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Arabic NF 8 and the Latin Manuscripts of St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai

The Monastery of St. Catherine, at the foot of Mounts Horeb and Sinai, forms an extraordinary crossroads at which the different traditions of East and West have met over the centuries. It has been a place of pilgrimage since at least the late 4th century, when the Spanish woman Egeria/Etheria visited. It has been home to Greek, Syrian, Arab, Georgian, Slavic, and Latin-speaking monks, all espousing orthodoxy as expressed at the Council of Chalcedon (451), requiring books in their own languages. Around two thirds of Sinai's medieval books are in Greek; a majority of the rest are Christian Arabic texts; and the remainder are in various languages, predominantly Syriac, Georgian, and Slavic. Some are Greek-Arabic bilinguals for use by Arabic Christians and Greek monks raised in Muslim territories (such as Syria, Egypt, and Sinai itself) who increasingly spoke Arabic as their first language and Greek as their second.

Sinai has always been a meeting place of cultures. It is not surprising that its collections reflect this, but miraculous that they have survived the vagaries of history. The New Finds that were uncovered in 1975 indicate that it still has much to tell us about the formation of culture in the eastern Mediterranean, and the Latin New Finds, in particular, promise to cast significant new light upon relations between East and West during the formative historical period of the Middle Ages.

Amongst the most important of Byzantine monasteries, St. Catherine's was founded by Emperor Justinian between 548 and 565, building upon a tradition of Christian eremitic monasticism on the site that was already centuries old. Its remote location and its international diplomatic network ensured survival across the centuries, and despite losses it retains mosaics and icons from the time of its foundation onwards and over 4,500 manuscripts (of which some 170 items are palimpsested)—part of the greatest library held by any Orthodox monastery.¹ This collection began to be known to the West when Konstantin Tischendorf discovered part of the earliest Christian Bible, *Codex Sinaiticus*, there in 1844. A further important cache of books was discovered there in 1975, in a sealed room in the Tower of St. George, seemingly considered to contain redundant items and forgotten when the library was moved to new accommodations elsewhere in the monastery in 1734. These included a missing portion of the famed *Codex Sinaiticus* itself and increased the amount of known material from St. Catherine's library by about a third. Some of these New Finds have been catalogued (with priority having been accorded to the Greek and Syriac materials) and international initiatives are underway to conserve, preserve, and digitise parts of the library's holdings.²

Many manuscripts survive from St. Catherine's, mostly service books but also Biblical, patristic, study texts, medicinal texts, and romances (mostly of a Christian, hagiographical character), along with documents. These include a number from the mid-5th to the 9th centuries, some written over earlier erased texts, with up to three layers of palimpsests in some cases, which are being recovered with the aid of high-resolution digital imaging as part of the Sinai Palimpsests Project. They are mostly in rounded majuscule scripts inherited from Greece and Rome, with some penned in minuscule scripts from the 7th/8th and 9th centuries. Although these early manuscripts do not generally contain figural imagery (with the exception of the fragment from an illustrated Latin *History of Apollonius of Tyre*, probably from 6th-century Rome, and an illustrated botanical work in Greek, perhaps by Crateuas, of 5th or 6th-century date), probably being influenced in this by influence from Islam and from Byzantine iconoclasts, their decoration includes fish-shaped initials resembling those of pre-Carolingian Italy and Gaul, perhaps inspired by gifts of books from these areas. The end of Iconoclasm in Byzantium, coupled

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¹ For the history of the monastery and its library, see the contribution by Father Justin Sinaites in this volume.

² I have been charged by the monastic community with cataloguing the Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's. This work is ongoing, and has resulted in many publications, some of which are mentioned here.

with the wealth of Fatimid Egypt, meant that from the 10th century more opulent illuminated books were made at Sinai, such as the Lectionary of Mount Horeb. By 1000, Constantinople had re-emerged as the central focus of Byzantine culture and its influence can be clearly seen in manuscripts subsequently imported into Sinai and produced there, which feature important Byzantine-style illuminations. A significant number of Georgian manuscripts are also represented, made in the 10th to 14th centuries, when Georgian monasteries were flourishing in Syria and Palestine and producing recruits for the Sinai community. Sinai's Slavonic books, probably later imports from Macedonia and Croatia, include two 11th-century items in the Glagolitic language—from which Cyrillic is derived—which are amongst the earliest surviving Slavonic manuscripts.³

One element missing from this multi-lingual, multi-cultural mix was the book culture of the Latin West, which historically was not expected to be represented as Latin speakers were not thought to have been present in the Levant prior to the Crusades, from the late 11th century onwards. Awareness of the Latin New Finds should significantly change this perspective.

During a visit to the monastery in January 2009, I was able to identify several items, most of them fragmentary, in Latin. A couple were bound, most were fragments (some from bindings), and some were contained in 39 envelopes of fragments bearing Latin script. Most of these came from amongst the New Finds. Adding these to my searches in the archives and work by myself and others⁴ on the high-level digitisation of the palimpsested materials from the monastery provided by the Sinai Palimpsests Project, which added a few further fragments to the corpus, I currently know of portions of some 55 Latin manuscripts to date, ranging from the 5th/6th to 16th centuries. It is extremely rare for new materials from the early Latin West to be discovered, especially bearing decoration or neumatic notation, and these items therefore represent an important addition to the early medieval corpus. Furthermore, their presence in the region, and perceptible impact upon the Greek Orthodox culture of the Middle East, opens up historical consideration of an unexpected amount of interaction between the eastern and western churches long before the Crusades.

