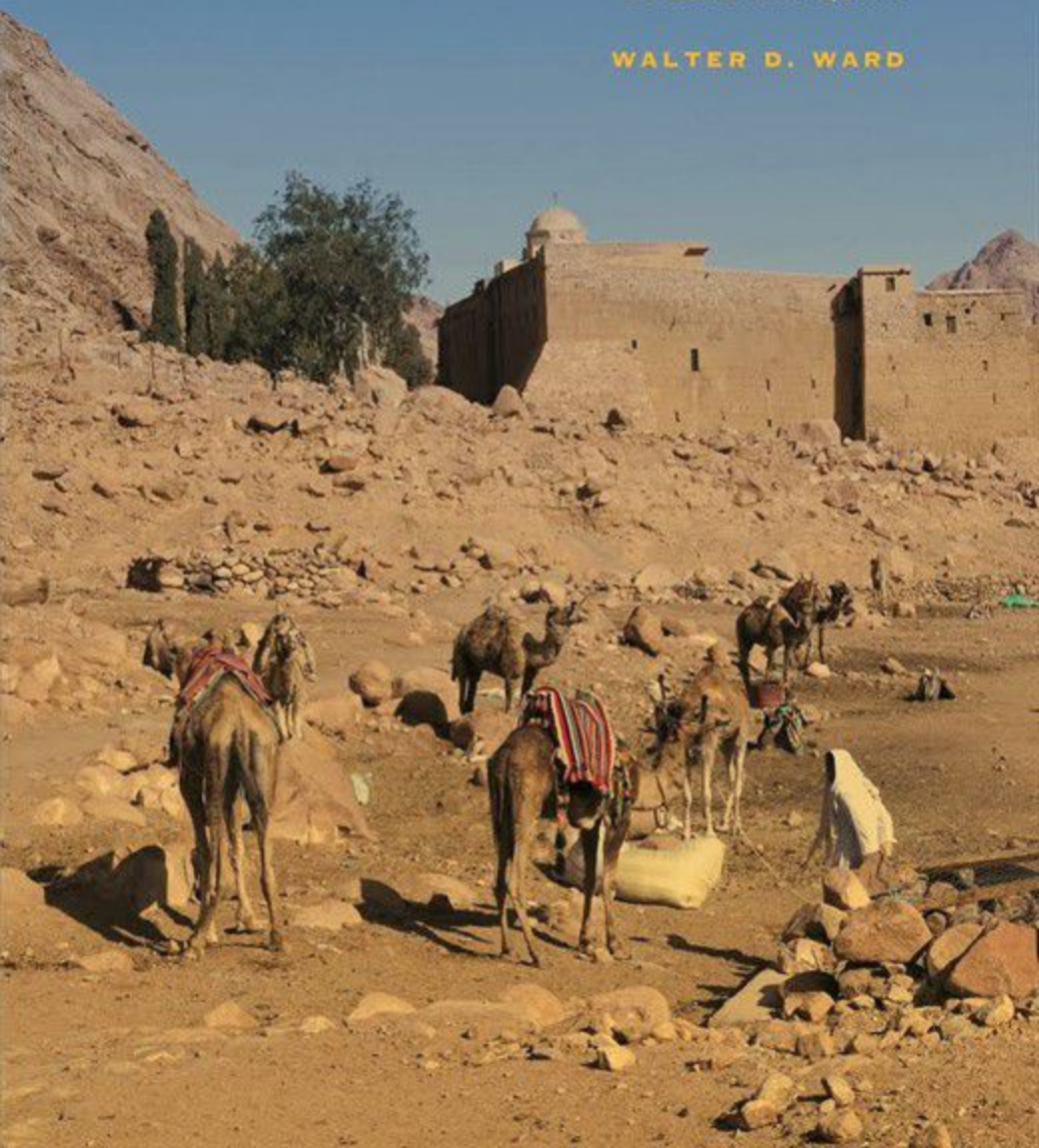
MIRAGE OF THE SARACEN

CHRISTIANS AND NOMADS IN THE SINAI PENINSULA IN LATE ANTIQUITY

WALTER D. WARD



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Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity

Walter D. Ward

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

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To Melissa, Agatha, Nico, and Ansel

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PREFACE

This book began as a seminar paper in my first year of graduate school and has since expanded far beyond its roots, including a brief stop as a dissertation, which I completed in 2008 at UCLA under the supervision of Claudia Rapp, Ronald Mellor, David Phillips, and Susan Downey. Since that time, most of the original dissertation has been completely reworked.

This book could not have been completed without the support and encouragement of many individuals. Previous mentors Claudia Rapp, Ronald Mellor, and S. Thomas Parker continued to provide advice and encouragement. At UAB, several scholars, including Brian Steele, Andrew Keitt, Steve Miller, John van Sant, Andrew Demshuk, John Moore, Jr., and Lamia Ben Youseef Zayzafoon, read chapters, engaged in stimulating discussions, or provided materials. Special thanks are due to history department chair Colin Davis, former history department chair Carolyn Conley, and former CAS Assistant Dean Rebecca Bach. Without Interlibrary Loan, I could not have completed this project, so my deepest thanks go to Eddie Luster and the entire ILL staff, plus reference librarian Brooke Becker. I would also like to thank all the UAB history department's graduate students who assisted in copying and scanning material.

I also must single out Dr. Tali Erickson-Gini for providing an excellent tour of the Byzantine towns of the Negev, which enriched my knowledge of the region. Others have lent unpublished material to me at various stages of this project, including Dr. Hans Bernard and Professor Willeke Wenrich at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, Roberta Tomber of the British Museum, Dr. Benjamin Dolinka of the Israel Antiquities Authority, Professor Traianos Gagos of the University of Michigan, Greg Fisher of Carlton University, and Professor Dan Caner

of the University of Connecticut. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Peter Brown, all of whom provided helpful comments for revision. Professor Andrew Jacobs of Scripps College helped with revising chapter 3. Any mistakes that remain in the text are my own.

In 2007, I spent four months at the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan, as the Kress Fellow in the Art and Archaeology of Jordan. My work there formed the nucleus of several chapters in this book. I would especially like to thank the director, Dr. Barbara Porter, and associate director, Mr. Chris Tuttle, for their assistance and support during my stay. While I resided at ACOR, a number of scholars inspired and assisted my research, including Professors Bert de Vries, Burton MacDonald, and Megan Perry, and fellows Drs. Yorke Rowan, Morag Kersel, Ann Peters, Jennifer Ramsey, and Jesse Karnes.

Above all, my family and friends must be commended for their loving support. My lovely wife, Melissa, and three wonderful children—Agatha, Nico, and Ansel—are sources of daily joy. Melissa should be especially commended for providing advice and editing assistance. Agatha, Nico, and Ansel have all been born while I've been working on this project. Finally, I want to thank my parents and my sister, Amy Ward, who designed the maps in this book.

Thanks to Father Justin and the Sinai monks for providing their blessing to the publication of the two mosaic images from Mount Sinai, which were reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai. Claudia Rapp provided many photos of the Sinai and granted me permission to publish them. Thanks also to the staff at the University of California Press—especially Eric Schmidt, Maeve Cornell-Taylor, and Cindy Fulton—for their work in moving this project to publication. Finally, thanks to Paul Psoinos for his patient work copyediting the manuscript and preventing errors both large and small. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

NOTE ON SOURCES

In this book, I utilize a variety of sources, including ancient literary works, archaeological remains, papyri, and inscriptions. Each of these types of sources provides a different opportunity for analysis, yet all have pitfalls that can lead the unwary scholar astray. In general, the literary sources that describe the Near East during late antiquity are problematic for historians. In contrast to the sources for classical Greek and Roman history, scholars are confronted with an almost complete lack of secular writings. Of the extant sources for late antiquity, only the fourth-century Ammianus Marcellinus and the sixth-century Procopius attempted to follow the standards of historical analysis developed by Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, and Tacitus. In fact, the composition of history devoid of supernatural forces almost disappeared.[1] Religion became one of the driving forces of historical inquiry and clearly influenced the development and narratives of these texts. Religious identity predominates throughout these texts; it is only through close scrutiny that the traces of individual lives and competing identities can be discovered, not all of them revolving around religious belief.[2]

I use six major primary-source texts: Eusebius's *Onomasticon,* the Sinai Martyr Narratives by Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus, the pilgrimage accounts written by Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim (sometimes referred to by the name Antoninus Placentinus), and Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography.* The relevant sections of all but Eusebius's *Onomasticon* are translated and introduced in detail in Daniel Caner's remarkably useful *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai.*[3]

1. See the essays in Croke and Emmett 1983; Rohrbacher 2002.
2. Roggema 2009, 1–2.
3. Caner 2010.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–ca. 340 C.E.) was a prolific writer.[4] His output, spanning the late third and early fourth centuries, surpassed that of any other author, pagan or Christian, of his age. He established himself as one of the preeminent Christian writers in creating a new type of literature—ecclesiastical history—but only his *Onomasticon* concerns me here. The Greek text of the *Onomasticon* is preserved in only one manuscript, currently in the Vatican, which was discovered in the library at Saint Catherine's.[5] In the late fourth century, Jerome translated the *Onomasticon* into Latin, and the Latin text became widely disseminated.[6]

The *Onomasticon* was the fourth in a series of biblical studies by Eusebius, although only the *Onomasticon* has survived.[7] It lists toponyms organized by the biblical book and Greek alphabetical order. Most important, each entry contains a brief description of the site during Eusebius's time, including the contemporary place name, the location of Roman garrisons, and a discussion of the inhabitants of the site. Although the date of the *Onomasticon* is debated, it seems to be a product of the 320s C.E.[8]

Ammonius's *Relatio* claims to be a firsthand account of a pilgrimage to the Sinai in 375–78, during the reign of Valens.[9] Several scholars have suggested that the *Relatio* was written not by a pilgrim to the Sinai in the fourth century but rather by Christian monks at Mount Sinai or Rhaithou in the sixth or seventh century.[10]

The *Relatio* contains two separate reports of Christian martyrdom. In the first, Ammonius describes how he witnessed the martyrdom of forty monks at Mount Sinai at the hands of Saracens, narrating the atrocities in the first person. The second report is told in the third person, through the testimony of an "Ishmaelite" who fled to Mount Sinai from an attack of nomadic Blemmyes at Rhaithou in

4. For an introduction to the life of Eusebius, see the entry s.v., *ODB* 751–52.

5. Codex Vaticanus graecus 1456. This manuscript was apparently created in the eleventh or twelfth century (Wolf 1964, 80).

6. Klostermann 1904; some scholars have questioned his practice of restoring the Greek text based on eighth-century and ninth-century Latin manuscripts (Bury 1905; Wolf 1964, 81).

7. The best discussion of the content of the *Onomasticon* appears in Wolf 1964, 73–80. Also see Barnes 1981, 106–11.

8. Louth 1990, 118–20; Carriker 2003, 39; Taylor 2003, 3–4; Grafton and Williams 2006, 221; Ward 2012.

9. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 1. Ammonius states that the journey began while Peter was patriarch of Alexandria. There are two patriarchs by that name attested, one during the reign of Diocletian and the other during the reign of Valens. Although the synaxarion for 14 January puts Peter in the reign of Diocletian, the *Relatio* must refer to the Peter of Valens's reign, not Diocletian's (Tsames 2003, 280–81, 284).

10. Tillemont 1706, 7.574; Devreesse 1940; Mayerson 1980a; Solzbacher 1989, 231–35, 242; Gatier 1989, 514–17; Grossman 2001a, 178–81. The debate is summarized by Caner 2010, 143–49.

which forty monks were killed.[11] The first report, concerning the Saracen attack on Mount Sinai, seems more likely to be authentic because the it is written in the first person and is largely unembellished as compared with the second report.[12] The second report is more influenced by hagiographic topoi and much more elaborate in its descriptions of martyrdom. Since the two reports are so different in their content, it seems likely that they were originally written by two different authors and later combined into a single text.

All scholars agree that the *Relatio* was written by someone (perhaps two people) familiar with the Sinai, regardless of whether it was written by Ammonius or anonymous monks at Rhaithou or Mount Sinai. Through Ammonius's *Relatio,* we are able to see how the inhabitants of the Sinai thought about themselves, the nomadic populations, and the geography of the Sinai. Although the events themselves may be fiction, the text reflects a deeper cultural knowledge than could have been invented. However, because the image created by the *Relatio* presents an entirely antagonistic relationship between the Saracens and the monks, one cannot use that text to understand other possible forms of interaction between the two groups.

The *Relatio* is extant in several traditions: two Greek lines, Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA), Syriac, Arabic, and Georgian.[13] The Greek and CPA texts claim that Ammonius originally composed the work in Coptic, but no Coptic version of this text has been discovered.[14] A Greek text is clearly the basis of the CPA text, but the surviving Greek version seems to be from a separate tradition than the CPA, and the Greek version(edited by Demetrios Tsames) that I have used may reflect a later tradition as compared with the CPA version.[15] The surviving Greek versions differ in merely minor ways, which may represent later alterations of the text.[16]

As with Ammonius's *Relatio,* the authenticity of Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* has been questioned by many scholars. By the tenth century, the *Narrationes* had become associated with Nilus of Ancyra, largely because the *Narrationes* were

11. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 8.

12. Gatier 1989, 510–17.

13. Caner 2010, 141. I have used only the Greek (ed. Tsames) and CPA (ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) editions.

14. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 42: "Ταῦτα εὑρὼν ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης πρεσβύτερος . . . γεγραμμένα γράμμασιν αἰγυπτιακοῖς, ἅτινα καὶ μετέβαλον δι᾽ ἑλληνικῶν."

15. Caner 2010, 141–43.

16. One of the Greek texts states that the martyrs were killed on 14 January. This date may have been influenced by a similar statement in the *Narrationes* (Mayerson 1980a, 142 n. 50). The CPA text says that the martyrs died on 28 December (Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* [CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff] fol. 61). Although this different date may suggest an interpolation of the sixth century into the text, it does not disprove a fourth-century date for the entire work.

believed to contain philosophical and narrative similarities to Nilus of Ancyra's (d. ca. 430) letters. It is now generally accepted that Nilus of Ancyra did not compose the text.[17] For this reason, the author is commonly referred to as Pseudo-Nilus.[18]

The *Narrationes* concerns the trials and tribulations of the Sinai monk Nilus and his son Theodulus. The *Narrationes* is written in the first person, purportedly by the protagonist Nilus, and begins in medias res.[19] The first *narratio* begins with Nilus arriving at Pharan after fleeing a Saracen attack at Mount Sinai. Although Nilus begins to despair, the people of Pharan embolden him with praise of the monastic life. In the second *narratio,* Nilus begins to tell his life story. When he starts questioning God's will, the people of Pharan urge him to accept his fate and put his trust in God. Nilus continues his story in *narratio* three. This section contains an ethnographic comparison of the behaviors and customs of the Saracens and the Sinai monks. *Narratio* four describes the Saracen attack and how Nilus's son was captured. In the fifth *narratio,* another survivor arrives at Pharan and tells how he and Theodulus survived a Saracen attempt at human sacrifice. The *narratio* dwells on the cruelty and barbaric nature of the Saracens and, in addition to the human sacrifice, describes a vicious attack on a number of ascetics. The sixth *narratio* describes a journey across the Sinai desert to seek recompense for the Saracen attacks from the chief, Ammanes. Nilus participates in the journey to find his son, but when the emissaries reach Ammanes, they learn that Theodulus has been sold as a slave and is living in Elusa in the nearby Negev. Nilus then travels to Elusa and finds his son serving in a church. In the final *narratio,* Theodulus describes his adventures and concludes that he survived by placing his trust in God's Providence.

Most scholars believe that the text is a fabrication of some sort and does not describe the actual experience of a monk known as Nilus.[20] Many have pointed out the linkages between the *Narrationes* and earlier Greco-Roman novels, such as Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon,* from which entire sentence constructions are copied.[21] This has suggested to several scholars the claim that the work is pure

17. Mayerson 1975, 107–8; Nilus Ancyranus, *Epistula* 4.6, mentions two Galatian monks at Mount Sinai. The son was kidnapped by a band of nomads but later escaped. Despite the current consensus, Caner (2010, 75) suggests that Nilus of Ancyra could have been the author.

18. See Devreesse 1940, 220–22; Gatier 1989, 518; Caner 1994; Link 2005.

19. The first line reads, "Ἀλώμενος ἐγὼ μετὰ τὴν ἔφοδον τῶν βαρβάρων ἦλθον εἰς τὴν Φαράν" (Pseudo-Nilus 1.1).

20. Heussi 1921, 6–10; Devreesse 1940, 220–22; Henninger 1955; Ševčenko 1966, 256. Pseudo-Nilus is well informed about the topography of the region, leading most to assume that the text was written by someone in the Sinai or a nearby region such as the Negev (Caner 2004, 138, and 2010, 76–77); Solzbacher (1989, 228) instead thinks that the source was a map.

21. Caner 1994; Link 2005.

literary fantasy.[22] Other scholars have argued that the text possesses greater historical value. Vassilios Christides, for example, thinks that the ethnographic accounts of the Saracens are valuable even if the rest of the text is suspect.[23]Philip Mayerson, although conceding that Nilus and his son Theodulus are probably fictional characters, believes that the text itself provides many credible details. He argues that the *Narrationes* is based on a plausible event, a Bedouin raid on the unprotected monks, even though the discussion of the event is highly literary. The date of production is also debated, with some scholars preferring late-fourth-century, fifth-century, or even sixth-century dates.[24] The *Narrationes* can be read as a late-antique romance that reveals much about the constructions of identities and the self.[25] Thus, it is not the overt moral of the tale that concerns me but how the underlying assumptions and implications demonstrate the creation of identity and images of the Other.

The *Itinerarium Egeriae* (*Itinerary of Egeria*) is preserved in only one manuscript, dated to the eleventh century, which was discovered in 1884 in Spain.[26] Egeria describes the Christian holy places that she visited and the liturgy of Jerusalem that she witnessed during a three-year (381–84) pilgrimage to the Near East.[27] Egeria possibly originated in Spain or Gaul and may have been writing to inform an aristocratic circle or possibly a group of ascetic women.[28] Because readers had never seen the regions that she mentions, she tries to impart her impressions, feelings, and visual sensations to her readers; the *Itinerarium Egeriae* is an excellent source on the geography of the late-fourth-century Near East and the development of Christian holy places.

The text of the *Itinerarium Egeriae* begins and ends in midsentence, and it is possible that only about one-third of the original text is extant.[29] The surviving text begins as Egeria's party approaches Mount Sinai and therefore does not include her journey to the Sinai Peninsula or the sites visited en route to Mount Sinai. Some of this missing information has been preserved in the twelfth-century *Liber de Locis Sanctis* written by Peter the Deacon.[30]

22. Heussi 1921, 6–10; Gatier 1989, 517–19.

23. Christides 1973.

24. Heussi 1917, 154; Mayerson 1963, 160–61; Devreesse 1940, 220–22; Gatier 1989, 520–21; Shahid 1989, 134–39; Grossman 1999, 461, and 2001a, 182; Caner 2010, 75–76.

25. See Whitmarsh 2011 on identity and the Greek novels.

26. Gamurrini 1884. Codex Arretinus 6.3. The critical edition is Maraval 1982. I have also consulted the text by Franceschini and Weber 1965 and the text and commentary by C. Weber 1994.

27. Davies 1954, 95–100; Devos 1967.

28. On Egeria's origins and audience, see Valerius, *Epistle* 5.7–8; Maraval 1982, 21; Hunt 1982, 163–64; Sivan 1988, 528–30, 533–34; Díaz y Díaz 1982, 326 n. 8; C. Weber 1989, 450–56,

29. Wilkinson 1981, 3.

30. Peter the Deacon apparently used the *Itinerarium* at Monte Cassino (Gingras 1970, 16–17), copying Egeria's descriptions of sites almost verbatim but leaving out any details about Egeria herself or the people she encountered (Caner 2010, 211–12).

The *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* describes a pilgrimage from Placentina (Piacenza) in Italy to the Holy Land. The author, commonly referred to as the Piacenza pilgrim, traveled throughout the Near East, visiting Cyprus, Jerusalem and Palestine, Egypt, the Sinai, Syria, and the upper Euphrates River in either the 560s or the 570s.[31]

This account provides invaluable descriptions of the Near East in the late sixth century. Although often not so descriptive about his feelings and impressions as Egeria, the Piacenza pilgrim does not focus exclusively on sites of religious significance and often provides descriptions of secular locations. In addition, unlike Egeria, he actually describes the appearance of buildings and sites, whereas Egeria had simply mentioned what she saw without description.[32] He seems to have recorded what he found interesting rather than just those items that elucidated Scripture. The Piacenza pilgrim describes not only places that he saw firsthand but also others that he did not visit. This suggests that he received information from guides, traveling companions, or a guidebook.[33] Most scholars implicitly assume that the details provided by the *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* are generally sound, but one may be more skeptical about the places he knew only via hearsay.[34]

Finally, Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography* contains a wealth of geographic knowledge; but it should be read as a theological rather than a geographic text. In it, Cosmas attempted to describe the nature and structure of the universe as revealed in the Christian Scriptures rather than through physical observations. According to Cosmas, the universe is divided into two parts, reflecting the two natures of mankind—one impure, facing pain, death, and immorality, and another pure, representing immortality and holiness. These were separated by a firmament that prevented the imperfect humans, who lived in the lower section, from reaching the upper section reserved for the holy. Everything was enclosed inside a cube represented by the Tabernacle as presented to Moses in Exodus.[35] Although Cosmas completely rejects pagan models of the circular universe, his work shows that he was aware of previous pagan scholarship, and he debated the attempt by his contemporary Philoponus to Christianize these pagan theories.[36]

The *Christian Topography* has been dated to 547–49 because two eclipses occurred in the year 547 while Cosmas was completing the text.[37] The author of the *Christian*

31. On the name, see Milani 1977, 34–36. On the date, ibid. 36–38. Milani prefers 560. Wilkinson 2002, 12, prefers 570.

32. Leyerle 1996, 136–37.

33. Wilkinson 2002, 13.

34. See, for example, Devreesse 1940; Mayerson 1963; Gatier 1989.

35. Wolska-Conus 1962, 37–61.

36. Ibid. 147–244.

37. Wolska-Conus 1968, 16; Cosmas Indicopleustes 6.3. It is preserved in three manuscripts: Vaticanus graecus 699, dating to the ninth century, and two eleventh-century manuscripts, Sinaïticus graecus

Topography provides many details of his life in the text, but he never mentions his own name, possibly because his ideas would have been deemed heretical at the time. The name Cosmas Monachos appeared in the ninth century, and the term Indicopleustes (The Sailor to India) was added in the tenth or eleventh century, but it is doubtful that he ever visited India.[38] Cosmas tells us that he was a merchant who traveled extensively in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.[39] He visited Ethiopia between 522 and 525.[40] He sailed into the Persian Gulf and landed on the island of Socotora, which lies at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula and was the last harbor on the naval route to India.[41] He also sailed as far as the modern Cape Guardafui in Somalia.[42]

Cosmas visited the Sinai during his travels and stayed at the monastery of Rhaithou.[43] He includes an in-depth discussion of the Sinai as a result of his stay there, in which he demonstrates the importance of the Exodus account for understanding the nature of the universe. Because the work is more about theology than geography, the descriptions of the Sinai in the *Christian Topography* cannot be taken at face value and must be evaluated to determine their theological implications. This complicates the use of the *Christian Topography,* but its testimony cannot be ignored. The survival of his manuscript in the Sinai demonstrates the importance of the text to the Sinai monks.

