

A Moses Cycle on a Sinai Icon of the Early Thirteenth Century

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THE LARGEST EXTANT icon from the Byzantine period in St. Catherine's monastery at Sinai depicts the Giving of the Law to Moses (Fig. 1). Shown striding to the right, Moses raises his head and covered hands to receive the tablets held by the Hand of God, which issues from a segment of sky in the upper right corner. Moses is barefoot, his sandals visible below him. A substantial fiery plant, the burning bush, is depicted nearby. At the feet of the prophet is the small, prostrate figure of a bishop. An inscription along the top of the central image reads "Ο ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ ΜΩΗΣΙΣ ΔΕΧΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΑΣ ΠΑΛΚΑΣ [*sic*]." A partially preserved dedicatory inscription near the figure of the bishop informs us that the icon was commissioned by the "most modest monk Neilos Vooueri . . . , archbishop and kathedoumenos of the holy mountain Sinai."¹

This is the only known icon with a biographical cycle of Moses; around the edges of the icon are twenty scenes of the prophet's life (Figs. 1–16).² Following the standard arrangement of such cycles on the borders of historiated icons, the Moses cycle starts on the upper border, moving from left to right, continues on the vertical borders in antithetical pairs, and finishes on the bottom, again from left to right. The episodes are separated by narrow strips of gold ground. A few scenes are not entirely preserved on the left side where a narrow section of the border is missing, and some other areas of the painting have also been damaged. Traces of overpainting remain in some sections and the state of preservation of the inscriptions varies.

¹ The inscription in Greek is: Ο ευτελ(ης) (μον)αχ(ος) Νε(ι)λος ο Βουουερι . . . αρχιεπισκοπος και καθη[γου]μενος του αγ(ιου) σινα.

² The photographs published here were provided by the monastery of Saint Catherine. I wish to extend my gratitude to His Beatitude, the archbishop of Sinai, Damianos, and the Holy Synaxis for giving me permission to publish the icon. The icon is 142 cm high and 90 cm wide. The width of the border is 11 cm and the thickness of the board, 2.8 cm. The panel was cleaned recently by Tassos Margaritoff.

³ For some of these icons, see D. Mouriki, "Icons from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century," in *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery* (Athens 1990), 108–111, 113–114, 115–116. A brief mention of the vita icon was

The stylistic assessment and dating of the icon are based on a comparison with a group of related icons at Sinai, which illustrates several trends in Byzantine painting of the early thirteenth century.³

DESCRIPTION OF THE CYCLE

1. *The birth of Moses* (Fig. 2). The mother of Moses, clad in black and nimbed (her face is completely obliterated), lies on a couch attended by two women who hold covered bowls. The basin for Moses' bath is discernible on the floor, to the left. A continuous wall and a rectangular building, to the right, form the architectural background of the scene. The left side is occupied by red drapery. Inscription: Η γεννησις του Μουσεως.

The scene illustrates Exodus 2:1–2, but its iconography closely follows that of the birth of the Virgin, which must have been the ultimate model for the scene. The same formula is found in the twelfth-century Octateuchs, such as Vat. gr. 746.⁴

2. *Moses' exposure in the Nile and his finding by Pharaoh's daughter* (Fig. 2). A young woman in red, presumably the infant's mother, leans over the bank of the river and places the ark, which has the form of a wooden casket, into the Nile. The ark, covered with a gabled lid, is seen floating lower down. On the bank to the right, Pharaoh's daughter, clad in brown with a white kerchief wrapped around her hair and neck, stands in front of a building with a gabled roof. She is being addressed by a

made by K. Weitzmann, "The Study of Byzantine Book Illumination, Past, Present, and Future," in K. Weitzmann et al., *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art* (Princeton 1975), 24–25, figs. 20, 21, reprinted in idem, *Byzantine Book Illumination and Ivories* (London 1980), no. I; idem, "Icon Programs of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries at Sinai," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.*, 4th ser., 12 (1984), 97–98, fig. 28. For a color illustration, see A. Paliouras, *The Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai* (published by the monastery) (Glyka Nera Attikis 1985), fig. 137.

⁴ Fol. 152r: K. Weitzmann and H. L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (DOS 28) (Washington, D.C. 1990), fig. 32.

young woman on her right. At the lower right, the closed casket with Moses is seen once more. Inscription: *σταν εριφη εις . . .*

The scene, which illustrates Exodus 2:3–5, includes two episodes: the exposure of Moses in the Nile and Pharaoh's daughter discovering the ark. In the Octateuchs, the first episode is depicted only in Vat. gr. 747,⁵ but it also appears in the Menologion of Basil II.⁶ Although in the Sinai icon the female figure putting the ark into the Nile has a youthful appearance and is dressed in vivid red, her traditional identification as Moses' mother, following the biblical text, can be accepted.⁷ In the second episode, Pharaoh's daughter is dressed in a sober fashion, while in the Octateuchs (for instance, Vat. gr. 746),⁸ she is crowned and dressed like a Byzantine empress and has a nimbus. In the Sinai icons the young woman on her right must be one of the maidservants, always included in this scene when Pharaoh's daughter is depicted.⁹ The poor condition of the icon at this point does not allow us to confirm the presence of Miriam, Moses' sister, who, according to the Bible, watches the ark, and is usually included in depictions of this scene.¹⁰

3. *Moses attempts to take Pharaoh's crown and place it on his own head* (Fig. 3). Pharaoh, who is dressed in brown red and wears the crown of the Byzantine emperor, sits holding the child Moses on his knee. The infant stares at him, touching Pharaoh's chin with his left hand. Behind Pharaoh a courtier, dressed in red and wearing black boots, extends his arms. To the right, Pharaoh's daughter, in a white robe, red overgarment, and white head-covering, reaches toward the child. Behind her, a

female attendant watches the episode through an arched doorway. The architectural background of the scene is complemented by a rectangular gabled building behind Pharaoh and a connecting wall between the building and the doorway. Inscription: *Ο Μουσης απλωσας εις τον πογονα του φαρωω.*