The range of Latin materials that I have so far identified at the monastery indicates the presence within the medieval library of St. Catherine's of a range of Latin Biblical and liturgical manuscripts of probable 6th- to 10th-century date. Some were probably imports and include what may have been gifts from Pope Gregory's Rome, along with examples of neumatic notation from the Carolingian Empire; others were written at St. Catherine's or in the Christian Orient. There is also important evidence suggesting the presence of western scribes working at Sinai and of the output of Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's itself, indicating that it was catering for a considerable pilgrim presence throughout the Middle Ages. The archives also yield significant and unexpected evidence relating to Sinai's international relations following the Crusades, up to the 18th century, and include material such as the only extant letters of introduction and safe passage on behalf of medieval pilgrims, and testimonies by pilgrims on how they were received at Sinai. The nature of St. Catherine's western property holdings from the 9th century onwards and the diplomatic role of the monastery as a vital bridgehead between East and West are also illuminated by these materials, as are late medieval and early modern diplomatic and commercial relations with Italian merchants, the Doge, and the Spanish monarchy.⁵

The Latin material at St. Catherine's is thus revealing a complex and significant picture of interaction of personnel and materials across the imaginary historiographical early medieval East-West divide, including evidence for direct and indirect cultural contact between the Insular world (Britain, Ireland and Brittany) and the eastern Mediterranean.⁶ I am currently working to pull together all of the Latin manuscript materials from

³ See also the contribution by Claudia Rapp in this volume.

⁴ Sin. gr. NF M 48 was found by David Ganz (see the relevant Sinai Palimpsests Project entry) to contain, in the erased layer, 22 fragments of a hymnal with texts by Prudentius, Fortunatus, prayers and other devotional materials in a Visigothic minuscule script which he characterized as of 9th- to 10th-century date and attributed, owing to its blend of palaeographical features, to an eastern Mediterranean origin, following my characterization of other Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's. Its fish initial on f. 2r, in Merovingian style, recalls the senmurv initial in the Insular pocket Gospel book fragments in Sin. ar. NF 8. The hymnal was palimpsested to make way for a liturgical Typikon in Greek minuscule during the 11th century and then palimpsested again with prayers for matins and vespers in Greek minuscule during the 14th century. David Ganz also initially identified the Apollonius text in Sin. ar. NF 8, on which more below.

⁵ Brown, *Latin Manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of St Catherine*.

⁶ Brown, *The Eastwardness of Things*; Brown, *Imagining, Imaging and Experiencing the East*; Brown, *The Bridge in the Desert*; Brown, *Were Early Medieval Picture Cycles recycled?*

the monastery in a single catalogue and to preface this with a substantial historical introduction in which the circumstances of cross-cultural interaction are explored and contextualized.

I was invited by the Sinai Palimpsests Project to be one of the scholars to work on the Latin palimpsests at St. Catherine's Monastery, along with David Ganz, later joined by Daniela Mairhofer. One of the most notable manuscripts with Latin erased text is Arabic New Finds 8 (Sin. ar. NF 8). The folios of this manuscript are sewn together from several palimpsested pieces and contain, *inter alia*, medical material by an early 6th-century Greek hand, and a fragment of a magnificent, illustrated Latin copy of the *History of Apollonius of Tyre*, perhaps made in 6th-century Rome (see Fig. 2). Several Biblical texts in Latin are copied by Roman hands of 6th-century date and by two 8th-century Insular hands (probably Northumbrians, but displaying some Mercian influence). All of these were erased and over-written, in turn, in kufic script, by a Christian Arabic scribe in the second half of the 9th century, resulting in a codicologically complex manuscript which is among the earliest extant Gospel texts in Arabic.

A further manuscript that speaks to the extensive cultural connection between the West and the East, as crystallized in the Sinai material, is Sin. lat. NF 1. In 2006, when I curated the exhibition 'Bibles Before the Year 1000' at the Smithsonian Institute, we were graced with the loan not only of the newly discovered portion of *Codex Sinaiticus*, but also with ff. 19v–20r of this manuscript, written in Sinai or the Christian Orient during the 10th century.⁷ This Latin Psalter was not recognized as such until the 20th century as it was initially misidentified as a Slavonic manuscript. Elias A. Lowe discerned a scribal familiarity with Visigothic, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic palaeographical features in this and two other contemporary Latin fragments in the same collection, but I would suggest that the closest analogies for some of the features of its script and decoration can be found within the pre-Carolingian scriptoria of Gaul and of Irish foundations on the Continent, such as Luxeuil, St. Gall and Bobbio—all founded by St. Columbanus by 600. Western influence is also reflected in the illumination, with zoomorphic initials, resembling those of pre-Carolingian Gaul and provincial Greek illumination (such as that of southern Italy), combined with Insular-style interlace. The significance of the fragments already published by E.A. Lowe and Bonifatius Fischer, and until now thought to have come to the monastery later in the Middle Ages,⁸ must be reappraised in view of the other early medieval Latin manuscripts at the monastery. Together, they paint a very different picture of early East/West relations, indicating the possibility of considerable post-Roman interaction between the churches of East and West.

