικατερίνης με σκηνές του μαρτυρίου της, του Αγίου Νικολάου, του Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου, της Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας κ.ά.

Ένα από τα έργα της Μονής που ζωγραφίστηκαν στη Δύση είναι το πορτραίτο της Αγίας Αικατερίνης, με ολοφάνερα τα στοιχεία της δυτικής ευρωπαϊκής τέχνης. Το έργο, σύμφωνα με την επιγραφή, δωρήθηκε από τον πρόξενο των Καταλανών στη Δαμασκό Bernardo Maresa και είχε παραγγελθεί στη Βαρκελώνη το 1387.

Μία μοναδική πνευματική και καλλιτεχνική αναγέννηση παρατηρείται στην εποχή των Παλαιολόγων, λίγο πριν τη δύση της αυτοκρατορίας.

Ως δείγματα μόνον αυτής της τέχνης μπορούν να αναφερθούν το εξάπτυχο με το Δωδεκάροτο, η εικόνα με την Παναγία Γλυκοφιλούσα και η εικόνα με τον Θρήνο που αποτελεί το μεταίχμιο ανάμεσα στην υστεροβυζαντινή τέχνη και την κρητική σχολή, η οποία ακμάζει από τα τέλη του 15ου ως και τον 17ο αιώνα.

Από τις εικόνες της κρητικής σχολής με την τεχνική τους τελειότητα, την ευγένεια των προσώπων με τις συκρατημένες στάσεις και χειρονομίες, ξεχωρίζουν οι εικόνες του ζωγράφου Άγγελου, όπως η Δέηση και τα Εισόδια της Θεοτόκου.

Ο Ανδρέας Ρίτζος ζωγράφησε τις εικόνες του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ

και της Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας, ενώ οι εικόνες του Ιωάννη του Προδρόμου και του Συμεών είναι έργα του Μιχαήλ Δαμασκηνού. Το επιδέξιο χέρι του Εμμανουήλ Τζάνε Μπουλιανή δημιούργησε την Παναγία Βρεφοκρατούσα με Προφήτες, ενώ η πολυπρόσωπη εικόνα με την Παναγία και διάφορα επεισόδια από το βίο της και την Παλαιά Διαθήκη ζωγραφίστηκε από τον Γεώργιο Κλόντζα.

Στους θησαυρούς της Μονής περιλαμβάνονται επίσης ένας μεγάλος αριθμός από εικονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα και κώδικες σε διάφορες γλώσσες: στα Ελληνικά, στα Συριακά, τα Αραβικά, Γεωργιανά, Σλάβικα κ.ά. Πρόκειται για έναν ανεκτίμητο θησαυρό και συνάμα πολύ ευαίσθητο ως προς τη διατήρησή του, αφού το υλικό τους είναι οργανικό και για τον λόγο αυτό χρήζει ξεχωριστής προσοχής και συντήρησης. Περιλαμβάνονται επίσης χρυσοκέντητα υφάσματα, όπως οι επιτάφιοι του Χριστού και της Αγίας Αικατερίνης, λάβαρα και άμφια. Πολύτιμα μέταλλα σκεύη, ατομικά αφιερώματα προσωπικότητας από διάφορα μέρη, από Ανατολή και Δύση, όπως του βασιλιά της Γαλλίας Καρόλου του ΣΤ', του επισκόπου της Μολδαβίας, του τσάρου Μιχαήλ Φιοντόροβιτς ή ομαδικά, όπως των αξιωματούχων της αυλής της Βλαχίας, των χριστιανών της πόλεως των Ιωαννίνων και πολλά άλλα.

Αναμφίβολα, όμως, η καρδιά της Μονής χτυπά στο καθολικό της, το ναό που έχτισε ο αυτοκράτορας Ιουστινιανός, αμέσως μετά το θάνατο της Θεοδώρας, όπως μαρτυρούν οι επιγραφές που είναι χαραγμένες στα δοκάρια της στέγης και αναφέρουν συγκεκριμένα. «Υπέρ σωτηρίας του ευσεβεστάτου ημών βασιλέως Ιουστινιανού και Υπέρ μνήμης και αναπαύσεως της γεναμένης ημών βασίλιδος Θεοδώρας».

Σύμφωνα με μια άλλη επιγραφή, αρχιτέκτονας του ναού ήταν ο Στέφανος από την κοντινή πόλη Αϊλά, ο οποίος καταγόταν από τους Ναβαταίους.

Πρόκειται για μια τρίκλιτη βασιλική που περιβάλλεται από εννέα παρεκκλήσια. Είναι χτισμένη από μεγάλους δόμους από γρανίτη και διατηρεί ακόμα και την ξυλόγλυπτη ιουστινιανεία θύρα.

Το βλέμμα του πιστού, του ιστορικού της τέχνης και του απλού επισκέπτη, αιχμαλωτίζεται από το Ιερό Βήμα και προσηλώνεται στο θριαμβικό τόξο και την κόγχη, που διακοσμούνται με εξαιρετικής τέχνης ψηφιδωτά γεμάτα συμβολισμούς.

Το κέντρο του μετώπου του θριαμβικού τόξου κοσμεί η παλαιότερη ίσως παράσταση του θέματος της Δεήσεως. Σε ένα δισκίο με έναν σταυρό εικονίζεται ο Αμνός του Θεού.

Πρόκειται για μια καθαρά συμβολική παράσταση, όπου απεικονίζονται οι δυο φύσεις του Χριστού, με τον αμνό η ανθρώπινη και με τον σταυρό η θείκη.

Η παράσταση αυτή, σπανιότατη στην εικονογραφία της βυζαντινής τέχνης, ήταν συνηθισμένη στη λατινική Δύση. Μάλιστα, η απαγόρευσή της για τις εκκλησίες της βυζαντινής επικράτειας από τη Σύνοδο του 692 θεωρείται από πολλούς ότι είχε και ένα πνεύμα αντιρωμαϊκό.

Τον δίσκο αυτό πλαισιώνουν δυο υπέροχοι άγγελοι με φτερά παγωνιού που πετούν προς το κέντρο για να προσφέρουν στο Χριστό τα σύμβολα της εξουσίας, το σκήπτρο και τη σφαίρα. Οι μορφές είναι αναμφίβολα εμπνευσμένες από την αρχαία παράδοση και παριστάνονται όπως οι Νίκες σε διάφορα έργα της αρχαιότητας. Νίκες απεικονίζονται σε κλασικά αγγεία και αργότερα, στη ρωμαϊκή περίοδο, στις γωνίες των ανθίδων θριάμβων, στον ίδιο ακριβώς τύπο, όπως οι άγγελοι του ψηφιδωτού.