This and the following scene are part of a group of illustrations depicting the life of Moses at Pharaoh's court. It would be difficult to interpret the meaning of this first scene on the basis of the visual evidence and the accompanying inscription, which states that Moses extended (his hand) toward the chin of Pharaoh. But since the following scene shows the child Moses holding a coal in his hand and bringing it to his face, it may be argued that both episodes illustrate a Jewish legend that has come down to us in several variants. The variant closest to our scene, the Midrash Rabbah, Exodus I.26, recounts that "Pharaoh used to kiss the infant Moses and hug him, and the child used to take the crown of Pharaoh and place it upon his own head, as he was destined to do when he became great."¹¹ Although no other illustration of this particular legend can be found in Byzantine art, it does appear in several illustrated copies of the Haggadah¹² and in Western Christian works; in the latter, however, the variant preserved by Josephus seems to have been the most popular.¹³ While the identification of the first of our two scenes seems secure, and is corroborated by the accompanying inscription, the omission of the main item of contention, the crown, and the lack of any dramatic content make it look almost like a genre scene. This must be attributed to the painter's misunderstanding of the meaning of his model, since the gesture of the infant

⁵ Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), fig. 36.

⁶ *Il Menologio di Basilio II (Cod. Vaticano greco 1613)* (Codices e Vaticanis Selecti 8) (Turin 1907), pl. on p. 13.

⁷ For the identification of similar figures at Dura and elsewhere as the mother of Moses, see Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 28. The extreme youthfulness and the bright red dress of the figure who casts the ark into the water stand in sharp contrast to the appearance of the mother of Moses in the birth scene on the Sinai icon, where she is dressed in a black maphorion and, although her face has been damaged, must have looked more advanced in age.

⁸ Fol. 153r: K. Weitzmann, "Zur Frage des Einflusses jüdischer Bilderquellen auf die Illustrationen des Alten Testaments," in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klausner (JbAC Ergänzungsband 1)* (1964), 409, pl. 15b, reprinted in English as "The Question of the Influence of Jewish Pictorial Sources on Old Testament Illustration" in idem, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, ed. H. Kessler (Chicago 1971), no. IV. Cf. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 29, fig. 35.

⁹ Cf. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 29–30.

¹⁰ For a study of the scene emphasizing the Jewish tradition, see also K. and U. Schubert, "Die Errettung des Moses aus dem Wasser des Nil in der Kunst des spätantiken Judentums und das Weiterwirken dieses Motivs in der frühchristlichen und jüdisch-mittelalterlichen Kunst," in *Studien zum Pentateuch. Walter Kornfeld zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. G. Braulik (Vienna 1977), 59–68.

¹¹ *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon, vol. III, *Exodus*,

trans. and ed. S. M. Lehrman (London 1961), 33. According to the variant of the legend recounted by Josephus, Pharaoh's daughter laid the infant Moses in the arms of her father, who, to please her, clasped him affectionately to his breast and, again to please her, placed his diadem upon the child's head. But Moses tore it off and flung it to the ground, trampling it underfoot. See Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Loeb Classical Library), vol. IV (London 1967), 265–267. For the variant in Josephus, cf. Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 33. A second variant of the same legend places the episode at an official dinner in Pharaoh's palace where the infant Moses was sitting upon the lap of the king's daughter, at his left. The infant took the crown from Pharaoh's head and placed it on his own to the dismay of everybody. See M. Gaster, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel; or, the Hebrew Bible Historiale* (London 1899), 111 (XLIV.8–9). Cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia 1909–1938), vol. II, 272.

¹² M. Metzger, *La Haggada enluminée*, vol. I, *Étude iconographique et stylistique des manuscrits enluminés et décorés de la Haggada du XIII^e au XVI^e siècle* (Leiden 1973), 243.

¹³ This is the case, for instance, in one of four English leaves of the Romanesque period: M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1060–1190. A Survey of Manuscript Illumination in the British Isles* (London 1975), no. 66; Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 33. The scene is often illustrated in copies of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*. See A. Wilson and J. Lancaster Wilson, *A Medieval Mirror. Speculum Humanae Salvationis 1324–1500* (Berkeley 1984), illustration on p. 163.

Moses can only be understood in this light. Such a case is not without parallel in other scenes in this cycle.

4. *The trial of Moses with the burning coal* (Fig. 3). With her left hand, Pharaoh's daughter supports the child Moses, who leans against her knees and brings the hot coal to his mouth with his right hand. Pharaoh, watching in amazement, extends his arms toward the child. Two rectangular gabled buildings and a wall connecting them form the background of the scene. Inscription: Ο Μωυ[σης] υ την ισπαν . . . αυ.

The subject of this scene is easily identified by the presence of the glowing coal in Moses' right hand. All variants of the Jewish legend agree on this episode. The advice of the king's sage counselors, that the child was a threat to the throne of Pharaoh and should be slain, was ignored thanks to the intervention of the archangel Gabriel, who, disguised as one of the advisors, proposed the test of the hot coal. In the *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus I.26, we read: "This boy has no sense. However, test him by placing before him a gold vessel and a live coal; if he stretch forth his hand for the gold, then he has sense and you can slay him, but if he make for the live coal, then he has no sense and there can be no sentence of death upon him.' So they brought these things before him, and he was about to reach forth for the gold when Gabriel came and thrust his hand aside so that it seized the coal, and he thrust his hand with the live coal into his mouth, so that his tongue was burnt, with the result that he became slow of speech and of tongue."¹⁴ Again, this depiction of the trial of Moses by the live coal seems to be the only extant Byzantine illustration of this Jewish legend. The episode also appears rarely in illuminated manuscripts of the *Haggadah*¹⁵ and in Western Christian art, usually as a continuation of the previous scene, in a group of works including, among others, copies of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*.¹⁶

5. *Moses slaying the Egyptian* (Fig. 4). The young Moses, clad in a short red tunic, is shown in the act of slaying an elderly man with a large knife. Both figures are on a strip of green ground. Three gesticulating men, farther back to the right, witness the episode. Two hills form

the landscape of the scene. Inscription: [Ο Μωυσης] φονευων τον αιγυπτιον.