What then was the historical context that enabled such unexpected cultural interaction in this desert wilderness? In 599 Pope Gregory the Great sent a letter from Rome to Sinai along with gifts, and this would have been one possible route of such influence on the Sinai scriptorium. Input and gifts from pilgrims visiting from Northern Europe would have been another. For this was a time when the Monastery of St. Catherine served as the guarantor of safe passage throughout the Levant through its dispensation from the Prophet Muhammad. Around 640 the Sinai region had come under Arab rule, and an alleged letter of protection was besought of the Prophet Muhammad by the Sinai monks. The original document (of which a copy survives) was presented by the monks to Sultan Selim I in 1517, when he became Caliph of Islam. But such a document would have been especially important during the persecution of Christians in Egypt around the year 1000, and there are parallels with other 7th-century letters of protection which support the original document's early date. The document grants the monks the right to dwell unmolested at the monastery and accords the right of safe passage throughout Islamic territory to any visiting pilgrims. Anyone wishing to visit the Holy Land would therefore be able to include St. Catherine's in the itinerary, with the guarantee of a safe passage.

The monastery possessed a range of Latin manuscripts (mostly Biblical and liturgical) of possible 6th- to 10th-century date. Some were probably imports, including possible gifts from Pope Gregory's Rome and some quite early examples of Carolingian neumatic notation. Others would appear to have been written at St. Catherine's or in the neighbouring Christian Orient.

⁷ Brown, *In the Beginning: Bibles Before the Year 1000*, no. 48.

⁸ Lowe, *An Unknown Latin Psalter on Mount Sinai*; Lowe, *Two New Latin Liturgical Fragments*; Lowe, *Two Other Unknown Latin Liturgical Fragments*; Vezin, *À propos des manuscrits latins du Sinaï. Problèmes de localisation et de datation*.

The Latin manuscripts evince an interest at St. Catherine's in the liturgy, music, and scripts of the early medieval West. Indeed, a preoccupation with the visual appearance of scripts may herald the origins of the study of palaeography, for St. Nilus of Sinai, in his treatise on vices, the *Narrations* (also known as Pseudo-Nilus, *Narrations*), criticises indolent young monks who do not concentrate on the meaning of a book but, as a displacement activity, count its leaves and examine its handwriting, complaining of its writing and format.⁹ The date and authorship of the *Narrations* is debatable, although a 5th- or 6th-century date is generally accepted, but the earliest evidence of its existence is an excerpt from it, written in Syriac in a Sinai manuscript from St. Catherine's (a Syriac compilation of hagiography and menologia) datable to 886, the scribe of which refers to making his translation from a copy in Greek dated 767.¹⁰ This is the period in which some of the Latin manuscripts from St. Catherine's seem to evince an interest on the part of some of its scribes in studying and absorbing features of western manuscript production. This text also suggests that manuscripts may have been available for study in the Sinai from an early date.

Perhaps the earliest Latin hand from Sinai to survive is a 5th- or 6th-century uncial with rustic capital features—a curious hybrid script with some odd features from other scripts (perhaps Old Roman Cursive and Coptic), which occurs on a fragment that now forms Sin. ar. 588 and consists of ink offsets from a Latin manuscript leaf on the inside cover of a papyrus cartonnage binding. The text is largely illegible, as yet. Similar binding structures have been found from Coptic Egypt and even from as far afield as Ireland, on the *Faddan More Psalter* of ca. 800 (mentioned below, which was excavated in 2006 from a peat bog in Co. Tipperary).¹¹

The early Latin materials also encompass palimpsested fragments, which include in their strata half-uncial scripts from 6th-century Italy,¹² some of which may have been among the gifts known to have been sent by Pope Gregory.¹³ Some of the non-palimpsested pieces are clumsy copies of early Western scripts, such as Visigothic, Beneventan, Luxeuil, and Caroline minuscule; written in the black carbon ink characteristic of Sinaitic and other Egyptian manuscripts (and essentially the sort of ink used there since ancient times). These may represent attempts by Sinai scribes to copy the scripts of imported Western manuscripts or the hands of foreign scribes they had met.

One such is Sin. lat. NF 4, which blends Visigothic and Caroline minuscule features and is written on paper, which was not available in the West until much later. Other scripts, however, are likely to be Sinai scriptorium products, either by western scribes at work there or by members of an in-house Latin scriptorium which merged Insular, Frankish, Beneventan, other Italian, and Visigothic palaeographical features, sometimes blended with Greek, Syriac, and Arabic codicological features and a characteristic tendency towards a rightwards slant in aspect—a feature of Sinaitic Greek uncial script that may reflect the influence of Semitic scripts.¹⁴

Some of the fragments had already been palimpsested previously, giving two or three strata of texts which are difficult—and in some cases impossible—to decipher. The Sinai Palimpsests Project's application of high-level digital imaging and enhancement techniques offers the possibility of retrieving some of the lettering, with different images working together to yield different details, but the texts still often remain elusive. Some have proven identifiable, others are so fragmentary that textual recovery is so partial that they cannot be pinned down, even if palaeographical stylistic appraisals are possible.