Σε δύο δισκάρια στα χαμηλά μέρη των τυμπάνων του θριαμβικού τόξου παριστάνονται δυο προτομές, μια γυναικεία και μια ανδρική. Παρότι η παράδοση θέλει να τις ταυτίζει με τον Ιουστινιανό και τη Θεοδώρα, στην πραγματικότητα πρόκειται για τον Ιωάννη τον Βαπτιστή και την Παναγία. Ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζει το ρεαλιστικό πορτραίτο του Ιωάννη που θυμίζει αρχαία τραγικά προσωπεία.

Λίγο ψηλότερα, στους τοίχους πάνω από το θριαμβικό τόξο υπάρχουν δύο σκηνές άμεσα συνδεδεμένες με το φυσικό περιβάλλον της Μονής και με την ιερότητα του χώρου. Στη μία, αριστερά, ο Μωυσής λύνει τα σανδάλια του μπροστά στη φλεγόμενη Βάτο και στην άλλη, δεξιά, ο ίδιος παραλαμβάνει από το χέρι του Θεού τον Νόμο.

Στην κόγχη του Ιερού βρίσκεται ένα αριστούργημα της Πρωτοβυζαντινής τέχνης. Το ψηφιδωτό της Μεταμόρφωσης. Το χρυσό φόντο, μια καινοτομία της εποχής του Ιουστινιανού, με τις ψηφίδες λοξά τοποθετημένες ώστε να διασπούν το φως, αντιπροσωπεύει την εικόνα του Ακτίστου Φωτός, αυτού του θείκου Φωτός για το οποίο είχαν κάνει λόγο ήδη ο Δαυίδ, ο Πλάτων και ο Πλωτίνος.

Από τον υπερβατικό αυτό κάμπο ξεπροβάλλει στο κέντρο, μέσα σε μια μπλε δόξα, με ολόλευκο χρυσοκεντημένο ιμάτιο, η μορφή του Χριστού, εξάιλωμένη και αποστασιοποιημένη από τα εγκόσμια.

Αντίθετα, ο προφήτης Ηλίας στα δεξιά του και ο Μωυσής στα αριστερά, απεικονίζονται να πατούν στο έδαφος με ανθρώπινη έκφραση και κινήσεις που μαρτυρούν ανθρώπινα συναισθήματα. Το ίδιο και οι τρεις μαθητές, ο Ιωάννης, ο Πέτρος και ο Ιάκωβος, που έχουν πέσει στο έδαφος έκπληκτοι από το θέαμα.

Η σύνθεση είναι μνημειώδης, ισορροπημένη και ζωντανή. Η λεπτότητα και η λαμπρότητα των χρωμάτων, η εξάρτηση από την αρχαία παράδοση και η ποικιλία των εκφράσεων, αποκαλύπτουν έναν άριστο και επιδέξιο καλλιτέχνη του οποίου η προσωπικότητα θα πρέπει να είχε διαμορφωθεί στην Κωνσταντινούπολη.

Ολόγυρα στην κεντρική παράσταση υπάρχουν δισκάρια με τις προτομές των Αποστόλων και των Προφητών. Στο πάνω μέρος, ακριβώς πάνω από το Χριστό, ένα δισκάριο εικονίζει τον σταυρό, υπαινικτικό τη Θεία φύση του, ενώ στο δισκάριο που βρίσκεται συμμετρικά ακριβώς από κάτω παριστάνεται η μορφή του βασιλιά Δαυίδ, μια αναφορά στη γενεαλογία του Χριστού και φυσικά στην ανθρώπινη φύση του.

Ο Δαυίδ παριστάνεται ως βυζαντινός αυτοκράτορας και μάλιστα με τα χαρακτηριστικά του Ιουστινιανού, όπως τα βλέπουμε στο ψηφιδωτό του Αγίου Βιταλίου της Ραβέννας. Είναι προφανές ότι ο καλλιτέχνης αναφέρεται με τον τρόπο αυτό έμμεσα στον αυτοκράτορα ιδρυτή της Μονής.

Τα ψηφιδωτά της αψίδας του ναού είναι αριστουργήματα, είναι μοναδικά έργα τέχνης, άρτια στην εκτέλεσή τους. Είναι όμως και κάτι παραπάνω από αυτό. Περιέχουν μηνύματα και νοήματα. Διατρανώνουν πανηγυρικά το δόγμα που προέκυψε από τη Σύνοδο της Χαλκηδόνας το έτος 451, δόγμα το οποίο υποστήριξε τη διπλή φύση του Χριστού.

Με τον τρόπο αυτό, ετούτα τα έργα, καθώς και ολόκληρη η Μονή, αντιπροσωπεύουν και αντανακλούν τη θρησκευτική πολιτική του αυτοκράτορα Ιουστινιανού.

Είναι γνωστό ότι τα τελευταία χρόνια της βασιλείας του ταρασσόνταν από ποικίλες θρησκευτικές έριδες, οι οποίες είχαν

προκύψει από αιρέσεις που υποστήριζαν διαφορετικές απόψεις ως προς αυτό το ζήτημα.

Αν δηλαδή ο Χριστός ήταν άνθρωπος στον οποίο προστέθηκε η Θεία φύση, αν ήταν σύνθετη οντότητα, δηλαδή εξίσου Θεός και άνθρωπος ή αν η ανθρώπινη φύση του είχε απορροφηθεί τελείως από τη θείκη.

Μπορεί σε μας αυτού του είδους τα ερωτήματα να φαίνονται περίεργα, ίσως και ασήμαντα. Ωστόσο, την εποχή εκείνη, επηρέαζαν σοβαρά την κοινή γνώμη. Κι αυτό γιατί ο άνθρωπος της βυζαντινής εποχής έχει εντελώς διαφορετική θεώρηση των πραγμάτων από τον άνθρωπο της αρχαιότητας. Δέχεται αγόγγυστα τη μοίρα του και φροντίζει μόνο για τη σωτηρία της ψυχής του.

Παρά το γεγονός ότι ο θρησκευτικός ηγέτης ήταν ο Πατριάρχης, τα βλέμματα του λαού ήταν στραμμένα στον αυτοκράτορα, ο οποίος, άλλωστε, υπέγραφε και τα σχετικά διατάγματα.

Ο αυτοκράτορας ταγμένος από το Θεό ως άρχων της Οικουμένης, είναι ο ακρογωνιαίος λίθος του βυζαντινού πολιτειακού συστήματος.

Μια αυθαιρέτη και λάθος κίνηση θα μπορούσε να έχει οδυνηρά αποτελέσματα, γι αυτό και η όποια παρέμβαση ή απόφασή του θα έπρεπε με κάποιο τρόπο να υποστηρίζεται και από την επίσημη εκκλησία. Διαφορετικά ποιά πίστη θα όφειλε κανείς σε έναν αυτοκράτορα που θα μπορούσε να θεωρηθεί αιρετικός και υπονομευτής του σκοπού για τον οποίο είχε δημιουργηθεί η αυτοκρατορία?