This scene illustrates Exodus 2:11–12, in which Moses punishes an Egyptian for attempting to slay an Israelite out of desire for the latter's wife. The scene on the Sinai icon, however, differs notably from the corresponding illustration in the *Octateuchs*.¹⁷ In the *Octateuchs*, for example, Moses is nimbed and wears prophet's garments, whereas on the icon he is represented as a Hebrew youth whose future role is not explicitly indicated. The only notable feature shared by both scenes is the presence of witnesses, in contradiction to the biblical text. This perplexing scene depicts Moses' first public act, which became the subject of varying interpretations. According to a Jewish legend, Moses' act took place after the consent of the angels whom he first consulted.¹⁸

6. *Moses and the burning bush* (Fig. 5). The young Moses, nimbed and wearing a gray blue chiton, extends his arms and raises his head in the direction of the blessing Hand of God, which issues from the segment of sky in the upper right corner. Two sheep stand in front of the burning bush. The landscape consists of a hill with vegetation. Inscription: [Μωυς]ις ιδ[ων].

This scene illustrates the first of the two incidents narrated in Exodus 3:1–6, Moses' vision of the burning bush, and implies the second, his removing his shoes. The command to Moses in verse 5, "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," is expressed visually by the Hand of God. Both episodes appear in the twelfth-century *Octateuchs*. In Vat. gr. 746, for example, the first episode is identical in content to the scene on the Sinai icon, whereas the second one shows Moses loosening his sandals.¹⁹ When only one of these two scenes is chosen to illustrate the episode of the burning bush, it is usually the loosening of the sandals.²⁰ The scene on the Sinai icon thus follows a much rarer variant, seen in the eleventh-century *Octateuch* Vat. gr. 747²¹ and in the Aristocratic *Psalters*,²² although it has no other special affinities to them.

The inclusion of the Hand of God in this scene fol-

¹⁴ *Midrash Rabbah*, *Exodus* (as in note 11), 33–34. In another variant of the legend, the child had to choose between an onyx stone and a burning coal. See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. II, 274.

¹⁵ Metzger, *Haggada enluminée* (as in note 12), 244.

¹⁶ Wilson and Lancaster Wilson, *Medieval Mirror* (as in note 13), illustration on p. 163.

¹⁷ For instance, in the Smyrna copy, fol. 64v: D. C. Hesseling, *Miniatures de l'Octateuque grec de Smyrne* (Codices Graeci et Latini, Suppl. 6) (Leiden 1909), pl. 51, fig. 154.

¹⁸ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. II, 280.

¹⁹ Fol. 157r: Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes*

(as in note 4), 36, fig. 44.

²⁰ For observations on the iconography of this subject and a vast survey of pictorial examples of the scene, see Chr. Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai: Die Ikonographie der Berufung des Moses und des Empfangs der Gesetzestafeln* (Tuduv-Studien, Reihe Kunstgeschichte 20) (Munich 1986), passim. See also Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 34–38.

²¹ Fol. 74r: Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 37, fig. 45.

²² For the miniature in the Paris Psalter, see H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter* (Studies of the Warburg Institute 2) (London 1938), pl. X.

lows an old tradition of Jewish origin. Aside from the fresco in the Dura synagogue, the Hand of God appears in Early Christian or archaizing examples of the scene.²³ In the Middle Byzantine period, the angel of the Lord is generally found near or behind the burning bush. This dual approach is explained by the account of the event in the Septuagint, which reads first that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (3:2) and later that "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush" (3:4).²⁴ The Sinai icon's reliance on the second of these two passages indicates that it was adhering to an archaizing visual model.

Two additional observations can be made about the iconography of this scene on our icon. First, the two sheep, which add a bucolic note to the scene, are usually included only when the first episode, the actual vision of the burning bush, is depicted, as here.²⁵ Second, it is also worth pointing out that the burning bush, although depicted in a color suggesting fire, is not rendered as an acanthus, the form normally used in these scenes and following an extensive literary tradition.²⁶

7. *Moses before Pharaoh* (Fig. 6). The nimbed Moses stands at the left addressing the enthroned Pharaoh and holds a rod that is being transformed into a snake. He is dressed in a gray blue chiton and an ocher himation; Pharaoh wears Byzantine imperial garb. A vermilion cloth is spread on the floor beneath both figures. The background shows a building with a vaulted roof behind Pharaoh and a hill with sparse vegetation behind Moses. Inscription: Ο Μωυσης διαλεγομεν[ος] μετα του φαρ[α]ω.

Based on the iconography of this scene and the identification of the following one, which depicts the Plague of Hail, we must conclude that this is not Moses' initial encounter with Pharaoh as described in Exodus 5:1–5, which was the first step of the mission entrusted to Moses during his vision of the burning bush to lead the

²³ For the scene at Dura, see Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), fig. 41. Early Christian examples with this feature include, among others, the frescoes in the Via Latina catacomb (the scene is represented twice), the mosaic in the sanctuary of the Basilica of Sinai, and the bronze cross at Sinai. For the Via Latina frescoes, see A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina* (Vatican City 1960), 56, pl. XXXIII:2; 70, pl. LXIV:2. For the Sinai mosaic, see G. Forsyth and K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor [1973]), pls. CXXVI, CLXXXII, CLXXXIV, CLXXXVI:A. For the Sinai cross, see K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Sinai," *DOP* 17 (1963), figs. 1, 3, reprinted in K. Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (Princeton 1982), 81–104, with additional notes on 425–426.

