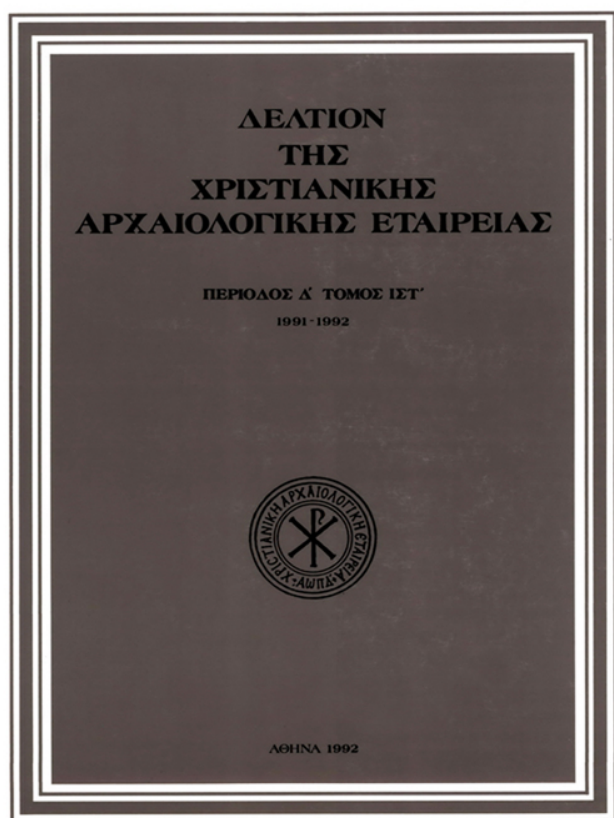


Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 16 (1992)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 16 (1991-1992), Περίοδος Δ'. Στη μνήμη του André Grabar (1896-1990)



Ένα ζεύγος εικόνων του Μωυσή των αρχών του 13ου αιώνα στο Σινά με τις σκηνές της Καϊόμενης Βάτου και της παραλαβής του Νόμου

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A Pair of Early 13th-century Moses Icons at Sinai with
the Scenes of the Burning Bush and the Receiving of
the Law

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ΑΘΗΝΑ 1992

A PAIR OF EARLY 13th-CENTURY MOSES ICONS AT SINAI WITH THE SCENES OF THE BURNING BUSH AND THE RECEIVING OF THE LAW*

The early years of the 13th century represent a high point in the history of the icon collection of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai. Iconographic and stylistic evidence indicates that a substantial group of large-size icons with a concise subject-matter were produced at the Monastery during this period in order to highlight its importance as a cult center of international renown¹. Since almost every one of these panels is a work of art in its own right, and in view of the fact that the large majority were painted, as I believe, at the Monastery by a restricted group of artists who applied the most progressive trends in Byzantine art of that period, a plausible hypothesis is that several of these painters arrived at Sinai from Constantinople immediately after the capture of this city by the Crusaders in 1204.

The group of early 13th-century icons intended to promote the cult of the holy figures connected with the history of Sinai includes, among others, numerous panels with images of the Virgin and Child, several historiated panels with portraits of saints such as St. Catherine, St. John the Baptist, St. Nicholas, and St. Panteleimon, panels with portraits of ascetics of the nearby desert such as St. Euthymios, as well as Old Testament protagonists of the biblical events which, according to tradition, took place at the site of the Monastery; among them the icons with depictions of Moses occupy a distinct place.

Of the large extant Moses panels from this period (there are five), only one, a huge historiated icon², was not apparently meant to be paired with any other panel. The rest were intended to form pairs, and the best known example is the icon depicting Moses in the act of receiving the Law, with, as companion piece, the masterly icon of Elijah³. Moreover, another pair comprises the two panels of a sanctuary portal with depictions of Moses and Aaron⁴. A different type of pairing concerns the well-known icon of Moses before the Burning Bush (Fig. 1)⁵ and a recently published icon depicting Moses in the act of receiving the Law (Fig. 2)⁶. These icons are the only such pair among the Sinai portable icons from the Byzantine period and 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 Basilica⁷.

The icon illustrating the episode of the Burning Bush (Figs. 1, 3, 5 and 8) measures 92 cm in height, 64 cm in width, and 3 cm in thickness; the border is 5.8 cm wide.

* I wish to extend my thanks to the Monastery of Sinai for permission to publish the icons and for the photographic material.

1. A large number of these icons were published by George and Maria Sotiriou, *Eikónes tēs Movḗs Sīnā*, I (Plates), II (Text), Athens 1956, 1958, *passim*. Some of these icons have, moreover, been commented upon in the various studies of Kurt Weitzmann on the Sinai material. Special mention should be made of his recent article, *Icon Programs of the 12th and 13th Centuries at Sinai*, *ΔΧΑΕ Δ'*, IB' (1984), *passim*. See also D. Mouriki, *Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century, Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery*. Ekdotike Athenon, Athens 1990, pp. 108-11, 113-14, 115-16.

2. For this icon see K. Weitzmann, *The Study of Book Illumination, Past, Present, and Future*, in K. Weitzmann *et al.*, *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, Princeton 1975, pp. 24-25, and figs. 20-21. Weitzmann, *Icon Programs* (as in note 1), pp. 97-98, fig. 28. D. Mouriki, *A Moses Cycle on a Sinai Icon of the Early 13th Century*, *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann* (forthcoming). For a color illustration see *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai* (published by the monastery), Glyka Nera Attikis 1985, fig. 137.

3. Sotiriou, *Eikónes* (as in note 1), I, fig. 75; II, pp. 89-90. The icon has often been commented upon by Weitzmann, see, e.g., *Icon Programs* (as in note 1), pp. 102-106 (with earlier bibliography).