The Latinate scribes, some of whom I suggest were working at the monastery, had a range of material from other cultural orbits available to them, probably in the form of imported books but also via direct contact with foreign scribes. Indeed, some of the manuscripts may even have been produced by westerners at work in Sinai. This can be demonstrated by one particular book, Sin. ar. NF 8 (henceforward, Arabic NF 8), which was found in the sealed room among the New Finds. It is a fascinating confection of pieces of earlier parchment leaves

⁹ Nilus Sinaita, *Narrationes*, 600; Kornarakis, *The Monastic Life according to Saint Nilus*. The historical identity of Nilus Sinaita (died ca. 430) is a complex and contested issue, but it is generally agreed that the *Narrationes* were composed by an author working in the Sinai and that it reflects, if only in part, circumstances there in the early 5th century. The earliest extant manuscript is of 10th-century date, so it predates this. Whether the *Narrationes* are a post-Roman or early medieval source, they indicate the presence and study of manuscripts in the Sinai in the post-Roman period. See Mayerson, *Observations on the 'Nilus' Narrationes*.

¹⁰ Vat. sir. 623 (*Diktyon* 69457). See Caner, *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai*, 75–76.

¹¹ Read, *Faddan More Psalter*.

¹² For example, Sin. ar. NF 8, f. 13v, the lower script in the lower left-hand portion.

¹³ Sin. ar. NF 8, f. 21v.

¹⁴ For a Sinaite scribe writing a version of pre-Caroline minuscule, see the flyleaf of Sin. ar. 455.

from a number of manuscripts, palimpsested and sewn together, some of its pages resembling a patchwork quilt of several fragments (some leaves being formed of as many as five fragments), to form a book (now lacking its binding) containing the earliest Arabic language Gospels, written by a Christian scribe writing in Arabic in the second half of the 9th century.¹⁵ It speaks eloquently of the shortage of membrane, as might be expected in the heart of the Sinai desert, for example, and of the sacrifice of earlier works to the needs of the monastic community at a time when Arabic had become the first language of many of the monks.

The lowest strata of the scripts on the pieces of membrane from which Arabic NF 8 was composed consist of Greek majuscule hands of 5th/6th-century date. Some also carry Latin uncials and half uncials by Italian hands, dating to the 6th century. One of these scribes penned a Vulgate Apocalypse/Book of Revelation in uncials/half-uncials of 6th-century date (Arabic NF 8, f. 19v; see Fig. 1) of the sort practised in Gregory the Great's Rome. Another penned Luke's Gospel in Roman uncials, again in the 6th century on another of the fragments used to make f. 19v. Other fragments carry the Latin hands of 7th/8th to 9th-century scribes, including two of Insular origin, some of whom may even have been writing at St. Catherine's.



Fig. 1: Fragment from a Vulgate Apocalypse in Latin uncials / half-uncials, 6th century (Sin. ar. NF 8, f. 19v). Undertext in red (© St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

¹⁵ Kashouh, Sinai Ar. N.F. Parchment 8; Kashouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, 76.

The Sinai Palimpsests Project's digital images have made possible the textual identification by David Ganz of fragments incorporated into Arabic NF 8, of the Latin *History of Apollonius of Tyre* (forming parts of ff. 12 and 18), which I have discussed in its palaeographical and art historical contexts.¹⁶ This is written by one of the hands that I have associated with 6th-century Rome. This copy predates the other known (9th–10th century) Latin versions of the text by some way. It is of very fine quality and provides evidence of the sort of Late Antique illustrated cycle that inspired the earliest extant medieval illustrated copy, a fragment now in Hungary (National Széchényi Library, cod. lat. 4),¹⁷ which was made in the Ottonian monastery of Werden in ca. 1000. This contains some 38 line-drawings, executed in crude style but probably ultimately based on something similar to the Sinai fragment.

Amidst the barbarized palimpsested membrane of Arabic NF 8, the sole figural image that has so far been found to survive from this grand Late Antique book, on f. 18r (see Fig. 2), depicts the heads of a man and a young woman, set beneath an architectural device with two columns topped by lotus capitals, which resembles a proscenium theatrical stage.¹⁸ Comparison with the Werden manuscript, which has a similar scene of a man and woman standing in an architectural surround, although the composition and style vary, suggests that the subject of the Sinai fragment is likely Apollonius and his daughter, Tharsia, at the house of the unscrupulous innkeeper, Strangulos (Stranguillo). In the recent publication of the *Apollonius Pictus* manuscript in Hungary, Herbert Kessler discussed the possibilities that the newly-discovered Ottonian picture cycle was either a new early medieval composition, or that it might have been based upon a lost Late Antique prototype. The Sinai Apollonius fragment indicates that Kessler's suspicions were correct and that there was indeed an earlier illustrated Apollonius tradition in Italy by the 6th century.¹⁹