Other sources. Archaeological excavations have added to our knowledge in the region; however, interpretation of archaeological materials is often more difficult than dealing with literary sources. Many of these excavations have been published only in preliminary form, limiting the amount of material for analysis. Most important is the invaluable survey of monastic structures and work at Saint Catherine's Monastery largely conducted in the 1970s.[44] More recently, excavations have been conducted at Pharan and Ras Raya (Rhaithou), although the publications remain preliminary.[45]

1186, dating to the eleventh century from the Sinai, and Laurentianus pluteus 9.28. Wolska-Conus's edition is based on Vaticanus graecus 699. When one of the eleventh-century manuscripts agreed with Vaticanus graecus 699, she adopted that reading but did not include the variant text. Although this process has been criticized, the Wolska-Conus edition remains the most widely used. See Alexander 1972 for criticisms.

38. Wolska-Conus 1968, 1.1–2, 61; Frézouls 1989, 442–43.

39. Cosmas Indicopleustes 2.54, 56.

40. Wolska-Conus 1968, 16; Cosmas Indicopleustes 2.56.

41. Ibid. 2.29, 3.65. See the first-century *Periplus Maris Erythraei.*

42. Cosmas Indicopleustes 2.30; Kirwan 1972, 169–70.

43. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.8, 14, 51–52.

44. Grossman 1988; Dahari 2000. Also see Weitzmann 1973; Weitzmann and Galey 1976; Weitzmann and Galavaris 1991.

45. Grossman 1984, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2001b; Kawatoko and Bunka 1995; Kawatoko, Senta, and Chosa 1996; Kawatoko, Chosa, and Bunka 1998; Kawatoko and Shindo 2009.

Papyri provide a snapshot of life in the region but are limited to the sites of Nessana in the Negev and Petra, capital of Third Palestine. The Nessana Papyri (cited as *P.Ness.*) were discovered in the 1930s and published in 1958.[46] They were discovered in the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus and the Church of Mary Theotokos. There are in total five archives: a soldier's archive of seventeen papyri dated to 505–96, the papers of Patrick son of Sergius, who died in 628, the archive of George son of Patrick from the late sixth century, a post–Islamic Conquest archive, and a literary archive. These five archives provide a wealth of knowledge about Nessana in the sixth and seventh centuries, but none of them explicitly mentions larger historical events such as the Persian or the Islamic Conquest. The Petra Papyri (cited as *P.Petra*) were discovered inside Room I of the Petra Church in a series of rooms that were added to the ecclesiastical complex.[47] The documents date between 537 and 593 and chiefly concern the family of a certain Theodorus. They are still in the process of decipherment and publication: four volumes have appeared as of the completion of this book.[48]

Inscriptions make up one final source of information about the region. Among the most curious features of the Sinai are the almost innumerable inscriptions left by Nabataean travelers and traders in the second and third centuries C.E. The writings are mostly made up of names and greetings, and there is not a single monumental inscription in the entire Sinai written in Nabataean.[49] The largest concentration of these inscriptions was found in the Wadi Haggag.[50] A systematic search of the Sinai found more than 3,850 inscriptions.[51] Although the dated Nabataean inscriptions were written prior to the chronological period covered in this book, one of the latest inscriptions may be Christian.[52] These Nabataean inscriptions were noted by Cosmas Indicopleustes, who believed that they were carvings of the ancient Israelites.[53] In addition, a number of Armenian inscriptions have been discovered in the Sinai, indicating pilgrimage prior to and after the Islamic Conquest.[54]

46. Literary papyri: Casson and Hettich 1950. Nonliterary papyri: Kraemer 1958. The nonliterary papyri are occasionally cited by other authors as *P.Colt.*

47. On the discovery of the scrolls and their archaeological context, see Fiema et al. 2001, 139–50; Frösén, Arjava, and Lehtinen 2002, 5–8.

48. Frösén, Arjava, and Lehtinen 2002; Arjava, Buchholz, and Gagos 2007; Arjava et al. 2011, Koenen et al. 2013.

49. M. MacDonald 2003, 47–48.

50. Negev 1977a.

51. M. E. Stone 1992–94.

52. Schmitt-Korte 1990. This four-letter Nabataean inscription is flanked by two Christograms. If the Christograms were carved by the author (Maslam) of this Nabataean inscription, then the Christograms may suggest that the inscription was carved in the middle of the fourth century, extending the known range of dated Nabataean inscriptions in the Sinai by one hundred years. This is the only Nabataean inscription that may be Christian.

53. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.53–54.

54. Mayerson 1982; M. E. Stone 1982 and 1986.

Two longer inscriptions, one from the Sinai and one from Beersheva in the Negev, play prominent roles in the later portions of the book. The inscription from the Sinai is of an unknown late-antique date. It currently lies in a chapel dedicated to the "Holy Fathers slaughtered at Sinai and Rhaithou" and honors Sinai Martyrs.[55] Its exact translation is debated. The meaning of the other inscription, the Beersheva Edict, also remains in doubt.[56] Fragments of this inscription were sold by antiquities dealers in Beersheva in the early twentieth century, and a recent discovery has added substantially to our knowledge of the inscription. The inscription may have sought to end overzealous tax collection by establishing fixed payment amounts for various governmental positions in the region.[57]

NOTE ON ARABIC NAMES AND TOPONYMS

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, and in order to preclude any confusion, all diacritical marks have been omitted throughout the book with Arabic personal names and toponyms appearing in transliteration in the roman typeface.

55. See Caner 2010, 51–63.

56. Basic bibliography on the text includes Macalister 1902, 236; Clermont-Ganneau 1906; Robinson 1908; Abel 1909 and 1920; Hartmann 1913; Burkitt 1920, 19, 20; Alt 1923, 52–55; Van Berchem 1952, 33–36; Kraemer 1958, 119–25; Mayerson 1986a; Isaac 1990, 287–88, and 1995, 138–39; Di Segni 2004. The standard text is Alt 1923, 52–55, but Di Segni 2004 should be preferred. Di Segni 2004, 142–46, provides an excellent analysis of previous scholarship on the edict.

57. Di Segni 2004, 136, lines 1–5.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
ACO	*Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum.* Ed. E. Schwartz. 4 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924–40.
ACOR	American Center of Oriental Research
ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
A.G.	*Anno Graecorum* (from 312/1 B.C.E.)
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*Americal Journal of Philology*
Ä&L	*Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant*
A.M.	*Anno Mundi*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BZ	*Byzantische Zeitschrift*
CCPA	Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CPA	Christian Palestinian Aramaic
CRAI	*Comptes-Rendus des Séances de l'Année de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
SS	Scriptores Syri
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

CTh	*Codex Theodosianus*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
GGM	*Geographi Graeci Minores.* Ed. C. Müller. 2 vols. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1855–82.
GM	*Göttinger Miszellen*
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JARCE	*Journal of the Archaeological Research Center in Egypt*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LA	*Liber Annus*
NPNF	*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark
OC	*Oriens Christianus*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
ODB	*Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium.* Ed. A. Kazhdan. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
PEF	*Palestine Exploration Fund*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*
PL	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*
P.Ness.	*Excavations at Nessana.* Vol. 3, *Non-Literary Papyri.* Ed. C. J. Kraemer, Jr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.
PP	Piacenza pilgrim
P.Petra	*The Petra Papyri.* Vol. 1. Ed. J. Frösén, A. Arjava, and M. Lehtinen. ACOR Publications, vol. 4. Amman: ACOR, 2002.
———.	Vol. 2. Ed. L. Koenen et al. [L. Koenen, M. Kaimio, J. Kaimio, and R. Daniel.] ACOR Publications, vol. 7. Amman: ACOR, 2013.
———.	Vol. 3. Ed. A. Arjava, B. Matias, and G. Traianos. ACOR Publications, vol. 5. Amman: ACOR, 2007.
———.	Vol. 4. Ed. A. Arjava et al. 2011. [A. Arjava, M. Buchholz, T. Gagos, and M. Kaimio.] ACOR Publications, vol. 6. Amman: ACOR, 2011.
P.Yadin	*The Documents from the Bar-Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters.* Vol. 1, *Greek Papyri, Aramaic and Nabatean Signatures and Subscriptions.* Ed. N. Lewis, Y. Yadin, and J. Greenfield. Judean Desert Studies, vol. 2. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989.

RB	*Revue Biblique*
ROC	*Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*
SC	Sources Chrétiens
SHAJ	*Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*
T&MByz	*Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines*
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
v., vv.	verse, verses
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

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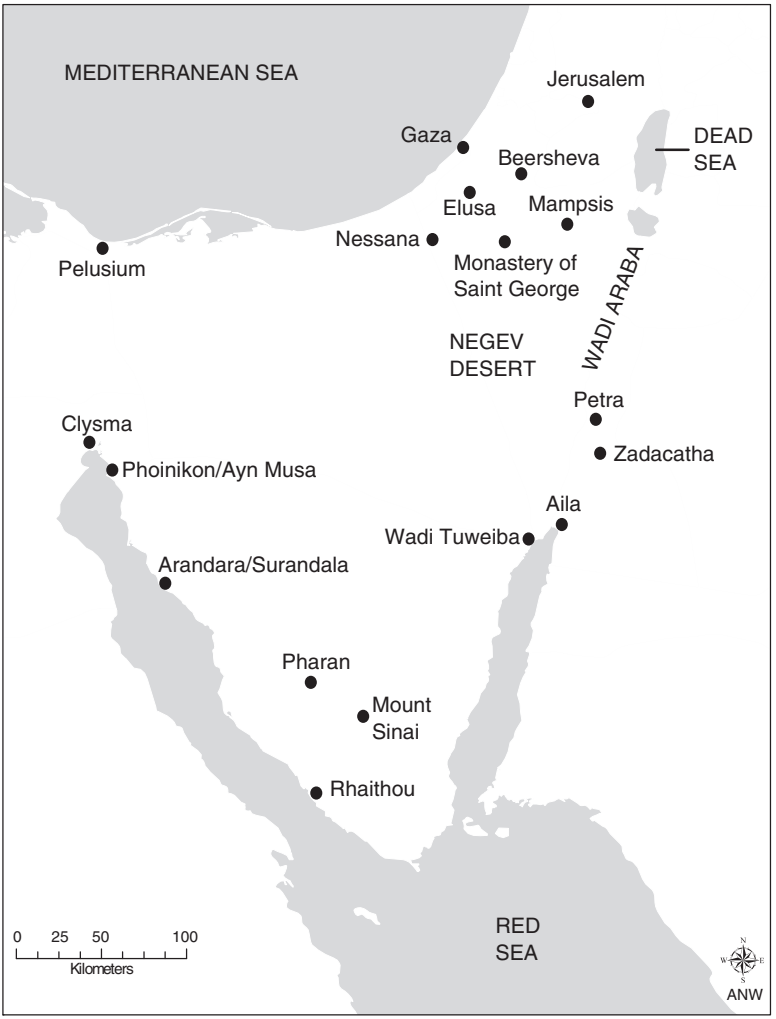
Introduction

In a world where wealth was determined by agricultural prosperity, the Sinai appeared barren and unimportant. With minimal rainfall and no cities, there was little of interest to Greco-Roman pagan society. To early Christians, however, the Sinai's biblical connections exerted a powerful attraction, enticing monks and pilgrims to experience the locations of the Exodus. For these Christians, the emptiness of the Sinai was an asset that created the perfect conditions for experiencing solitude (*hēsychia*). The Sinai was far from unpopulated, however, and Christians encountered an indigenous nomadic population there—a population described as cruel, barbaric, and unrepentantly pagan. The sources of the late-antique Near East named these nomads Saracens.[1] Later, during the Muslim Conquests of the Near East in the seventh century C.E., Christians applied the word "Saracen" to the Muslims, identifying the Muslims with the already-existing negative image of the Saracens. While the term "Saracen" was applied to nomads throughout the Near East, accounts written about the Christian communities in the Sinai Peninsula provide some of the most detailed and polemical descriptions of these nomadic groups.

1. I feel that to employ the words "Saracen" (or "Saracens") or "barbarian" (or "barbarians") as my own usage risks conveying a negative judgment. To avoid this, I generally use the words "nomad" and "nomads." These terms are not without their own set of problems, because they imply a strict binary of opposites between sedentary and nomadic ways of life—which, as will be shown in chapter 1, does not accurately reflect living conditions in the Near East at this time. Nor were there ever just two groups, sedentary and nomadic, in the region. I have viewed this risk as less dangerous than using the word "Saracen," if only because "nomad" preserves the assumption in the sources of the separateness between the communities without invoking the baggage of the word "Saracen."



MAP 1. The Sinai Peninsula and the southern Levant in late antiquity. (Map: Amy Ward.)

The borders of the Roman Empire conjure romantic images—Hadrian's Wall reaching across Britain, the forests stretching beyond the Danube, and the open deserts of North Africa. The Romans had long faced off against the groups beyond the border, first as Roman territory expanded during the Republic and under Emperor Augustus and then later, when the borders became less expansive and more defensive. The Romans, like the Greeks before them, typically called anyone

not culturally like themselves "barbarians," whether they were Celtic, "German," Persian, Berber, or Arab.[2] Large pockets of supposed barbarians could also be found throughout the empire, for Romanization in the provinces had been steady but was not complete by the fourth century. Once the emperors had adopted Christianity, they could use the new faith to spread imperial culture to these barbarians both inside and outside the frontiers.

Nomadic tribes had lived in the Sinai for centuries, but they attracted outside attention only with the rise of Christianity and the immigration of monks to the peninsula. These monks enhanced their spiritual sanctity and their claim to the Sinai by asserting that the nomads radiated a constant threat of violence and martyrdom against them. To make this point, the monks described in exceedingly gruesome detail the attacks that these nomadic groups were accused of perpetrating. Their accounts—the Sinai Martyr Narratives, namely Ammonius's *Relatio* and Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes*—demonized the nomadic population by describing the nomads' pastoral culture and purportedly impure religious practices, including black magic and animal and human sacrifice. In these sources, Christian monks created an image of the Saracens that reflected their own holy qualities in a completely oppositional fashion. The Saracen image therefore was not an autochthonous creation of the nomads; rather, it was invented by Greco-Roman sources, Christians in particular, and was used to marginalize the nomadic populations of the Near East and in the Sinai.

The real relationship between the nomadic groups and the sedentary populations of the Near East, in the Sinai largely represented by Christian monks, was much more nuanced than the Christians' representation of the nomads. In theory, the Eastern Roman Empire held the strategic advantage, but in many geographic regions, the nomadic groups maintained tactical superiority. For this reason, in Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia the Roman authorities utilized the nomadic groups (the most famous of them commonly known as the Ghassanids) as a buffer against the Sassanid Persians and their nomadic allies the Lakhmids. Despite this reality, the role of these allied tribes, including those in the Sinai, in defending the empire is overshadowed by descriptions of Saracen attacks in late-antique literature. The reiteration of these descriptions, especially those detailing martyrdoms in the Sinai, reinforced the perceived differences between the nomads and the Christian population.[3] In addition, although many of the nomads in the Near East converted to Christianity in the fourth century and later, the Sinai sources consistently portray the nomads as pagan idolaters.[4]

2. See Isaac 2004 and 2011; Gruen 2011.

3. Shahid 1995–2002, 1.2.984–86.

4. While use of the terms "pagan" and "paganism" have come under fire in recent scholarship because of their modern pejorative connotation, I continue to use them in this book because these terms

Though scholars continue to debate the verisimilitude of the so-called Saracen threat, I am largely interested in how Christian discourse created this in concert with the Saracen image, not whether the Saracens were in fact a danger to the Christian communities of the Sinai.[5] The sources indicate that the nomads were perceived as a threat and that the inhabitants of the late-antique Near East and the imperial authorities believed that such a threat existed. When the sources are viewed in this light, the descriptions of the nomads become evidence of how Greco-Roman authors viewed and represented the nomads, but not necessarily of historical events and practices. Furthermore, the manifestation of this perceived threat in the Sinai Martyr Narratives is of crucial significance for understanding Christian self-conception in the Sinai.

Christians used the Saracen image along with the identification of biblical sites to justify monastic occupation of the Sinai. The monks identified sites that were mentioned in Exodus and worked to reinforce connections between late-antique locations and those mentioned in biblical accounts. They accomplished this through naming, repetition of rituals, and construction of mnemonic physical structures. In doing so, the monks claimed the Sinai and the Exodus in the name of Christ, superseding the claims of the Jews and the indigenous nomads.

These two techniques—linking Sinai sites with biblical events and describing the nomads as bloodthirsty villains—combined to enhance the reputations of the monks who practiced in the Sinai. The biblical sites were believed to possess an inherent spiritual power, which the monks absorbed as a result of their pious lives; and the Saracen threat demonstrated that the monks lived daily under the threat of martyrdom. By the middle of the fourth century, when Christian monks began to settle in the Sinai, there were few avenues within the Roman Empire to attain

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remain the most widely recognizable. (See also North 2011, 489–92.) Other scholars have proposed different terms, but these often present problems. Garth Fowden (1991, 119 n. *), for example, suggested the use of the term "polytheists," as used by scholars of comparative religion; however, Drake (1996, 3 n. 1) rightly rejects the term for late antiquity because it "would merely reinforce an already lamentable tendency in modern readers to presume that only Christians were monotheists, thereby distorting the fourth-century landscape as significantly as the term 'pagan' now does." Bowersock proposed and used the terms "Hellenism" for pagan culture and "Hellenes" for the people. (See especially Bowersock 1990.) Trombley (1993) also used the term "Hellenic religion" for late-antique paganism. Although these scholars use the actual late-antique term for pagans (*Hellēnes*), they risk confusing culture with religion and ethnicity, and could be misinterpreted as referring to previous periods. Chuvin's (1990, 9) definition that "*Pagani* or pagans are quite simply 'people of the place,' town or country, who preserved their local customs," is quite applicable for this idea that pagan practices in the Sinai and Third Palestine were survivals from the Nabataean religion. Therefore, despite the problems with "pagan," I have continued to employ it as a general term, without intending to endorse the moral and value judgments inherent in it.

5. See Banning 1986, 1987, 1992; Parker 1986, 1987; Graf 1989; Mayerson 1989; Isaac 1990.

martyrdom. The Sinai was an exception: a space in which martyrdom could occur and was thought to.[6]

Modern scholarship on the Sinai has focused on the authenticity of the Martyr Narratives, in the sense of whether they describe actual historical events or even whether they are what they purport to be.[7] Some scholars, such as Philip Mayerson and Rudolf Solzbacher, have used the Sinai literature to write historical narratives of the Christian communities there with an emphasis on the creation of martyrs.[8] There has not been much recent work on the Sinai, but I expect this situation to change now that Daniel Caner has compiled the Martyr Narratives and translated them into English for the first time in his *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai*.[9]

Caner argues that the invention of a martyr tradition served to complete "the process of Christianization" by imbuing "obedience, suffering, and triumph" into the landscape of the Sinai.[10] Yet the Sinai possessed a unique set of biblical associations that visitors to the Sinai did not forget to mention—the Sinai did not need martyrs to make it Christian. Alternatively, Solzbacher argues that the tradition of Sinai Martyrs was responsible for increasing the popularity of pilgrimage to the Sinai.[11] However, neither of the two surviving pilgrimage accounts (Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim) mentions the martyrs at all. If these pilgrims were motivated to travel to the Sinai because of the martyr tradition, then surely they would have said so, just as they describe the holiness of the monks and the biblical connections of the Sinai. This omission suggests that the martyrdom accounts were not intended for consumption by outsiders; rather, the monks themselves were the audience envisioned, with the intention to reinforce the claim that they were the righteous inhabitants of such holy land. Outsiders did read these works, however, influencing imperial security in the sixth century and possibly impacting Christian-Muslim relationships till modern times.

The Sinai monks, in participating in the creation of the negative Saracen image, unwittingly came to influence global, cultural, and religious politics. In the early seventh century, Muslim armies conquered the Near East, including the Sinai, thoroughly defeating the armies of the Eastern Roman Empire. The first non-Muslim references to these invasions refer to the perpetrators as Saracens, because

6. Christians were also subject to violence from Christians of other doctrinal sects. The most famous example comes from North Africa, where orthodox and Donatist Christians violently clashed. See Gaddis 2005, 103–30; Shaw 2011.

7. I describe the scholarship surrounding the authenticity of these works above in the Note on Sources.

8. Mayerson 1963, 1980b; Solzbacher 1989. Others include Eckenstein 1921 and Hobbs 1995.

9. Caner 2010.

10. Ibid. 64.

11. Solzbacher 1989, 200.

the Muslims appeared at first glance to be merely another nomadic group. From this inauspicious origin, "Saracen" quickly became the word most frequently used by Christians to refer to Muslims throughout the medieval period, bringing the pejorative image with it. This usage has profoundly impacted how Christians have viewed Muslims and Middle Easterners up to the present day.[12] As John Tolan has argued, medieval Christian texts about Muslims "provide concrete examples of how one perceived as other can be pinned down through discourse, made explicable, rendered inert, made useful (or at least harmless) to one's own ideological agenda."[13] As will be demonstrated in the present work, the imagined and invented Saracen Other of the Sinai served similar purposes in the pre-Islamic period.

POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE LATE-ANTIQUE SINAI

I have read the Sinai Martyr Narratives through the framework of postcolonial studies. This field originates out of Edward Said's criticism of Near Eastern scholarship. He famously argued that Orientalists in the long nineteenth century projected exoticism and weakness onto the East (Muslim Arabs especially) and wittingly or unwittingly helped to justify colonial endeavors in the Middle East.[14] Despite critics, Said's theories have exerted a tremendous influence on scholarly activity about identity and culture.[15] In brief, postcolonialism seeks to understand the complex interaction between imperial power and discourse and to discover the voice and thoughts of the colonized (the subaltern), the majority of whom are oppressed or marginalized.[16]

In the Sinai, the monks acted as colonizers, bringing the new imperial culture, Christianity, and justified their occupation of it with vitriolic attacks against the colonized nomads. Although the Sinai had been controlled by the Romans since the annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom, it remained a relatively unknown, little-visited region, inhabited by nomadic groups and, probably, descendants of the Nabataeans based at the only true town, Pharan. The ethnographic information in the literature of the monks, therefore, reflects this early stage of contact between imperial power and indigenous lifestyles. As Greg Woolf has demonstrated, Roman ethnographic literature on Britain continued to describe the Britons as savage and unlearned even after decades of contact and rule by the Roman authorities. This provided a foil by which Rome and Roman culture could be artic-

12. This is expanded in much greater detail in chapter 5.

13. Tolan 2002, xxiii.

14. Said 1979.

15. For criticism of Said, see, for example, Irwin 2006, esp. 277–330. Macfie 2002 is an excellent introduction to the debate surrounding Orientalism. Lockman (2004, 215–67) provides an interesting discussion of more recent interpretations of Middle Eastern Studies.

16. Though dated, Ashcroft, Gareth, and Helen 1995 remains an excellent introduction.

ulated.[17] In the context of the Sinai, descriptions of the Saracens as savage pagans served to reinforce the pious nature of the Christian monks. It granted justification to monastic colonial actions by distancing the nomads from what were historically their own lands.[18] As Nicholas Thomas has argued, "colonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress. . . . Rather, colonialism has always . . . been a cultural process; its discoveries and trespasses are imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives."[19] The Sinai Martyr Narratives enact this very process by creating an image of the Saracens as unworthy of the land, whereas, in the words of the fourth-century pilgrim Egeria, the monks were "equal in dignity to the land itself."[20]

As Christians migrated and settled in the Sinai, they replaced native toponyms with names derived from the Bible. As Kevin Butcher argues, "renaming is a colonial act of 'symbolic violence' aimed at the landscape," which in the case of the Sinai created an alternative topography, alienating indigenous elements.[21] In the ancient period, the best-documented process of renaming occurred in Syria under the Seleucid dynasty, where sites were consciously named after locations in the Greco-Macedonian homeland.[22] In the early modern period, the earliest colonists who settled America largely replaced indigenous names with others from their homelands.[23] A similar process occurred after the creation of the modern state of Israel, where Hebrew names, especially biblical names, replaced Arabic ones. This imprinting made the land unrecognizable to Palestinian refugees on official

17. Woolf 2011, 89–94.

18. Similar conditions have been noted in North America, where hundreds of native groups were defined by one word—"Indian." Horrific stories were told about the indigenous populations as justification for brutal assaults by the colonizers. (See Bach 2000, esp. 6–10.)

19. N. Thomas 1994, 2. On how culture and colonialism have shaped each other, also see the essays in Dirks 1992.

20. Egeria 3.4: "senex integer et monachus a prima vita et, ut hic dicunt, ascitis, et . . . qualis dignus est esse in eo loco."

21. Butcher 2003, 99–100. Spurr (1993, 4) wrote that "the very process by which one culture subordinates another begins in the act of naming."

22. See Frézouls 1977, esp. 238–48.

23. Puritans named every new town in New England before 1660 after communities in their English homeland; whereas in Virginia two counties had the names of English rulers or English communities. Other American colonies demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of community names came from the settlers' places of origin, with the exception of the Quakers, who retained a few indigenous names supplemented with names based on their ideals, such as Philadelphia or Concord, and the settlers of the back country, who used clan names and cultural names (such as cooking implements) in addition to the names from their points of origin (Fischer 1989, 36–38, 239–40, 441–45, 639–42). Also see Bach (2000, 67–112) on how naming and mapping functioned as colonial activities in North America in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century.

documents and helped justify Israeli exploitation of Palestinian land.[24] Even though the late-antique Near East differed from these two modern examples in some ways—anyone who has read Eusebius's *Onomasticon* will understand the multinominal nature of settlement in the region—the actions of the monks in identifying, memorializing, and commemorating biblical events in the Sinai displaced local traditions.[25]

Postcolonialism is especially interested in the creation of identity and image. Identity is created through navigating competing narratives.[26] In the study of the ancient and early medieval worlds, analyzing identity formation can be difficult, because the source documents are limited. Greek literature has proved especially fruitful for understanding how Greek identity was constructed in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.[27] Later, the so-called Greek Romances have proved valuable for understanding the construction of Hellenic identities under the Roman Empire.[28] Recent work has demonstrated that there was no unified Greek or indigenous identity in Roman Syria; rather, identities were constantly transforming and interacting to meet new circumstances.[29]

Many scholars have investigated the role of the Other in shaping identities in the ancient world. Greek and, later, Roman and Christian identities were predicated on the construction of the identity of the Other. In the dialectic of identity, several scholars have argued that "we" can be known only in opposition to the Other.[30] Foundational work in this field has examined the construction of Greekness and Otherness, but the nature of the sources makes it almost impossible to understand the converse—how the Other understood the Greeks.[31] For example, Edith Hall's *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* convincingly argues that Athenian tragedy created both Greek identity and a Persian image in the aftermath of the Greco-Persian Wars. These images divided the entire world into Greeks (*Hellēnes*) and barbarians.[32] François Hartog's *The Mirror of Herodotus* explores how Herodotus's Scythians reflected an opposite of Greek society.[33] In both cases, Persian and Scythian reactions to these constructed images of themselves are unknown. Recently, Erich Gruen has demonstrated that although

24. Abu El-Haj 2001, 32–35, 82–98; Gregory 2004, 88, 135–36.

25. Thanks to Andrew Jacobs for mentioning the multinominal landscape of the *Onomasticon.*

26. Somers 1994; Ezzy 1998.

27. See J. Hall 2002.

28. See Whitmarsh 2011.

29. Andrade 2013.

30. Hentsch 1992, 190.

31. Cartledge 1993; also see Lenfant 2011.

32. E. Hall 1989; for an alternative reading, see Gruen 2011, 9–75. Unfortunately, we do not know what the Persians thought of the Greeks.

33. Hartog 1988.

the ancient Greeks and Romans (and others as well) thought in terms of binary Others, they also created links to the Other by refashioning the Other in accordance with more creative and less hostile purposes.[34] Likewise, Ian Moyer's *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* has demonstrated that Greek and Egyptian discourses occasionally operated like a dialogue rather than a unilateral imposition of Hellenism onto a barbaric, Othered Egypt.[35]

Greco-Roman authors applied similar rhetorical tropes as examples to fit specific circumstances, and common topoi were used to describe all peoples who were Other.[36] It is therefore hard to distinguish the practices of non-Greco-Roman populations from one another, because similar phrases were used for all. Furthermore, with Christianity came the Othering of pagans and Jews.[37] Sorting through the problems of identity in the late-antique and early Islamic period is also exceeding complex, because "though religious allegiance came to be the prime form of identity, other forms of affiliation—political, linguistic, geographical, ethnic, historical, cultural, and sectarian—still bore weight."[38]

This idea that the representations of different races were created by rhetoric reinforces recent research into the field of ancient ethnographies, such as the ethnographic sections in Herodotus's *Histories,* which suggests that such descriptions cannot be taken at face value, because the stereotypes they employ are based on the needs of the genre, audience, and writer. Each description of the Other was cleverly selected and crafted to create a particular response, and a description of a people in these ethnographies should not be accepted as historical truth. In Woolf's words, "ethnography had become a new species of myth."[39] For this reason, it may not be possible to use Greco-Roman sources to understand the culture of the historical Near Eastern nomads.[40]

34. Gruen 2011, esp. 308–51.

35. Moyer 2011.

36. For example, early Christian writers typically used the terms "Ethiopians," "Egyptians," and "Blacks" to indicate the presence of the devil. These motifs were developed not because of racial descent but because those groups stood in for those who were "blackened by their sins." (See Byron 2002.) Earlier writings could be quite nuanced in their depiction of Ethiopians and other Africans (Gruen 2011, 197–220). Jewish conceptions of Black Africans do not seem to be inherently racist (Goldenberg 2003, esp. 17–128). On the Other and its application for Middle Eastern studies, see Hentsch 1992 and the essays in Djedidi and Dirasat al-Wahdah al-Arabiya 2008.

37. Though of course individual situations were more complicated. On Jews, see C. Evans and Hagner 1993 and Lieu 1996. Also see the essays in Kahlos 2011a, esp. Kahlos 2011b and 2011c.

38. Hoyland 1997, 20–22; quotation on p. 20.

39. Woolf 2011, 111–17; quotation on p. 114. Also see Skinner 2012 on the role of ethnography in the creation of identity and the Other.

40. The way Greco-Roman sources treated the Other is quite different from, say, white slaveowners in North America, whose accounts can be used to study the origins and contributions of Africans in South Carolina (Peter Wood 1974).

Prior to Islam, attitudes toward Arabian nomads tended to be clouded by assumptions about the contrast between Greco-Roman lifestyles and those of the barbarians. Very few authors seem to have had personal knowledge of the customs of the nomadic groups, meaning that descriptions often contain the same tropes that were applied to all supposedly uncivilized groups.[41] No writer that we know of wrote about the Arabian nomads exclusively; rather, they appear as incidental characters in larger works.[42] This is especially true for the Sinai sources, in which the nomads appear only in order to commit violence against the Christian monks.

In the Sinai, only the records written by the Christian monks survive. If—and that is a substantial "if"—the nomadic groups wrote anything beyond the hundreds of short greetings that survive on the rocks of the Sinai, their works are not extant. They have no voice and are therefore a classic subaltern people.[43] For this reason, it was the Christian monks who constructed the image of the nomadic groups, and not the nomads themselves.

The sources about the late-antique Sinai claim to provide detailed narratives of events such as martyrdoms, but the historical accuracy of these sources has often been doubted. Instead of attempting to determine if the sources about the Sinai are "historically true" (something that is impossible to determine given their nature), I view the Sinai Martyr Narratives as having been constructed by the Sinai monks and other Christians in order to give meaning to their relationship with the nomadic inhabitants of the Near East. As Nancy Khalek has recently stated, "we can, and should, ask questions about *why those narratives came to look the way they did,* and propose scenarios for *how* they got to be that way."[44] This book attempts to understand the nomadic image created by the Sinai Martyr Narratives and to suggest a possible reason for their existence.

In terms of identity, the Sinai functioned as a *liminal* space.[45] *Liminality,* as described by Victor Turner, concerns the point during rituals in which a person is "in-between states," whether social, religious, mental, or other.[46] Postcolonial theorists have used "liminal" in a geographic sense to describe a location in which

41. The classic description of the Other is Ammianus Marcellinus's discussion of the Huns (31.2); see Isaac 2011.

42. Jeffreys 1986, 305–12.

43. Subaltern studies began by studying South Asia during the British colonial period. It has now expanded to include other geographical regions, but the emphasis on oppressed and low-status individuals remains. For examples, see Spivak 1988; Prakash 1990 and essays in Prakash 1995; Beverley 1999; Ludden 2002; and Chaturvedi 2012.

44. Khalek 2011, 20; emphasis original.

45. For a discussion of the use of space and liminality in late antiquity (with a focus on the West), see Harrison 2001.

46. V. Turner 1967, 93–11, and 1978, inspired by van Gennep 1960.

cultural change can occur.[47] Other scholars note that even places in marginal or border zones not completely "in-between" often allow the combination of elements of two groups to form a collective (*hybrid*) and unique identity.[48]

In addition, American historians have long studied the places "between," beginning with the pioneering frontier studies of Fredrick Jackson Turner.[49] Recently, *borderlands* have been defined as "the contested boundaries between colonial domains," whereas a *frontier* is "a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders [are] not clearly defined."[50] These theories have in turn inspired ancient historians, especially those studying the edges of the Roman Empire in late antiquity.[51] Particularly compelling is C. R. Whittaker's characterization of the Roman frontiers as porous zones that allowed the creation of hybridized cultures.[52]

In late antiquity, the Sinai was not an intermediate space between two political entities, but it was a frontier along the eastern edge of the Roman Empire in direct contact with the Arabian Peninsula.[53] The Sinai also existed between two economic and cultural zones, making it a liminal space inhabited by two different populations—one settled, agricultural, and increasingly Christian, with the other nomadic, pastoralist, and pagan—at least according to the Sinai sources. The Sinai can therefore be thought of as a *middle ground,* a location where several ethnic and religious groups lived together and interacted in complex ways.[54] Although part of the later Roman Empire, the nomadic groups of the Sinai could employ violence against the unarmed monks, thereby putting the Christian monks and themselves on a more equal footing. Although the nomadic groups could and apparently did attack the Christian communities, those Christians, as agents of the much more powerful empire, could retaliate with appeals for assistance, temporarily acquiring the use of coercive force against the nomads or convincing the authorities to station additional troops in the region, as occurred in the sixth century. In many

47. Bhabha 1994, 5; Anzaldúa 2007.

48. Rosaldo 1993; also see D. Weber 1995, which collects an extensive bibliography about the evolution of liminal studies.

49. F. J. Turner 1920.

50. See Adelman and Aron 1999, 815–16; also see the responses to that article in the same issue.

51. These studies have tended to focus on the Western portion of the empire and the effect of the Germanic invasions on concepts of ethnicity and identity. See particularly Pohl 1997; Pohl and Reimitz 1998; Pohl, Wood, and Reinitz 2001; Gillett 2002; and Curta 2005; Pohl, Gantner, and Payne 2012. On the Eastern Empire and the early Caliphate, see Andrade 2013 and Philip Wood 2013.

52. Whittaker 1994, 98–131. Scholars who study the modern world tend to define borders and frontiers in the same sense: that modern borders allow rather than restrict movement (van der Velde and van Houtum 2000; Berg and van Houtum 2002; Brunet-Jailly 2007).

53. Palmyra in the first through the third century provides perhaps the clearest example of a community between two empires. As detailed by Smith 2013, a unique cultural identity was formed, combining elements of Roman and Aramaic culture.

54. White 1991.

ways, the Sinai parallels the Syrian steppe, the so-called Barbarian Plain. As at Rusafa, the imperial authorities could use the monastic communities to project Greco-Roman Christian influence into the Sinai.[55]

GEOGRAPHY OF THE SINAI PENINSULA

During the time of Jesus, the Sinai was controlled by a Roman client state, the Nabataean Kingdom, founded during the Hellenistic period by nomadic peoples who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula. In 106 C.E., the kingdom was annexed by the Roman Empire, and the Nabataean Kingdom was incorporated as the Roman province of Arabia (*provincia Arabia*).[56] Under Diocletian, the province of Arabia was cut in half at the Wadi al-Hasa in modern-day Jordan, and the Sinai was attached to the province of Palestine. Later in the fourth century, this larger province of Palestine was split, and the Sinai became part of the province of Palaestina Salutaris, which later became known as Palaestina Tertia (Third Palestine). The Sinai remained administered in this province until the Muslim Conquests.[57]

Nabataean occupation in the Sinai was concentrated in the southern mountainous regions. The northern Sinai coastal plain between Egypt and Gaza remained largely out of Nabataean control. (Rhinocoloura may represent an exception.) Between the coastal plain and the southern Sinai lies the waterless desert of Tih (also known as the Sinai Plateau). In the southern Sinai, high mountains predominate, with Jabal Katarina and Jabal Musa topping 2,200 meters.[58] Pharan was the only town of any size in the area, and it may have owed it existence to the mineral deposits of the southern Sinai and the nearby oasis.[59] Hundreds of Nabataean inscriptions have been discovered in the Wadi Haggag, near Pharan.[60] There were also a few smaller settlements, such as Dahab on the eastern coast of the Sinai.[61] In addition, there were a number of religious shrines in the area, mostly located on or near mountain peaks.[62]

The lack of settlements in this region is a direct result of an insufficient water supply for the practice of agriculture. The Sinai typically does not receive the minimum 200 millimeters of rainfall per year that is needed for agriculture. The highlands of the Sinai receive more precipitation than the coastal areas, but still only

55. E. Fowden 1999, esp. 67–100.

56. The standard scholarly account remains Bowersock 1983a, 12–89.

57. Ward 2012; Sipilä 2004, 2007, and 2009, 131–210.

58. Hobbs 1995, 5–6.

59. The remains at Pharan have been extensively excavated, but the publications remain in a preliminary state (Grossman 1984, 1992, 2000, 2001b; Grossman, Jones, and Reichert 1998).

60. Negev 1977a.

61. For the excavations at Dahab, see Meshel 2000.

62. Negev 1977b.

average 62 millimeters per year at Saint Catherine's Monastery. Rainfall averages, however, ignore the fact that yearly precipitation in the region is sporadic, with some years producing more than the 200-millimeter limit, whereas others produce much less. When it does rain, the granite mountains do not absorb the water, which rushes down slopes as a flash flood.[63] Only the oasis at Pharan provided enough water for settlement and was able to support at least minimal agricultural production. Sinai monks, however, learned from the communities of southern Jordan and the Negev how to construct terrace-and-runoff water-catchment systems, allowing them to grow some of their own food.[64] This imprinted the landscape with the features of sedentary communities.

The economic realities of the Sinai created the prerequisite conditions for the shifting identities and images characteristic of liminal geographic spaces. Because the Sinai lacks water resources, it is situated at the edge of agricultural development. This location was particularly conducive to transhumance and other mobile forms of economic exploitation. The province therefore existed between "the desert and the sown."[65] Much of the Sinai has been termed an "inner *limes,*" meaning a desert or uninhabited zone located near settled communities that was inside the Roman defensive system.[66] Whether the Sinai nomads were related to the Nabataeans, to other tribal groups (such as the Saifitic or Thamudic tribes), or to groups newly emigrated from the Arabian Peninsula is largely unknown because of the lack of sources.[67] The Greco-Roman sources generally do not differentiate

63. Hobbs 1995, 12–17; Dahari 2000, 5–6. On the average modern precipitation rates in the southern Levant, see Executive Action Team, Middle East Water Data Banks Project 1998, 45. Whether these modern figures have any bearing on the Byzantine settlements has been intensely debated. E. Huntington (1911, 370–71), for example, argued that rainfall must have been higher in the Byzantine period. Most scholars and scientific studies, however, conclude that the climate in the ancient period was very similar to modern conditions. For a summary of the debate and evidence, see Shereshevski 1991, 14–17. This is not to say that the region did not suffer from temporary periods of greater or less rainfall. The depiction of the Dead Sea on the Madaba Map suggests that there was an intense dry period when the map was created (Amiran 1997). Sediments from the Dead Sea show that it rose and fell throughout antiquity (and the historical period), probably as a result of increased and decreased precipitation (Klein 1985).

64. Dahari 2000, 147–49. On Negev agriculture, see Zohary 1954; Kedar 1957, 1967; Mayerson 1959, 1962; Evenari, Shanan, and Tadmore 1963, 95–119; Elliott 1982, 26; Bruins 1986, 38–54.

65. Bell 1908; Nelson 1973.

66. Mayerson 1986b, esp. 44–45.

67. On the presence of these groups in the Nabataean Kingdom, see Graf 1989, esp. 357–80. One of the Nessana Papyri from the late sixth or early seventh century mentions the "Bani al-Udayyid" (οἱ Σαρακενοὶ ὑοὶ Ειαλωδεειδ—the first indication of an Arabian migration into the Negev (*P.Ness.* 89.35). Research on the date when the various modern Bedouin tribes arrived in the Negev and the Sinai suggests that their migration to the Sinai was a slow process, with a succession of new arrivals (Bailey 1985, 1991; Stewart 1991). As noted by Bailey (1985, 33–34, 47), there is substantial evidence for the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes in the Sinai, though much of the current Bedouin migrated long after the Islamic Conquests of the seventh century.

between tribes, making it difficult to avoid generalizations and oversimplifications.[68] Like nomadic groups throughout the Mediterranean world, those in the Sinai are portrayed in the literary sources as culturally distinct and utterly different from the sedentary population.[69] It would take a unique Christian phenonomon—the desire for monks to obtain quietness (*hēsychia*) and the biblical associations of the Sinai—for the region to be more extensively settled by nonnomadic groups.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

In the following chapters, I explore the complex relationship between identity and image formation in the Sinai and its consequences, beginning with the *indigenes*. Chapter 1 focuses on the nomadic inhabitants of the Roman Near East in general, and then on the Sinai in more detail. It begins by examining the lifestyle of the nomads, with a special emphasis on their economic sustainability in the semiarid regions of the Near East. Next, the chapter examines the relationship between the Roman authorities and several allied groups, such as the Monophysite Ghassanids, who dominated the nomads of the Roman Near East in the sixth century C.E. This chapter also describes the religious practices of the nomads, as seen through the eyes of Christian authors, both from the Sinai and in the Near East in general. The origins and connotations of the various names applied to the nomads—"barbarians," "Saracens," "Ishmaelites," and "Scenite Arabs"—are examined in detail.

Chapter 2 shifts focus to the colonizers and covers the spread of monasticism in the Sinai and the growth of pilgrimage to the region. The first known Christian to visit Mount Sinai was Julian Saba, sometime in the middle of the fourth century C.E. By the second half of that century, several churches and numerous monastic sites had been founded in the Sinai, as attested by the pilgrim Egeria. Growth continued in the fifth and sixth centuries, and two fortresses were constructed during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527–65) to defend the monks at Mount Sinai and the coastal site of Rhaithou. Innumerable pilgrims visited the Sinai from all corners of the Mediterranean world; several pilgrims left accounts of their travels. Without the influx of pilgrims the monastic communities of the Sinai could not have sustained themselves.

The monks who settled the Sinai did so because of the region's connections to the Exodus, and chapter 3 examines how these monks created a Christian Sinai by identifying contemporary locations with sites mentioned in the Exodus account. Three major sites were identified: Elim, Raphidim, and Mount Sinai. Biblical readings were employed to locate these sites, and local topographic features were

68. Millar 2005, 301–3.

69. On the image of the nomad, see Shaw 1982.

believed to prove the historicity of the biblical accounts. Elim is particularly instructive, because several authors place it at different locations in the Sinai, at first in the northwest of the peninsula and later at the monastic community at Rhaithou. One reading of this site movement is the desire for a monastic community (Rhaithou) to be associated with the Exodus account. In addition, the Pharanites embraced the identification of Pharan with Raphidim, connecting themselves to Moses and not to Ishmael. By labeling Sinai locations with Christian names, the monks replaced the nomadic understanding of the Sinai with a Christian topography.