4. M. Chatzidakis, *L'évolution de l'icône aux 11e-13e siècles et la transformation du templon*, *Actes du XVe Congrès International d'études byzantines*, Athènes, septembre 1976, I, Athens 1979, pp. 355-56, pl. XLIV.18 and 19. The date proposed here is the early 12th century. Mouriki, *Icons* (as in note 1), p. 110, fig. 35 (in color). Here a dating of the work in the early 13th century has been proposed.

5. Sotiriou, *Eikónes*, I, fig. 160; II, pp. 140-41. K. Weitzmann, *The Icon* (George Braziller), New York 1978, no. 18 (with color illustration). Mouriki, *Icons* (as in note 1), p. 110, fig. 36 (in color).

6. Mouriki, *Icons* (as in note 1), p. 111, fig. 37 (in color).

7. K. Weitzmann, *Introduction to the Mosaics and Monumental Painting*, in G. H. Forsyth and K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Church and Fortress of Justinian*, Ann Arbor (n.d.) [1973], p. 15, pls. CXXVI-CXXVII, CLXXIV, CLXXXII-CLXXXIII.



Fig. 1. Sinai. Monastery of St. Catherine. Icon. Moses and the Burning Bush.



Fig. 2. Sinai. Monastery of St. Catherine. Icon. Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law.

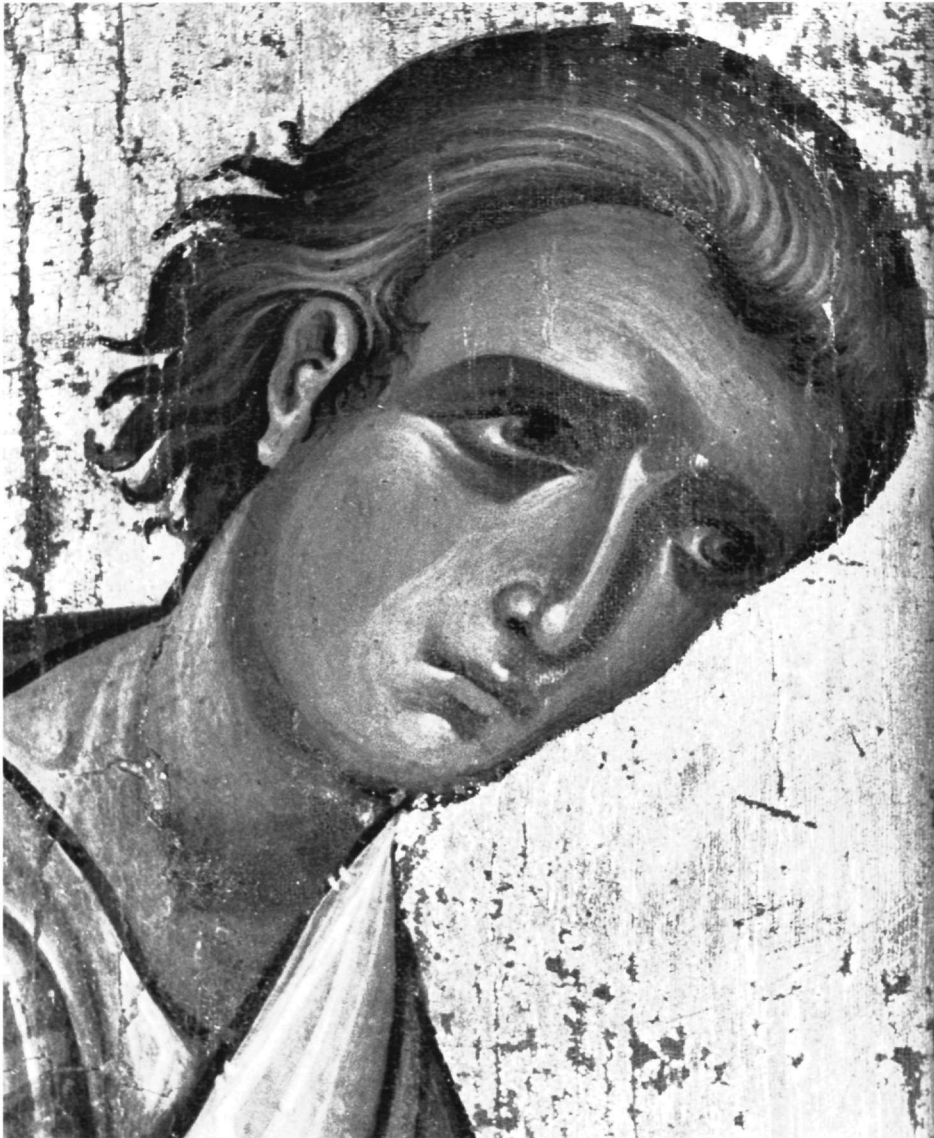


Fig. 3. Moses and the Burning Bush. Detail.

The panel consists of two boards of heavy wood, each being 27 and 35.6 cm wide. Two strips of wood (approximately 2 cm in height) were added in order to reinforce the panel at the top and bottom. The paint is laid on canvas. The back of the panel is stuccoed and painted in red brown. In the upper right section of the gold background, an almost totally obliterated inscription reproduces the relevant biblical passage in capital letters. A few words of Exodus 3: 4, [Ε]ΚΑΛΕΣΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΝ [ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΕΚ ΤΟΥ ΒΑΤΟΥ [ΛΕ]ΓΟΝ ΜΩΣΗ [Ο ΔΕ] ΕΙΠΕΝ ΤΙ Ε[ΣΤΙΝ; Ο ΔΕ ΕΙ]ΠΕΝ ΜΙ..., can be deciphered⁸. At the bottom left corner of the border, extending also onto the lower strip, the depiction of a tiny prostrate donor wearing a turban is included (Fig. 8).