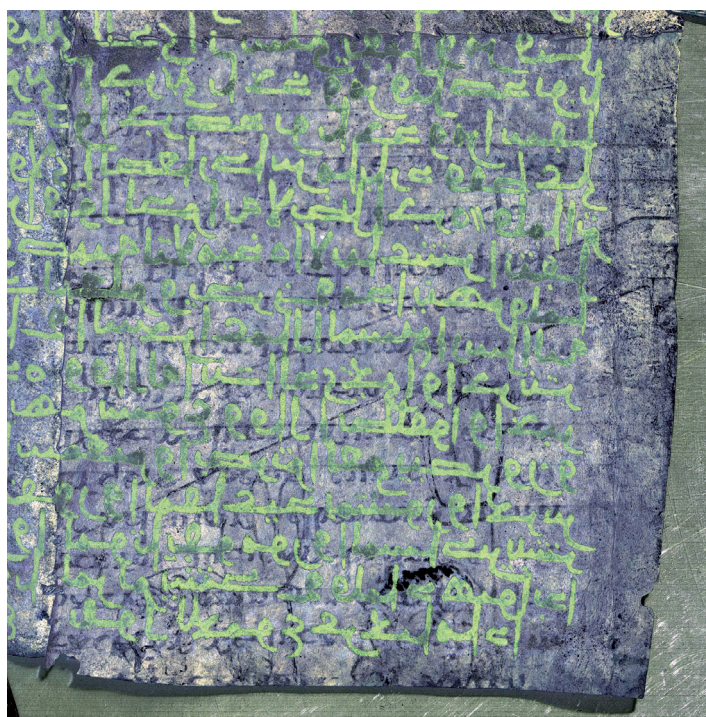


Fig. 2: Fragment from an illustrated Latin copy of the *History of Apollonius of Tyre*, in uncials of 6th-century Roman style, with part of a drawing of a man and girl (probably Apollonius and his daughter, Tharsia) under an architectural cornice supported by lotus-capital columns (Sin. ar. NF 8, f. 18r). Undertext in black (© St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

¹⁶ Brown, *Bridge in the Desert*; Brown, *Were Early Medieval Picture Cycles Recycled?*

¹⁷ Boreczky and Németh, *Apollonius Pictus*; Boreczky, *Illustrated Life of Apollonius and Tarsia*; Boreczky, *Apollonius pictus* Reevaluated.

¹⁸ There are also faint remains of possible erased drawings on f. 24v and f. 26r, but these fragments do not appear to carry the script of the Apollonius text.

¹⁹ Brown, *Were Early Medieval Picture Cycles Recycled?* I am gratefully indebted to Prof. David Ganz for discussions concerning the identification of the text.

The Apollonius manuscript that the Sinai fragment came from would have been large, formally penned in Latin uncial script, and illustrated with ink line drawings. Not enough survives to determine whether there was text in one column, or two, but the drawing is large and artistically accomplished and recalls the scale of the images, set above single columns, in the *Vatican Virgil* (which is coloured, but the aesthetic of which is drawing-based). The Ottonian version is written in Caroline minuscule accompanied by an outline drawing picture cycle. Its subject matter contains a scene to which the Sinai fragment may be compared, but the composition varies, the figure-style is less naturalistic, and the images are of smaller scale. This, and the provenance circumstances, indicate that there must have been other early copies circulating, from one of which the manuscript in Hungary is descended. The Sinai Apollonius would not have been available as an exemplar, for it would appear to have travelled to the Levant and been broken apart and palimpsested there by the late 9th century and probably earlier, for there are traces of another layer of Latin script (still being worked on) between it and the upper Arabic text.

Also of great significance for our present purpose is my discovery in 2009 that other fragments of the palimpsested materials which make up Arabic NF 8 bear the hands of two 8th-century Insular scribes writing Insular minuscule.²⁰ The Sinai Palimpsests Project images have made it possible to assess more of their relationship to one another and to the other palimpsest strata.²¹ On f. 26v these hands occur together, indicating that these two scribes were working alongside one another. The work of one of them, who wrote a formal set minuscule, includes part of a service book including a lection from St. Mark's Gospel, in the Vulgate (f. 15v).²² This was subsequently over-written by the Christian Arabic scribe in the second half of the 9th century.

The first of the English scribes wrote a compact, rounded Insular 'Phase II' set minuscule (see Fig. 3), recalling the sort of Phase II Insular minuscule script introduced by that of the *Moore Bede*,²³ copied during the 740s at Wearmouth-Jarrow, and that of London, British Library, Egerton 1046. These parallels suggest a mid-8th-century English background.²⁴ The Insular script on f. 15 incorporates on f. 15v a zoomorphic initial, an uncial E (see Fig. 3), composed of an exotic *senmurv*—a beast of Persian origin, conflating animal, bird, and fish components to symbolise the union of the elements. This resembles another *senmurv* found in an initial in the early 9th-century *Mercian Royal Prayer Book* (BL, Royal MS 2.A.xx, f. 17), an example of the exoticism of Mercian art at this period.²⁵ However, the style of the initial in the palimpsest fragment resembles the Merovingian-inspired zoomorphic initials found in other early Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's (such as Sin. gr. NF M 48, f. 2r, a 9th- to 10th-century hymnal in a minuscule script with primarily Visigothic features),²⁶ rather than its more sophisticated Anglo-Saxon counterpart and this, coupled with the eastern pedigree of the beast in question, suggests that the artist-scribe may have been working at the monastery.