²⁴ This supposed contradiction in the Bible, which may account for the designation of the theophany by either the Hand of God or an angel, did not pass unnoticed in the Christian commentaries on this part of the Old Testament. Several of the catenae to the Octateuch attempt to explain that the angel of the theophany was none other than the Lord. See

Israelites out of Egypt. Rather, the scene illustrates a later meeting between Moses and Pharaoh described in Exodus 7:10, which, because of Pharaoh's stubbornness regarding the salvation of the Israelites, resulted in the plagues.

In the biblical account, both Moses and Aaron were present at this meeting. Aaron's staff, according to the instructions of the Lord, was meant to be cast down before Pharaoh and become a serpent (Exodus 7:9) which would swallow up the rods of the wise men and the sorcerers summoned by Pharaoh (7:11–12). The twelfth-century Smyrna Octateuch, among others, also includes a scene of the Miracle of the Rods,²⁷ but as was the case with the preceding scenes, there seem to be no iconographic affinities between the two versions. On the icon the scene is reduced to the absolute minimum, showing the encounter of Moses with the enthroned Pharaoh. Aaron is absent, but Moses holds the rod changing into a snake, a curious iconographic detail. The explanation for this detail is found in Exodus 7:15, where the Lord orders Moses to meet Pharaoh at the river, adding, "and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand." Moses' mission was once again to attempt to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, and he was to use the rod to turn the river into blood if Pharaoh's stubbornness persisted.²⁸

8. *The Plague of Hail* (Fig. 7). Moses, nimbed and wearing a gray blue chiton and vermilion himation, strides toward the right holding a long, vivid pink staff in his right hand. Behind him an olive green hill speckled with large ocher dots creates the impression of a desert. Inscription: περασας την επη[μοω] αγων[ον].

Illustrating Exodus 9:23–25, this scene refers to the Plague of Hail, although the half-effaced inscription gives only a hint of the setting, a desert stripped of any kind of life. Again this depiction diverges from the iconography of the scene found in other Byzantine works,

N. Theotokis, *Σειρα ενος και πενηκοντα Υπομνηματιστων εις την Οκτατευχον και τα των Βασιλειων*, vol. I (Leipzig 1772), col. 577. Cf. D. Mouriki-Charalambous, "The Octateuch Miniatures of the Byzantine Manuscripts of Cosmas Indicopleustes," Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1970, 56–57.

²⁵ As in, for instance, the miniature in the Octateuch Vat. gr. 746, fol. 157r; see note 19 above.

²⁶ For this feature, see D. Mouriki, "A Pair of Early Thirteenth-Century Moses Icons at Sinai with the Scenes of the Burning Bush and the Receiving of the Law," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.*, ser. 4, 16 (1991–92), 171–184.

²⁷ Fol. 72r: Hesseling, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 54, fig. 163.

²⁸ The transformation of Moses' rod into a snake is mentioned in another context in the Bible. In the narrative of the mission entrusted to Moses by God on Mount Horeb, God ordered Moses to throw down his rod, which became a serpent (Exodus 4:3), a sign to the Hebrews that Moses' mission was entrusted to him by God.

particularly in the Octateuchs, for example, the Seraglio Octateuch,²⁹ where the Plague of Hail is witnessed by Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh, two bodyguards, and two sorcerers. While the depiction of only one plague on the Sinai icon was due to the limitations of space, we may ask why this particular plague was chosen. Based on the Midrash Rabbah, Exodus XII.4, the plague presumably had to be selected from among the three—hail, locusts, and darkness—that came through the agency of Moses.³⁰ The selection of this particular plague may find justification in Jewish legend, where it has special significance.³¹ The closest parallel for the depiction of a single plague in our cycle is in the Dura synagogue, where two plagues were chosen, one of which is the hail.³²

9. *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (Fig. 8). The towering figure of Moses pushes his staff into the water with his extended right hand. Behind him are two Israelites. At the bottom of the sea a mounted soldier, clad in red, tries to escape in the opposite direction; except for the soldier's garments, everything under the sea is rendered in grisaille. On the shore, the Egyptian soldiers on horseback form a compact group. Two tall mountains provide the setting of the scene. Inscription: Οἱ πνιγεντες Αἰγυπτιοι ἐν τη ἐρυθρα θαλάσση.

Despite the compressed space allotted to it, the scene, which illustrates Exodus 14:19–29, retains an epic grandeur. It depicts, in particular, 14:21: "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea." A domineering figure in contrapposto, Moses strikes the water with his red staff. The Israelites are reduced to two overlapping figures, whose heads alone are visible. The remaining space is given to pursuing Egyptians both on the shore and under the water, to justify the title of the scene: "the Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea." In emphasizing Moses through his size and placement, the Sinai composition adheres to an old tradition found in the frescoes of the Dura synagogue³³ and in one of the versions of this scene in the frescoes of the Via Latina catacomb.³⁴ The Sinai Moses shares with the catacomb figure the contrapposto stance and the way the staff is held. Moreover, both the Sinai icon and the Dura fresco focus attention on the figure of the drowning Egyptian. In the fresco, he is placed at the center of a triptychlike

composition; in the icon the inscription indicates that he is the main theme of the composition. The high mountains found along the vertical borders of many of the scenes provide a dramatic visual suggestion of the division of the two continents.

10. *Miriam and the Israelite women celebrating after the crossing of the Red Sea* (Fig. 9, top). Five women, dressed like female participants in New Testament scenes, in chitons and maphoria, stand on a strip of olive green ground. The three women in the middle wear dark colored garments, while the other two wear vivid pink maphoria. The woman who occupies the center and plays the tambourine is in all likelihood Miriam. Inscription: [Μαριαμ] ἀδελφη του Μω[υσεως] [σ]υν ταις λοιπαις γυ[ν]α[ι]ξι ασωμεν τω [Κ(υρι)ω].