Chapter 4 covers the descriptions of martyrdoms in the Sinai according to the Sinai Martyr Narratives. Once Christianity was legalized, in 313, the number of martyrs quickly dwindled except in a few regions of the Roman Empire, such as in the Sinai. Christians there employed previously existing rhetoric about martyrs to describe nomadic attacks on the monks. The description of these attacks in the Sinai Martyr Narratives helped create a pejorative image of the nomads by depicting them as a threat to the monks and pilgrims in the region.

Chapter 5 investigates imperial security in the sixth century in the Sinai and surrounding regions. In the early fourth century, several forts had been built along the edge of Roman territory facing Arabia, but by the sixth century most of these were abandoned. However, in response to the perceived danger to monks and pilgrims, the imperial government constructed fortresses in the Sinai and along the pilgrimage routes in the middle of the sixth century. Among these, several authors describe the construction of the monastery now known as Saint Catherine's as a direct response to what they supposed was a Saracen threat.

Chapter 6 moves beyond the chronological and geographic parameters to describe the broader implications of the Christian application of the word "Saracens" to Muslims. Contemporaries of the Muslim invasion, such as the patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius, initially did not comprehend that the invasions were launched by followers of a new religion, calling them Saracens and thinking that they were just ordinary nomadic raiders. Once it became clear that the Muslim attacks were something different, the term stuck, and some Christians engaged in polemical arguments with tropes previously connected with the pre-Islamic Saracen image. Authors such as John of Damascus wrapped these rhetorical descriptions together into a neat package, defining the standard Christian understanding of Islam for centuries.

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1

Saracens

When the Piacenza pilgrim had surmounted the summit of Mount Sinai, his party was "totally amazed" by a supernatural occurrence.[1] This was to be expected, of course. Christians, elaborating on the Exodus account, had long described the noises and divine fire emanating from Mount Sinai.[2] It had long been tradition that no one could sleep on the summit, because of its sanctity and because the thunder and mystical happenings were too frightening.[3] What is surprising about this incident is that the Piacenza pilgrim was witnessing a "Saracen" ritual, in which a priest, who was said to reside on the mountainside, tended to a white marble idol. When the Saracens began to worship the idol at the beginning of their festival, the idol's color changed to black. After the festival, the idol reverted to its original white color.[4]

This passage stands as a reminder that Christians did not occupy an uninhabited Sinai. In addition to the Pharanites, inhabitants of the town of Pharan who cultivated a Christian connection to Moses described in chapter 3, the Sinai was home to nomadic pastoralist groups who lived among the settled population and

1. PP 38: "unde omnino mirati sumus," trans. Caner 2010, 258.

2. For example, Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 4.

3. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8.7.

4. PP 38: "Et in ipso monte in parte montis habent idolum suum positum Saraceni marmoreum candidum tam quam nix. In quo etiam permanet sacerdos ipsorum indutus dalmatica et pallium lineum. Quando etiam uenit tempus festiuitatis ipsorum recurrente luna, antequam egrediatur luna, ad diem festum ipsorum incipit colorem mutare marmor illa; mox luna introierit, quando coeperint adorare, fit nigra marmor illa tamquam pice. Completo tempore festiuitatis reuertitur in pristinum colorem, unde omnino mirati sumus."

roamed widely throughout the semiarid region. These nomads were the peoples whose lands became dotted with monastic dwellings. And these were the people described in pejorative language by the Sinai Christian sources.

Ethnographic, archaeological, and literary evidence suggests that the nomads and the settled communities interacted in complex ways, depending on the political, social, economic, and cultural environment, despite what our sources say. Much of the research on the interaction between these groups has occurred in the Negev Desert, which is an extension of the Sinai el-Tih Plateau. Modern nomads there are dependent on the sedentary population for survival. This seems true for earlier periods as well and likely extends to the nomads of the southern Sinai in late antiquity.[5] Whereas the pastoralists required food supplies from the sedentary population to survive, the settled communities acquired animal products from the nomads, a fact suggesting that these two populations could engage in mutually beneficial economic activities. Nevertheless, the cooperative view is largely absent in the extant literary sources from the later Roman Near East. In the Sinai sources, almost exclusively written by Christian monks and pilgrims, the nomadic inhabitants are accused of being anything but cooperative. Rather, these sources almost universally present an antagonistic relationship between the sedentary communities of the Sinai and the nomadic inhabitants. These inhabitants are known in the literary sources as Saracens, although other names are occasionally used. The sources accuse the Saracens of being uncivilized, pagan, traitorous, and dangerous. Despite these accusations, some nomads proved valuable as Roman allies against the Sassanid Empire on many occasions, and there were even several military units composed of Saracen troops. In addition, there is ample evidence that many nomads were not pagan but Christian, though often of a nonorthodox variety.

In contrast to other regions of the Near East, where nomadic populations were limited to peripheral areas on the edge of settled communities, Saracens could be encountered throughout the entire province of Third Palestine and the Sinai in particular.[6] According to Pseudo-Nilus, the nomads "dwell in the desert lying between Arabia, Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Jordan River," or in other words, the province of Third Palestine and the southern half of the province of Arabia.[7] Even pilgrimage accounts mention that nomads were encountered throughout the Sinai. Egeria wrote that she could see Egypt, Palestine, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the borders of the "infinite" territories of the Saracens from the

5. Magness 2003, 79–83.

6. Mayerson 1989 surveys a number of these literary sources, but his discussion includes sources from throughout the Near East.

7. Pseudo-Nilus 3.1: "Τὸ μὲν οὖν εἰρημένον ἔθνος τὴν ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας μέχρις Αἰγύπτου θαλάσσῃ Ἐρυθρᾷ καὶ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ παρατεταμένην νέμεται ἔρημον."

top of Mount Sinai.[8] When the Piacenza pilgrim crossed the north Sinai desert, he encountered a family of Saracens and was told by one of his guides that the number of Saracens in the desert was 12,600.[9] Surely this precise number lacks historical value, but the impression that there was a wide distribution of nomads in the region must be correct.

NOMADS IN THE LATE-ANTIQUE NEAR EAST FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the literary sources, peoples who practiced nomadic lifestyles lived throughout the Sinai Peninsula and the wider region in the late-antique period. It was long argued that these peoples left no archaeological traces; however, recent research in the Negev Desert and in southern Jordan has demonstrated that archaeological surveys are in fact able to identify the remains of nomadic groups.[10] Because few archaeological remains of the nomads of the Sinai in the late-antique period have been sources of investigation, the material from the Negev and southern Jordan must be utilized to understand Sinai nomadic behaviors. This appears intellectually sound—the Sinai was not isolated from the Negev or southern Jordan, and the sources indicate that human movement occurred easily between and through these zones. To provide just one representative example, the nomads who attacked the monks at Mount Sinai in Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* were based in the north Sinai desert and sold slaves to the communities in the Negev.[11]

Though the relationship between the sedentary and nomadic populations could be quite complex, modern scholarship on the nomads of the region has tended to focus on two extreme positions: mutual codependence and outright hostility.[12] The position taken by anthropologists suggests that there were a number of possible relationships between these two groups; however, they tend to stress mutual economic codependence. Historians, on the other hand, are more likely to trust the depiction of the Saracens in the literary sources that describe hostile relationships.

According to anthropologists, economic behaviors range between the extremes of sedentary agriculturalism and nomadic pastoralism. Between these polar

8. Egeria 3.8: "Egyptum autem et Palestinam et Mare Rubrum et Mare illut Parthenicum quod mittit Alexandriam, nec non et fines Saracenorum infinitos ita subter nos inde videbamus ut credi vix possit."

9. PP 36.3, 5: "Familia autem Saracenorum vel uxores eorum venientes de heremo. . . . Populus autem, qui per ipsum maiorem heremum ingrediebatur, numerus duodecim milia sexcenti."

10. See Finkelstein and Perevolotsky 1990; Finkelstein 1992; Rosen 1992; Avni 1996.

11. Also see *CTh* 5.6.2 and Lenski 2011, 263.

12. See, for example, Banning 1986 and Parker 1987. The hostile view will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5.

opposites are an unlimited number of hybrid options, such as the permanent settlement of a majority of the population with a small group continuing to practice pastoralist economic activities, to the exploitation and enslavement of sedentary populations by militarily superior nomadic groups, to the seasonal migration of sedentary farmers to pasture areas, to a mostly nomadic lifestyle with limited opportunity farming. Some hybrid groups develop gender-specific tasks in which the females cultivate agricultural crops while the men continue some forms of pastoralist tradition.[13]

The pastoralist economy is based primarily on animal resources, especially the secondary products of animals. Meat is eaten only rarely, normally either for religious reasons or if an animal is incapacitated. Male or unproductive female animals are the most likely to be butchered, because of the importance of maintaining a virile but small herd. The most important dietary commodities are renewable animal products such as milk, butter, and blood. Most pastoralist societies are not self-sufficient and require provisions, such as grain, from agricultural communities. If a pastoralist group itself does not practice a form of agriculture, however limited, such needs must be met from outside the group. These nomadic groups are thus dependent on sedentary groups for survival.

In order to obtain necessary goods, the pastoralists generally exchange animal products—such as leather, hair, milk, butter, cheese, manure, yogurt, and even whole animals—with sedentary populations. Whole animals are generally sold in the spring, after new animals are born, in order to cull the herd before the population exceeds the fodder potential of the grazing lands during the dry seasons. Sedentary communities often have the advantage in these commercial transactions, because they do not need the pastoralist goods for survival. When trade does not provide adequate sustenance for the pastoralists, or when an easy opportunity presents itself, goods can be obtained by the pastoralists through violence, coercion, or theft from other nomadic or sedentary groups. Nomadic groups also engage in raids to kidnap for ransom or enslavement.

In extremely arid environments, the camel and the goat are the most important animals to the pastoralist. The camel requires the least amount of water, being able to subsist even on brackish water and to obtain moisture from vegetation. In addition to providing its famous carrying capacity, the camel also produces milk and hair. The goat, while requiring more water, produces a larger volume of milk and hair than the camel. Today, winter Bedouin tents are made from goat hair, demon-

13. Nomadic studies is an increasing field, especially in the Middle East, which focuses on the transformation of traditional pastoralist groups during an age of globalization. See Barth 1964; Marx 1967; Johnson 1974; Galaty and Salzman 1981; Russell 1988; Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Khazanov 1994; Khazanov and Wink 2001; Salzman 2004; Chatty 2006; Barnard and Wendrich 2008.

strating the importance of this product.[14] Sheep are the less resilient ovicaprids in an arid climate, but their wool makes them attractive. Among nomadic groups, bovine cattle are rarely herded in the Near East, and horses are kept only as prestige animals.[15]

Moving from the general to the more specific, there have been several studies of late-antique nomadic lifestyles in the Negev and southern Jordan. Though the archaeological remains are difficult to interpret, the authors of these studies emphasize the importance of cooperation between the nomadic and sedentary populations of the region. An emergency survey in the Ramon Crater region, conducted just before the Israeli military began using the Negev for training exercises in 1982, revealed extensive evidence of pastoralist activities from the second to the late seventh century. Steven Rosen concluded, based on the lack of farmsteads and the limited irrigation dams and terraces, that the region was largely inhabited by pastoralists who subsisted by herding sheep, camels, goats, and donkeys.[16] Another survey of an area between the Negev towns and the Ramon Crater discovered a large number of animal pens and a few small irrigated terraces. Mordechai Haiman argues that these fields could not support the populations, who would therefore have needed to acquire grain from elsewhere.[17]

Archaeological discoveries at these pastoralist campsites suggest that the nomadic groups interacted with the sedentary inhabitants, possibly in mutually beneficial ways.[18] First, a number of millstones have been discovered, suggesting that grain was ground into flour at the nomadic campsites. Since there is limited evidence of agricultural activity, the pastoralists must have acquired the grain from the agriculturalist society. Second, the sites are dated by the presence of fine-ware ceramics, known as Late Roman Red Wares (LRRW), such as African Red Slip, which must have been obtained in the towns of the region.[19] The presence of these wares, and not handmade sherds, attests to economic contacts with the towns of the Byzantine Negev. Archaeology cannot answer the question whether these goods were acquired through trade or violence or some other mechanism such as payment for services.

14. Saidel 2008, 467–69. Note that the modern tent appears to be an innovation of the past two hundred years.

15. Johnson 1974, 1–19.

16. Rosen 1987.

17. Haiman 1995, 30–34.

18. It should be noted, however, that inscriptions from the Harwan region in southeastern Syria demonstrate little contact between the nomadic and sedentary populations (M. MacDonald 2009b, 346–52). These nomadic groups lay outside Roman territories, and therefore are probably unlike the nomadic groups who lived among sedentary populations in the southern Levant.

19. Rosen 1987. Excavations conducted by Rosen at one of the sites from the survey revealed a tent encampment from the Nabataean/Roman period. Among the finds were more than two hundred pieces of pottery, but these may have been the remains of only a dozen vessels (Rosen 1992). Also see Rosen and Avni 1993.

The remains of sheep and goat bones discovered at Nessana in the Negev may support this evidence of economic links between the sedentary and nomadic populations. Analysis by Joel Klenck suggests that, in the fourth and the fifth century, sheep and goats were kept alive to reproduce. Because a majority of animals survived until age four, they seem to have been exploited for their hair and milk. Later, in the sixth century, the majority of animals were slaughtered between six months and two years of age, suggesting that these animals were more commonly used for meat. Cattle and pigs were also represented in the archaeological record.[20] The evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries suggests that the animals were produced by a largely nomadic group whose subsistence was based on animal products rather than on the production of animals for meat as in the sixth century, implying that some of the population of Nessana was engaged in sedentary animal production of cattle and pigs, whereas another segment of the population was occupied with pastoralist or semipastoralist herds. That animal pens surround another Negev town, Shivta, implies that some portion of the sedentary population probably raised pastoral animals there as well.[21]

In addition to the evidence from the Negev, evidence from southern Jordan indicates a close connection between pastoralists and agricultural communities. For example, a survey of the Wadi al-Hasa revealed intensive late-antique occupation suited to both agricultural and pastoralist behaviors.[22] The scholarly team that investigated this area divided the microclimatic zones of the wadi in six different occupation zones. Four of the zones were better suited for agricultural exploitation (Zones 1, 3, 5, and 6), whereas two were ideal for nomadic economic activities (Zones 2 and 4).[23]

Although the various ecological niches could be shared by agriculturalists and pastoralists in the region in late antiquity, the schedules of these two groups conflict in the modern period. During the winter, the modern Beni Atiyah tribe establish themselves inside the Wadi Araba, to the southwest of the Wadi al-Hasa, and in the summer they migrate to the east of Karak. When the first rains arrive, the Bedouin head west toward the Wadi Araba, when small springs and ample forage become available. This schedule means that their movements cross through the

20. Colt 1962, 67–69; Klenck 2004, 158–63.

21. Hirschfeld 2003, 396.

22. See B. MacDonald 1988, 232–49.

23. Banning 1986, 39–40. Zone 1 is located in the main wadi bed and was suitable for agriculture. Zone 2 consists of the gorges, cliffs, and other steep escarpments overlooking Zone 1. Agriculture is not possible, but the zone could be utilized by goats. Zone 3 is made up of the beds of tributary wadis that could easily be irrigated for agriculture. Zone 4 is a region of sloping limestone ridges, normally covered with oak and pistachio trees. This zone is now utilized mainly by sheep and goats. Zone 5 consists of upper tributary gorges, some of which have springs and may have supported small orchards of vineyards. Zone 6 comprises the plateau, which is suitable for dry farming.

agricultural fields before harvesting, a timing that could easily damage crops and cause conflict with the agriculturalists.

According to E. B. Banning, if the migration during late antiquity began two months earlier than in modern times, then the migration would be in concert with the agricultural cycle. The presence of grain stubble would enable the nomads to begin seasonal migrations earlier, and the flocks could therefore graze and fertilize the fields without harming the crops. Before returning east, the pastoralists could shear their sheep and sell the wool to the sedentary population. Surplus animals could also be sold for food, and mules and donkeys could be rented for plowing the fields before planting. A system of mutual dependence could be created, with the pastoralists providing the sedentary populations with labor, animal products, and manure, and the agriculturalists could provide goods, such as grain, which the pastoralists could not manufacture themselves.[24] Currently, there is no evidence about when the migration occurred in the late-antique period, an absence suggesting that the cooperative model is just as plausible as the antagonistic model demonstrated by the modern Beni Atiyah tribe.[25]

Animal remains discovered in southern Jordan, like those in the Negev towns, also suggest that pastoralists may have played an important role in supplying animal products to the sedentary population. The majority of faunal remains discovered at Aila were of sheep and goats, with very few examples of bovine cattle, pigs, or chickens. The sheep and goats were imported into Aila "on the hoof" for dietary consumption, probably from the semiarid regions around Aila itself. S. Thomas Parker suggests that the animals were raised by nomadic groups, possibly members of Thamudic tribes.[26] This same pattern is remarkably similar to the finds from the monastery at Jabal Harun, outside Petra. The majority of mammal remains there were sheep and goats, with some bovine and pig bones.[27] The survival of bovine and pig remains suggests that some members of the sedentary societies practiced animal husbandry, since bovine cattle and pigs are generally not raised by fully nomadic groups in the Near East.

In conclusion, archaeological survey and excavation have provided ample evidence that sedentary and nomadic populations were interacting economically in the southern Levant in late antiquity. These sources, however, cannot explain how that activity was taking place or what the relationships between these groups were. Only the literature of the period can do this, which almost uniformly describes the nomads as a threat to the settled communities. Of course, as discussed in the introduction, we must be critical of using the ethnographic descriptions in

24. Ibid. 42–44.
25. See the criticisms of Parker 1987.
26. Parker 2006a, 229.
27. Studer 2002, 171.

the ancient sources without taking into account the reasons why the texts were written.

NOMADS IN THE LATE-ANTIQUE NEAR EAST ACCORDING TO THE LITERARY SOURCES

While modern anthropologists regard nomadic, pastoralist societies as interesting human adaptations to arid environments and point to the necessity of cooperation between settled and nomadic peoples, most sedentary groups in world history have considered nomadic peoples inferior.[28] In late antiquity and earlier, Greek and Roman sources almost unanimously denounce the nomads for their "uncivilized" way of life and stress the antagonistic relationship between nomads and sedentary peoples.[29] The words used in the Greek and Latin sources of late antiquity for nomads in the Near East are quite varied, demonstrating the ways that sedentary people viewed the nomads. These terms include "Arabs" (Ἄραβες, *Arabes*), "tent-dwelling Arabs" (Σκηνῖται Ἄραβες, *Scenitae Arabes*), and "Saracens" (Σαρακηνοί, *Saraceni*), as well as the more generic "barbarians" (βάρβαροι, *barbari*).

The word "Arab" first appears on the Kurkh Monolith inscription of Shalmaneser III in the ninth century B.C.E., where it is used for desert-dwelling nomads.[30] The Greek word "Arabs" (Ἄραβες) appears in the Septuagint indicating populations who live according to a nomadic lifestyle.[31] By the Roman period, the term "Arabia" (the land of the Arabs) could mean the totality of the Arabian Peninsula, just the Nabataean Kingdom (annexed as *provincia Arabia* in 106 C.E.), the southern Arabian Peninsula, known as Felix, or "Lucky," because of its aromatics, or even a region in northeastern Egypt.[32] The use of the word "Arab" (Ἄραψ) was used just as widely and nonspecifically, perhaps to indicate people dwelling on the borders of Arabia.[33]

By late antiquity, nomads in the Near East were often called "Saracens" in the Greek and Latin sources.[34] The word seems to have gained mainstream acceptance

28. Compare the pronunciations against the nomadic Arabs in the Koran (Bashear 1997, 7–14) and those of the Xiong-nu in Han China (Sima Qian 110 [Martin 2010, 129–30]) or Turks during the Sui-Tang transition (Skaff 2004, 120–21).

29. Shaw 1982. In this discussion, I am primarily interested in the Greco-Roman sources. See Segal 1984 for a discussion of the pre-Islamic Syriac image of the Arabs.

30. Eph'al 1982, 6–7, 75; For Assyrian usages, see Hainthaler 2007, 13–14.

31. For example, Isaiah 13:20.

32. Egeria 7.1–2; Hoyland 2001, 2–8; Retsö 2003b; Hainthaler 2007, 23–26; M. MacDonald 2009a.

33. Retsö 2003a, 508–9.

34. Millar 2005, 298, 303. With minor spelling changes: Greek Σαρακηνή, Latin *Saracenus*. Corresponding words in Syriac are *ṭayyāyē* and *sarqāyē*. In Aramaic, the word is *SRQAII* (e.g., Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* [ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff] fol. 30).

in the fourth century, as noted by Ammianus Marcellinus.[35] There is little agreement among scholars concerning the origins of this appellation.[36] The first uncontested appearance of the word "Saracen" appears in Ptolemy's *Geography,* in the second century C.E., as both the name of a location and the name of a tribe in or near the Sinai desert.[37] The earliest Christian usage of the term appears in the third century in a letter about martyrs during the time of Decius (r. 249–51); in it the Saracens are already described as slavers and barbarians.[38] In the third century, several new groups immigrated to the Near East from Arabia, and it is possible that preference for the word "Saracen" is somehow associated with these migrations.[39] Alternatively, the word may have gained currency after the annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom in 106 C.E., when the Romans needed to differentiate between the nomads inside the Roman Empire (Arabs) and those outside (Saracens).[40] If accurate, this distinction eventually disappeared as literary sources routinely use "Saracen" for nomads within the frontiers. Ultimately, this derivation does not seem to conform to the usage in Ptolemy's *Geography,* in which "Saracen" refers to a minor group, nor to the statement about Saracens in Ammianus Marcellinus. (See below.) Regardless of where and how the name originated, it came to be the primary designation for nomadic groups in the Near East.

Christian sources of the fourth and fifth centuries attempted to understand where the word "Saracen" came from by linking Arabs with the biblical personages of Ishmael, Sarah, and Hagar. Jewish writers had often connected the Arabs with

35. Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.13: "Scenitas Arabas quos Saracenos posteritas appellavit." Retsö 2003a, 514–21.

36. The debate is summarized most intensively by Graf and O'Connor 1977 and Shahid 1984b, 123–41; M. Macdonald 2009c, 1–5. Hitti 1946, 43, believed that Saracen originated with the Arabic word for "the East," *šarq.* Graf has repeatedly argued that "Saracen" derives from the Arabic *širkat,* "federation," and that the term entered Roman usage via the Nabataeans (Graf and O'Connor 1977; Graf 1978 and 1997a, xii–xiii). Shahid concludes that there are two likely origins of the name and neither can be ruled out. Either the term came directly from a tribe in the Sinai, as suggested by Ptolemy, or it may have been used by the Nabataeans to designate either *sharqiyyīn* (Easterners) or *sāriqīn* (marauders, plunderers; Shahid 1984b, 133–36). M. Macdonald (2009c, 4–5) has argued that the term originates with the north Arabian usage of the word *šarq,* which implies a movement into the desert.