Το δόγμα της διπλής φύσης του Χριστού βγήκε από την Ιερά Σύνοδο, με τη βοήθεια της θείας φώτισης, γι αυτό και έγινε αποδεκτό από το λαό. Δεν έγινε όμως αποδεκτό στις ανατολικές περιοχές της αυτοκρατορίας, κυρίως στην Αίγυπτο και τη Συρία, όπου επικρατούσαν οι μονοφυσίτες.

Ο συνετός αυτοκράτωρ στην προσπάθειά του να αντισταθμίσει την επίδραση της μονοφυσιτικής εκκλησίας ίδρυσε μονές στις περιοχές αυτές. Ανάμεσά τους η Μονή του Σινά, αυτή που μόνη ίσως από όλες τις άλλες εκπλήρωσε το αυτοκρατορικό, θρησκευτικό και διπλωματικό όραμα, έφερε σε πέρας την αποστολή της στο έπακρο και διατηρεί έως σήμερα την αρχική της αίγλη και μεταδίδει στον επισκέπτη το μυστήριο της μέθεξης και της επικοινωνίας με το θείο.

«Δυο λογίων είναι τα θάματα», λέει ο Βούδας, «τα σωματικά και τα ψυχικά. Στα πρώτα δεν πιστεύω, πιστεύω στα δεύτερα!».

Κι ο Καζαντζάκης συμπληρώνει. «Το Μοναστήρι του Σινά είναι ένα ψυχικό θάμα. Μέσα στην απάνθρωπη έρημο, κυκλωμένο από φυλές αρπαχτικές, αλλόθρησκες, αλλόγλωσσες, γύρα από ένα πηγάδι νερό, δεκατέσσερις αιώνες τώρα, υψώνεται σαν φρούριο το Μοναστήρι ετούτο κι αντιστέκεται στις φυσικές κι ανθρώπινες δυνάμεις που το πολιορκούν. Εδώ, διαλογίστηκα με περφόνια, υπάρχει μια ανώτερη ανθρώπινη συνείδηση, εδώ νικάει η αρετή του ανθρώπου την έρημο».

PREVIEW

Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th – 9th Century)

12 MARCH – 8 JULY 2012

The exceptional objects from the Monastery of Saint Catherine pictured opposite are just three of some 300 treasures from the Metropolitan Museum's forthcoming *Byzantium and Islam* exhibition, opening on 12 March 2012. We are grateful to the editors of the exhibition catalogue, Helen C. Evans and her associate Brandie Ratliff, for allowing us to publish these images and draw on the catalogue entries for the information about each one. We would like to thank the authors of the texts for so generously sharing their scholarship with us: Father Justin, Librarian of Saint Catherine's, for the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*; Anna Ballian, Senior Curator of the Benaki Museum, Athens, and a major author for the exhibition catalogue, for the Islamic eagle; and Kathleen Corrigan, professor, Dartmouth College, and an expert on icons and iconoclasm, for the Three Hebrews icon.

We hope that this taste of the exhibition will encourage you to visit in person or online at www.metmuseum.org. The exhibition will continue until 8 July 2012.

The exhibition catalogue will be available online from 12 March 2012 at www.metmuseum.org. It can also be pre-ordered from Yale University Press at www.yale.edu/yup.

Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition

Edited by Helen C. Evans, with Brandie Ratliff

356 pages

471 colour illustrations

23.5 x 30.5 cm (9 ¼ x 12 inches)

ISBN 978-0-300-17950-7, \$65

The Ladder of Divine Ascent by Saint John Klimacus

7th-8th century

Vermilion and black ink on parchment; two contiguous bifolia, 21 x 14 cm (8 ¼ x 5 ½ in.)

The Ladder of Divine Ascent was written by John, abbot of Sinai, who lived in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. He took as his inspiration the ladder that Jacob saw extending from earth to heaven (Genesis 28:12), and wrote a spiritual guide consisting of thirty steps as rungs on the ladder of spiritual ascent. Saint John was a shrewd observer of the complexities of human nature, and the astute advice he gives, drawn from his own profound experience in the spiritual life, has won the respect of monastics and laity alike.

The manuscript consists of only four folia. These contain the opening sections of Step One, written twenty-five lines to the page in a majuscule script. The leaves date to within one hundred years of Saint John himself, and are the oldest that survive of the *Ladder*.

FATHER JUSTIN

Bird - shaped vessel

Syria or Iraq, early 9th century

Copper alloy, cast, engraved; handle and supporting rod separately made and riveted

This aquamanile in the shape of an unidentified raptor—eagle or falcon—forms a group with three other examples in the Berlin Museum, the church of San Frediano in Lucca and the Hermitage Museum. The Sinai bird differs from the rest of the group in having a hole made for filling with water and a handle in the shape of a quadruped holding a small ball in its mouth. In contrast to the realistic ferocity of the raptor, the engraved decoration with a few punched lines is conventional: plumage, dotted scale pattern, rosettes and vinescrolls.

The Sinai bird, like the rest of the group, is a prestigious object made for the market but destined for a contemporary elite, and for this reason it was deemed suitable as a donation to the Monastery of St Catherine.

The inscription follows a formula that will become standard. It begins with the Muslim invocation to God, the *basmala*: 'In the name of God', and is followed by the supplicatory prayer of the anonymous owner. He or a subsequent owner donated the aquamanile and could equally well have been either Christian or Muslim, as the monastery, in addition to being a Christian shrine, was also a Muslim one from as early as the seventh century.

ANNA BALLIAN



Top left: *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Saint John Klimacus
 Top right: Bird-shaped vessel
 Bottom: Icon with the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace

Icon with the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace
 Egypt or Sinai(?), 7th century
 Encaustic on wood, 35.5 x 49.6 cm (14 x 19 ½ in.)

The three Hebrew youths stand unfazed among the flames to which Nebuchadnezzar condemned them for refusing to worship idols. Despite surviving the flames, these Old Testament figures were still considered as models for Christian martyrs. Their relics were collected and cult centers developed, primarily in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Thus their representation on a small icon undoubtedly meant for private devotion is not surprising. Images of the three ‘saints’ were especially popular in Egypt in the sixth and seventh centuries, and these offer the closest comparisons to the composition on the icon. Both in the icon and in a sixth- or seventh-century wall painting from the Monastery of St. Jeremiah in Saqqara, the three Hebrew youths stand frontally with their hands raised, wearing so-called Persian garb, while a slightly crouching angel at the left reaches out in front of them with a long cross staff.

The icon probably comes from a monastic context, as suggested by the garment the three Hebrews wear over their tunics and under their cloaks. It should probably be identified as the *koukoullion* or scapular. The three Hebrew youths were seen as models of endurance for the Christian monk; the monastic cell was referred to as ‘the furnace of Babylon in which the three children saw the Son of God.’ Their wearing of the monastic garment would have encouraged a monastic viewer to identify with them.