The scene illustrates Exodus 15:20–21. Miriam is identified by her tambourine and her placement at the center of the group. The composition has no iconographic relation with the corresponding scene in the Octateuchs. For example, in the Smyrna version,³⁵ all the women are dressed like the female companions of the Virgin in the depictions of the Presentation at the Temple.

11. *The Smiting of the Rock* (Fig. 10). Moses, in a gray blue chiton and ochre himation, strikes a well with his staff; a stream flows out across the lower section of the scene. Behind Moses is a group of Israelites wearing short chitons, boots, and white head-coverings. In the background is a mountain. Inscription: σχίσθαισα ἡ πέτρα και βλύσασα ὕδωρ.

Of the four water miracles of Moses (Marah, Exodus 15:23–25; Rephidim, Exodus 17:1–6; Meribah, Numbers 20:1–11; Be'er, Numbers 21:16–18), the Smiting of the Rock at Rephidim is, in my opinion, illustrated here. The inscription accompanying the scene: "the rock that was torn apart and gushed forth water," corroborates this identification. In addition, the fact that the rock actually existed at Horeb (Exodus 17:6), representing a kind of *locus sanctus* for the monastery of Sinai, adds weight to this interpretation. However, instead of striking the rock, as he does in the traditional iconography of the scene in the later Octateuchs and in the Kosmas manuscripts,³⁶ Moses here dips his rod into a well.

²⁹ Fol. 181v: T. Ouspensky, *L'Octateuque de la Bibliothèque du Sérail à Constantinople* (Sofia 1907), pl. XX, fig. 110. Cf. also Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 40, fig. 54.

³⁰ *Midrash Rabbah, Exodus* (as in note 11), 146.

³¹ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. II, 346, 356–357.

³² See Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 39–40.

³³ Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), figs. 48, 49.

³⁴ Ferrua, *Pittura* (as in note 23), 81, pl. CXV.

³⁵ Fol. 82v: Hesselting, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 59,

fig. 180.

³⁶ For the scene in the Smyrna Octateuch, fol. 85v, see Hesselting, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 60, fig. 184. For the miniature in the Sinai Kosmas, fol. 73r, see K. Weitzmann and G. Galavaris, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts*, vol. I, *From the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Princeton 1990), 55, fig. 141. For the iconography of the Smiting of the Rock, with an emphasis on the legend of "Miriam's well," see Mouriki-Charalambous, "Octateuch Miniatures" (as in note 24), 62–69.

Although the miracle at Be'er mentions a well, the well in the Sinai icon is undoubtedly meant to represent the "well of Miriam" described in various Jewish legends,³⁷ particularly since this scene forms a pair with that of Miriam and her companions (Fig. 9, top). The best-known representation of a water miracle showing Moses dipping his rod into a well is the one at Dura, which has received a variety of interpretations.³⁸ Reflections of the legend of Miriam's well in the scene of the Smiting of the Rock have also been identified in the late fourteenth-century Serbian Psalter in Munich³⁹ and in a sixteenth-century icon of the Novgorod School in Moscow.⁴⁰ The depiction on this Sinai icon is a further example of the pairing of these scenes. This combination leads to one feature that differentiates the iconography from traditional depictions of the Smiting of the Rock: here Moses lowers his rod to perform the miracle.⁴¹

12. *The Miracle of the Manna and the Quails* (Fig. 9, bottom). Moses, wearing a gray blue chiton and pink himation, stands on a strip of green ground; he raises both hands and looks upward. He is accompanied by a second figure, most of which is lost along with the painting along the edge of the icon in this area. The background is filled with manna scattered on a hilly landscape. Higher up, three quails are delineated in ochre against the gold ground. Inscription: εβρεξεν ὁ θεός το μα[ννα και] την ορτυγομητρα[ν].

The scene illustrates Exodus 16:13–31. The figure behind Moses, although largely destroyed, can be identified as Aaron on account of his stature, his gesture, and his later role in putting the manna into a stamnos placed before the Ark of the Covenant. His presence in this scene connects it with the corresponding scene on the right border, where Aaron officiates before an altar (Fig. 11). Again, no close iconographic parallel between this scene on the icon and in the Octateuchs can be observed. In the latter, for example, in the Smyrna copy, the biblical passage is illustrated with a two-register miniature, that, in the upper register, shows the Israelites as active participants, while Moses is absent.⁴² In

this connection, it may be noted that, according to Jewish tradition, the manna descended in honor of Moses.⁴³

13. *Aaron officiating* (Fig. 11). Aaron, in priestly garments and holding a censer with his right hand, officiates before an altar with a red brown covering. Behind Aaron are people praying and in the background, a hill with vegetation. Inscription: [A]αρων λειτουρη[γων ε]ν τη

The scene in all likelihood illustrates Exodus 16:32–34. The connection of the scene with Moses is implied in verse 33: "And Moses said unto Aaron, 'Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations.'" This verse is illustrated in the Octateuchs, for instance in the Seraglio copy.⁴⁴ The subject of the scene, also confirmed by the half-effaced inscription, "Aaron officiating in the" (most probably, the tabernacle), thus becomes a thanksgiving scene for the manna. However, the stamnos is not depicted on the altar.

14. *Moses receiving the tablets of the law* (Fig. 12). The left edge of the panel has not survived at this point, and a large part of the figure of Moses, including his head, has been destroyed. Moses, clad in a gray blue chiton and pink himation, stands on a strip of green ground, raising his uncovered hands to receive the tablets of the law from the Hand of God, which issues from a segment of sky in the upper right corner. In the background is a mountainous landscape with vegetation. Inscription: [Ο Μωυσης δεχομεν]ος τον [νομον].