Moses is represented turning to the right and facing the

burning bush. He is loosening the black sandal of his left foot placed on a rock; the discarded sandal of the right foot is on the ground. The prophet is fully aware of the Theophany he is witnessing, as revealed by his deep-set eyes which express utmost concentration. He is a well-proportioned figure exuding vigor and innocence which conform to his young age. Moses wears a light blue chiton in three tones, highlighted in white. The clavi are in deep pink. His himation changes in color from deep pink in three tones to white as if it were affected by the reflection of the fire of the bush. Although light blue for the chiton and pink for the himation are the traditional colors for Moses⁹, in this case the deep pink of the drapery harmonizes in a fantastic way with the fiery bush in front of the prophet. The



Fig. 4. Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law. Detail.

folds of the white surfaces of Moses' himation are indicated by light blue, and its contour in the central area is enlivened by double white dots. Black is used occasionally to outline the drapery where it is necessary to distinguish the forms more clearly. The drapery adheres softly to the body enhancing its plasticity. Moses' face is modeled with ochre producing broad lighted areas, with white highlights at the bridge and the tip of the nose, above the upper lip, at the corners of the mouth, and also on the chin. Vivid red in various shapes is freely placed on the cheeks, the bridge and tip of the nose, the lips, on the contour of the chin, and also at the edges of the forehead. Olive shading is restricted mainly to the area around the eyes. Moreover, warm tonalities predominate in the modeling of the neck, of the arms,

hands, and feet. The hair is short and blond, modulated with brushstrokes in ochre and light brown, as well as dark brown for the ends at the nape of the neck and for the contours. The soft painterly modeling endows the face with a radiance and a tenderness as befits the very young age of Moses.

8. The fact that the letters were written in black indicates that they were redrawn at a later period, probably in the 18th century, by Ioannis Kornaros.

9. See, for instance, the other Moses panels preserved at the monastery; also his depictions in the Cosmas manuscripts and in the Octateuchs.

5



6





Fig. 5. Moses and the Burning Bush. Detail.

Figs. 6-7. Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law. Details.

The rare sensitivity in the use of light and in the blending of color tonalities apparent in the figure style is also revealed in the interaction of the figure of Moses with the gold background and the landscape. Moses is projected from the waist up against the uniform gold background whose transcendental function enhanced by the shining effect of the “rotated” nimbus outlined by a thin incised line. On the other hand, extreme care has been given to a detailed rendering of the landscape, which conveys a paradisiac atmosphere. The strictly topographical elements required by the narrative are of course the Βάτοϛ, all in flames, and the hillside of Horeb where, according to Exodus, the event took place. A striking contrast is produced by the basaltlike peaks of

the hills on either side of the figure and the soft wavy strip of ground rendered in olive and speckled with refined flowers looking like daisies. A middle ground area including the undulating peak that serves as support for Moses’ left foot provides the transition to the bare rocks at the back; this area is also enlivened with flowers. An impression of aerial perspective is suggested by the change from a strip of two tones of green, of a darker tonality, at the bottom, into olive and ochre in the larger upper section. Despite the transcendental and, at the same time, decorative atmosphere, which permeates the setting of the action, enhanced by the broad strip of plain gold on the border, the figure seems to move freely in an almost naturalistic landscape. The diagonal axis



Fig. 8. Moses and the Burning Bush. Detail.

formed by the right foot of Moses, the lower hem of his himation, the left foot, and the hillside crowned by the cubist peaks counterbalances the diagonal thrust of Moses reaching for the tablets extended to him by the Hand of God in the companion panel (Fig. 2).

The second Moses panel (Figs. 2, 4, 6-7) measures 88 cm in height, 64.9 cm in width, and 3 cm in thickness; the width of the border is 5.9 cm. The icon consists of two heavy boards, each being 48 and 16.7 cm wide. The paint is laid on canvas. The back was stuccoed and painted in red brown. No traces of inscriptions have survived¹⁰. Moses is represented turned to the left in a striding pose, with his veiled hands grasping the tablets held by the Hand of God, which issues from a segment

of the sky in the upper left corner. Moses' glance betrays awe and utter concentration. Compared to the figure in the panel of the Burning Bush, Moses is shown slightly more robust and even younger, almost an ephebe. He is clad in a light blue chiton with dark blue clavi exposed only at the lower hem. His body is almost entirely covered by his himation in three tones of pink, which conveys a monochromatic impression despite its softly highlighted areas in white. Black has been used in places for the contours of the himation in order to enhance their clarity. The tension of the thrust of the body upward is emphasized by the heavy drapery with its system of diagonal fold lines which converge onto the tablets. Only a few curves are used to define the rounded con-

tours of the body in the areas of the shoulder and the thighs. The cubist appearance of the massive body forms a sharp contrast to the small head. The prophet is barefoot, and his black sandals are depicted nearby.

Moses' face is very youthful, slightly fleshy and innocent. As in the previous panel, we have the portrayal of a figure with a rare physical beauty. Facial modeling is rendered mainly with ochre, with spare white highlights above the left eyebrow, below the left eye, at the bridge and bottom of the nose, around the mouth, as well as with abundant red, which is shown on the cheek, the lips, the chin, and on part of the forehead; moreover, red is used sparingly at the neck. The hair is light brown, modulated with free brushstrokes of dark brown and black. The tips at the back give the impression of being wet, a detail shared with the Moses figure on the icon of the Burning Bush. The Tablets of the Law are rendered in light orange with brown red lines imitating veined marble; they have the appearance of a closed diptych. The Hand of God emerges from a gold cuff decorated with a floral pattern in brown-black. The Hand issues from a starry segment of the sky rendered in several tones of blue; the stars are shown as deep red dots.