37. Ptolemy, *Geographia* 5.17.3: "Καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν δύσεως τῶν ὀρέων τούτων παρὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἥ τε <Σαρακηνὴ> παρήκει." Later, Ptolemy mentions "Saracens" as a people who dwell near Scenitae (Tent Dwellers), Thaditae, and Thamudeni (*Geographia* 6.7.21): "Κατέχουσι δὲ τὴν μεσόγειαν παρὰ μὲν τὰς ὀρεινὰς τὰς πρὸς ἄρκτους ὡς ἐπίπαν <Σκηνῖται>, καὶ ἔτι ὑπὲρ αὐτοὺς <Θαδῖται>, μεσημβρινώτεροι δὲ τούτων <Σαρακηνοί>, καὶ <Θαμυδηνοί>." On this passage and the locations of the Thamudic confederacy, see Graf 1978, 11. An earlier possible attestation of the word "Saracen" may come from Dioscorides' first-century-C.E. *De Materia Medica* (1.67) as the name of a tree in the same area; see M. Macdonald 2009c, 1 no. 2.

38. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.42. Solzbacher 1989, 77–78.

39. Hoyland 2001, 234–36.

40. M. Macdonald 2009c, 4–5.

Ishmael, and that association was adopted by Christian writers. The term "Ishmaelites" is employed for Arabs as early as the Hebrew Bible, and the first-century C.E. Jewish writer Josephus uncritically describes Ishmael as the founder of the Arab race.[41] But, as Erich Gruen notes, the image of Ishmael in Jewish sources, which stressed Ishmael's autarchy, was not necessarily a negative one.[42]

By late antiquity, some authors use the term "Ishmaelites" to suggest that the nomads in question had converted to Christianity or had adopted some Jewish customs, but others use it in a derogatory sense.[43] The church historian Theodoret (early to mid-fifth century) describes the Ishmaelites as nomads who visited and venerated Saint Simeon at his stylite tower, implying that they were either Christians or on their way to becoming Christian.[44] In another section, the Ishmaelites smash the idols that they previously worshipped and renounced some of their customs, like orgies dedicated to Aphrodite.[45] Theodoret adds that an "Ishmaelite" may have killed the emperor Julian.[46] Since the murder of Julian was seen as good by the Christians, this is not an unflattering suspicion, perhaps confirming the connection between Ishmaelites and Christianity in Theodoret's writings. Both Theodoret and Sozomen mention how Ishmaelite leaders converted to Christianity after being healed of infertility.[47] On the other hand, Jerome's *Life of Malchus*

41. See Hainthaler 2007, 15–18; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.12.2 (214).

42. Gruen 2011, 299–302.

43. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.38: "Τουτὶ γὰρ τὸ φῦλον ἀπὸ Ἰσμαὴλ τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ παιδὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβὸν καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν εἶχε, καὶ Ἰσμαηλίτας αὐτοὺς οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἀπὸ τοῦ προπάτορος ὠνόμαζον. . . . τοιοῦτον δὲ τὸ γένος ἕλκοντες ἅπαντες μὲν ὁμοίως Ἑβραίοις περιτέμνονται καὶ ὑείων κρεῶν ἀπέχονται καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐθῶν φυλάττουσι . . . ἐξ ἐκείνου τε παρ' αὐτοῖς εἰσέτι νῦν πολλοὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῶσιν." Compare with Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1.180: "καὶ κτίζει τὴν Φαρὰν καλουμένην ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ. τούτῳ παῖδες γίνονται δεκαδύο τὸν ἀριθμόν, ἐξ ὧν αἱ φυλαὶ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν τῶν καὶ Ἰσμαηλιτῶν, Σαρακηνῶν δὲ τανῦν καλουμένων."

44. See Shahid 1989, 167–80, 332–49; Millar 2005; Jerome, *Vita Malachi* 4; Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, vita* 26.11.

45. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, vita* 26.13: "Ἰσμαηλῖται δὲ κατὰ συμμορίας ἀφικνούμενοι, διακόσιοι κατὰ ταὐτὸν καὶ τριακόσιοι, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ χίλιοι, ἀρνοῦνται μὲν τὴν πατρῴαν ἐξαπάτην μετὰ βοῆς, τὰ δὲ ὑπ' ἐκείνων σεβασθέντα εἴδωλα πρὸ τοῦ μεγάλου ἐκείνου φωστῆρος συντρίβοντες καὶ τοῖς τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ὀργίοις ἀποταττόμενοι."

46. Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.20 (Parmentier and Scheidweiler 1954, 204): "ἀλλ' οἱ μέν τινα τῶν ἀοράτων ταύτην ἐπενηνοχέναι φασίν, οἱ δὲ τῶν νομάδων ἕνα τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν καλουμένων, ἄλλοι δὲ στρατιώτην τὸν λιμὸν καὶ τὴν ἔρημον δυσχεράναντα. ἀλλ' εἴτε ἄνθρωπος εἴτε ἄγγελος ὥσε τὸ ξίφος, δῆλον ὡς τοῦτο δέδρακε τοῦ θείου νεύματος γενόμενος ὑπουργός."

47. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.38: "μετέσχον δὲ τῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πίστεως ταῖς συνουσίαις τῶν προσοικούντων αὐτοῖς ἱερέων καὶ μοναχῶν, οἳ ἐν ταῖς πέλας ἐρημίαις ἐφιλοσόφουν εὖ βιοῦντες καὶ θαυματουργοῦντες. λέγεται δὲ τότε καὶ φυλὴν ὅλην εἰς Χριστιανισμὸν μεταβαλεῖν Ζωκόμου τοῦ ταύτης φυλάρχου ἐξ αἰτίας τοιᾶσδε βαπτισθέντος." Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, vita* 26.21: "Ἡ δὲ τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν βασιλὶς στερίφη οὖσα καὶ παίδων ἐφιεμένη πρῶτον μέν τινας τῶν ἀξιωτάτων ἀποστείλασα γενέσθαι μήτηρ ἱκέτευσεν. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἔτυχε τῆς αἰτήσεως καὶ ἔτεκεν ὡς ἐπόθησε, τὸν γεννηθέντα βασιλέα λαβοῦσα πρὸς τὸν θεῖον ἔδραμε πρεσβύτην."

portrays the Ishmaelites as animallike slavers.[48] From these references, it appears that the word "Ishmaelite" could bear multiple connotations.

For the sources related to the Sinai, only the Greek version of Ammonius's *Relatio* uses the term "Ishmaelites" (Ἰσμαηλῖται). Ammonius describes the Pharanites as "the Ishmaelites from Pharan" in conjunction with their conversion to Christianity. Since the Pharanites were probably descendants of Nabataean settlers, they would have been considered Arabs. By calling them Ishmaelites, Ammonius distinguishes the Christian sedentary population at Pharan from the Saracens and barbarians who attacked the monks of the Sinai.[49]

Early Christian writers believed that the name "Saracen" was an attempt by the nomadic Arabs to link themselves to Old Testament Sarah, the legitimate wife of Abraham, instead of Hagar, the Egyptian slave concubine. Jerome states that the Saracens had falsely taken the name of Sarah, whereas the church historian Sozomen (early to mid-fifth century) believed that the nomads themselves invented the word to erase the negative conceptions of the term "Ishmaelites."[50] Some have suggested that Arab Christians were trying to reappropriate a negative term for their own use, but there does not seem to be evidence that Arab Christians used either name to describe themselves.[51] Later Christian writers expanded on the connection between the Saracens and Sarah. John of Damascus (early eighth century) wrote that the word "Saracen" came from a combination of the Greek words for "Sarah" (Σάρρα) and "empty" (κενός) because Sarah was barren.[52] These etymologies are false, however, because the word "Saracen" was employed prior to the Christianization of the Roman Empire. The quest to understand the word nevertheless demonstrates the need for Christians to understand their contemporary word in light of biblical precedents. By citing false etymologies of the word "Saracen," the Christian sources were able to insult the nomads on account of the low birth status of their progenitor and stress the contemporary duplicity that late-antique Christians assumed was characteristic of nomads in

48. Jerome, *Vita Malachi* 4: "subito equorum camelorumque sessores Ismaelitae irruerunt crinitis vittatisque capitibus ac seminudo corpore, pallia et latas caligas trahentes. Pendebant ex umero pharetrae, et laxos arcus vibrantes hastilia longa portabant. Non enim ad pugnandum, sed ad praedandum venerant."

49. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek) 33: "ἔρχονται πλήθη ἀνδρῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Φαράν." The CPA version of the *Relatio* (ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, fols. 13, 28) calls the people of Pharan "Pharanites" (*prnaii*) while referring to the non-Christians as Saracens (*srqaii*).

50. Genesis 16; Jerome, *Commentarius in Hiezechielem* 14.8.25.1–7 (Glorie 1964, 335); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.38.10: "ἀποτριβόμενοι δὲ τοῦ νόθου τὸν ἔλεγχον καὶ τῆς Ἰσμαὴλ μητρὸς τὴν δυσγένειαν [δούλη γὰρ ἦν] Σαρακηνοὺς σφᾶς ὠνόμασαν ὡς ἀπὸ Σάρρας τῆς Ἀβραὰμ γαμετῆς καταγομένους."

51. Christides 1972; Sahas 1998, 392; Tolan 2011, 173.

52. John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus* 100.5–6: "Σαρακηνοὺς δὲ αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν ὡς ἐκ τῆς Σάρρας κενοὺς διὰ τὸ εἰρῆσθαι ὑπὸ τῆς Ἄγαρ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ· Σάρρα κενήν με ἀπέλυσεν."

their own time. A similar term is "Agareni" (Ἀγαρηνοί, *Agareni*), derived from the name Hagar, mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome as an alternative for "Saracen" or "Ishmaelite."[53]

Other names for the nomadic inhabitants demonstrate that this population was defined by their different culture. Most instructive is the term "Scenite" (Σκηνίτης), meaning "Tent Dweller," derived from the Greek word for "tent" (σκηνή).[54] Clearly, this population is differentiated from the settled communities because they did not live in permanent dwellings. The various names used for the nomads of this period echo earlier Hebrew, Akkadian, and Assyrian terms, which named the nomads "Arabs" (*Ar-ibi,* among others), "Easterners" (*bny qdm*), and "tent dwellers" (*a-si-bu-ut kus-ta-ri*).[55]

Additionally, some sources (such as Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes*) simply call the nomads "barbarians," suggesting that those writers viewed nomadic culture as completely alien from traditional Greco-Roman culture—though it should be noted that they may be employing the term merely as part of a "classicizing" style.[56] Often the nomadic groups who had converted were no longer described as barbarians.[57]

These terms are often combined in the literary sources, layering their impact. For example, Eusebius, quoting from the letter describing the Saracens under Decius, called them "barbarians."[58] The sixth-century writer Evagrius Scholasticus described a population who attacked the monastery of Mount Sinai as "Scenite barbarians."[59] At approximately the same time, Procopius described the nomads as "Saracen barbarians" when discussing the possible threats to the monks at

53. See Hainthaler 2007, 20; Jerome, *Commentarius in Hiezechielem* 14.8.25.1–7 (Glorie 1964, 335), "Ismaelitas et Agarenos—qui nunc Saraceni appellantur, assumentes sibi falso nomen Sarae"; Eusebius, *Chronicon* (Helm 1956, 24a), "Abraham ex ancilla Agar generat Ismahel, a quo Ismahelitarum genus, qui postea Agareni et ad postremum Saraceni dicti."

54. This word is first applied to the nomads along the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire by Strabo 2.5.32: "ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν ἥ τε εὐδαίμων Ἀραβία πᾶσα, ἀφοριζομένη τῷ τε Ἀραβίῳ κόλπῳ παντὶ καὶ τῷ Περσικῷ, καὶ ὅσην οἱ Σκηνῖται καὶ οἱ Φύλαρχοι κατέχουσιν οἱ ἐπὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην καθήκοντες καὶ τὴν Συρίαν." The term was also used by Latin writers such as Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.13): "Scenitas Arabas quos Saracenos posteritas appellavit."

55. Eph'al 1982, 6–11.

56. Christides 1969, 319–24; E. Fowden 1999, 65. See, for example, Pseudo-Nilus 1.1: "Ἀλώμενος ἐγὼ μετὰ τὴν ἔφοδον τῶν βαρβάρων ἦλθον εἰς τὴν Φαράν." The cultural aspect of this attribution is noted in Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* (Schwartz 1939, 97): "Σαρακηνοὶ . . . τῶι ἤθει βάρβαροι, τῆι γνώμηι κακοποιοί."

57. Christides 1969, 319–21. A good example of this appears in Cyril of Scythopolis's *Vita Euthymii* (Schwartz 1939, 75), which mentions two barbarian Saracens and one Christian Saracen: "δύο τῶν βαρβάρων μετά τινος Χριστιανοῦ Σαρακηνοῦ."

58. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.42: "πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ Ἀραβικὸν ὄρος ἐξανδραποδισθέντες ὑπὸ βαρβάρων Σαρακηνῶν."

59. Evagrius Scholasticus 5.6 (Bidez and Parmentier 1898, 202): "κελεύμασι δὲ Ἰουστίνου καὶ τοῦ Σινᾶ ὄρους· ἐν ᾧ μεγίστοις ἐμπέπτωκε κινδύνοις πολιορκίαν ὑποστὰς ὑπὸ τῶν Σκηνητῶν βαρβάρων."

Mount Sinai.[60] This attribution seems to apply to non-Roman treaty groups, since the Greco-Roman sources generally do not refer to their phylarch allies as barbarians.[61]

One final term should be mentioned here—the Blemmyes—though not often connected directly with the Saracens in modern scholarship. The sources on the Blemmyes are ambiguous about their location and lifestyle, and they may have lived a nomadic lifestyle in the south of Egypt's Eastern Desert or a settled way of life in Nubia along the Nile Valley.[62] Some scholars, including myself, have connected a handmade pottery found in Egypt's Eastern Desert with the Blemmyes, but recent evidence suggests that this attribution may be incorrect.[63] As there were several groups whom Greco-Roman sources described as living in the region and Greco-Roman ethnographies are notoriously biased and inaccurate, it may never be possible to sort out who the Blemmyes were historically. Since it seems unlikely that the people labeled "Blemmyes" used that term to describe themselves, the word (and the culture) is likely an invention or distortion of the Greco-Roman sources.[64]

The importance of the Blemmyes for this work is not their historical reality, however, but their image and their connection to the Saracens. The Blemmyes, like the Saracens, were accused of attacking the monastic settlement of Rhaithou in the *Relatio.* According to the Christian Palestinian Aramaic text of Ammonius, the Blemmyes captured a ship that was located beyond Aila: in other words, a ship that was sailing the coast of Arabia.[65] Since there was no tradition of the Blemmyes' operating in Arabia, this report suggests that the author was somehow confusing the Saracens with the Blemmyes.[66] Later, the Greek text clarifies the situation by locating the ship in Ethiopia and by describing the Blemmyes as "Blacks" (Μαῦροι).[67]

The connection between the Blemmyes and the Saracens is not so strange as it may seem. In Egyptian texts in late antiquity, the Blemmyes and Saracens are often

60. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8.9: "ἐς δὲ τοῦ ὄρους τὸν πρόποδα καὶ φρούριον ἐχυρώτατον ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος ᾠκοδομήσατο, φυλακτήριόν τε στρατιωτῶν ἀξιολογώτατον κατεστήσατο, ὡς μὴ ἐνθένδε Σαρακηνοὶ βάρβαροι ἔχοιεν ἅτε τῆς χώρας ἐρήμου οὔσης, ᾗπέρ μοι εἴρηται, ἐσβάλλειν ὡς λαθραιότατα ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Παλαιστίνης χωρία."

61. Christides 1969, 321.

62. See Updegraff 1988; Barnard 2005; Burstein 2008, 258–59.

63. Ward 2007, 166–67; Barnard 2005, 38, 2006, 2007, 2009, 19–21.

64. On the Blemmyes and ancient ethnography, see Burstein 2008.

65. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) fol. 29. The Greek version (18) changes this phrase to indicate that the boat was in Ethiopia, leading Caner (2010, 143) to argue that the Aramaic tradition is earlier than the Greek. On the hazards of sailing the coast of Arabia in the first century, see *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 20.

66. A similar confusion has been noted in chapter 5 with a discussion of the construction of the monastery-fort at Rhaithou.

67. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 18–19. Caner 2010, 142–43.

mentioned together. For example, both groups appear together in the Coptic papyrus 89 in the British Library. In this text, a Blemmye and Saracen attack was understood as punishment for Coptic Christians' turning away from Christ.[68] Another papyrus, written by Dioscorus, mentions fighting in Egypt against the Blemmyes and Saracens around 570.[69] The Blemmyes are even mentioned in connection with the Saracens in Ammianus Marcellinus, though he does not consider them nomads.[70] Additionally, people described as Saracens lived within Egypt's Eastern Desert, and a number of enigmatic structures in the desert have been interpreted as evidence of the Arabs' living a seminomadic life there.[71] Like the Saracens, the Blemmyes were considered barbarians, raiders, and one source even accuses them of practicing human sacrifice.[72] In the *Menologium* of the Byzantine emperor Basil II (ca. 1000 C.E.), the Saracens who attacked the Sinai monks are instead called "Blemmyes," demonstrating the confusion in differentiating these groups.[73] The Blemmyes and their attacks may even have influenced anti-Black rhetoric in monastic literature.[74]

The nomenclature used in the Greco-Roman sources in late antiquity to describe people of a nomadic lifestyle is, therefore, quite complex and ambiguous. What is not ambiguous, however, is the image of these groups as barbarians and the consistency of denunciations against them. Despite ample evidence that there was a range of economic behaviors between fully sedentary and fully nomadic lifestyles, and the complexities of understanding the culture of such groups, the Greco-Roman sources emphasize the differences between agriculturalist and nomadic behavior and create an image of the barbarous Other.[75] Postcolonial theorists have recognized similar patterns throughout world history.[76]

In the mid-fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus composed the most famous description of the nomads in the Near East. He describes the Saracens as famous raiders and unreliable as allies. Their lifestyle was unlike civilized people's, because they wore few clothes and did not know the taste of wheat or wine. Instead, they subsisted on meat and milk, classic pastoralist products. They did not grow food or construct dwellings. They lived a restless life, moving from place to place, and

68. See Hoyland 1997, 171.

69. MacCoull 1986, 36.

70. Ammianus Marcellinus 14.4.3: "apud has gentes, quarum exordiens initium ab Assyriis ad Nili cataractas porrigitur et confinia Blemmyarum." For a discussion of this passage, see Burstein 2008, 259.

71. See Power 2007, 199–200, for a list of primary sources.

72. Procopius, *Persian War* 1.19

73. *PG* 177: 256.

74. Byron 2002, 82–84.

75. Shaw 1982.

76. See Introduction, pp. 6–12.

did not accept the rule of law.[77] A similar description can be found in many works of the late-antique Near East, such as John Moschos's *Spiritual Meadow*.[78]

In the Sinai, several authors elaborate on these tropes. According to Pseudo-Nilus, the nomads "practice neither art nor trade, nor agriculture, and acquire food only through use of the sword."[79] They were also brigands who preyed upon any travelers they encountered.[80] Most important, they moved from place to place in the desert, making camp wherever they discovered adequate fodder and water, and they never settled down.[81] In traditional ancient ethnographic writing, the Other is often a moral example of a simpler or less refined life. In this way, Greco-Roman writers, such as Tacitus in his description of the Germans, were able to criticize their own societies.[82] One unique aspect of Pseudo-Nilus's description of the nomads is that he does not set up such a dichotomy. Rather, the barbarous nature of the Saracens is compared to the righteous behavior of the monks of the Sinai. In doing this, Pseudo-Nilus turns the reader's expectations around, demonstrating that the uncivilized nature of the nomads serves only to enhance the spiritual power of the Sinai monks.

The Piacenza pilgrim describes how a family of Saracens in the Sinai lived in abject poverty and begged for bread from travelers.[83] Although this was just one encounter, it fits into the wider description of the Saracens as unable to provide for their needs without resorting to parasitic activities such as besieging.[84] The Saracens are, therefore, portrayed in Greco-Roman sources in general and Sinai sources in particular as a subhuman population that survived only through treachery, hostility, or charity.

THE RELIGION OF THE SARACENS

In the late-antique Greco-Roman sources, the names and descriptions of nomadic peoples created the impression that the nomads were an Other. The Christian sources of the Sinai pushed such an identification even further with depictions of

77. Ammianus Marcellinus 14.4; Isaac 2011, 243–44.

78. Sahas 1997; Millar 2005, 303–4.

79. Pseudo-Nilus 3.1: "οὐ τέχνην οὐκ ἐμπορίαν οὐ γεωργὶαν ἐπιτηδεῦον ποτε, μόνην δὲ τὴν μάχαιραν ἔχον τῆς τροφῆς ὑπόθεσιν."

80. Ibid.: "ἢ τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας αἷς ἐφεδρεύουσιν ὁδοῖς λῃζόμενοι."

81. Ibid. 3.4: "καὶ οὕτως ἐμβιοτεύοντες τῇ ἐρημίᾳ τόπους ἐκ τόπων ἀμείβουσιν, ἐκεῖ τὰς παρεμβολὰς ποιούμενοι ὅπου δ᾽ ¨ν χιλὸν εὔπορον ᾖ τοῖς κτήνεσιν καὶ ὕδωρ εὑρεῖν δαψιλές."

82. E.g., Tacitus, *Germania* 18–19 on marriage and vice among the Germans. Also see Hartog 1988, 310–81.

83. PP 36.3: "Familia autem Saracenorum vel uxores eorum venientes de heremo, ad viam sedentes in lamentatione et, sareca missa ante se, petiebant panem a transeuntibus."