While the closest comparisons for the composition come from Coptic Egypt, the icon’s inscription is in Greek, not Coptic, and the closest comparisons for the ‘scapular’ they wear are in ninth- and eleventh-century Byzantine manuscripts, where they often are an indication of the suffering or penitent monk.

KATHLEEN CORRIGAN

OBITUARIES

Athina Difonis Carras
(25 July 1915 – 26 July 2010)



Athina Carras supported the Saint Catherine Foundation as she lived her life, with great generosity, commitment and enthusiasm. Matriarch of the Carras shipping family, Athina was, like her husband John, born in the village of Kardamyli on the Aegean island of Chios. Their wedding day, 24 February 1938, was the start of a long and happy life together. Athina was the beloved mother of four daughters – Fotini, Eugenie, Alexandra and Christine – and the adored grandmother and great grandmother of ten grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren. Athina is remembered as a caring mother, a very devoted wife and a wonderful friend. She was a stylish representative of her generation of women. A sense of fun never deserted her.

John died in September 2008, aged 93, eulogized as a ‘Greek shipping legend’. Athina’s death on 26 July 2010 was a more private event. It deprives the Carras family of a remarkable woman who supported her husband’s achievements while remaining the centre of family life.

John William Georgas
(14 January 1928 – 21 November 2009)



John Georgas gave early, wholehearted and sustained support to the American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation. A Founding Sponsor of the New York charity, he attended events on both sides of the Atlantic, including the Metropolitan Museum galas, the 1999 Highgrove dinner, the White Nights Weekend in St Petersburg and the Library Grand Tour. John continued to participate actively until his death, always accompanied by his wife Tarsi. John was sincere and genuine, with an easy manner that was matched by Tarsi’s warm friendliness. He will be greatly missed by all at the foundation.

John was born and educated in New York. He received a BS degree in Business Administration at Syracuse University and an MBA at Hofstra University. He also completed the Harvard Business School Executive Program. John began his career at General Foods Corporation (1951) and the J Walter Thompson advertising agency (1962), joining the Coca Cola Company as Vice President Coca Cola USA in 1974. He was named to a number of positions in the US and internationally before returning to Atlanta in 1984 as Senior Vice President of the Coca Cola Company and President of Coca Cola International (1986). John led the international expansion of the company as it developed into one of the largest multinational corporations in the world, a signal achievement.

Retirement in 1992 enabled John to pursue his many philanthropic interests, including the Greek Orthodox Church, hospitals, education and the arts. He served on numerous international boards and organizations. The Saint Catherine Foundation, for its part, counted John Georgas among its most generous benefactors.

George Embiricos
(17 March 1920 – 21 February 2011)



The death of George Embiricos comes as a tremendous blow to his many friends at the foundation and around the world, but also, paradoxically, brings a lesson in hope and survival against the odds. For he had long battled ill health, reaching his 90th birthday in March last year thanks to an indomitable will rather than any physical resilience. On the occasion of his landmark birthday, Bernard Lown, George's long-time physician and friend, wrote, in a letter of congratulations:

'It would have been a wild wager to predict that this would or could happen. In over fifty years of doctoring I have learned that prognosis is the weakest of all the physician's pretensions. Euripides put it more poetically in the final chorus of Medea:

Of it do the gods bring forth things to pass beyond man's expectation; that which we thought would be is not fulfilled, while for the unlooked-for thing the gods find a way.

George, the gods found a special way for you because you are very special. While most people take pride in accumulating trinkets, you have harnessed knowledge, feasted your discriminating eye on great art, and cultivated probing conversation about things that truly matter.'

George's life initially followed a conventional path. He studied law, first in Athens and then at Cambridge, after which he entered the family shipping business. An astute businessman, he was the first Greek shipowner to build ships in Japan. His many other interests gradually drew him away from the world of business. He retired early and dedicated the rest of his long life to art and learning. He became a formidable art collector, a reader and a philosopher.

Nuccio Ordine spoke for all of George's friends when he wrote, again on George's birthday last year,

'Against all odds, even against medical science, you have shown us especially through these last few years that a genuine Love of Life, and Great Passion, can be an extraordinary antidote to the ills that afflict us all. More than once you have heroically beaten infirmity and illness and demonstrated that the Force of Human Will is more effective than any merely chemical remedy. The stage you have reached today, in a long life which destiny prolongs even further, is exceptional encouragement for all of us and a wonderful lesson in optimism and hope. [...]

You have also shown us that cultivating true passion gives specific meaning to life. Even as a young man you realized that material riches allow human beings to buy almost everything except for two essential things: Knowledge and Happiness. You realized from reading the classics of philosophy and literature, that knowledge cannot be acquired by money but only by individual effort: by study, reading and concentration. Learning depends on us alone; nobody can do it in our place. Driven by this love, you devoted more and more of your time to the adventure of knowledge, and this wisdom transformed your own life.' [...]

Professor Ordine went on to write:

'All that it takes is an exceptional moment, an unexpected opportunity to understand that the life we lead, whatever its difficulties and sorrows, can make us enjoy living. And that earthly things, far from being contemptible, can be a source of intense happiness.

In a beautiful passage of *De vita beata*, Seneca observes that "Fortune is a wise man's servant and a fool's boss" (*Divitiae enim apud sapientem virum in servitute sunt, apud stultum in imperio*). And you, profiting from your culture, have managed to enslave riches but avoid becoming a slave yourself.'

George's wife Maria, member of the US Board of the foundation and Vice President of the Swiss Friends, shared this rich intellectual and cultural life with George. Together they contributed greatly to the development of the Saint Catherine Foundation and its cultural activities, both in Europe and America. Now Maria must continue alone.

Bernard Lown spoke of the 'grandeur' of George's 'unpretentious presence' and the impact of his personality:

'You will be remembered by those who knew you as one who reached the hearts of people with your mind and the minds of people with your heart.'

SINAI SYRIAC 30 AND MRS BENSLEY'S SILK COVER

FATHER JUSTIN



In February of 1893, seven people made the long and difficult journey from Cambridge, England, to Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai desert. Among them was James Rendel Harris, who had visited the monastery once before, in the spring of 1889. On that occasion, he had spent several weeks reading manuscripts in Syriac and Arabic. This had convinced him of the singular importance of these manuscripts. But he knew that there remained others he had not had time to see.

The party also included Agnes Smith Lewis and her twin sister, Margaret Dunlop Gibson. They had devoted themselves to scholarship, Agnes becoming proficient in Hebrew and Syriac, and her sister proficient in Arabic. This was all the more remarkable, for at that time, women were not allowed to attend university. With the encouragement of Rendel Harris, they had come to Sinai the previous year, in 1892. On that visit, Agnes had been able to read Sinai Syriac 30, a manuscript written in AD 778, containing Lives of the Saints. But it is a palimpsest, where the original writing, made in perhaps the fifth century, had been erased, and the valuable parchment used a second time. Beneath the later writing, she could make out the text of the Gospels in what seemed to be the Old Syriac version, a translation made from the Greek in the second century. Understanding the importance of such a manuscript, she and her sister photographed it in its entirety. These photographs had convinced two other scholars to join them on this expedition.