Unlike the icon of Moses and the Burning Bush, where we have the interaction of four colors, in the icon of The Receiving of the Law we have only three, i.e., the pink of Moses' himation, the green of the landscape, and the gold of the background; light blue plays the role of an accent shown at the lower hem of the prophet's chiton and in the small area of the segment of the sky. Compared to the previous panel, the composition shows a more sober approach. In agreement with the content of the scene, gold has been assigned a more important role, since more than half of the figure of Moses floats in the gold ground. His nimbus with an incised contour undoubtedly had the shiny effect of that on the other Moses panel, for it was a standard device for catching the light of gold, employed in a large number of Sinai icons.

The landscape in the foreground consists of one strip of green bordered on top by an undulating line in brown-black, on which grow refined plants crowned with daisy-like flowers in red and blue, and with white dots, as in the previous panel. Above extends a higher surface of green ground with mountain peaks highlighted in white and orange brushstrokes. Here, the flowers of the foreground appear more sparingly.

Aside from the subject matter, the pairing of the two Moses icons is supported by technical, iconographic, and stylistic details. Approximately the same measurements and the same type of heavy wood, treated in a similar way with two boards, have been used in each

case, and no special decoration was intended for the back. Characteristic for both panels is the broad border covered with gold leaf, which enhances the transcendental character of the images. Moreover, in quality and tonality, the gold leaf is similar in the two icons, and the same is true of the palette in general. In addition, both panels reveal close affinity in the figure style, in the rendering of the landscape, as well as in the relation of the human figure to the gold background and the landscape. A rare sensitivity in combining color values for harmonious effects and in using the light to create shimmering surfaces is a common characteristic of the style of both works. Especially revealing is the unconventional facial type of Moses characterized by extreme youthfulness and striking beauty. Finally, the two depictions of Moses share many Morellian features, such as the form of the eyes and the eyebrows, the rendering of the blondish hair with the "wet" tips at the back, the shape of the foot, and the commalike end of the lower hem of the chiton or the himation above it.

As regards the iconography of the two Sinai icons several observations can be made¹¹. In the rendering of the scene of the Burning Bush, which illustrates Exodus 3: 1-6, the depiction of Moses beholding the fiery plant and loosening his sandals is the canonical contracted version¹². Moses' act of loosening his sandals has been rendered in different variants in art. The one shown on the Sinai icon is the most popular and finds a close parallel in the mosaic panel with the same scene in the sanctuary of the Basilica, which may have served as the direct model for our panel. If this is the case, we should point out a major omission, that of the visual device to

10. The icon has been cleaned of a heavy overpainting by Tassos Margaritoff.

11. Observations on the iconography of both subjects have been made in numerous studies. The latest comprehensive monograph with earlier bibliography is by Th. Chr. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai: Die Ikonographie der Berufung des Moses und des Empfangs der Gesetzestafeln* (Tuduv-Studien. Reihe Kunstgeschichte, vol. 20), Munich 1986. Many pertinent observations are found in the latest monograph by K. Weitzmann and H. L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, DOS 28, Washington 1990, especially pp. 34-38 and 52-55.

12. In some examples, e.g., the later Octateuchs, two episodes are illustrated: Moses beholding the burning bush and Moses loosening his sandals.

indicate the divine presence shown in the mosaic by the Hand of God emerging from a segment of the sky in the upper right corner. The Hand of God is the traditional symbol for this purpose in the earlier or the archaising examples of the scene, to be replaced in later works by an angel depicted behind or beside the bush. This dual approach is justified by the account of the event in Exodus. At first we read that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (3: 2). A little further on we read that "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush" (3: 4). This supposed contradiction in the Bible text, which may account for the designation of the Theophany either by the inclusion of the Hand of God, or by the depiction of an angel, did not pass unnoticed in the Christian commentaries on this part of the Old Testament. Several of the *Catena*e to the *Octateuch* attempt to explain that the angel of the Theophany was none other than the Lord¹³. The omission of either of the symbols of the divine presence on the Sinai icon is puzzling. An explanation could lie in the restrictions imposed by an earlier model including the Hand of God, such as the Early Byzantine mosaic in the sanctuary of the Basilica. Since the Hand of God had already been superseded by the angel in the Middle Byzantine renderings of the scene of the Burning Bush¹⁴, the artist opted for its omission without, however, wishing to change substantially the iconographic variant of his model by introducing the novel iconography.

It is worth making a brief comment on the form of the bush, the *Βάτος* of the Septuagint text. On the Sinai icon, as in many other representations of the scene, the bush has the form of a low plant growing directly out of the ground. Following Jewish tradition, the bush assumes the form of an acanthus plant¹⁵. Nevertheless, the same concept pervades the Christian commentaries on the Bible, which even try to draw symbolic implications from this identification¹⁶.

Regarding the setting of the scene on the Sinai icon, which is organized so as to have Moses placed in a relatively flat area flanked by hills on either side, this is a rather infrequent feature, to be found also in the Early Byzantine mosaic panel in the sanctuary of the Basilica. The same type of setting is encountered much more often in depictions of The Receiving of the Law. The almost identical approach to the landscape on both Sinai icons will preoccupy us further on.

The Receiving of the Law is mentioned several times in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. The rendering of the scene on the Sinai icon conforms to the account of the event in Exodus 31: 18, "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon

mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God". The rendering of this episode on the Sinai panel is in agreement with the standard iconography of this scene. Moses' sweeping posture with the thrust of his body upward has many parallels, especially among earlier depictions of the scene¹⁷, which, however, do not include the Early Byzantine mosaic at Sinai. Of the artistic works preserved in the monastery one can single out the Early Byzantine bronze cross, which may have served as one of the models for the scene of our panel¹⁸. Along with the stride of Moses, his himation has been given an important role as an expressive means of conveying the psychological tension of the action. The great sweep of the flowing drape 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. In this feature the closest parallel is the marble relief from Constantinople, now in Berlin, which has been dated to the 7th century¹⁹. The Sinai icon represents example for the dynamic movement and the emotional tension of the scene, in sharp contrast to the subdued static rendering of The Receiving of the Law in the Justinianic mosaic at Sinai and in its probable early 13th-century copy, the well-known Moses panel that forms a pair with the Elijah panel.