The scene illustrates 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." From what is left of his figure, it may be inferred that Moses is in a static pose, which is rare in the pictorial examples of this scene. It is also noteworthy that he receives the tablets with bare hands, unlike the usual contemporary iconography of the scene, as shown in the depiction of

³⁷ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. III, 50–54.

³⁸ See C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue. Excavations at Dura-Europos* (Final Report, vol. VIII, pt. 1) (New Haven 1956), 123ff., where the Rabbinical literature of legends regarding Miriam's well is presented. J. Milgrom, "Moses Sweetens the 'Bitter Waters' of the 'Portable Well': An Interpretation of a Panel at Dura-Europos Synagogue," *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978), 45–47; Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 64, fig. 93.

³⁹ Fol. 102r: J. Strzygowski, *Die Miniaturen des serbischen Psalters der Königl. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in München* (Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 52) (Vienna 1906), 46. For the association of the scene with Miriam's well, see C.-O. Nordström, "The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend and Byzantine Art," *Orientalia Suecana* 7 (1958), 98–100, fig. 8, reprinted in *No Graven Images. Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Gutmann (New York 1971), 297–299.

⁴⁰ N. P. Likhachev, *Materialy dlia istorii russkago ikonopisaniia*, Atlas 1 (St. Petersburg 1906), 7, no. 207; Nordström, "Water Miracles" (as in note 39), 102–105, figs. 10, 11.

⁴¹ Most of the Octateuchs and the Kosmas miniatures share this detail as well. Mouriki-Charalambous, "Octateuch Miniatures" (as in note 24), 68. For some examples of the traditional iconographic approach to the scene, see E. Becker, *Das Quellwunder des Moses in der altchristlichen Kunst* (Zur Kunstgeschichte des Auslandes 72) (Strasbourg 1909).

⁴² Fol. 84r: Hesseling, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 60, fig. 182.

⁴³ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. III, 49; vol. VI, 19–20 n. 113.

⁴⁴ Fol. 205v: Ouspensky, *Octateuque du Serail* (as in note 29), pl. XX-III, fig. 126.

the same subject in the principal image of this icon (Fig. 1). Unlike earlier examples of the scene, Moses does not touch the tablets.⁴⁵

15. *Aaron and the golden calf* (Fig. 13). Aaron, wearing priestly garments, including the ephod, extends his right hand toward the golden calf and the fire behind it; fire also emerges between the horns of the calf. The event is watched by a group of Israelites. The setting consists of a mountainous landscape with sparse vegetation. Inscription: οἱ ἰσραηλιταὶ οἰδόντες [Α]αρὼν τὸν χρυ(σὺν) [βου]ν . . . βαλὼν δὲ ὁ [Ααρων] τὸ πῦρ ἐχρήθη βοῶς κεφ[αλή].

The scene of the act of idolatry committed by the Israelites through the making of the golden calf is from Exodus 32:1–4. This event, which took place while Moses was on Sinai receiving the tablets, is thus a counterpart of the receiving of the law. The Greek inscription mainly describes the fashioning of the molten calf by Aaron through the fire, which is described in greater detail later in the narrative (32:24) when Aaron tries to explain to Moses the circumstances of his act. There is no iconographic relation between the scenes on the icon and in the Octateuchs, as shown by the Smyrna copy.⁴⁶

16. *Moses breaking the tablets of the law* (Fig. 14, left). The figure of Moses, except for a large portion of the head, is mostly destroyed because a section of the painting is missing in this area. Moses stands to the left, while in the center the tablets of the law fall on the ground. At the back is a mountainous landscape. To the right, four beardless youths express their fear by their glances and gestures. In front of them is the golden calf. Inscription: [Ο Μ]ωυ[ση]ς ριπ[τ]ῶν [τὰς π]λα[κ]ὰς.

The scene, which illustrates Exodus 32:19, shows Moses' dramatic confrontation with the idolaters after he returns from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the law. It adheres more closely to the Bible text than that in the Octateuch. In the Smyrna copy, for instance, Moses breaks the tablets in front of Joshua,⁴⁷ who is mentioned in verse 17 but has no direct involvement in this particular episode.

17. *Moses ordering the sons of Levi to slay the idolaters* (Fig. 14, right). Three youths lean over an elderly man, trying to immobilize him. Moses, in a gray blue chiton and pink himation, strides in their direction extending his right hand. He is followed by two more Israelites.

⁴⁵ For the iconography of the scene and a vast repertory of pictorial examples, see Aliprantis, *Moses auf dem Berge Sinai* (as in note 20). See also Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 52–55.

⁴⁶ Fol. 107v: Hesseling, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 64, fig. 202.

⁴⁷ Fol. 106v: Hesseling, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 63,

Inscription: [Ο Μωυ]σης φονεῶν παρα[νο]μ[ο]ν λα[ο]ν.

The scene conforms closely to Exodus 32:27–28, which does not imply a direct participation of Moses in the slaying of the idolaters, but only his instigation of the deed by the sons of Levi. The inscription, "Moses slaying the unlawful people," seems to be a freer interpretation of the narrative, which follows the requirements of a vita icon. The "unlawful people" are represented by a single Israelite. The iconography of the scene in the Octateuchs can be attested only by Vat. gr. 747, where a large group of people is being slain by an equally imposing mass of soldiers.⁴⁸

18. *Moses receiving the renewed tablets of the law* (Fig. 15, left). Wearing a gray blue chiton and pink himation, Moses steps on a strip of green ground. He extends his uncovered hands to receive the tablets of the law from the Hand of God, which issues from a segment of sky in the upper right corner. The background is composed of two broad hills with skeletal black vegetation. Inscription: [Ο Μωυση]ς δεχομενος τὰς πλακὰς.