The first was Robert Lubbock Bensley, Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, lecturer in Hebrew and Syriac, and Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic. He was accompanied by his wife, Agnes von Blomberg Bensley. The second scholar was Francis Crawford Burkitt, a former student of Bensley, who in 1905 was to be appointed Norris

Professor of Divinity. He was accompanied by his wife, Amy Persis Burkitt.

All had made the journey in order to try to decipher the text of the Gospels in Sinai Syriac 30. They had brought tents with them, which they set up in the monastery garden. They had also brought with them a cook and attendants, and enough food to last them the forty days they planned to stay at the monastery.

The faint underlying text of this manuscript could only be adequately read in bright daylight. In order to allow the scholars to make the best use of their time, Father Galakteon by special exception entrusted Sinai Syriac 30 to the care of Agnes Smith Lewis, whom he had come to know on her previous visit. This allowed the scholars to read the manuscript in shifts. One would study the manuscript from eight o'clock till eleven, a second from eleven till two, and a third from two till five. But the monastery lies in a steep valley, and from half-past three, it passed under the shadow of the mountains opposite. To make this schedule more fair, they took turns in their shifts on successive days. In actuality, the first scholar would often begin work at six o'clock in the morning, and there were times when Agnes read the manuscript by candlelight till half-past ten at night, copying out the upper writing containing Lives of the Saints. Every night the manuscript would be entrusted to her for its safekeeping.

In order to better protect the manuscript, Mrs Bensley made a silk cover for it. This was made from a cloth of purple and white striped silk. The cover was sewn together to fit over the manuscript, with two ties to hold it in place. She also made a label for the cover, with the name and number of the manuscript beautifully embroidered in Greek:

ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΣΥΡΙΑΚΟΝ ΠΑΛΙΜΨΗΣΤΟΝ 30
Gospel Syriac Palimpsest 30

The silk cover was made from a treasured cloth, in that it had belonged to her son, who had died. It was thus made both to protect the manuscript, and as a way of honouring the memory of her son.

On their return to England, Agnes commissioned a box to house the manuscript. It was made of Spanish mahogany, lined with cedar, and the lid was adorned with carvings of acanthus leaves, Greek crosses, and Saint Catherine wheels. She specified that the lid must be solid, to protect the manuscript from dust, but the sides perforated with small holes, to allow for ventilation. The lid opened to reveal the manuscript beneath a plate of glass. In this way, the fragile manuscript could be shown to visitors, but protected from damage.

In the centre of the lid was a silver plate, stamped with British hallmarks. It was engraved with a Greek inscription composed by Charles Walter Moule, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He was the successor as librarian to Agnes' late husband, Samuel Savage Lewis, and was later elected president of the college. The Greek text, which Agnes specified must be engraved in majuscule letters, reads as follows:



Η ΑΓΙΑ ΤΕΤΡΑΚΤΥΣ ΣΥΡΙΣΤΙ
 ΚΟΙΝΟΒΙΟΙΣ ΑΓΝΗ ΚΛΕΙΝΟΙΣ ΞΕΝΗ ΟΥΚ ΑΧΑΡΙΣΤΟΣ
 ΘΗΚΗΝ ΤΩΝ ΙΕΡΩΝ ΤΗΝ Δ' ΑΠΕΔΩΚΕ ΓΡΑΦΩΝ
 AGNES SMITH LEWIS

Agnes included a translation of this inscription in her book, *In the Shadow of Sinai*, published in 1898,

The four Holy Gospels in Syriac

Agnes, the foreigner, has given this casket for the Sacred Scriptures,

not without gratitude, to the famous monks.

Agnes Smith Lewis



The box was sent to the Archbishop in Cairo that same year, and from there, it reached Saint Catherine's Monastery. On their subsequent visits to the monastery, which the twins made to complete their work on Sinai Syriac 30 or to read other texts, the manuscript was invariably presented to them housed in its box of Spanish mahogany, and wrapped in the silk cover that Mrs Bensly had made for it. Sinai Syriac 30 is now on display in the monastery Skevophylakion, the museum opposite the church, where it can be seen by visitors. The mahogany box was kept in the library, and shown to special visitors. Recently, we came across the silk cover in the monastery archives. We folded together a box made from archival board, and slipped the silk cover over it, so that it again assumes the shape it would have had when it was used to protect the manuscript.

The scholars who came to Sinai in 1893 went on to publish their transcriptions of Sinai Syriac 30 in several editions, and these were important contributions to the study of the textual history of the Gospels.

A biography of the twins, describing their devotion to scholarship, and especially their work on Sinai Syriac 30, has recently been published, *The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels*, by Janet Soskice, Professor in Philosophical Theology at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Jesus College. The book has been well received. The author has made a presentation about these remarkable twin sisters to members of the American Associates of the Saint Catherine Foundation in New York.



Illustration opposite: Silk cover

From top to bottom: Box plate, Box hallmarks, Box side, Box lid

CYPRUS AND THE SINAI ICONS

ROBIN CORMACK

A lecture for the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies and the Hellenic Centre given by Professor Robin Cormack in London on 5 July 2011.

I am going to start at Paphos, with the late 12th-century wallpaintings of the Enkleistra of St Neophytos. These works are a personal visual statement of faith in the power of art – declared by the representation of the iconophile saint, Stephen the Younger, who proclaims his stand against the iconoclasts in the 8th century by holding up a portable icon of the Mother of God and infant Jesus. The same artist who painted these wallpaintings also produced just such a panel icon of the Virgin and Child in his next commission on Cyprus, for the Church of Arakou at Lagoudera.

My first point is to underline the special importance in Cyprus of the tradition of icon painting, and the considerable production of icons on the island itself over many centuries. Paradoxically, despite the fierce opposition of Neophytos to the takeover of the island by Crusaders and his belief in the declining fortunes of Cyprus, the truth is that the 13th century was a bumper harvest period for the icon painting of Cyprus. The quantity and quality of the icon production of this period and later is well documented; in particular I pay tribute to the solid publications of the late Doula Mouriki. But decades before her, in 1937, David Talbot Rice wrote a monograph on the icons of Cyprus. He wrote that he hopes the photographs will convey something of the glory of the art of icon painting. This will strike the reader today as ironical, as the book must hold the record for the worst set of photographs of icons ever published, and the originals in the Conway Library at the Courtauld leave a lot to be desired. The blurb on the cover of the book reads very oddly today. We are told that as the first monograph in English on the subject of these icons, it will serve a definite demand, boosted by the popularity of Cyprus as a Crown colony and delightful holiday resort. This merited the printing of 190 copies. All this is a far cry from modern academic marketing.