It should be pointed out that Moses' posture as shown in our icon is justified by the requirement of the narrative which implies that Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the tablets (portrayed in numerous examples, such as the so-called Aristocratic Psalters)²⁰. This "climbing" pose can be traced to an Early Christian tradition as may be attested by a large number of extant works²¹. However, the dynamic pose with the wide stride has also been retained in many works where, as on the Sinai icon, Moses is stepping on flat ground. Moreover, it may be noted that this icon, together with the two other large Sinai panels with The Receiving of the Law from the same period, have preserved a feature of the earlier iconography of the scene, i.e., the physical contact of Moses' hand with the tablets, a detail which is usually avoided in later examples. For this feature the Justinianic mosaic in the sanctuary of the Basilica may have served as model for all three Sinai panels.

In our panel Moses is shown striding on flat ground but is flanked by mountain peaks, giving the impression that he is actually in a gorge, an occurrence which is observed in many other works including the Early Byzantine mosaic at Sinai²². In addition, in the pair of panels under discussion the landscape setting is identical for both scenes, a feature also shared with the pair of the same subjects in the Early Byzantine mosaics at Sinai.

This approach has a direct relation to the actual pairing of these two scenes in the icons under discussion, which acquires special significance since it is connected with the *loca sancta* tradition of Sinai, having as it does two early local antecedents of special significance, the mosaic panels in the Sanctuary of the Basilica and the large bronze cross²³. The Burning Bush belongs *par excellence* to Sinaitic iconography since the monastery was built at the spot of the Burning Bush marked by the homonymous chapel which stands behind the Sanctuary of the Justinianic Basilica. The association of the Burning Bush with the site of the Monastery is reflected as early as the end of the 4th century in the *Peregrinatio* of Etheria²⁴. Moreover, a survey of the art treasures of the Monastery reveals the wide popularity of the theme of the Burning Bush, a phenomenon closely related to the typological association of the Burning Bush and the Virgin²⁵. The assignment of The Receiving of the Law to the *loca sancta* iconography of Sinai is of course based on the Early Christian tradition which also goes back to the 4th century. According to this tradition, the Mount Sinai at the foot of which the Monastery was built is identified with the Mount Sinai where Moses received the tablets²⁶.

The episodes of the Burning Bush and of The Receiving of the Law are related in chapters in Exodus which are far apart. According to the Bible text, the first episode occurred on Mount Horeb and the second on Mount Sinai. Following Jewish tradition, Horeb and Sinai are different names for the same mountain, the "mountain of God"²⁷. Jewish tradition may account for uniting the

expression as Philo, it is probable that they borrow it from the Jewish author. See Mouriki-Charalambous, *The Octateuch Miniatures* (as in note 13), p. 58. Symbolic implications of the identification of the bush with an acanthus plant are also found in other Early Christian fathers, such as in Gregory of Nyssa. Cf. J. Daniélou, *Moïse exemple et figure chez Grégoire de Nysse*, *Cahiers Sioniens*, VIII, No. 2-4 (1954), pp. 276-77.

17. E.g., the silver lipsanoteca of the Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki, the ivory pyxis at Dumbarton Oaks, a marble relief in Berlin, several Psalters of the "Aristocratic" recension, the Regina Bible, etc. See Aliprantis (as in note 11), figs. 76, 80, 82, 96-97, 101, 104, 108, 110-11, 119 etc.

18. See K. Weitzmann, in K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, *The Moses Cross at Sinai*, *DOP* 17 (1963), pp. 385-98, figs. 1 and 3. Reprinted in K. Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, Princeton 1982, as no. IV. For the original function of the cross see *ibid.*, p. 390.

19. J. Strzygowski, *Das Berliner Moses-Relief und die Thüren von Sta. Sabina in Rom*, *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlung XIV* (1930), p. 65, fig. 1. Cf. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Ševčenko (as in note 18), p. 387, where the particular rendering of Moses' himation in this relief has been commented upon.

20. Cf. Aliprantis (as in note 11), figs. 96-97, 101, 108, 110-11.

21. See Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Dura Synagogue* (as in note 11), p. 53.

22. E.g., the San Vitale mosaic, the miniatures in Psalter 15 of the National Library of Athens, Psalter 965 of the University Library of Chicago, Psalter 3 (olim Pantocrator 47) of Dumbarton Oaks. See Aliprantis (as in note 11), figs. 75, 85, 90, 96, etc. As regards the Early Byzantine mosaic at Sinai, according to Kurt Weitzmann, the depiction of Moses standing in a gorge suggests that the artist was inspired by the serrated peaks of the actual locality. See Weitzmann, in Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine* (as in note 7), p. 15.

23. Such paralleling in the programmatic layout in the center part of a cult room, to be seen in the Dura Synagogue, in San Vitale in Ravenna and in the Basilica of Sinai, has been interpreted as pointing to a common tradition which originated in a monumental composition. See G. Kretschmar, *Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen jüdischer und christlicher Kunst in der Antike*, *Abraham unser Vater. Festschrift für Otto Michel*, Leiden 1963, pp. 303-13. Reprinted in Gutmann, ed., *No Graven Images* (as in note 15), pp. 164-74.

24. J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*. Newly translated with supporting documents and notes, London 1971, p. 96.