84. For more, see chapter 4.

the Saracens' pagan cultic practices. Of the practices described, the most damning were animal and human sacrifice. As modern scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that ancient ethnography is notoriously unreliable for understanding historical cultural practices, we should be critical of such accounts.[85]

Jerome's description of the cult of the Saracens occurs in his biography of the monk Hilarion, who was said to have been active around Gaza and the Negev Desert in the middle of the fourth century.[86] The biography of Hilarion stresses his successes in converting the villages and peoples of the Negev to Christianity through miracles and exorcisms.[87] According to Jerome, people began to flock to Hilarion for spiritual training, because there were no monasteries in Palestine or in Syria at that time. With Hilarion's assistance, monasteries were set up around southern Palestine and in the Negev.[88]

Jerome's Hilarion was quite effective in Christianizing the region around Gaza, but when he visited Elusa in the Negev Desert, he encountered a large celebration to the goddess Venus. Jerome reports the encounter as follows:[89]

> On his way to the desert of Cades to visit one of his disciples, he arrived at Elusa together with a great number of monks. It happened to be the day on which the whole population of that town had gathered in the temple of Venus for the annual celebrations. (They worshipped her on account of Lucifer, to whose cult the Saracen people are devoted. But in fact the town itself is to a large extent semi-barbarous on account of its situation.) When they heard that the holy man Hilarion was passing through (for he had often cured many Saracens possessed by demons), crowds of them went out to meet him together with their wives and children. They bowed their

85. Woolf 2011.

86. Weingarten 2005, 81–164. The church historian Sozomen wrote (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.14, 5.15) that his grandfather was converted by Hilarion.

87. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis,* 13, 15–18, 22. It is a common topos in hagiographic literature that miracles bring converts or adherents. In this literature, the holy men who perform miracles cause the conversion of the witnesses. The exorcism of demons is also a common topos. See Brown 1971 on the anthropological and sociological functions of the holy man. Monks are often portrayed with magical powers: see Binns 1994, 218–44.

88. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 24.

89. Ibid. 16, translated in NPNF 2.6.309: "quod uadens in desertum Cades ad unum de discipulis suis uisendum, cum infinito agmine monachorum pervenit Elusam, eo forte die, quo anniuersaria sollemnitas omnem oppidi populum in templum Veneris congregauerat. Colunt autem illam ob Luciferum cuius cultui Saracenorum natio dedita est. Sed et ipsum oppidum ex magna parte semibarbarum est propter loci situm. Igitur audito quod sanctus Hilarion praeteriret (multos enim Saracenorum arreptos a daemone frequenter curauerat), gregatim ei cum uxoribus et liberis obuiam processere, submittentes colla, et uoce Syra: "Barech," id est, "Benedic," inclamantes. Quos ille blande humiliterque suscipiens, obsecrabat ut Deum magis quam lapides colerent: simulque ubertim flebat, caelum apectans, et se pollicitans, si Christo crederent, ad eos se crebro esse uenturum. Mira Domini gratia, non prius eum abire passi sunt, quam futurae ecclesiae limitem mitteret; et sacerdos eorum, ut erat coronatus, Christi signo denotaretur."

> heads and shouted, *Barech,* a Syriac word meaning "Bless." Hilarion received them in a friendly and humble manner, and entreated them to worship God rather than stones. At the same time he wept profusely looking up to heaven and promising that if they believed in Christ he would come and visit them often. How wonderful is the Lord's grace! They would not allow him to depart until he had marked out the foundations of the future church and until their priest, garlanded as he was, had been marked by the sign of Christ.

In the context of Jerome's account, this passage seems designed to demonstrate the difficulty but eventual triumph of Hilarion's missionary work at Elusa.[90] Among the problems reported by Jerome are the ethnic background of the inhabitants (they are Saracens), their lack of culture (semibarbarians), and their religion (worship of the Morning Star as Venus).[91] Hilarion overcame these difficulties and succeeded in converting the population and their priest via exorcisms and healings.

Since the passage was intended to demonstrate Hilarion's power, it is unknown if Jerome was recording a historical event.[92] Regardless, the passage is successful in terms of Jerome's narrative, and it has an unintended consequence of connecting the Saracens of the Negev Desert to pagan beliefs, in this case related to the historical depictions of Arab religious cults. Jerome's characterization of the Saracens as worshippers of Venus has parallels in Greek sources dating back to Herodotus, who says that the Arabians call Aphrodite *Alilat* (al-Allat).[93] In addition, the founders of Elusa, the Nabataeans, are frequently associated with the worship of a goddess equated with Venus (Aphrodite). For example, according to the Babatha Archive, there was a temple of Aphrodite in Petra where the *acta* of the *boulē* were displayed.[94] Finally, there was a temple of Aphrodite faced with marble at Oboda, near Elusa.[95] This does not mean that Jerome understood that the Saracens were descendants of the Nabataeans; rather, he may have repurposed well-known religious practices for his own ends.[96]

Jerome was probably also influenced by the historical practices of the Nabataeans when he characterized the inhabitants of Elusa as stone worshippers, for the

90. Mayerson 1983c, 247–48.

91. Weingarten's (2005, 112–19) explanation of the term "semibarbarus" to indicate only their language understates Hilarion's triumph.

92. See Retsö 2003a, 602–10, or Hainthaler 2007, 36–37, for interpretations.

93. Herodotus 1.131–32: "καλέουσι δὲ Ἀσσύριοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην Μύλιττα, Ἀράβιοι δὲ Ἀλιλάτ, Πέρσαι δὲ Μίτραν." Elsewhere Herodotus equates Alilat to Urania and associates this goddess with Dionysus (Herodotus 3.8: "Ὀνομάζουσι δὲ τὸν μὲν Διόνυσον Ὀροτάλτ, τὴν δὲ Οὐρανίην Ἀλιλάτ.")

94. *P.Yadin* 12.

95. Negev 1997 104–6.

96. A similar case is mentioned by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 2.286–87), who describes a cult functioning in Petra, Elusa, and Alexandria that was dedicated to a virgin goddess who gave birth to the Nabataean god Dusares. See Bowersock 1990, 31–39.

Nabataean religion involved the worship of aniconic stone blocks. According to the tenth-century lexicon the *Suda,* a god Theus Ares was worshipped in Petra, capital of the Nabataeans. The cult image was a square unworked black stone four feet in height and two feet wide. This stone was placed on a base of beaten gold, and the inhabitants of Petra honored the image with blood libations.[97] Few modern scholars have believed that these statements were literally true.[98] As Glen Bowersock points out, "with all that we know about Petra there is nothing anywhere to suggest that Ares was particularly honoured there. . . . Indeed there is nothing to suggest he was honoured there at all."[99]

Even if the particular details in the *Suda* may not be entirely accurate, archaeological and epigraphic evidence shows that stone blocks were frequently used as Nabataean cult images. Approximately five hundred betyl (Greek βαιτύλια, Aramaic *bytl,* Nabataean *nṣb* and *mwb*) blocks have been discovered in Petra to date. These blocks are typically rectangular or stelar in shape. They are often carved directly into a niche, although empty niches for portable betyls are known from Petra. Some betyls are suggested simply by rectangular lines carved in stone. Although the majority of the betyls are aniconic, fewer than thirty betyl blocks have been discovered with facial features, the most famous with eyes and a nose (known as "eye idols"). The throne or *mōtab* (*mwtb*) is a common feature of the betyl niches and may be analogous to the cult stage in front of the Qasr al-Bint. There is some speculation that the *mōtab* was also worshipped in the absence of a cult image.[100]

The importance of Jerome's account of the conversion of Elusa is how he shaped the historical religious beliefs of the Nabataeans to create an image of paganism and backwardness that Hilarion was forced to overcome. Such images of the Saracens' worshipping Aphrodite and stones appear in a much more elaborated version in the Sinai Martyr Narratives but were also standard descriptions echoed in later Christian writings about the Muslims.[101]

Whereas Jerome's account was written to further the glorification of Hilarion, Pseudo-Nilus's was meant to impress upon the reader the Otherness of the nomads

97. *Suda,* Θ 302: "Θεὺς Ἄρης· τουτέστι θεὸς Ἄρης, ἐν Πέτρᾳ τῆς Ἀραβίας. σέβεται δὲ θεὸς Ἄρης παρ' αὐτοῖς· τόνδε γὰρ μάλιστα τιμῶσι. τὸ δὲ ἄγαλμα λίθος ἐστὶ μέλας, τετράγωνος, ἀτύπωτος, ὕψος ποδῶν τεσσάρων, εὖρος δύο· ἀνάκειται δὲ ἐπὶ βάσεως χρυσηλάτου. τούτῳ θύουσι καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῶν ἱερείων προχέουσι· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν αὐτοῖς ἡ σπονδή. ὁ δὲ οἶκος ἅπας ἐστὶ πολύχρυσος, καὶ ἀναθήματα πολλά."

98. Larché and Zayadine 2003, 199, accept this description as accurate in their reconstruction of the cult of the Qasr al-Bint. Also see Wenning 2001, 84–85.

99. Bowersock 1983a, 44. Ares and Dusares formed (with Theandrios) "an Arabian trinity" that is shown on coins from Bostra in the third century. The coins depict both anthropomorphic and aniconic images (Bowersock 1986). Ares is a Greek assimilation of the Semitic god A'ra, and the city of Areopolis is sometimes referred to Arsapolis after A'ra.

100. On betyls at Petra, see Wenning 2001; Healey 2001, 155–56.

101. Tolan 2012, 522–26.

and the excessive danger that they represented.[102] However, it is important to keep in mind that Pseudo-Nilus's purpose in his text is to create a contrasting image as compared with the monks. He may have been inspired by Herodotus's descriptions of the Egyptians, in which the Egyptians do everything completely the opposite of his fellow Greeks.[103] The *Narrationes* has a similar section in which Pseudo-Nilus directly compares the pious monks and vicious, pagan nomads, and the descriptions of Saracen life and religion come from these sections.[104] As discussed in the introduction, therefore, ancient ethnography was written to produce a certain outcome, and thus may not present historical customs. However, the discourse and its impact remain real, and for those who had never been to the Sinai, these would have profoundly influenced the image of the nomads.

Of all the Sinai sources, Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* produces the most elaborate evidence of pagan practice among the nomads.[105] Throughout his narrative, Pseudo-Nilus stresses the barbaric religious practices of the nomads. He states openly that they do not know God (θεὸν οὐκ εἰδότες), immediately noting how different they are from the monks and fellow Christian readers.[106] He then proceeds in his account to describe several religious practices, including the sacrifice of a camel and sacrifices of young boys.

In his least hostile description, Pseudo-Nilus provides an elaborate discussion of the sacrifice of a camel, which occurs when the nomads cannot find a child to sacrifice. First, the nomads select a white, spotless camel, and after binding its knees, the entire tribe circumambulates it three times.[107] Then either the king or an elder priest begins the ceremony by singing hymns to the Morning Star.[108] After the third circle, when the very last verse of the song was sung, the official sliced the neck and drank some of the blood.[109] Then the remaining tribesmen slice off pieces

102. Henninger 1955 doubts that any of the ethnographic material in this text can be accepted as historically accurate. His view has been influential, but others, such as Christides 1973, have argued otherwise.

103. Herodotus 2.35–36.

104. Pseudo-Nilus 3.1–18.

105. Surprisingly, Link 2005 does not mention the Saracens in either his introduction or his commentary.

106. Ibid. 131. There is no evidence in the text to support Shahid's suggestion (1989, 138) that the Saracen chief Ammanes was a Christian: Pseudo-Nilus 3.1.

107. Ibid. 3.3: "ἦν δ' οὗτοι μὴ παρῶσι, κάμηλον λευκὴν τῷ χρώματι καὶ ἄμωμον ἐπὶ γονάτων κατακλίναντες περιέρχονται τρίτῳ κύκλῳ κειμένην παμπληθεὶ δολιχεύοντες."

108. Ibid.: "ἐξάρχει δέ τις καὶ τῆς περιόδου καὶ ᾠδῆς τῆς εἰς τὸ ἄστρον αὐτοῖς πεποιημένης ἢ τῶν βασιλευόντων ἢ τῶν ἡλικίᾳ γήρους σεμνυνομένων ἱερεων."

109. Ibid.: "Ὡς μετὰ τὴν τρίτην περίοδον, οὔπω τῆς ᾠδῆς παυσαμένου τοῦ πλήθους, ἔτι δὲ ἐπὶ γλώσσης τὸ ἀκροτελεύτιον τοῦ ἐφυμνίου φέροντος, σπασάμενος τὸ ξίφος εὐτόνως παίει κατὰ τοῦ τένοντος καὶ πρῶτος μετὰ σπουδῆς τοῦ αἵματος ἀπογεύεται." Is Pseudo-Nilus possibly referencing Ammianus's description of the Saracen who drank the blood of a Goth (Ammianus Marcellinus 31.16)?

of the flesh, eviscerating the corpse and consuming the bones and marrow, leaving nothing.[110] The ceremony was to be concluded before dawn.[111] According to David Frankfurter, this description "not coincidentally echoed ancient xenophobic tableaux of alien cultures. . . . [The Saracen] is a cannibal and pervert who engages in unspeakable and irrational acts; consequently he is not human."[112]

If the description of animal sacrifice indicates that the nomads are "not human," then the characterization of the nomadic inhabitants as practitioners of human sacrifice completes their alienation from the Christian *oikoumenē*.[113] According to Pseudo-Nilus, the nomads worship the Morning Star and sacrifice the best of their stolen goods to it.[114] Most of all, they prefer to sacrifice boys in the prime of life, presumably ones who have been kidnapped. At daybreak, the boy is brought forward and sacrificed on rocks.[115] The use of the word "rocks" (λίθοι) here is a reflection of the Nabataean practice of worshipping aniconic stone blocks, which are called "rocks" (λίθοι) in the *Suda*.[116] It therefore appears possible that Pseudo-Nilus's account is influenced by the Nabataean cultic beliefs discussed earlier; however, he has warped the historical aspects of Nabataean religion to create a sensationalist and thoroughly dehumanizing impression.

The narrator (Pseudo-Nilus) feared that his son, Theodulus, would be sacrificed in such an impious manner after being captured in the raid on the monastic communities of Mount Sinai.[117] According to a captive who escaped from the barbarians, the prisoners overheard that they (including Theodulus) were going to be sacrificed to the Morning Star, confirming the narrator's worst fears. In preparation, the barbarians erected an altar and gathered a pile of wood.[118] At this point in

110. Pseudo-Nilus 3.3: "καὶ οὕτως προσδραμόντες οἱ λοιποὶ ταῖς μαχαίραις οἱ μὲν σὺν ταῖς θριξὶ μέρος τι βραχὺ τῆς δορᾶς ἀποτέμνουσιν, οἱ δὲ τὸ ἐπιτυχὸν ἁρπάζοντες τῶν σαρκῶν ἀποκόπτουσιν, οἱ δὲ μέχρι σπλάγχνων χωρούσι καὶ ἐγκάτων, οὐδὲν τῆς θυσίας καταλιμπάνοντες ἀκατέργαστον ὃ δυνήσεται λοιπόν ποτε ὀφθῆναι φαίνοντι τῷ ἡλίῳ." Link 2005 removes τῷ.

111. Mayerson 1975, 114; Link 2005, 135.

112. Frankfurter 2001, 368, concludes that the account of the camel sacrifice is "sensationalist" and probably has little real historical accuracy (discussed ibid. 365–68).

113. Despite a few significant exceptions, human sacrifice was always condemned by Greco-Roman writers (Balsdon 1979, 245–48).

114. Pseudo-Nilus 3.1: "ἄστρῳ δὲ τῷ πρωϊνῷ προσκυνοῦτες καὶ θύοντες ἀνατέλλοντι τῶν λαφύρων τὰ δόκιμα, ὅταν ἐξ ἐφόδου λῃστρικῆς αὐτοῖς περιγένηταί τι πρὸς σφαγὴν ἐπιτήδειον."

115. Ibid. 3.2: "παῖδας δὲ μάλιστα προσφέρειν σπουδάζουσιν ὥρᾳ καὶ ἡλικίας ἀκμῇ διαφέροντας, ἐπὶ λίθων συμπεφορημένων περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον τούτους ἱερεύοντες."

116. See above (note 97), *Suda,* Θ 302; Link 2005, 132, suggests that these "rocks" are cairn piles that were used for the burial or commemoration of dead.

117. Pseudo-Nilus 3.2: "ὅ με καὶ λίαν, ὦ φίλοι, ὀδυνᾷ καὶ ταράττει, μή πως τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἡ μορφὴ τοῦ παιδὸς πρὸς τὴν νενομισμένην ἀσέβειαν ἔχουσά τι λίχνον καὶ ἐπαγωγὸν γένηται χρήσιμος πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτοῖς."

118. Ibid. 5.2: "'ἐμὲ καὶ τὸν σὸν' ἔλεγε, 'παῖδα παρὰ τὸ δεῖπνον διαλαλοῦντες ἐπηγγέλλοντο τῷ ἄστρῳ θύειν πρωΐ, καὶ βωμὸν ἤγειραν καὶ ξύλα παρέθεσαν.'"

the narrative, the witness escapes from the barbarians, leaving Theodulus to his fate. This creates a sense of anticipation and dread in the narrative, since Pseudo-Nilus assumes that his son has been sacrificed.

After being reunited with his father in Elusa, Theodulus later recounts to him his description of the preparations for his sacrifice. Once the barbarians decide to sacrifice Theodulus, they begin their preparations in the evening. Theodulus explains how the nomads raise an altar and prepare the sacrificial knife, libation, ritual bowl, and frankincense. They are prepared to sacrifice Theodulus at dawn unless, as Theodulus indicates, God intervenes to save him from death.[119] At this point in the narrative, Theodulus prays that he will be saved. In the prayer, he reveals further details about the religious practices of the nomads. He cries out to God: "Do not deliver my blood as a sacrifice to their demons, nor let the wicked spirits enjoy the smell of my flesh. They prepared me as a sacrifice to the star that was named for lustful desire. Do not allow my body, which until now has been chaste, to become a sacrifice and a victim to a demon of lust."[120] The most likely explanation of Theodulus's "demon of lust" is a connection between the Morning Star and Aphrodite. Such a connection is implied by several sources but is made explicit only by (the much-later) John of Damascus when describing Muslim veneration of the Ka'aba as a "rock" dedicated to Aphrodite on which Abraham and Hagar engaged in sexual intercourse.[121]

To monks, this kind of sexual violence must have seemed terribly frightening. To Theodulus, it represents the destruction of his monastic sexual self-restraint. Stories of the despoiling of virgins or the temptations of sex abound in early Christian literature. For example, in the *Life of Antony,* a Black boy, representing the devil, tempts Antony with pederastic sex after Antony has refused the advances of a scantily clad woman.[122] Since Athanasius portrays a desire for sexual activity as a problem for young monks, sexual sin must have been a particularly apt insult to the child Theodulus.[123] As with Antony, sexuality was often associated with "Blackness" in early Christian accounts. Since Ammonius described the Blemmyes as "Blacks," it is possible that the sexual violence Theodulus imagines could be a metaphorical indication of the military threat of the Blemmyes.[124]

119. Ibid. 7.3: "δέδοκτο τοῖς βαρβάροις . . . ἡ ἡμετέρα σφαγήν καὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν θυσιαν ἀφ' ἑσπέρας ἦν ἅπαντα εὐτρεπῆ, βωμός, μάχαιρα, σπονδή, φιάλη, λίβανος, καὶ ὄρθρου βαθέος ἦν, εἰ μὴ θεὸς ἔμελλε κωλύειν ὃν ἐκώλυσε θάνατον."

120. Ibid. 7.4–5: "μὴ δῷς δαίμοσι σπονδὴν γενέσθαι τὸ ἐμὸν αἷμα, μηδὲ κνίσῃ τῶν ἐμῶν σαρκῶν εὐφρανθείησαν πνεύματα πονηρά. ἄστρῳ με θυσίαν ηὐτρέπισαν ἐπωνύμῳ λαγνείας πάθει. μὴ γενέσθω σῶμα ἕως εἰς τὴν σήμερον ἁγνὸν δαίμονος ἀκολασίας ἐπωνύμου θῦμα καὶ ἱερεῖον."

121. Retsö 2003a, 602–3. John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus* 100.92–94. See chapter 6, pp. 135–36.

122. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 5–6.

123. Brakke 1995, 227–30.

124. Byron 2002, 85–89. See above, note 67.

There is no evidence that human sacrifice was historically practiced by the Bedouin of the Sinai, but Procopius mentions that Alamoundaras (Al-Mundir), leader of the Lakhmids, sacrificed a son of his rival Arethas (a Ghassanid) to Aphrodite.[125] Despite this supportive evidence, there is reason to doubt the accuracy of Pseudo-Nilus's account. For example, many of his descriptions are closely related to the Greek novels of Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, and Lollianus. Several sentences in the *Narrationes* parallel or directly copy passages in one or another of these authors.[126] As Caner has argued, the *Narrationes* should be considered the last surviving example of the genre of Greek Romance.[127] Nevertheless, these borrowings do invalidate neither the possibility that such sacrifices could occur nor the impact that the *Narrationes* must have had on the creation of an image of the nomads.

Though there is no way to confirm that Pseudo-Nilus has accurately portrayed the religion of the nomads, the account of the Piacenza pilgrim suggests that some pagan practices continued among the nomads of the Sinai in the late sixth century. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, he described how the Saracens erected an idol on Mount Sinai and left a priest to tend it. The idol may be associated with the worship of betyl stones, and its transformation to the color black could suggest sexual overtones, as described above.[128]

The testimony of such authors clearly conjures the image of the Saracens as non-Christian heathens who practice several pagan rituals; however, it is clear that much of the evidence concerning the pagan nature of the Saracens is associated in some way with their Christianization, as with the actions of Hilarion in converting the pagan priest of Elusa. This is true throughout the Near East, where many individual nomads and several tribes are known to have converted to Christianity in this period.[129] *Acts of the Church Councils* mention the names of several bishops who served nomadic groups, including those named "Saracens."[130] Several of the

125. Procopius, *Wars* 2.28. See Henninger 1955, 101–13, for a critical view. Lenski (2011, 257) has collected many references to human sacrifice among the Saracens and accepts the possibility that this was historically practiced.

126. Link 2005, 132. On the dangers faced in these novels from outlaws and "uncivilized" groups, see Winkler 1980; on the problems of banditry, also see Isaac 1984 and Shaw 1984.

127. Caner 1994 and 2010, 77–81.

128. Pagans and Christians occasionally shared holy places, such as the Oak of Mamre. (See E. Fowden 2002, 125–29.) PP 38: "Et in ipso monte in parte montis habent idolum suum positum Saraceni marmoreum candidum tam quam nix. In quo etiam permanent sacerdos ipsorum indutus dalmatica et pallium lineum. Quando etiam uenit tempus festiuitatis ipsorum recurrente luna, antequam egrediatur luna, ad diem festum ipsorum incipit colorem mutare marmor illa; mox luna introierit, quando coeperint adorare, fit nigra marmor illa tamquam pice. Completo tempore festiuitatis reuertitur in pristinum colorem, unde omnino mirati sumus" (Caner 2010, 258 no. 31).