Much work is currently in progress on the icons of Cyprus, and there are all over the island, in churches, monasteries and museums, works of great importance. To give just one example, there is the large icon of Christ Elkomenos from the Church of the Holy Cross at Pelendri, dating around 1200, with unique iconographical details. Christ (with the jewelled halo found in other icons on Cyprus) is being led to the cross, which is being fixed in the ground. Soldiers stand behind him. To the right we see the Virgin Mary and St John and in front of them a Pharisee pointing at the four nails on the cross. Mindful of the current exhibition of relics in the British Museum (*Treasures of Heaven*), one might ask whether this church in the late 12th century claimed to own the nails of the crucifixion,

just as Neophytos at Paphos proudly displayed in his rock-cut church a strikingly large relic of the True Cross which he had acquired.

In addition to the icons which are still to be found on the island, many icons in collections around the world are attributed to a production on Cyprus, often controversially. Considerable debate surrounds two large icons in the National Gallery at Washington DC. Although the current label reads “Anonymous Byzantine”, they are often attributed to Cyprus, and as such one of the pair was exhibited in the *Glory of Byzantium* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, New York (cat 262). They were sold in the early 20th century in Spain, but perhaps the most popular attribution recently is that they were painted in Italy in the 13th century by an Italian artist who knew the art of Byzantium. The alternative is that they were painted in the east by a Byzantine artist who knew the art of the west.

It is the political history of Cyprus that has led to the suggestion that the meeting point of eastern and western art in the Middle Ages was on the island: captured in 1191 by Richard I of England, it thereafter left Byzantine political control, but not the Greek Orthodox church tradition. The Lusignans very speedily took over and on their coins from 1267 described themselves as Kings of Jerusalem and Cyprus. This French crusader dynasty continued to 1473, when the period of Venetian rule began, lasting for a hundred years before the Ottomans took over. As on Crete, Cyprus was a fruitful place for the production of icons of painters from both east and west, and for the highly creative synthesis of differing traditions and ideas. The two islands need to be considered together if we are to understand the dynamics of Late Byzantine art.

But the issue I want to face in this lecture is a stark one: why are there in the 13th century so many connections between the icons found on Cyprus and in the monastery of St Catherine at Sinai? Just to illustrate the question, there is the huge 13th-century Vita icon (over two metres high) of St Nicholas from the church of St Nicholas of the Roof at Kakopetria – known both in the photograph published by Talbot Rice showing its condition in 1937 and in its restored condition as we see it today in Nicosia. Special features of this icon are the use of relief gesso decoration to model the trilobe arch, the halo of the saint and several other features. These and other features seem to have their origins in the west. It is, unusually, painted not on canvas or linen but on parchment. So is another icon of this period, the seated Virgin Hodegetria from the church of St Cassianos at Nicosia, which includes Latin inscriptions as well as Dominican monks as donors. It must surely be by the same painter as St Nicholas. At the feet of St Nicholas are, on the left, the kneeling figure of a western knight in armour and, at the right, his wife and daughter. No doubt this was the gift of a western crusader to the Orthodox church at Kakopetria, where this Catholic family must have worshipped. But despite its western features and patronage, this icon has many stylistic features in common with more than one icon at Sinai, but especially with a Vita icon of St Nicholas now at Sinai, slightly earlier in date. Some will

guess the Sinai icon to be the work of an Orthodox painter from Cyprus, and that the artist of the St Nicholas may too have been Cypriote, or alternatively an immigrant western painter learning from his encounter in the east with Byzantine icons like the one at Sinai. This comparison underlines the close relations of Cyprus and Sinai in the 13th century (just as one might find close relations between Sinai and Crete in the 14th century and later).

In both Sinai and Cyprus we find several icons which combine the traditions of east and west. Who were the artists and who were the patrons? Sinai has an extraordinary number of icons in the monastery. How did this happen?



Diptych icon with St Prokopios and the Virgin Kykkotissa and saints. 51 x 39.7 cm (each leaf). Egg tempera on wood about 1280. Collection of the Holy Monastery of St Catherine at Sinai.

Were they brought as gifts to the monastery or were they made there? What were the processes of icon production in the East Mediterranean in the Crusader period of change and uncertainty, when Sinai perhaps offered a safe haven for visiting and resident monks – none of whom were of course born at the monastery, but who all travelled there from outside the region. One question is therefore how far some of the monks and the artists may have come from Cyprus, where the monastery is known to have had four metochia and other legal connections.

The Holy Monastery of St Catherine at Sinai today has the greatest collection of Orthodox icons in one place, and is also rich in high quality work of the 13th century, which is the period on which I am focussing today (some icons of this period having come to the recent Royal Academy exhibition of Byzantium, including what is probably the earliest known high iconostasis screen). The monastery currently keeps its icons in the church, in the treasury, in a number of chapels and in storerooms. Within the monastic precinct there would have been space for artists' workshops, alongside the mosque and Latin chapel for pilgrims. I show an early 20th-century photograph of a monk who restored the icons (and a postcard of monk artists on Cyprus which I am sure you have all seen before). One thing we have

learned from recent research is that, just as many icons on Cyprus were retouched in the 16th century, so also many Sinai icons have over-paint from later centuries of restoration within the monastery. Not all the Sinai icons are exactly as first painted. When I first visited the monastery in 1971, many icons were in a room next to the library, as recorded by Kurt Weitzmann in the Princeton-Michigan expeditions. Today the storerooms are on the lower floors of the building whose renovation is a current project at the monastery.

As illustrated in the 12th-century Klimakos manuscript in the library, the tradition of the monastic use of icons is long established at Sinai, and there are few churches in the world where the pilgrim can venerate an actual 12th-century icon of the patron saint, St Catherine, set above her relics. But the rest of this lecture focusses on two examples of icons which have connections, it has been argued, with Cyprus; one is a diptych at Sinai and the second is an icon of St George in London.

The diptych at Sinai with St Prokopios on the left and the Virgin and Child on the right, both surrounded by saints in the frames, is one of the most exquisite and rich paintings in the whole collection of the monastery of St Catherine, and all who have studied it date it to around 1280.