25. Cf. K. Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine*, *DOP* 28 (1974), p. 53. Reprinted in Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts of Sinai* (as in note 18), no. II. For the typological association of the Virgin with the Burning Bush, see below.

26. See Egeria's Travels (as in note 24), p. 94.

27. Among numerous Jewish sources, see *Midrash Rabbah*, with references to various treatises. English translation made by various scholars under the editorship of I. Epstein, London 1951. Especially Exodus, II, 4, p. 51, and Numbers, I, 7, p. 13. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (Loeb), vol. IV, II, 2, p. 278. Cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I-VII, Philadelphia 1909-1938: II, p. 302; III, p. 80; V, p. 415 note 113. See also C. H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. The Synagogue. Final Report. VIII. Part I*, New Haven 1956, p. 231, note 915. For a further discussion on this subject and the relevant bibliography, see *Éthérie. Journal de Voyage. Texte latin, introduction et traduction de Hélène Pétré* (SC, no. 21), Paris 1948, pp. 31ff. See also Mouriki-Charalambous, *The Octateuch Miniatures* (as in note 13), pp. 60-61.

13. See N. Theotokis, Σειρά ενός καὶ πενήκοντα ὑπομνηματιστῶν εἰς τὴν Ὀκτάτευχον καὶ τὰ τῶν Βασιλειῶν, I, Lipsiae 1772, col. 577. Cf. D. Mouriki-Charalambous, *The Octateuch Miniatures of the Byzantine Manuscripts of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1970, pp. 56-57.

14. Examples constituting exceptions to this rule, such as the Octateuch Vat. gr. 747, adhere to an archetype where this time-honored symbol, harking back to the Jewish tradition, was adopted. Cf. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Dura Synagogue* (as in note 11), p. 37, fig. 45.

15. This feature can be traced back to Philo who states explicitly that the miraculous bush was ἀκανθῶδες τι φυτόν. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* (Loeb), VI, p. 311, i, 65, 66. Cf. E. R. Goodenough, *Early Christian and Jewish Art*, *JQR XXXIII* (1942-43), pp. 415-16. Reprinted in J. Gutmann (ed.), *No Graven Images, Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible*, New York 1971, pp. 197-98. Abr. Meyer, *Légendes juives apocryphes sur la vie de Moïse*, Paris 1925, p. 63. Also C.-O. Nordstrom, *Some Jewish Legends in Byzantine Art*, *Byzantion* 25-27 (1955-57), pp. 491ff.

16. In the Catenae to the Octateuch, for instance, we find similar passages by Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch. See Theotokis (as in note 13), cols. 575 and 577. Since both use the very same

Burning Bush and The Receiving of the Law in art²⁸, found for the first time in the frescoes of the Synagogue of Dura Europos, on either side of the niche of the Torah shrine²⁹. The pairing of these two scenes occurs, among other examples, in the two early Sinaitic works, the mosaic panels in the Sanctuary of the Basilica and the bronze cross; in the 6th-century mosaics of San Vitale in Ravenna³⁰, in the three extant illustrated Cosmas manuscripts from the Byzantine period³¹, and in the Paris Psalter and its copies³². None of the works seems to reflect a purely narrative approach, and the same should be true for the pair of Sinai icons under discussion. It is the ideological, not the narrative content that must have dictated the juxtaposition of the scenes of the Burning Bush and The Receiving of the Law. Moreover, according to Kurt Weitzmann, the pairing of these two scenes "is not so much to be understood topographically as typologically. The appearance of the Lord in the burning bush and the giving of the tablets are two epiphanies which foreshadow Christ's epiphany"³³. Surely, the presence of the pair of these two scenes in a Christian context is related to the widespread concept of Moses as type of Christ³⁴. Nevertheless, the pairing of these two scenes in the Sinai panels deserves more particular comment to which we will turn after a few observations regarding the chronology of these two Moses icons.

According to Weitzmann, the icon of Moses before the Burning Bush is datable to the late 12th or possibly the early 13th century, and "may well have been executed on-the-spot in the monastery by a painter who, if not Constantinopolitan himself, was surely influenced by the art of the Capital"³⁵. In agreement with this assessment³⁶, we believe that the pair of these icons illustrates the most progressive trend in Constantinopolitan painting of the early 13th century as attested by the wall paintings of the church of the Virgin at Studenica (1208/9)³⁷. We notice in both cases the recession in the extreme linearism which constitutes the hallmark of Late Comnenian style, as well as the moderate painterly elements that assert their presence in Byzantine painting during the early 13th century. Along with these formal devices, a new sense of monumentality insures the importance of the human body whose plasticity is enhanced through the organic treatment of the drapery. Moreover, a new sense of self-awareness pervades facial expression and the bearing of the body. That we are at the beginning of a new style may explain why it has been difficult to cite until now close stylistic parallels for the frescoes of Studenica. Since we are far from the development of a formalistic approach, which goes together with a mature or even mannered phase in the develop-

ment of a style, this explains why all these early 13th-century works possess a certain spontaneity and freshness that betrays their pivotal character. The genius of the artist of the two Moses panels comes out clearly in the handling of color and light to infuse life into the pictorial elements of the scenes and to produce a sophisticated interaction of color areas, which possesses a great aesthetic value. His palette is based mainly on soft pinks, light blues, and olive greens, which are activated by the ample areas of gold ground. These colors are far removed from the saturated enamel-like palette favored in the Comnenian period, a feature which also assists us in dating our panels in the 13th century. By contrast, their iconography hardly helps us in determining a more precise chronology. Apart from the youthful appearance of Moses represented without a beard of conformity with Middle Byzantine conventions, the iconographic rendering of these scenes reveals, as has been pointed out above, a number of archaizing features which only partly can be accounted for by older works existing in the monastery, such as the Early Byzantine mosaics in the Sanctuary of the Basilica and the large bronze cross from the same period. Moreover, it does not come as a surprise the fact that a variety of models for Moses' portraiture were available in the monastery.