Arabic NF 8, f. 15v also features angular Insular display lettering, as continuation script following on from the zoomorphic initial, with multi-coloured infills in a palette of slate-blue, orange, and yellow, reminiscent of display script found in Mercian manuscripts around 800.²⁷ There are orange, blue, and yellow infills to minor

²⁰ Brown, *Eastwardness of Things*; Brown, *Imagining, Imaging and Experiencing the East*.

²¹ This has clarified exactly where the different strata of scripts occur on any individual folio. The presence of several different hands from different periods and backgrounds on the same folio does not necessarily mean they were related, if the folio in question was made up of more than one fragment. Seeing the different elements clearly in the excellent final Sinai Palimpsests Project images, rather than as disjointed elements, has enabled me to revise somewhat statements in my previous publications concerning how the hands related to one another. The relationships outlined here are the correct ones.

²² F. 15v, section a i, and f. 18r, section a ii, which are conjoint; it is possible to see the Insular hand most clearly in the section in the gutter (and also on f. 15r), a few lines below the orange zoomorphic initial and display lettering. The pages are usually composed of fragments sewn together; they tend to fall into two or four sectors, which are here numbered a i (top right), a ii (top left), b i (lower left), b ii (lower right) and so forth. The folia comprising fragments of this Insular pocket Gospel book are as follows: ff. 15r, 15v, 18r, 18v, 19r, 19v, 24r, 24v, 25r, 25v, 26v (any Insular script on f. 26r has either been completely erased or it was blank), 27r, 27v, 27v. The arrangement of the folia in textual order is as follows: ff. 18r/15v, col. b; 15r; 18v; 25v; 15v; 18r/15v, col. a; 19v; 14v.

²³ Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.v.16.

²⁴ Brown, *Writing in the Insular World*.

²⁵ London, British Library, Royal MS 2.A.xx.

²⁶ See fn. 4, above.

²⁷ Such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 93 (a *primum in ordine* mass text) and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS lat. 10861 (a collection of saints' lives). On this, and BL, Royal MS 2.A.xx and other related manuscripts, see Brown, *Mercian Manuscripts*, and Brown, *Imagining, Imaging, and Experiencing the East*.

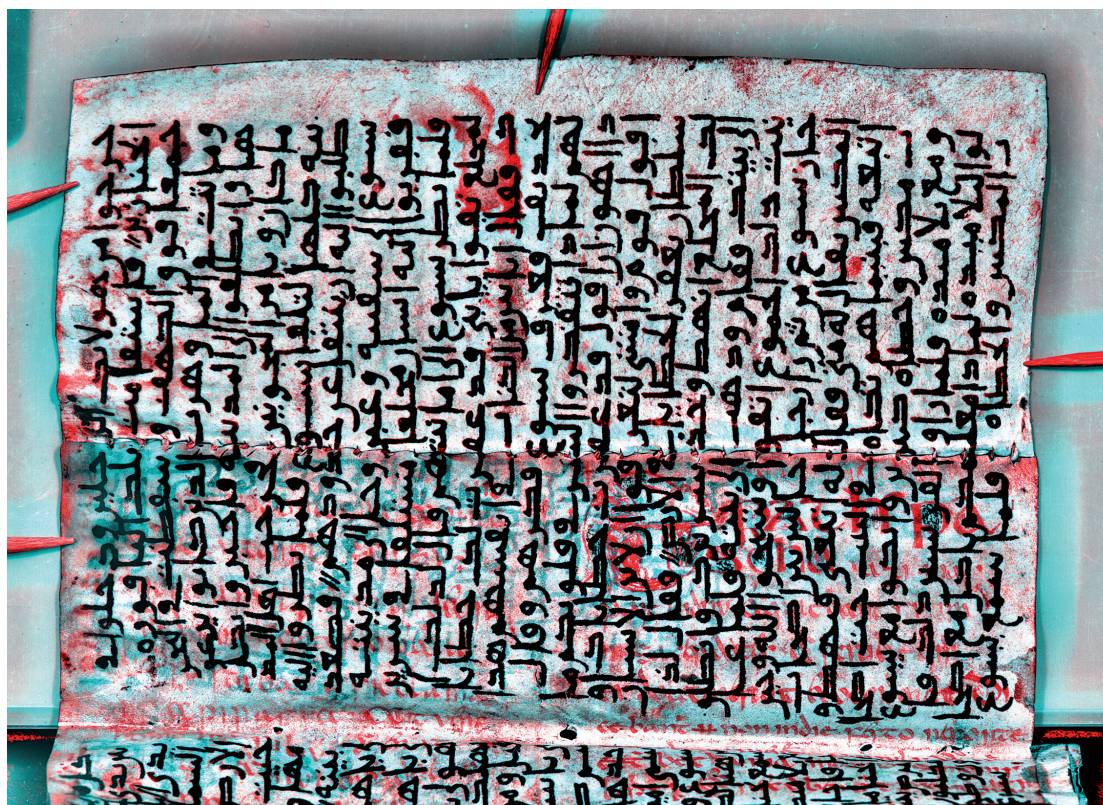


Fig. 3: Fragment of an Insular pocket Gospel book, with zoomorphic initial E formed of a Persian senmurv and Insular display script of Mercian style of ca. 800 (Sin. ar. NF 8, f. 15v). Undertext in red (© St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