129. See esp. Hainthaler 2007; Fisher 2011, 34–71.

130. See Shahid 1984a, 330–45; Millar 2005, 302. For example, Ioannes and Eustathios, bishops "of the Saracens" in the Council of Chalcedon (*ACO* 2.1.1.3).

allied tribes converted to Christianity, and the Ghassanids alone may have constructed dozens of churches and monasteries in Syria.[131] Irfan Shahid has even argued that many of the monks in the Sinai were Christianized Arabs.[132]

Another example demonstrates how the religious image of the Saracens could be manipulated for different purposes. According to Anastasius of Sinai, in the middle of the seventh century, most of the Saracens within the Sinai converted to Islam not from paganism but from Christianity.[133] Thus, the same groups who have been blasted as pagans in the pre-Islamic period suddenly appear as Christians in the Islamic period. At least one of these nomads was so devoted that he threw himself off Mount Sinai, as described in chapter 6.

THE SARACENS AS ROMAN SOLDIERS AND ALLIES

As early as the end of the first century B.C.E., Arab tribal groups were serving the Romans and Parthians as allies.[134] In many ways, the use of nomads in the military was just a continuation of long-standing imperial policies in the Near East. Even in the Assyrian period, nomads were contractually obligated to maintain control over border regions.[135] In mandating this practice, the states of the ancient Near East recognized that zones of nomadic control existed along the edges of the agricultural states.[136] Likewise, Roman policy elsewhere, such as along the Rhine and Danube frontiers, was to develop relationships with non-Roman groups to acquire recruits or establish hegemonic control over Roman borders.[137]

As Roman direct rule in the Near East expanded in the second and third centuries, evidence of interaction between Roman authorities and nomadic groups increased.[138] For example, a set of inscriptions from the second century written in Greek or Nabataean, or both, at Ruwwafa in the Hijaz may have been composed by nomads serving as auxiliary troops in the Roman army.[139] By the late fourth century, several units composed of Saracens and units named after the Thamudeni, a

131. See Shahid 1995–2002, 2.1.143–219. Shahid's use of later Islamic poetry to reconstruct the material culture of the sixth century has recently been questioned (De Vries 2010; Fisher 2011, 10–11, 23).

132. Shahid 1995–2002, 2.3.968–89.

133. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, pp. 138–41.

134. Strabo 16.1.28: "Ὅριον δ' ἐστὶ τῆς Παρθυαίων ἀρχῆς ὁ Εὐφράτης καὶ ἡ περαία· τὰ δ' ἐντὸς ἔχουσι Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν Ἀράβων οἱ φύλαρχοι μέχρι Βαβυλωνίας, οἱ μὲν μᾶλλον ἐκείνοις οἱ δὲ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις προσέχοντες, οἱσπερ καὶ πλησιόχωροί εἰσιν, ἧττον μὲν Σκηνῖται οἱ νομάδες οἱ τῷ ποταμῷ πλησίον, μᾶλλον δ' οἱ ἄπωθεν καὶ πρὸς τῇ εὐδαίμονι Ἀραβίᾳ."

135. Eph'al 1982, 93–100.

136. Donner 1989, 81–83.

137. Luttwak 1976, 32–38; Liebeschuetz 1990, 34–36; Southern and Dixon 1996, 48–50.

138. On Roman rule and expansion in the Near East up to the fourth century, see Millar 1993, 27–222.

139. M. Macdonald 2009c, 9–11, 14.

nomadic tribe, are known from the *Notitia Dignitatum,* reflecting an increased Roman integration of Arabs into the official army.[140]

The tribal confederacies that developed as a result of Roman treaties with powerful dynastic, nomadic families proved to be of greater importance than individual recruits to imperial security in the Near East.[141] Several of these dynastic families and their associated groups are known from late antiquity, including the Hujrids, who dominated the Kinda, and the Jafnids, who controlled the confederation of the Ghassanids in the sixth century.[142] The earliest of such elite leaders as these may have been Imru al-Qays, who was buried within Roman territory at Nemara in 328. He famously claimed to be "king of all the Arabs," though what he meant has been endlessly debated.[143] At first the Romans contracted with several groups of varying power, but in the time of Justinian, the Ghassanids were placed above all other groups.[144] The elites within the Ghassanids took upon themselves the traditional roles of local power magnates, including the use of patronage, arbitration, the construction of monumental structures.[145] These roles imply that at least some portion of the tribes became more settled, even if this trend was restricted to a small elite group. These allies played an important role in the various wars between the Roman Empire and the Persians, facing off against the Persian-allied Lakhmids until the arrest of al-Mundhir, Jafnid leader of the Ghassanids, in 582.[146]

By the fourth century, the Greek word *phylarchos* (phylarch) was often employed as a technical term to indicate the leader of a Roman federate group, but it was occasionally used in the prior, generic sense, as of a tribal chief.[147] According to Ammonius, the violence at Mount Sinai began when "the holder of the phylarchy died."[148] Since phylarchy was an institution of the Roman Empire, this unnamed chief must have been bound by the Romans to help keep the peace in the Sinai. A similar story is told about the tribe led by the Saracen leader Mavia, whose revolt some have connected with the violence in Ammonius's account.[149]

140. *Notitia Dignitatum, Oriens* 34.22. Shahid 1984b, 51–63.

141. See Isaac 1990, 235–49; Fisher 2011, esp. 80–83, 95–99.

142. See Sartre 1982, 132–88; Shahid 1984a, 1989, 1995, Fisher 2008, 2011.

143. See Bowersock 1983b, 138–42; Shahid 1984a, 31–47, and 2000; Fisher 2011, 77–78, 140–44.

144. Procopius, *Wars* 1.17.45–47; Shahid 1995–2002, 1.2.103–17.

145. On settlement and Ghassanid constructions, see Shahid 1995–2002, 2.1.1–14, 76–219. The role of the nomadic leaders in local politics can be seen in the Petra papyrus that mentions the phylarch Abu Karib's role as an arbitrator in a local dispute (*P.Petra* 39; Caldwell 2001, 111–49; Kaimio 2011, 41–120).

146. Fisher 2011, 174–84.

147. Isaac 1990, 243–49; Mayerson 1991; Grouchevoy 1995.

148. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) fol. 5; (Greek, ed. Tsames) 3: "ἄφνω ἐπιρρίπτει ἡμῖν πλῆθος Σαρακηνῶν, ἀποθανόντος τοῦ κρατοῦντος τὴν φυλαρχίαν."

149. Socrates 5.1: "Ἐπεβοήθουν δὲ αὐτοῖς ὀλίγοι Σαρακηνοὶ ὑπόσπονδοι, παρὰ Μαυΐας πεμφθέντες, ἧς καὶ ἀνωτέρω ἐμνημονεύσαμεν." Sartre 1982, 148; Grossman 2001a, 181. For more on Mavia, see chapter 5.

In addition to the formal treaties made with the Roman Empire, it also appears possible that local groups could contract with nomadic leaders for protection. Pseudo-Nilus mentions that the town of Pharan had an agreement with Ammanes, "the king of the barbarians."[150] The agreement stipulated that the king would make restitution to the Pharanites, returning any captives and booty in return for a payment of tribute.[151] This agreement demonstrates the complexity of sedentary-nomadic relationships, in which the nomads themselves were divided, with some hostile whereas others were engaged in beneficial relationships.[152]

CONCLUSION

Describing the historical people named Saracens in the Greco-Roman sources is difficult. The sources defined the Saracens based on how different the Saracen lifestyle was from their own. These sources claimed that the Saracens were nomadic, lived in tents, did not eat bread, were not Christian, and were violent and treacherous. This chapter has demonstrated that the reality was much more complex. Modern scholarship shows that the range of economic behaviors was much more complex than a simple dichotomy of settled versus nomadic. Even if all the groups called Saracens had been entirely nomadic, which seems unlikely, they still participated in a complex economic relationship with the sedentary populations. Many of the Saracens may have remained pagan, but large numbers converted to Christianity in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Some may indeed have been violent and treacherous, but others were valued allies in the wars versus Persia. Even previously hostile leaders like Amorkesos (Imru al Qays?), who captured the port town of Iotabe, could be swayed to assisting the Romans in return for subsidies and imperial support.[153]

In sum, there are no simple conclusions that can be reached regarding the actual, historical relationship between the sedentary populations and the nomads. What is evident in the Greco-Roman sources is the creation of an image of the Saracens that may or may not accurately reflect them or their lifestyle in late antiquity. Nevertheless, for the millions of people who lived in the Roman Empire and never encountered a Saracen, the image generated by these sources was reality. And for all subsequent readers, mostly Christian, the discourse of the violent, heathen Saracen would leave a long shadow. The arrival of these Christian groups in the Sinai, the spread of their monastic communities, and the pilgrims who visited them are the focus of the next chapter.

150. Pseudo-Nilus 6.9, 6.17.
151. Ibid. 6.11; Mayerson 1986b, 44.
152. Lenski 2011, 146.
153. Malchus (Blockley 1983, 2.404–6); Sartre 1982, 154–55; Shahid 1989, 82–91.

2

Monasticism and Pilgrimage in the Sinai

She caught her first glimpse of Mount Sinai from a cleft in the rocky, barren mountains. In an instant, the light blinded her party as they left the mountains for the remarkably flat and beautiful valley floor. Her goal stood four miles farther on in the middle of the valley. The pilgrim Egeria had left Jerusalem three weeks ago and was tired, dirty, and hungry, but she could not contain her excitement at finally reaching Mount Sinai and the small monastic communities that had developed at its base around the Burning Bush. The monks accompanying her suggested that she pray just as they exited the mountain pass, which she did enthusiastically. She could not wait to ascend the mountain on which "God's majesty [had] descended."[1] This excitement distorted her sight—she claimed that Mount Sinai was higher than the other mountains, but this is visibly not the case.[2] Having followed local custom and praying, the group started the final stretch of the journey, passing through the plain where Egeria believed the Israelites lived for the forty days and forty nights while Moses conversed with God. That evening she arrived at the foot of the mountains, where her party found several monastic cells and even a church. After staying the night with the monks, she began the ascent to Mount Sinai. It was impossible to take a horse into the mountains, and she had to physically climb up the mountain on her own.

When she had reached the summit in the fourth hour, she claimed not to feel the pain of her toil. She was physically exhausted but spiritually invigorated. The mountain was so high that she could see Egypt, Palestine, and the Red Sea, and

1. Egeria 2.5, "hic locus ubi descendit maiestas Dei."
2. Caner 2010, 219 n. 51.

even claimed that she could see the Mediterranean. All these regions were bounded by the lands of the "Saracens," which she claimed were infinite.[3] To her surprise, a monk came out of the summit chapel to greet her, whom she described as "worthy of that place," even though no one remained on the summit at night.[4] After reading from the book of Exodus and taking Communion, the monks presented her with *eulogiae* (blessings), fruit that was grown by the monks around Mount Sinai. She was astonished that the monks were able to grow anything there, because the mountains were so rocky and dry. It was as if the monks, with their constant manual labor, required miracles just to survive.

Egeria's diary is filled with the kind of details that make it easy to reconstruct her thoughts and feelings when she encountered the holy places and the monks who dwelled there. Hers is a lone voice that must stand for the innumerable pilgrims who made the journey but did not leave behind such detailed records. It must be remembered that pilgrims were just as commonly visitors to Mount Sinai as were the monks who lived in the region. These monks guided the pilgrims, performed rituals for them, and kept them nourished physically and spiritually. Without the pilgrims, the monastic communities in the Sinai could not have survived, if only because they could not replace their populations through procreation. This meant that monastic communities were dependent on the immigration of new members, that they needed to attract pilgrims to sustain their populations.[5]

The monastic settlements in the Sinai sought self-sufficiency (*autarchy*), but the large numbers of pilgrims meant that the monks could not produce enough food to meet demand.[6] Although they could not achieve their goal of being autarchic, the monks were the first group to practice agriculture in the Sinai, importing methods known from the more settled regions of the Negev and southern Jordan. There, agriculture was based on the creation of elaborate water-catchment systems that directed the sparse rainfall toward agricultural beds.[7] The Sinai monks copied these installations in at least ten wadis (dry creek beds). Most of these were orchards rather than grain-producing farms, with the orchards situated on the slopes rather than in the wadi beds. For example, a winepress has been excavated at Wadi Tubuq, about six kilometers southwest from Saint Catherine's, verifying the production of

3. Egeria 3.7.

4. Egeria 3.4, "qualis dignus est."

5. On replenishment of monks in the Judean desert monasteries, see Hirschfeld 1992, 71.

6. Caner 2010, 22. Despite the desire to maintain an autarchic state, the Sinai communities needed to import food to survive. Though this was true everywhere in the Mediterranean, it was especially true in the Sinai on account of its arid nature. (See Horden and Purcell 2000, 112–15.) Ammonius mentions grain being traded from Clysma in Egypt to the monks at Rhaithou in exchange for woven baskets (Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* [Greek, ed. Tsames] 13). The transportation of these items apparently used the same infrastructure as pilgrims and Red Sea merchants (Ward 2009, 190–91).

7. Zohary 1954; Kedar 1957, 1967; Mayerson 1959, 1962; Bruins 1986; Lavento et al. 2004.

grapes there.[8] Throughout world history, colonizers have often imported new forms of agriculture, as for example with the spread of wheat and other crops to North America, South Africa, and Australia.[9] In bringing agricultural production to the Sinai, the monks acted much like those other colonizers and reduced the territory open to nomadic and seminomadic economic behaviors.

In the previous chapter, I focused on the nomadic lifestyle and the negative view of it. I argued that the situation was more complicated than a casual reading of the source material would suggest. I suggested that the ethnographic literature helped to frame the nomads as subhuman and that the dichotomy between nomads and Christian monks in Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* was intended to demonstrate the superiority of Christian lifestyles. In this way, the Christians who came to inhabit and visit the Sinai projected their own ideas onto the indigenous peoples, much as Europeans invented the Noble Savage to describe the natives of North America—except that in the Sinai there was nothing noble about the Saracen "savages."[10]

This chapter turns toward those Christian groups and begins by examining the origins of Christian monasticism before proceeding to a discussion of the monastic communities in the Sinai. Thereafter this chapter examines pilgrimage to the Sinai and the reasons why pilgrims traveled great distances to see the holy sites and holy men. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the various pilgrimage routes that crossed the region, with Mount Sinai and its monastic communities as the ultimate goal.

Any discussion of Sinai monasticism is integrally bound to the history of pilgrimage to the region. Because the authenticity of many of the sources written on the Sinai, such as Ammonius's *Relatio* and Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes,* remains controversial, only pilgrimage accounts can provide contemporary, historically verified eyewitness descriptions of Sinai monasticism. The pilgrimage accounts must be the first step in assessing monasticism in the Sinai, with the Sinai sources used to supplement material provided by more securely dated information. Archaeology can serve to partially transcend this problem, since surveys and excavations have revealed much about the monastic communities in the Sinai, but such evidence cannot replace the spiritual impressions created by the pilgrimage accounts.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

The origins of Christian monasticism are shrouded in mystery.[11] Despite the seemingly important *vitae* of Antony, Paul of Thebes, Pachomius, and Hilarion,

8. Dahari 2000, 147–49.
9. Cronon 1983; Kulikoff 1986; Isaacman and Roberts 1995; Mann 2011.
10. See the wide-ranging R. Williams 2012.
11. A good overview of early Christian monasticism is Dunn 2000.

little is known about the earliest forms of Christian monasticism and the people who became the first monks. Some scholars have looked to Jewish, pagan, or gnostic models to describe how Christian monasticism may have developed.[12] One possible origin is the custom of *anachōrēsis* in Egypt, in which individuals fled their villages to avoid financial or legal problems.[13]

Athanasius's popular *Life of Antony* is often credited with greatly enhancing enthusiasm for the monastic life.[14] It was widely read throughout the Mediterranean world and led to the most famous of conversions—that of Saint Augustine.[15] Athanasius wrote that Antony was one of the first to perform *anachōrēsis,* since he was forced to move deep into the desert to avoid the large numbers of visitors who sought spiritual comfort.[16] This is one early indicator of how popular holy men would become in late antiquity. While Antony may not have been the first monk to withdraw into the desert, the wide readership of Athanasius's *vita* made him the most famous early monk and a focus of emulation.[17]

Antony reflects just one monastic branch—the anchorites, who traditionally lived solitary lives. Another type of monk, the *apotactic* (not to be confused with the heretics of the same name), did not leave the settled communities but lived within villages. This type of monk appears with the first attested technical use of the term *monachos,* dated to June 324.[18] These monks dedicated themselves to an ascetic life but did not retreat from the world and continued to live in or near their previous villages.[19] Jerome described them as a third type of monk and strongly criticized them for not departing from the villages, for refusing to follow a monastic rule, visiting virgins, having fasting competitions, being gluttonous, and

12. Guillaumont 1979, 13–66, examines the Jewish origins of monasticism. See also Dillon 1995 for a discussion of Platonic renunciation; McGinn 1995 looks toward gnosticism and its impact on Christian asceticism.

13. Chitty 1966, 6–7; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.12.11; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.42.2. The earliest Christian monks in Egypt may have fled into the desert to avoid persecution, a proposition supported by Eusebius, who describes how Christians from Alexandria fled into the desert with their bishop to avoid persecutions during the reign of Decius.

14. The bibliography on the *Vita Antonii,* including its authorship and the intentions of Athanasius, is immense. Harmless 2004, 57–104, is an excellent introduction. Also see Rubenson 1990, 126–32. On the spiritual intentions of Athanasius, see Kannengiesser 1995, esp. 490–91 on the *Life of Antony.* Dunn (2000, 2) calls it a "paradigm of the early monastic movement."

15. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.12.29.

16. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 8–14. Athanasius describes Antony as a *monachos* only after he withdraws deeper into the desert (Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 14; Judge 1977, 77).

17. Harmless 2004, 418–23; see ibid. 97–98 for a discussion of the *vita*'s influence and wide accessibility in antiquity.

18. Judge 1977, 72–89.

19. Goehring 1999, 20–26, 53–72; Bagnall 1993, 297 no. 212, argues against using ἀποτακτικός as a technical term limited to a monk living on the edge of a village but proposes that the term could be applied to several types of monks.

arguing with church officers.[20] These condemnations are also found in other contemporary writings, such as John Cassian's *Conferences.*[21] Monks of a fourth type, called the *gyrovagi* in the Benedictine Rule, were accused of living an undisciplined life of wandering and begging.[22]

The last category of monks, the coenobitic, became more common in the Roman Empire.[23] "Coenobitic" derives its name from the Greek for "living communally" and represents the institutionalization of the monastic life. Pachomius's Rule, once translated from Coptic, influenced the character of monasticism throughout the Mediterranean world.[24] Basil of Caesarea later synthesized the solitary and coenobitic styles into a more moderate style and wrote two Rules, whose impact would later culminate in the Benedictine Rule. The Benedictine Rule, of course, would exert a great influence on the form of monasticism in Western Europe during the medieval period.[25]

Several early coenobitic communities have been archaeologically explored, but those in the Judean desert east of Jerusalem are the best known and likely similar to those in the Sinai. There are two major types of coenobitic monasteries. In the *laura,* monks live apart from each other in their own cells, but there is a central meeting area where the monastery is administered and the monks gather for weekly prayers. In a *coenobium,* the monks live and work together in a single com-

20. Jerome, *Epistula* 22.34: "Tria sunt in Aegypto genera monachorum: coenobium, quod illi sauhes gentili lingua uocant, nos 'in commune uiuentes' possumus appellare; anachoretae, qui soli habitant per deserta et ab eo, quod procul ab hominibus recesserint, nuncupantur; tertium genus est, quod dicunt remnuoth, deterrimum atque neglectum et quod in nostra prouincia aut solum aut primum est. hi bini uel terni nec multo plures simul habitant suo arbitratu ac dicione uiuentes et de eo, quod laborauerit, in medium partes conferunt, ut habeant alimenta communia. habitant autem quam plurimum in urbibus et castellis, et, quasi ars sit sancta, non uita, quidquid uediderint, maioris est pretii. inter hos saepe sunt iurgia, quia suo uiuentes cibo non patiuntur se alicui esse subiectos. re uera solent certare ieiuniis et rem secreti uictoriae faciunt. apud hos affectata sunt omnia: laxae manicae, caligae follicantes, uestis grossior, crebra suspiria, uisitatio uirginum, detractatio clericorum, et si quando festior dies uenerit, saturantur ad uomitum."

21. John Cassian, *Conferences* 18.7.

22. Dunn 2000, 115–16. By reading about the types of monasticism disparaged by such authors, it becomes clear that "wandering, begging monks" were among those practicing the earliest, most widespread forms of monasticism. These monks claimed to follow the apostolic tradition and answered to no higher authority. Over time, this form of monasticism was disparaged and rendered inert (Caner 2002, esp. 19–82, 243–47).

23. On Pachomius, see Rousseau 1985 and Dunn 2000, 25–33.

24. On the complicated nature of the Pachomian corpus, see Rousseau 1985, 37–56; Goehring 1999, 26 no. 56; Harmless 2004, 115–40. Greek, Latin, and Arabic translations were made of the original Coptic. For English translations of the most important texts, consult Veilleux 1980, 1981, 1982.

25. Dunn 2000, 34–41, 111, 114.

FIGURE 1. View of Saint Catherine's Monastery and the surrounding topography. (Photo: Claudia Rapp.)

plex, often physically separated from the outside world by a wall.[26] Both types of monasteries could be found in the Sinai, which also had its share of solitary anchorites.

EARLY MONASTICISM AT MOUNT SINAI

It is impossible to know when the first ascetic wandered into the Sinai desert or settled at Mount Sinai; however, by the end of the fourth century a large monastic community had grown up around the putative Burning Bush at Mount Sinai and by the mid-fifth century numerous satellite monastic communities had been established at Rhaithou and throughout the mountainous and coastal regions of the southern Sinai Peninsula. In the mid-sixth century, Justinian deemed the monks of sufficient importance and under such duress from the nomads that he ordered the construction of the famous monastery later called Saint Catherine's,

26. Hirschfeld 1992, 18–58.

which remains a functioning monastic community despite fifteen hundred years of Islamic control over the Sinai.[27]

Modern tradition at Saint Catherine's Monastery suggests that Helena, Constantine's mother, founded the first church at Mount Sinai around 330. She was supposedly guided by monks who lived in the area. This story is not reported by any contemporary sources, and it is highly doubtful that there was a community of monks at Mount Sinai in this period.[28] This is a much later tradition, possibly intended to connect the Sinai monasteries with Helena's constructions in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. As Helena was the "first pilgrim," it makes sense that the Sinai monastic community would want to justify its existence through reference to her.