As noted above, the Moses icons under discussion are the only pair of panels with the scenes of the Burning Bush and The Receiving of the Law in the monastery to have come down to us from the Byzantine period. However, the conflation of the two episodes characterizes many pictorial examples of The Receiving of the Law by Moses where the burning bush is conspicuously placed in the foreground and the sandals of the prophet are depicted near it.

As far as the motivation for the creation of this pair of panels is concerned, several considerations should be taken into account. One is related to the place of Moses in the Byzantine rite³⁸, and, more specifically, in that followed at the monastery of Sinai. Moses is commemorated on September 4 in the Synaxarion of Constantinople together with St. Babylas, the Early Christian martyr from Antioch. No mention of a synaxis held on that day is included in the notice dedicated to the prophet in this work³⁹. While several indications point to the fact that this notice does not belong to the earliest body of the material incorporated into the Synaxarion⁴⁰, Moses is commemorated together with Elijah, Aaron and Elisha on July 20 in the same work, where it is indicated that a synaxis was held on that day in the propheteion of Elijah⁴¹. The feast of July 20 seems the earliest, while it appears that that of September 4 was not known in Byzantium before the 10th century⁴². A bulk of liturgi-

cal hymns dedicated to Moses, to be used on the 4th of September, attest to the celebration of a feast of Moses⁴³; most have been incorporated into the Office of the Orthros. Moreover, numerous texts are addressed to Moses on the feast of the Transfiguration on August 6⁴⁴. In the Sinai monastery the feasts referring to Moses must have had special glamor throughout the Byzantine period as is also the case in its current liturgical practice⁴⁵. This means that a number of icons with portraits of Moses and the depictions of important events of his life connected with the local tradition had a specific use in the Basilica and the various chapels dedicated to Moses inside and outside the enclosure of the monastery⁴⁶.

Regarding the Burning Bush, in particular, its typological association with the Virgin, the original titular saint of the monastery as attested by Prokopios⁴⁷, account for the popularity of icons with this theme in the local context. This association appears in the texts earlier than most of the other types of the Virgin⁴⁸. It should be stressed that the veneration of the Virgin remained extremely powerful in the monastery even during the period when it had been re-dedicated to St. Catherine, probably from the 10th or 11th century on. This is attested by an impressive number of images of the Virgin and Child preserved in the art treasures of the monastery, which reproduce the so-called iconographic type of the Virgin of the (Burning) Bush⁴⁹. Although in the Sinai panel with the depiction of the Burning Bush no allusion to the scene's typological connection with the Virgin can be explicitly pointed out, such a connection was surely being made in the monastic community. The creation of this relatively large icon could find a justifi-

Stornajolo, *Le miniature della Topografia Cristiana di Cosma Indicopleuste* (Codices e Vaticanis selecti, X), Milan 1908, pp. 35-36, pl. 25. For the miniature of the Sinai copy, fol. 101v, see K. Weitzmann and G. Galavaris, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts. Volume One. From the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, Princeton 1990, p. 59, fig. 163.

32. For the miniature in the Paris Psalter, see H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*, London 1938, pl. X.

33. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Ševčenko, *The Moses Cross* (as in note 18), pp. 389-90.

34. The literature on the subject is vast. See, e.g., J. Chatillon, *Moïse figure du Christ et modèle de la vie parfaite. Brèves remarques sur quelques thèmes médiévaux*, *Cahiers Sioniens*, VIII, No. 2-4 (1954), pp. 305-14. Also J. Daniélou, *Moïse exemple et figure chez Grégoire de Nysse* (as in note 16), pp. 267-82.

35. Weitzmann, *The Icon* (as in note 5), pp. 36 and 75. On the other hand, George and Maria Sotiriou proposed a dating in the 11th-12th century and assigned the work to a provincial workshop which imitated the classicizing art of the capital. See Sotiriou, *Εἰκόνες* (as in note 1), II, p. 141.

36. The pair of these icons has been dated in the early 13th century in Mouriki, *Icons* (as in note 1), p. 110.

37. The latest research on the wall paintings has appeared in: *Studenica et l'art byzantin autour de l'année 1200* (Colloques scientifiques de l'Académie serbe des sciences et des arts, vol. XLI, Classe des sciences historiques, vol. 11), Belgrade 1988.

38. See J. Blanc, *La fête de Moïse dans le rite byzantin*, *Cahiers Sioniens*, VIII, No. 2-3-4 (1954), pp. 345-53.

39. *Synaxarium CP*, col. 14.

40. Cf. Blanc, *La fête de Moïse* (as in note 38), p. 345.

41. *Synaxarium CP*, col. 832.

42. Blanc, *La fête de Moïse* (as in note 38), p. 345.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 348-53. For the Greek text see the *Menaion of September*, Rome 1888, I, pp. 49-54.

44. E. Mercenier, *La Prière des Églises de rite byzantin*, II, 1, Chevetogne 1953, pp. 390, 396 and 399. Cf. Blanc, *La fête de Moïse* (as in note 38), pp. 348 and 349 note 9.

45. We should not forget that the decoration in the conch of the apse consists of the Justinianic mosaic representation of the Transfiguration.

46. In the monastery several icons of small size with the frontal portrait of Moses have the right proportions for their function as small proskynesis icons on the proskynetarion on the feast day of the prophet.