initials and *litterae notabiliore*s. A few interlinear corrections or glosses occur on f. 26v, marked with forward slashes. There is a dedication cross at the top left of f. 25r, a feature found in Insular scriptural manuscripts from Wearmouth-Jarrow, and their derivatives, in the 8th century. Another 8th-century Insular scribe who wrote an Insular Phase II minuscule similar to that of the first scribe, but more cursive in ductus, is to be found in other parts of the erased layers of what now forms Arabic NF 8 (see f. 26v, for example). The more formal of the hands penned Mark 15 on ff. 19r–v (Mark 14 opens on f. 15v with the red zoomorphic senmurv initial and coloured display script). The same hand appears on fragments forming part of ff. 15, 19, 25, 26, and 27. The second Insular, cursive minuscule, hand was probably writing a liturgical text (resembling the first Eucharistic prayer from the Roman Missal) and appears on ff. 24–26.

There were, therefore, at least two English scribes whose work is represented in the cache of materials drawn upon to form Arabic NF 8 in the late 9th century, and both ff. 25 and 27 were formed by sewing together two separate fragments of the Insular pocket Gospel book in which they appear, perhaps suggesting it had already been dismembered and was in small pieces. Stylistic features and the context of the non-palimpsested Latin manuscripts from St. Catherine's raise the possibility that these Insular scribes may even have been at work at St. Catherine's during the second half of the 8th century, and that their hands had been influenced by mid-8th-century Northumbrian scripts and by late 9th-century Mercian illumination, as well as eastern art forms.

The components of some of the composite leaves of Arabic NF 8 give an insight into how Latin manuscripts featured in the cache of membrane that the Arabic scribe drew upon to palimpsest and sew together to make his Arabic Gospel book. Those fragments forming f. 19 are a good case in point:

On f. 19v the top right section is by the same 8th-century Insular minuscule hand as the f. 15 fragment, it carries Mark 15.40–42 and is part of the Insular pocket Gospel book as the related fragments which form parts of ff. 15r, 15v, 18r (upper outer piece and piece along gutter), 18v, 19r, 19v, 24r, 24v, 25r (inner and outer pieces), 25v (inner and outer pieces), 26v, 27r (inner and outer pieces), 27v (inner and outer pieces).

The bottom left panel of f. 19v bears part of the text of Ecclesiasticus in a 6th-century Greek majuscule hand, which has been palimpsested by a 9th-century Greek sloping majuscule hand (text unidentified), which is in turn palimpsested soon after by the Arabic hand. Another fragment with the same stratification is f. 14r. On f. 19r only the Ecclesiasticus hand and the Arabic hand appear.

The top left panel of f. 19v is a Latin text of the Apocalypse/Book of Revelation, written in a Roman mixed uncial hand with half-uncial letter-forms. This continues on f. 19r, although it has been quite well erased and palimpsested by the Arabic hand.

The bottom right panel of f. 19v bears a stately Roman 6th-century uncial hand which wrote Luke 4.18 (Vetus Latina version) in two columns which has been palimpsested by the Arabic text. On f. 19r the Vetus Latina Gospel text has been thoroughly erased and palimpsested by a hand which writes a Roman-style (6th or 7th-century?) mixed capitalis-uncialis script also exhibiting some pre-Caroline minuscule features such as tall theta e and looped o (this is akin to the Latin hand which wrote a text of which the words 'amnos de nocturna' can be clearly seen on f. 13r), the remaining text of which has yet to be recovered but which starts 'pro no/as...' and ends '...bentuti' on its first line. This resembles other post-Roman hands in the non-palimpsest Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's Monastery. The fragment was then palimpsested by the Arabic hand. It is interesting that a fine copy of the Gospels of a Vetus Latina version should within a century have been palimpsested—on one side only, perhaps indicating pragmatic use—by another Latinate scribe, indicating that it was already considered of no textual value or had been damaged.

Amongst the materials that were reused to make the Arabic Gospel book were, therefore: some fragments of a large illustrated 6th-century copy of the *History of Apollonius of Tyre* (ff. 12r and 18r and v, and perhaps f. 20), probably made in Rome; fragments of Biblical texts in 6th-century Latin hands—a Vulgate Apocalypse (ff. 14r and 19v) and a Vetus Latina Gospel of St. Luke (f. 19v), written in a 6th-century Roman uncial hand which had already been overwritten in a 6th- or 7th-century Roman mixed capitalis-uncialis script also exhibiting some pre-Caroline minuscule features, akin to others found at St. Catherine's; and a number of leaves from an Insular minuscule pocket Gospel book featuring two late 8th-century Anglo-Saxon hands (ff. 15r, 15v, 18r [upper outer piece and piece along gutter], 18v, 19r, 19v, 24r, 24v, 25r [inner and outer pieces], 25v [inner and outer pieces], 26v, 27r [inner and outer pieces], 27v [inner and outer pieces]).