The scene, which illustrates Exodus 34:4–5, is not a literal rendering of verse 4: "And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone." As shown by both the iconography and the inscription, "Moses receiving the tablets," the scene on the Sinai icon is rendered as the actual giving of the law recounted in Exodus 31:18. The scene thus appears to duplicate no. 14 of this cycle (Fig. 12). On the contrary, in the Octateuchs, for example, in the Seraglio copy, the scene illustrating the ascent of Sinai after Moses had broken the first pair of tablets and God had commanded him to make new ones, depicts Moses bringing the tablets, not receiving them.⁴⁹

19. *Moses praying to see Jerusalem* (Fig. 15, right). Dressed in a gray blue chiton and a pink himation, Moses lies prostrate on a mountain with his hands extended in prayer. Before him is a stream, presumably the Jordan. Behind the river is a towerlike structure, which could be interpreted as a simplified depiction of a walled city. Inscription: Ο Μωυση]ς ευχομεν[ο]ς ι[δ]ειν τὰ Ἱεροσο[λ]ύμα.

The subject of this enigmatic scene is revealed by its inscription, "Moses praying to see Jerusalem." The scene is a loose representation of the Lord's decision not to let Moses see the Promised Land (e.g., Deuteronomy

fig. 201.

⁴⁸ Fol. 116r.

⁴⁹ Fol. 257r: Ouspensky, *Octateuque du Serail* (as in note 29), pl. XXIV, fig. 145. For this miniature and a commentary on it, see Weitzmann, in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Dura Frescoes* (as in note 4), 53, fig. 78.

32:52, 34:4), and Moses' repeated prayers in Jewish texts for this decision to be altered.⁵⁰ The closest approximation to the contents of the scene is provided by Deuteronomy 34:1–4, in which the Lord shows the Promised Land to Moses on Mount Nebo. There is no mention of Jerusalem in this passage. In the illustration of this text in the Octateuchs, for example, in the Seraglio copy, Moses looks from Mount Nebo upon the Promised Land, represented by a river, trees, and birds.⁵¹ The Sinai icon's free elaboration of the biblical text, showing Jerusalem as well as Moses in prayer, indicates that this is an ad hoc creation reflecting the special ties of the monastery with this city.

20. *The burial of Moses* (Fig. 16). The body of the nimbed Moses, in a white head-covering and a green winding sheet, is lowered by three angels into an ocher-colored sarcophagus with brown marbling. At the back is a low wall and to the left, a towerlike structure resembling the one in the previous scene. Inscription: [Η κηδε]ῖα του Μου[σε]ως.

This last scene of the Moses cycle, while it corresponds to the passage mentioning Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34:5–6, can hardly be accounted for by the enigmatic biblical passage. In the Smyrna copy of the Octateuchs, for instance, Moses' head emerges from behind a rocky mountain, probably to stress the fact that "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (34:6).⁵² By contrast, on the Sinai icon we have a burial scene with three angels placing the dead Moses into a sarcophagus. Here again, Jewish legends provide full justification for the pictorial components of the scene: they relate that three angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel, descended to earth to bury Moses.⁵³ The inclusion of the angels in a depiction of Moses' burial has been noted in the East on a Crusader icon in the Sinai collection,⁵⁴ and in the West in the *Bibles Moralisées*.⁵⁵ The Sinai icon illustrates the only known example of this scene in its developed form in Byzantine art. However, the role of the archangel Michael in the burial of Moses is hinted at in Jude's Epistle (verse 9) and is found in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* in the notice for the commemoration of Moses on September 4⁵⁶ and in the text of the *Menologion of Basil II*.⁵⁷ The legend is illustrated in the Vatican codex.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ A. Meyer, *Legendes juives apocryphes sur la vie de Moïse* (Paris 1925), 97, 98; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (as in note 11), vol. III, 471–473.

⁵¹ Fol. 470r: Ouspensky, *Octateuque du Serail* (as in note 29), pl. XX-XIII, fig. 213.

⁵² Fol. 219v: Hesseling, *Octateuque de Smyrne* (as in note 17), pl. 79, fig. 267. For a commentary on this scene, see K. Weitzmann, "Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai," *ArtB* 45 (1963), 191, reprinted in Weitzmann, *Studies* (as in note 23), 291–324.

⁵³ Meyer, *Legendes juives* (as in note 50), 111.

⁵⁴ See Weitzmann, "Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons" (as in note

The Moses cycle on the Sinai icon allows us to make certain observations regarding its formation. Following the conventions adopted in biographical cycles, it begins with a birth scene and ends with a burial scene. According to the same conventions, the first part of the cycle includes several infancy scenes. In our case, the birth scene is adapted from such infancy cycles as that of the Virgin, a formula that also appears in the group of the later Octateuchs. On the other hand, the two scenes of the child Moses at Pharaoh's court, as well as the concluding scene, the burial of Moses, can be explained by Jewish legends. The adherence of the twenty Moses scenes to the conventions of biographical cycles is also apparent in the selection and structure of the remaining scenes. They were carefully chosen to emphasize the principal events that marked the extraordinary personality of Moses and his unique role in the history of the Israelites' salvation from Egyptian bondage and their return to the Promised Land. Thus, the infancy scenes, including the episode of the crown, anticipate the future role of Moses. The two following scenes, the slaying of the Egyptian and the vision of the burning bush, mark the beginning of Moses' public life and the entrusting to him at Horeb of the mission to rescue his people. Next is the encounter of Moses and Pharaoh preceding the Plague of Hail, the only plague included in the cycle. The remaining scenes illustrate major events such as the Crossing of the Red Sea, a water miracle (the Smiting of the Rock), the Miracle of the Manna and the Quails, the giving of the law, the punishment of the idolaters for the creation of the golden calf, and the burial of Moses. Within this dense sequence are intercalated several scenes involving Aaron and Miriam, Moses' brother and sister, who played crucial roles of their own in the history of the Exodus. Even these scenes are in a certain sense integrated into the narrative of Moses' achievements. For instance, the celebration of Miriam faces a water miracle of Moses in which "Miriam's well" plays a conspicuous role. Moreover, the scene of Aaron officiating before the altar is the counterpart of the scene of the manna, thus relating the Aaron scene to an act of thanksgiving for the manna brought about by Moses. Aaron is also involved in the

52), 190–191, fig. 15.