Let me describe some of the

features. The choice of saints around the frames is significant. Above the Virgin, on the left you see a bearded Moses, and John the Baptist on the right, and a second representation of Mary between her parents Joachim and Anna – Mary as the Burning Bush of Sinai, the holy relic in the monastery. In the frame below is St Catherine and then SS Constantine and Helena, each with a cross, a western idea, as in Byzantium they normally hold just the one True Cross between them. The ascetics shown are St John Klimakos and St Onouphrios, both cult saints at Sinai. So the choice of saints indicates very clearly that this icon is made for use at Sinai. The choice of saints in the left leaf is also special, but their connections are all with the cult of St Prokopios. He is shown fully armed as a military saint and is crowned with a diadem by two angels. The special feature of the Virgin is her bright red veil, and this is identified by all commentators from Soteriou onwards as referring to the famous icon given to the Kykko monastery by Alexios Comnenos in the 12th century, said to have been painted by St Luke. All images of the Virgin with a prominent coloured veil like this are identified by art historians as copies of this famous icon. On the basis of this feature the diptych has been predictably identified as an icon painted for Sinai by a Cypriote painter. This was not the opinion of

Weitzmann, who argued that the style indicated a Venetian artist who had worked on Cyprus. But others have seen it as an icon actually painted at Sinai, perhaps by a western artist.

I want today to bring some new evidence to the story of this icon. One of the problems has been in the unusual choice of St Prokopios, not one of the most common saints on icons, who received relatively short treatment in Christopher Walter's monograph on Byzantine warrior saints, partly because he appears first in history not as a soldier but as a priest, born at Jerusalem and martyred at Caesarea. By the 8th-century texts, he metamorphosed into a soldier who won an outstanding battle. The icon at Sinai gives him a special name, St Prokopios the Peribogites. There has to be a spelling mistake here. Accordingly Soteriou and Weitzmann read it as "Peribolites", meaning "of the enclosure", and thought that it refers to a sacred precinct and so may copy a model which was kept in the cult centre at Jerusalem outside the walls at Siloe. This reading is rejected however by Mary Aspra-Vardavakis in the 2002 catalogue of the exhibition of the Mother of God at the Benaki Museum in Athens. She suggested the correct reading as "Periboites", from *periboitos*, meaning "noised abroad" (the word is used in two texts about the saint). That is her translation, and it comes from Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon – one might perhaps prefer the translation "famous" or "well-known". In favour of her reconstruction are those two texts and the closeness of this spelling to the pronunciation of the word, but it still seems an odd term for an icon. The connection with a cult site at Jerusalem remains a possibility, especially as there is an icon still in that city which looks like a possible model for this imagery of St Prokopios.

This icon of St Prokopios was published in 1996 by Alexander Kariotoglou in his book *Mother of Churches, Jerusalem*. The icon at that time was in the Patriarchal Throne Room in the Greek Patriarchate near the Jaffa Gate in the old city. He dated it to the 16th century. More recently Miltos Garidis (in 1998) thought it earlier in date than that. This icon is a Vita icon of St Prokopios, with the named archangels crowning the saint with a martyr's diadem. It includes a large number of seventeen scenes of his life around the frame. It is a very full account of his hagiography.

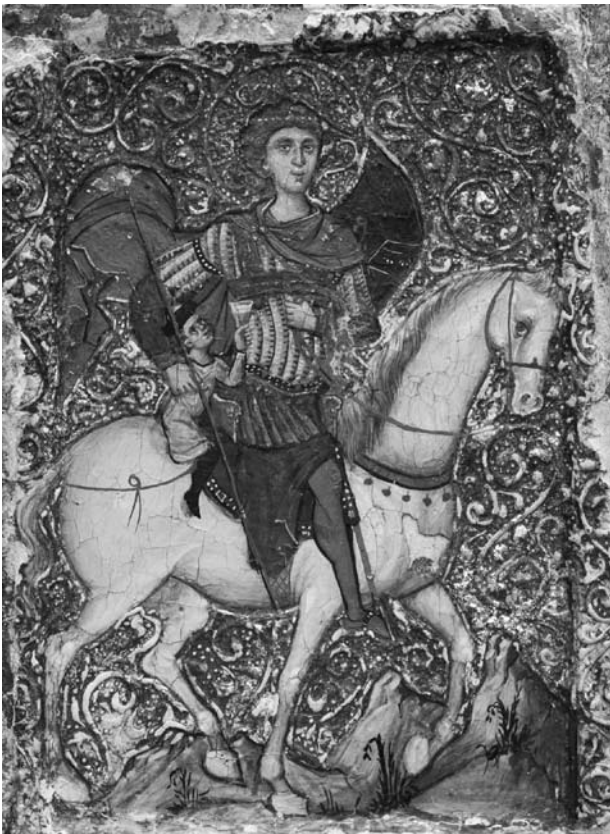
It is clear to me that this icon and the diptych are very closely related in their imagery. The Jerusalem icon represents the sword and spear and the dress of the saint in a more naturalistic and less decorative way, but the face and particularly the ears are modelled in almost identical ways – the diptych being flatter and more mask-like. So I would imagine that the Jerusalem icon was a possible and even very likely model, and should be dated earlier than 1280, but not much earlier. It is a crucial image for the understanding of the creation of the Sinai diptych and its unusual representation of St Prokopios.

We don't know where the Jerusalem icon was during the Middle Ages, but nor do we have any reason to think it was elsewhere than there. One solution is to say that the artist of the Sinai diptych saw the icon while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, maybe on his way to Sinai, where he then painted the diptych. (One artist with a number of icons now at

Sinai, who signed his works as Petros, had close connections with Jerusalem.) So perhaps the painter of the Sinai diptych was a westerner who went to the east by way of Cyprus and then moved to and worked in the monastery at Sinai. But it is equally open to argue that he was a Cypriote artist developing a new form of art which was a synthesis of eastern and western ideas, exactly the same scenario that we have on the Venetian island of Crete at this time. Maria Aspra-Vardavakis concludes he was a Christian monk of Syrian origin with some connection with Cyprus and Sinai, and that the icon was painted in the monastery for the abbot. These are of course only some of several speculative scenarios, but I should mention that we have other evidence of complicated narratives about the movements of artists, and we have other artists around 1280 whose icons at Sinai are equally enigmatic – like an icon of St Sergios with a crusader banner and kneeling female donor. The woman has been identified as a western catholic – you can see her rosary. The black veil has been identified as a mark of mourning for the loss of Jerusalem, and the artist has been identified as from Cyprus or from Syria, or as a Syrian living on Cyprus. It is assumed the woman gave this as a gift to Sinai, as a prayer for a crusader warrior, perhaps her dead husband. Another equally complicated scenario might explain the character of the large double-sided panel in the monastery with the Crucifixion and Anastasis with Latin inscriptions. Most commentators suggest that this was made for use at Sinai (perhaps in the Latin chapel) by a Venetian artist – it has three nails for the crucifixion, the new western imagery in this period, whereas in Byzantine crucifixions there are normally four (especially as we have seen that relics of the nails of the crucifixion were found in multiples of four). This panel has some other odd features, one a legacy from its later history. Why did some iconoclast cut out some of the eyes and haloes? Who was it? I know of no satisfactory explanation for this. Could it be a Christian or a Muslim attack?