47. Ed. J. Haury (Leipzig 1964), *Procopius. De Aedificiis*, V, viii, 5.

48. The mystery of the Burning Bush as an anticipation of the Incarnation of Christ appears, for instance, in the *Catenae* to the *Octateuch* composed by authors such as Gregory of Nyssa, Severus and Theodoretus. See Theotokis (as in note 13), cols. 576 and 577. See also J. Croquison, *Un Pontifical grec à peintures du XVIIe siècle*, *JÖBG* 3 (1954), pp. 134ff. For the Marian symbolism of the Burning Bush in Byzantine art and hymnography, see D. Mouriki, *Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρᾶ*, *ΑΔ* 25 (1971), *Μελέται*, pp. 221-24.

49. For this type see Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta* (as in note 25), pp. 53-54. Idem, *Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom*, *DOP* 20 (1966), pp. 65-66, reprinted in idem, *Studies in the Arts of Sinai* (as in note 18), no. XII. Idem, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons. Volume One. From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton 1976, pp. 87-88. Aliprantis (as in note 11), pp. 28-31. D. Mouriki, *Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons by the Painter Peter*, *Studenica et l'art byzantin* (as in note 37), pp. 331, 337-38.

28. See, e.g., Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer. Translated and annotated with introduction and indices by G. Friedländer, London 1916, p. 314; also the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*; with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum, 2 vols. Translated by J. W. Etheridge, London 1892, I, p. 449.

29. Sonne was the first scholar to relate the passage in Pseudo-Jonathan with the depictions of the Burning Bush and The Receiving of the Law at Dura. See I. Sonne, *The Paintings of the Dura Synagogue*, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XX (1947), pp. 258-59. Cf. also J. Gutmann, *Jewish Elements in the Paris Psalter*, *Marsyas VI* (1950-1953), p. 47. Kretschmar (as in note 23), pp. 303-13. Mouriki, *The Octateuch Miniatures* (as in note 13), pp. 60-61. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Dura Synagogue* (as in note 11), p. 35, figs. 3, 41, and 74.

30. F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna*, Wiesbaden 1958, pls. 316 and 318.

31. For the Cosmas miniature in the Vatican copy, fol. 61v, see C.

cation from the existence of the chapel of the Bush, where this particular iconography would have been very appropriate indeed⁵⁰. However, the pairing of this icon with one other depicting The Receiving of the Law broadens the range of possible spots where the two panels could have been placed. One plausible position would be the sanctuary, especially in view of the presence of the two mosaic panels with the same subjects above the triumphal arch. Furthermore, the two icons may have been placed in other areas of the Basilica or even in a Moses chapel outside the precinct of the monastery. In view of the fact that the interior walls of the Justinianic Basilica did not in all likelihood receive any decoration except in a restricted area of the sanctuary, it must be assumed that pairs of large icons with the most venerated holy figures in the monastery were needed to occupy symmetrical positions, especially on the long walls. The placing of some of the large icons on the north, south and west walls of the nave today may reflect a similar choice by the monastic community in the medieval period. Needless to say, icons as today were often moved about within the church.

The commissioning of large icons of Moses makes perfect sense in the context of the history of the Sinai monastery, especially in the early 13th century, a period of unusual flowering for the monastery, as is attested by the impressive number of icons of outstanding quality and of monumental size that have been preserved from this period. However, the depiction of a prostrate male figure with an Arab turban on the lower border of the icon with the Burning Bush raises a different type of question. Although the portrait is not accompanied by the customary invocation formula ("prayer of the servant of God..."), usually encountered near donor portraits, it is probable that it represents the donor rather than the painter of the panel. The minuscule scale of the figure and its relegation to the border have given the impression that this figure was an afterthought⁵¹. Both features, however, which are not without parallel among the Sinai icons⁵², suggest an attitude of extreme modesty on the part of the donor. From his appearance, we can conclude that he belonged to the Christian Arabic milieu but was not a member of the monastic community. The high quality and the large size of the pair of icons under discussion, in association with their subject matter, could also allow us to formulate the hypothesis that the creation of this pair was planned by a member in the higher hierarchy of the monastery, probably the archbishop himself, and that the Arab donor participated by providing the total or partial cost of one of these icons. This could well have been the case for further ambitious icon commissions produced in the monas-

tery, especially in the early 13th century, a period of an extraordinary flowering of this particular branch of artistic activity there. In this context, it is interesting to note that a pair of the most outstanding icons in the monastery from this period, the icons depicting Moses Receiving the Law and Elijah in the desert being fed by the raven, also indicates a connection with the Arab Christian milieu on account of the Kufic inscriptions appearing below the ones in Greek on both panels⁵³. It would be an attractive hypothesis that the veneration of Moses in the monastery in that period was of particular interest to the Arabic Christian community. A corroborating testimony is provided by the German pilgrim Magister Thietmar, who visited Sinai in 1207. He says: "There is also in a chapel of this monastery the spot where stood the bush venerated by all, as much by Saracens as by Christians"⁵⁴. For the time being, our suggestion, attractive though it may be, will remain hypothetical. What, however, can hardly be contested is the fact that in this period a group of exceptionally high quality icons with images of Moses were created in the monastery. The pair of the Moses panels which have been studied in this paper are masterly examples of an early phase in the development of the so-called monumental style in Byzantine painting of the 13th century.

50. See Weitzmann, *The Icon* (as in note 5), p. 75.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

52. A similar position, on the lower border, is occupied by a prostrate anonymous monk on a 15th-century icon with the Great Deisis. Mouriki, *Icons* (as in note 1), pp. 123-24, fig. 76 (in color).

53. See Sotiriou, *Εἰκόνες* (as in note 1), I, figs. 74-75; II, pp. 88-90.

54. J. C. M. Laurent (ed.), *Mag. Thietmari Peregrinatio, Ad fidem codicis hamburgensis* (Hamburg 1857). See G. H. Forsyth, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian*, in J. Galey (ed.), *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine (Massada) Givatayim, Israel 1980*, pp. 52, 187.