⁵⁵ A. de Laborde, *La Bible Moralisée conservée à Oxford, Paris et Londres*, vol. I (Paris 1911), 1–100, fol. 93v, pl. 93. In this example, three angels are also included. Cf. Weitzmann, "Thirteenth-Century Crusader Icons" (as in note 52), 191.

⁵⁶ H. Delehaye, ed., *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae. Pro-pylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris* (Brussels 1902), col. 14.

⁵⁷ PG 117, cols. 29–32.

⁵⁸ *Menologio* (as in note 6), pl. on p. 13.

episode of the golden calf, which is closely related to the giving of the law. Thus the choice of scenes stresses Moses' role in the salvation of his people in a variety of ways.

Moses' new status after his assumption of the leadership of his people at Horeb with the vision of the burning bush is emphasized by such details as the nimbus and the antique garb that characterize him in the later scenes. He is also uniformly differentiated in stature and position from the other participants in the scenes. The frequent appearance of Moses in the scenes of this cycle is one of the many elements that distinguish it from the Moses cycle in the Octateuchs. On the other hand, the witnesses or active participants in the episodes are either absent or reduced to a minimum, owing partly to the restricted space. The adherence to the conventions of a biographical cycle on an historiated icon is also evident in the even number of scenes, their layout,⁵⁹ and the formulation of their inscriptions.

A local point of view can be detected in some of the scenes, as in the three episodes referring to the tablets of the law. If we add the principal scene of the icon, the receiving of the law, the emphasis placed on the *loca sancta* of the monastery becomes evident. Another scene with a local point of view is that of Moses praying to see Jerusalem, an episode which has no textual justification, but which can be explained by the close ties of the monastery and the archbishopric of Sinai with Jerusalem.

In fact, a number of physical characteristics indicate that this *vita* icon of Moses was in all likelihood painted at Sinai, including its huge size as well as technical details such as the distinctive combination of supports on its back and their decoration, features which characterize other large icons from the same period at the monastery. The style of the icon also conforms to an idiom in use in the monastery during the same period. Other arguments confirming that this work was created at Sinai include the portrait of the donor, an archbishop of Sinai, and the local overtones found, for example, in the giving of the law or Moses praying to see Jerusalem. It should be added that the Moses icon is one of six large panels at the monastery dating from the early thirteenth century with biographical cycles surrounding a central image, thus documenting a new type of icon, of which only a few examples from this early period can be found elsewhere.

Of special interest is the question of the creative process used to assemble this Moses cycle. Some of the

compositions, such as Moses' birth and the encounter of Moses and Pharaoh, did not require precise models, since they repeated common iconographic formulas familiar to a painter working in a place like the monastery of Sinai, an important icon center during this period. However, I believe that further scenes, like the Plague of Hail or the Miracle of the Manna and the Quails, were simply *ad hoc* improvisations. I would even suggest that compositions like Moses praying to see Jerusalem required only a vague knowledge of the Bible. In addition, scenes such as Moses and the burning bush and the giving of the law were painted so often at the monastery that they must have become common knowledge to the artists working there. However, the Crossing of the Red Sea and other scenes leave little doubt, in my opinion, that the artist of the Moses icon did consult a visual model. One of the strongest arguments for this assumption is the misinterpretation of some scenes which is visible not only in their rendering, but also in the formulation of their inscriptions. The most obvious example is the scene I identify as Moses attempting to remove Pharaoh's crown, where the nature of the act is not made evident by either the iconography or the inscription, both of which emphasize Moses' caressing of Pharaoh.

As I have shown above, our *vita* icon shares no iconographic affinity with the recension represented by the Octateuchs, and, for that matter, has no relation with the Octateuch miniatures in the eleventh-century Kosmas manuscript in the Sinai library, for which an origin at Sinai has been recently suggested.⁶⁰ If that was the case, the manuscript must have been in the monastery when the Moses icon was painted at the beginning of the thirteenth century. One conspicuous feature of the presumed model for the icon was an awareness of rabbinical sources, as attested by the three scenes in the cycle that cannot be explained by the Septuagint text and by certain iconographic features, the most notable being "Miriam's well." Even if we can assume that the pictorial model for the Sinai icon was in the form of a Moses *vita*, we must leave open the question whether it was a manuscript or an icon. It could be argued that the model was less likely to have been an icon, since, from all appearances, the type of icon with a cycle of scenes on its border only came into existence at the beginning of the thirteenth century. On the other hand, icons with biographical cycles of saints in superimposed registers may have been created even earlier. Although the earliest biographical cycle of a saint in this form preserved

⁵⁹ Twenty scenes in a saint's cycle on a *vita* icon can also be found in the large icon of St. George in the Sinai Collection: G. and M. Soteriou, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ* (Athens 1956–58), vol. I, fig. 167; vol. II, 149–151.

⁶⁰ See Weitzmann and Galavaris, *Sinai Illuminated Manuscripts* (as in note 36), 7, 63.

at Sinai dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century,⁶¹ we should not overlook the possibility that our icon was modeled on an earlier icon with this type of layout which existed at the monastery.⁶² This hypoth-

⁶¹ Unpublished; 64.4 × 49.8 cm. The icon, which depicts a cycle of St. George, retains sections of a much later overpainting.

⁶² Icons with biographical cycles on their borders, however, could not have included more than twenty scenes, the number on the Moses

esis must be tested in the future against the necessary supporting evidence.

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vita, one of the richest icon border cycles. The restricted space available also excludes the possibility that the visual model for the icon was an iconostasis beam with a vita of Moses.



1. Mount Sinai, monastery of St. Catherine, icon with Moses cycle, early thirteenth century