So far icons from Sinai and Cyprus have been considered which show differing ways of producing imagery in the 13th century, with a question mark on whether their artists were trained in the east or the west. The same situation of ambiguity (or if you prefer "hybridity") exists in a group of manuscripts which were the subject of research by Hugo Buchthal, who worked at the Warburg Institute in London (and was one of my PhD supervisors), and who in 1957 wrote a seminal book in which he attributed several 13th-century manuscripts to western artists working in the city of Acre, producing books for western crusaders, including for King Louis IX of France. Only one of these attributions, the Perugia missal, has an entry in its liturgical calendar which links it to use at Acre. Buchthal then argued that this book and the rest of this group of the mid-thirteenth century were actually written and painted at Acre. This sweeping conclusion has been recently challenged, but only very tentatively, and it has been suggested that the manuscripts (or at least some of them) might actually have been illuminated on the island of Cyprus. I should mention that the subsequent work of Kurt Weitzmann and others on

the icons of Sinai applied the stylistic methodology of Buchthal to the attribution of these icons; a considerable number of 13th-century icons were interpreted as being manufactured by western artists at Acre (and other centres) and then carried to the monastery. Doula Mouriki followed the same methodology, but with considerably different conclusions, attributing many of these icons to the artists of Cyprus, influenced by western ideas. To explore this controversy, I want to introduce another icon and another artist, which opens up the same questions from a different standpoint.



Icon with St George and the Youth of Mytilene, 26.8 x 18.8 cm. Egg tempera and oil on wood. Middle of the 13th century. Collection of the British Museum, Inv. 1984.6-1.1.

The small icon is in the collection of the British Museum at London, and it represents St George and the miraculous rescue of a boy from Mytilene who had been snatched by Arab pirates and taken to Crete. St George brings him back home from slavery. The story is historically to be dated to the 10th century and is one of the many recorded posthumous miracles of St George.

I have continued to research this icon in London since I first published it with Stavros Mihalarias in 1984, and it repays repeated study. The dating of the panel to the 1250s or 1260s depends on a stylistic comparison (and the distinctive bulging eyes) with an illuminated Bible now in Paris, the Arsenal Bible, which Buchthal argued was made in Acre for King Louis IX while he was there on the seventh Crusade – he was in Acre from 1250 to 1254, when he returned to Paris. But more controversial than the dating is

the character and place of training of the artist. These questions can only be tackled on the basis of the style and the subject matter of the icon, as it has no signature. What we see is however distinctive. Although the inscription naming the saint is in red letters in the Greek alphabet, some features are curious for a Byzantine icon. These include the use of oil as well as egg tempera as a medium, the construction of a raised frame with gesso and the insertion of parchment fragments, the gilded gesso background, the armour and the swinging body of the saint on his horse. On the basis of these elements, I reckoned that this icon was, like the Bible, the work of an artist trained in France, and maybe the icon was produced for the pilgrim market at the cult centre of St George at Lydda (where the rare iconography would have been familiar). The immigrant artist had studied local traditions, but revealed his western training. He might have travelled from Paris with the fleet of King Louis in 1248, reaching first Cyprus and then moving to Acre and the Holy Land. The interest in gesso backgrounds is, however, a feature of icons from Cyprus, and Doula Mouriki saw this icon as one produced by a Cypriote painter under western influence. Both interpretations are of course based on minimal indications.*

On the basis of research in the monastery of St Catherine, I now believe that a number of icons at Sinai are actually the work of the same artist as the British Museum panel: four small devotional panels, the wings of a triptych, and some panels of a templon beam with thirteen festival scenes. On these panels are found some subjects which are accepted only by the western church (such as the coronation of the Virgin), and the use of parchment to help in making up a frame. Since the large templon was most likely made at Sinai, then we can take these panels as a strong indication that the British Museum artist travelled as far as the monastery itself, supplying icons for pilgrims. They corroborate the idea that the artist was a westerner, either trained in Paris or possibly the second-generation son of an immigrant French artist who grew up in the multicultural world of the east Mediterranean.

Both the icons that have been presented in this lecture are outstanding masterpieces of the 13th century, and both might be seen to have connections with both Sinai and Cyprus. Perhaps one day as we learn more about the Sinai collection, we will be able to give answers, rather than ask questions, about the sources of this great collection of the works of eastern and western artists: Who were the artists, who were the patrons, and why are there so many icons at Sinai? Were they gifts carried to the monastery by pilgrims, were they brought by the monks, or were they made at Sinai for devotion in the churches? What is the role of Cyprus and other communities in the history of the monastery?

*For further information on the British Museum icon of St George, see Robin Cormack, *Icons* (British Museum, 2007).

PROFESSOR ROBIN CORMACK is Emeritus Professor in the History of Art, Courtauld Institute of Art and a member of the Classics Faculty, University of Cambridge.

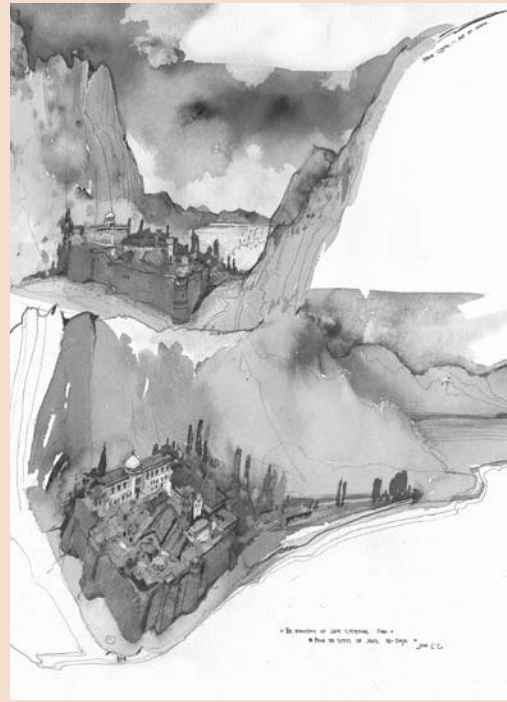
CHRISTMAS CARDS 2011

Support the Saint Catherine Foundation

Order charity cards direct from the foundation



Icon with the Virgin Hodegetria Dexiokratousa
Byzantine (Constantinople?), first quarter of the 13th century
Mosaic set in wax on wood panel
Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai



The Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, from the slopes of Jebel Ad-Dayr
Watercolour, Doug Patterson, 2002

The Saint Catherine Foundation charity Christmas cards for 2011 feature an icon from the important Saint Catherine's Monastery collection and an illustration from Doug Patterson's *Saint Catherine's Portfolio*. The cards are produced on heavy semi-gloss paper with a matt interior writing surface. The matching envelopes have a self-sealing flap.

Thanks to the sponsorship of the EFG Group, all proceeds from Christmas card sales benefit the Saint Catherine Foundation and its work.

Printing costs have been met by the