The interaction of the various hands indicates the need for the multiple reuse of membrane leaves and fragments prior to their ultimate palimpsesting to form the Arabic Gospels—a pattern repeated in other areas of the palimpsested materials. This would be particularly necessary if the palimpsesting took place at St. Catherine's in the Sinai Desert, where animal skins are at a premium. The pattern of interaction, along with that evident in the non-palimpsested Latin manuscripts at St. Catherine's, suggests that some of these scribes may even have been working in the monastery at Sinai.²⁸

The two main periods of palimpsesting the early manuscript materials seems to have been after the 6th century, the period following the monastery's establishment by Emperor Justinian (who would presumably have furnished it with imported books and literate personnel) and the 9th century, when Greek majuscule script was being replaced by minuscule (*metacharakterismos*). The overtexts could be added within a generation or several centuries later, suggestive of a cache of discarded materials which could be plundered for writing materials, and perhaps for other domestic purposes, over a long period of time.²⁹ This scenario would accord with that of the sealed room in the monastery, discovered in 1975, which contained a mass of manuscript materials that were redundant or damaged and which may have been drawn upon for waste materials (like binders' waste elsewhere) for a variety of purposes, including palimpsesting to construct new books. Perhaps this practice of keeping such a cache of useful materials was of considerable antiquity at St. Catherine's.

Claudia Rapp has cautioned that it cannot be assumed that the materials now at St. Catherine's, or others which were once there and are now in other repositories, necessarily originated at the monastery or were palimpsested there.³⁰ In the case of the Latin palimpsest materials, they lie beneath Greek, Arabic, and Slavonic over-scripts. Greek and Arabic Christian scribes seem to have been working in the same milieu and palimpsest-

²⁸ See Brown, *Imagining, Imaging, and Experiencing the East*.

²⁹ See the contribution by Claudia Rapp in this volume.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

ing Greek, Arabic, CPA, and Latin manuscripts and fragments (Arabic also occurs over Syriac and Greek over Ethiopic). Pilgrims have travelled to the Holy Mountain in the Sinai since at least the late 4th century, when the Spanish woman (nun?) Egeria/Etheria recorded her visit, and many would have brought gifts, and still do so; this and the Crusades would probably have accounted for the presence of a considerable component of St. Catherine's collection. Rapp also points out that other places in the Levant, such as the Monastery of Mar Saba near Bethlehem and Jerusalem itself, both of which she describes as forming a cultural hinterland to St. Catherine's,³¹ might also have had a tradition of palimpsesting and that there may even have been some trade in reused writing materials; certainly Giulia Rossetto has revealed evidence of Greek manuscripts from southern Italy being overwritten in the Syria-Palestine region.³² However, 'does not have to have been undertaken at' does not mean 'was not undertaken at'. St. Catherine's *could* be the place where the cache of materials was employed for palimpsesting and it *is* where a notably high volume of these palimpsests, and non-palimpsest manuscripts in a variety of languages, some exhibiting intriguing codicological and stylistic cross-fertilization, ended up.

I would contend that St. Catherine's therefore remains the strongest contender as the meeting-place of the varied cultural elements and influences represented in a number of the early manuscripts, palimpsested and non-palimpsested, which survive there. This is supported, in the case of the Latin manuscripts, by the relationships between the non-palimpsested manuscripts at the monastery, many of which suggest interaction in a distinctive scriptorium, and by aspects of the historical context, some of which I have previously discussed.³³ Ongoing work on the Sinai Palimpsests Project and on the catalogue of the Latin manuscripts from St. Catherine's will, it is hoped, shed further light on the matter.³⁴

The possible presence of at least two Insular scribes at work in Sinai at this period, or at the very least the presence there of an Insular 8th-century pocket Gospel book exhibiting eastern stylistic influence which had been palimpsested to form an Arabic Gospels within a century, whether this took place in Sinai or elsewhere in the Holy Land, supports the viability of literary accounts of journeys to the Holy Land which circulated in the Insular environment, related by travellers such as Bishop Arculf and Willibald, which have sometimes been viewed as literary *topoi*, rather like the late medieval Prester John tale. It also lends support to my contention that the material evidence for post-Roman East-West contacts³⁵ represents not only secondary transmission via areas such as Italy, Gaul, and Spain, but also direct and irenic contact between the peoples of the far-flung regions of Near East and far West.

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³¹ Rapp, *From the Holy City*, 66.

³² See Rapp in the present volume. Rossetto, *Greek Palimpsests at Saint Catherine's Monastery*, 227–260, discusses the erased texts of Sin. gr. 966.

³³ See Brown, *Bridge in the Desert*.

³⁴ Brown, *Latin Manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai*.

³⁵ Brown, *Eastwardness of Things; Imaging, Imagining, and Experiencing the East*.

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