The first documented anchorites arrived in the 360s or 370s.[29] One of these, the Syrian monk Julian Saba, founded a church and dedicated an altar on the top of Mount Sinai.[30] According to Theodoret, Julian Saba was motivated by the Sinai's connection to Moses and the manifestation of the Lord.[31] Ephrem the Syrian is more explicit; in his *Hymn* 20, he describes how the construction of the church and altar by Julian Saba elevated Saba to the level of a new Moses.[32] Julian Saba

27. The monastic community at Saint Catherine's has been the focus of many important studies. General studies include Devreesse 1940; Leclercq 1950; Chitty 1966, 168–78; Ševčenko 1966; Braun 1973; Solzbacher 1989; Galey 1980; Grossman 2001a; H. Evans 2004; Rossi 2006; Caner 2010, esp. 17–69. On the archaeological remains, see Forsyth 1968; Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973; Grossman 1988; Dahari 2000, 25–112. Of particular interest are the icons and manuscripts preserved in the monastery. On the icons, see Weitzmann and Galey 1976; Weitzmann 1982; Nelson and Collins 2006. On the manuscripts, see Gibson 1894; A. Lewis 1894; Weitzmann 1973; Bentley 1986; Weitzmann and Galavaris 1991; Brock 1995. On the legend of Saint Catherine, see Braun 1973, 24–45.

28. Eckenstein 1921, 99; Devreesse 1940; Bentley 1986, 86.

29. Chitty 1966, 168; Dahari 2000, 28; Grossman 2001a, 177–78.

30. On this church, see ibid. 194–95.

31. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, vita* 2.13: "Ταύτην ἀποδιδράσκων—δῆλος γὰρ ἅπασι γεγονὼς εἶλκε πρὸς αὐτὸν διὰ τῆς φήμης τοὺς τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐραστάς—, τὸ τέλος ἐπὶ τὸ Σίναιον ὄρος μετ' ὀλίγων τῶν συνηθεστέρων ἐξώρμησεν, οὐ πόλεως ἐπιβαίνων, οὐ κώμης, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἄβατον ἔρημον βατὴν ἐργαζόμενος. Ἔφερον δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων καὶ τὴν ἀναγκαίαν τροφὴν—τὸν ἄρτον φημὶ καὶ τοὺς ἅλας—καὶ κώθωνα ἐκ ξύλου πεποιημένον καὶ σπογγιὰν σμηρίνθῳ προσδεδεμένην ὅπως, εἴ ποτε βαθύτερον εὕροιεν ὕδωρ, ἀνιμήσαιντο μὲν τῇ σπογγιᾷ, ἀποθλίψαντες δὲ εἰς τὸν κώθωνα ἀποπίοιεν. Τοιγάρτοι πολλῶν ἡμερῶν ὁδὸν ἐξανύσαντες, καταλαμβάνουσι τὸ ποθούμενον ὄρος καί, τὸν οἰκεῖον προσκυνήσαντες δεσπότην, πολὺν ἐκεῖ διετέλεσαν χρόνον, τοῦ χωρίου τὴν ἐρημίαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡσυχίαν τρυφὴν μεγίστην ἡγούμενοι. Ἐν ἐκείνῃ δὲ τῇ πέτρᾳ, ὑφ' ᾗ κρυπτόμενος Μωϋσῆς τῶν προφητῶν ὁ κορυφαῖος ἠξιώθη τὸν θεὸν ἰδεῖν, ὡς δυνατὸν ἦν ἰδεῖν, ἐκκλησίαν δειμάμενος καὶ θεῖον ἁγιάσας θυσιαστήριον ὃ καὶ εἰς δεῦρο διέμεινεν, εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ἐπανῆκε παλαίστραν." Dahari (2000, 28–29) includes quotations from Ephrem the Syrian's poems that commemorate Julian Saba's founding of the church on Mount Sinai.

32. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymn* 20 (ed. Beck 1972 = CSCO 323.73–76). *Hymns* 14 and 19 also mention the church built by Julian Saba on Mount Sinai (ed. Beck 1972 = CSCO 323.61–62, 71–73); Caner 2010, 203–10.

may have traveled to Sinai in 362.[33] Another monk, Simeon the Elder, visited during the same period, possibly even before Julian Saba, but remained at Mount Sinai for only a short time.[34] Although it seems reasonable that some monks must have remained at Mount Sinai when Julian Saba departed, the first recorded permanent ascetic settlement appears around 380, when the Palestinian monk Silvanus established a small monastic community on Mount Sinai prior to settling at Gerari, near Gaza.[35] Both Julian Saba and Simeon the Elder traveled to the Sinai because of its tranquility (*hēsychia*), a condition that they were not able to achieve at the more populated holy places in Syria.[36]

Egeria's visit, in 383, displays how far the monastic settlement around Mount Sinai had progressed since the visit of Julian Saba, though the established community known from later sources had not yet coalesced. She routinely mentions the monks of the Sinai providing food, shelter, and spiritual nourishment.[37] They did not live in a single monastery, nor does Egeria mention any abbot; rather, the monks lived in many individual ascetic cells in the mountains and valleys surrounding Mount Sinai.[38] The core of the community was based around the putative Burning Bush, which would later be the focus of the monastery constructed by Emperor Justinian.[39] A well that allowed the cultivation of a garden was located near the Burning Bush.[40] Many individual cells also had small gardens.[41] Egeria also mentions several churches—one at the base of Mount Sinai, another on its summit, and one at the Burning Bush.[42] She provides no information, however, on the number of monks or their organization and administration.

33. Grossman 2001b, 178; Caner 2010, 203.

34. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, vita* 6.7.

35. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.32: "Σιλβανὸς δέ, ὃν διὰ τὴν ἄγαν ἀρετὴν ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων ὑπηρετούμενον θεαθῆναι λόγος, Παλαιστῖνος ὢν ἔτι οἶμαι κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἐφιλοσόφει τότε· ὕστερον δὲ ἐν τῷ Σιναίῳ ὄρει ὀλίγον διατρίψας, μετὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἐν Γεράροις ἐν τῷ χειμάρρῳ μεγίστην τε καὶ ἐπισημοτάτην πλείστων ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν συνοικίαν συνεστήσατο· ἧς μετ' αὐτὸν ἡγήσατο Ζαχαρίας ὁ θεσπέσιος." Chitty 1966, 71–74, 168.

36. Bitton-Ashkelony 2005, 159–60.

37. See below, "Pilgrimage and the Sinai."

38. Egeria (4.6) uses the word "monasteria" for these cells.

39. Ibid.: "Propterea autem ad caput ipsius vallis exire nos necesse erat, quoniam ibi errant monasteria plurima sanctorum hominum et ecclesia in eo loco ubi est rubus, qui rubus in hodie vivet et mittet virgultas."

40. Ibid. 4.7: "Hic est autem rubus quem superius dixi, de quo locutus est Dominus Moysi in igne, qui est in eo loco ubi monasteria sunt plurima et ecclesia in capite vallis ipsius. Ante ipsam autem ecclesiam hortus est gratissimus, habens aquam optimam abundantem, in quo horto ipse rubus est.

41. Ibid. 3.6: "id est de pomis quae in ipso monte nascuntur. . . . statim sancti monachi pro diligentia sua arbusculas ponunt et pomariola instituunt vel arationes et iuxta ibi monasteria, quasi ex ipsius montis terra aliquos fructus capiant, quos tamen minibus suis elaborasse videantur."

42. Ibid. 3.1, 3.3.

In the interval between Egeria's visit and the construction of the Justinianic monastery there are few extant sources.[43] Ammonius's *Relatio* claims to describe events that occurred in the late fourth century, but this has been doubted by many scholars. Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* is occasionally dated to the early fifth century, but not all scholars agree with this date either.[44] Nevertheless, both sources demonstrate that it was common for monks to live individually throughout the Sinai mountains. According to Ammonius, monks fled to a tower near Mount Sinai when the Saracens attacked, and he describes three locations—Gethrambe, Choreb, and Kodar—where monks lived. Although these cannot be associated with archaeological remains with any precision, it is suggestive that monks lived throughout the nearby region.[45] Pseudo-Nilus also notes a church at the Burning Bush but little else about the monastic community.[46] In addition, several monks who immigrated to the Sinai are mentioned in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (*Apophthegmata Patrum)* in this period, including several disciples of Silvanius.[47] One of these students became the first bishop of the Sinai: a certain Netras, whose episcopal seat was at Pharan about 400.[48]

The Council of Chalcedon (451) had consequences for the monks in the Sinai, just as it did for most Christians in the area. During that council, the patriarch of Jerusalem obtained responsibility for the churches of Third Palestine, including those in the Sinai.[49] The dealings of several monks with the patriarchs of Jerusalem appear in the sources, and it seems that a reservoir was constructed in the Sinai using funds provided by the patriarchs.[50] In 453, Emperor Marcian warned the bishop of Pharan and the monks of the Sinai to avoid the heresy of the Monophysite Theodosius, who had fled to the Sinai.[51] Theodosius had opposed the decision at the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus was one person with both a divine and a human nature; and he had usurped the bishopric of Jerusalem. In that position, he consecrated a number of Monophysite bishops before being deposed.[52] That Theodosius was able to find refuge in the Sinai suggests that some of the monks

43. Grossman 2001a, 183. The construction of this monastery is detailed in chapter 5.

44. On the date of composition of these sources, see the Introduction.

45. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 4, 5; Caner 2010, 21.

46. Pseudo-Nilus 4.1.

47. See Caner 2010, 23 no. 94, for a list of sayings.

48. *Vitae Patrum,* col. 918C–D, 36. *Apophthegmata Patrum,* col. 312A, 66. In the Latin he appears as Nathyr, but in the Greek he is called Netras (Shahid 1995–2002, 970).

49. Price and Gaddis 2005, 1.16–17, 2.244–49.

50. See, for example, John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 127, 134 (*PG* 89.3, cols. 2988, 2997); Caner 2010, 34–35.

51. *ACO* 2.1.490–911. On this text, which is the first official document attesting a bishop in the Sinai, see Caner 2010, 237–41.

52. See Evagrius Scholasticus 2.5 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier 1898, 51–53). For more information, see Whitby's (2000, 78–81) notes in his translation of this passage.

there also opposed the decision of the Council of Chalcedon; however, the majority of the monks seem to have remained orthodox, perhaps because of their diverse origins or because they accepted imperial benefaction.[53]

Beginning with the middle of the sixth century, the sources for monasticism at Mount Sinai become more informative with the writings of Procopius and John Moschus, who lived in the Sinai for ten years. Justinian ordered the construction of the monastery-fortress that later became known as Saint Catherine's.[54] A basilica church was placed within the fortress perhaps in 557, designed by Stephen of Aila and decorated with several theologically motivated mosaics.[55] Justinian may also have had a Church of Mary Theotokos constructed on the summit of Mount Sinai, though this church may be the same as the monastery basilica church.[56] Justinian is probably also responsible for arranging the monastic communities at Mount Sinai into an organized structure, perhaps even appointing the first abbot (*hēgoumenos*) himself.[57]

In the later sixth century Gregory, the future patriarch of Antioch, was appointed the abbot of the Mount Sinai monastery by Justinian's successor, Justin II. During Gregory's tenure, the monastery was besieged by "Scenite Arabs," but the walls held.[58] The Piacenza pilgrim also visited in this period, but he does not mention the Saracen attack. Instead, he was amazed at the "uncountable" number of hermit cells.[59] He also described how Justinian's monastery had enclosed the Burning Bush with strong walls and noted that a small church ("oratorium modicum") was located on the summit of Mount Sinai.[60] He mentions the large numbers of pilgrims who visited the site and differentiates between monks and hermits, indicating some knowledge of monastic organization.[61] In addition, Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) provided for fifteen beds in an infirmary for the monastery.[62]

Archaeological surveys and excavations also help to illuminate the Christian history at Mount Sinai.[63] The remains reflect the maximum occupation of the area around Mount Sinai (perhaps in the late sixth century), but not all the sites may have

53. Solzbacher 1989, 268; Dahari 2000, 22; Caner 2010, 35 no. 141.

54. See "Security in the Sixth Century" below in chapter 5.

55. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8 (ed. Haury 1962); Devreesse 1940, 213 no. 2; Ševčenko 1966, 257; Caner 2010, 26–29.

56. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8 (ed. Haury 1962); Dahari 2000, 30–36; Caner 2010, 29–30.

57. Ibid. 32–33.

58. Evagrius Scholasticus 5.6 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier 1898, 202).

59. PP 37: "et ecce multitudo monachorum et heremitarum innumerabilis." Ibid. 38: "per circuitum cellulae multae seruorum dei."

60. Ibid. 37.

61. Ibid.; Caner 2010, 257 no. 21.

62. Gregory the Great, *Epistle* 11.2 (ed. Norberg 1982, 860).

63. See Dahari 2000, 25–112.

been inhabited at the same time. Individual hermit cells or one-room buildings, numbering almost one hundred, made up the largest number of sites. Two-room dwellings constituted twenty-five sites, and at least seventeen larger dwellings were discovered. (There may have been at least six more.) Of the larger dwellings, the majority (some 8 to 14) were discovered near Mount Sinai and the nearby Mount Choreb. In total, the maximum number of monks living in the region may have been just over four hundred. Each monk could have farmed, on average, a plot of 253 square meters at Mount Sinai and Mount Choreb, or of 318 square meters at other sites in the area.[64] These population estimates do not include the monastery built by Justinian or the structures that the construction of Justinian's monastery may have destroyed. In general, the various monastic cells were spaced so that no cell could be seen from any other. This arrangement meant that hermit cells in the Sinai were more isolated than those in Egypt or the Judean desert.[65] Generally, although the cells were isolated from each other, they were nonetheless grouped together with access to a church, gardens, and workrooms. This conforms to a *laura* style of monastery, in which anchorites lived separately but close together and gathered for weekly worship services.[66]

OTHER MONASTERIES IN THE SINAI

Although the monastic community based at Mount Sinai has remained famous since antiquity, it was not the only monastic community in the late-antique Sinai. Archaeology and literary sources indicate that there were monastic cells scattered throughout the southern Sinai, including two important monastic centers at the town of Pharan and at Rhaithou on the Red Sea coast.[67]

Much less is known about the community based near the town of Pharan than about the one at Rhaithou. Neither Egeria nor the Piacenza pilgrim mentions monks at the site.[68] However, several monks originated at Pharan—as for example one Moses, who according to Ammonius exorcized a demon from the chief of Pharan—and may have initially practiced an ascetic life there.[69] An inscription from one of the churches at Pharan reads + AZAPIA MONAXOC (Azaria the

64. These numbers were taken from Dahari 2000, 48 table 3 and 94 table 4.

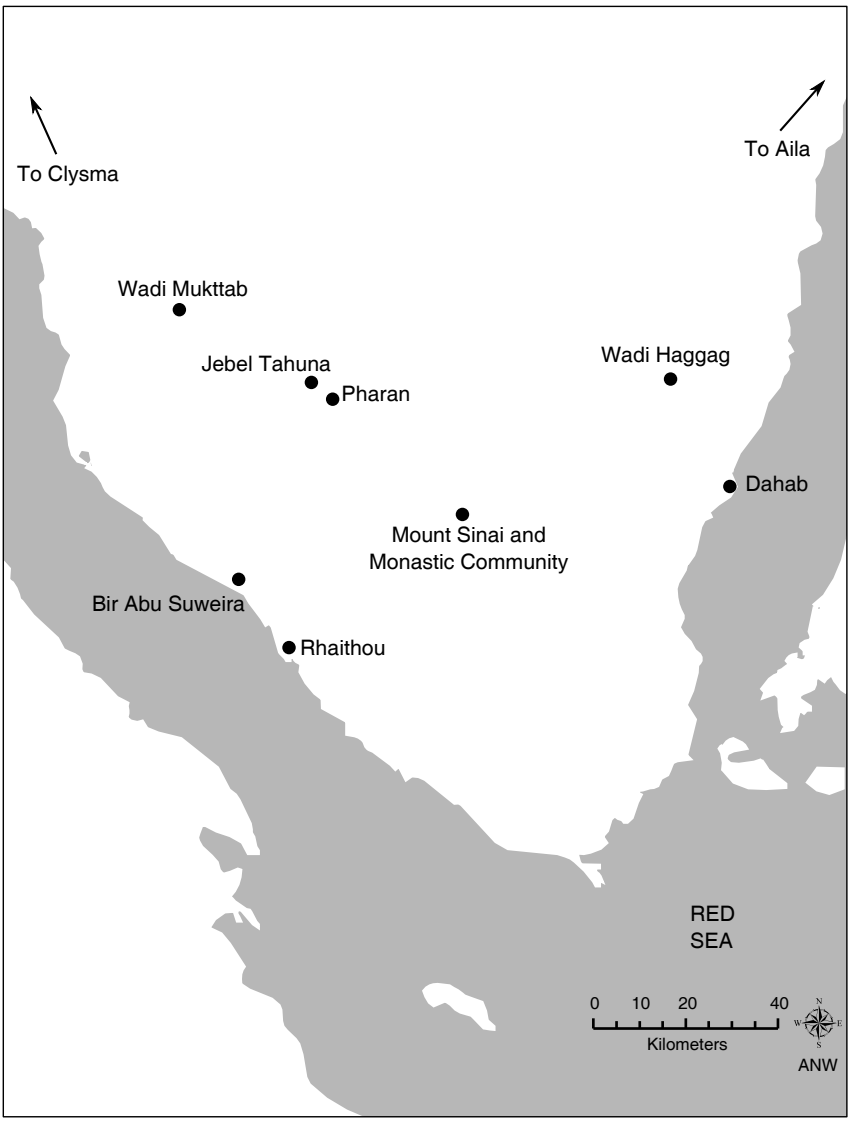
65. Patrich 2004, 438–39.

66. Caner 2010, 22.

67. See particularly Pseudo-Nilus 5, which describes the living spaces (and deaths) of anchorites in three autonomous cells.

68. Grossman 1992, 10 no. 7.

69. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 12: "Μωϋσῆς . . . ὁρμώμενος ἀπὸ τῆς Φαρὰν. . . ." The CPA text does not mention that he originated from Pharan. Also see *Apophthegmata Patrum,* col. 155C, 7.98, for a Daniel of Pharan, probably from Pharan in the Sinai and not from Palestine; and John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 121 (*PG* 89.3, cols. 2983–94), which mentions a Gregory of Pharan who died of thirst on an island in the Red Sea.



MAP 2. Detailed map of the southern Sinai Peninsula in late antiquity. (Map: Amy Ward.)

monk).[70] As this inscription was discovered near putative monastic dwellings at Jabal Tahuna, just north of Pharan, it seems probable that a monk named Azaria was a resident of the area.[71] Several structures at Jabal Tahuna may have been inhabited by monks at some point, though most appear to have been memorial chapels.[72] From these limited sources, it does appear that monks may have been based at Pharan at some points during its history.

Other archaeologically attested monastic communities were located approximately five kilometers south of Pharan, in Wadi Sigilliya. One was based around a two-story structure overlooking the wadi bed, but its current state of preservation and its location prevents excavation. Monastic cells were discovered in the area, one of them carved out of a giant boulder. An orchard and cistern were also discovered nearby. At the nearby site of el-Karm in the Wadi Sigilliya, four hermit cells and a church were discovered, in addition to two orchards and a winepress. As many as twenty-five or thirty-five monks could have practiced at the sites associated with this complex. That these monastic communities were connected to Pharan via a paved path proves that monks maintained some relation with the town of Pharan.[73]

Approximately fifty kilometers south of Pharan lay the much better-documented monastic community at Rhaithou.[74] Ammonius's *Relatio* remains the best source of information about this monastic community, but that work's uncertain authenticity and date invite skepticism. Ammonius wrote that the monks lived along a twelve-mile-wide plain on the Red Sea coast, and archaeology appears to indicate that the monastic center was fairly decentralized, stretching eighteen kilometers from Bir Abu Suweira to Sheikh Ra'iya, a distance that roughly approximates to twelve Roman miles.[75] Many of the monks lived on a mountain over-

70. Leclercq 1950, 1472.

71. Dahari 2000, 134.

72. The structures at Jabal Tahuna are detailed in Grossman 1984, 78–81, and 1992, 11–16; Solzbacher 1989, 419–20; Dahari 2000, 132–35. Until the late 1960s Bedouins used these structures for burials, complicating archaeological excavation (Rothenberg 1972, 21).

73. Dahari 2000, 112–32.

74. Excavations at the monastery at Wadi al-Tur have uncovered several lamps and pieces of glassware from the fifth and sixth centuries, but most of the finds have been later artifacts. Regardless, these finds demonstrate occupation of the region in the pre-Islamic period (Kawatoko and Bunka 1995, 51–76; Kawatoko, Senta, and Chosa 1996, 67–70)

75. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 10: "Ἔστιν δὲ ὁ τόπος ὁμαλὸς καὶ πεδιάσιμος, ὅλος, εἰς μῆκος μὲν κατὰ νότον παρατεινόμενος πάνυ, εἰς δὲ πλάτος ἄχρι μιλίων ιβ' . . . κατὰ δὲ δυσμὰς τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν ἐκτεινομένην. . . ." The CPA version notes that the plain was forty miles long (fol. 13); Dahari 2000, 138–46. A fort, which appears late-antique in form, was discovered at Ras Raya, at the southern tip of this expanse; the monastery at Wadi al-Tur lies at the northern edge. Little pre-ninth-century evidence has been uncovered at the fort, which housed a mosque in the ninth and tenth centuries (Kawatoko and Shindo 2009, 9, 23). Pre-Islamic ceramic finds have not yet been published.

looking the plain, and there was a church near the mountain.[76] The *Apophthegmata Patrum* also mentions a church where meals were eaten at Rhaithou.[77] The monks did not live in a unified monastery; rather, each lived in his own cell. Joseph of Aila, for example, lived two miles away on the coastal plain, and his pupil lived in a separate cell.[78] The monks also lived on islands off the coast near Rhaithou.[79] Surveys have confirmed that there were a number of monastic cells along the shore, many of which were literally carved out of the rock.[80]

Ammonius mentions a fort at Rhaithou, which is perhaps to be identified with a large monastery-fortress with close parallels to Saint Catherine's that has been partially excavated.[81] I argue below in chapter 5 that this structure was built during the reign of Justinian in response to the Saracen threat. In the late sixth century, John Moschus mentions that the monks lived in a *laura* with individual cells.[82] It seems likely that the *laura* was organized at the same time as the construction of forts at Rhaithou, following the example at Mount Sinai.[83]

INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

The origins of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land are obscure, but Christians were drawn to the places mentioned in the biblical texts from an early date.[84] The few surviving pilgrimage accounts describe rituals and folk practices that originated through numerous undocumented pilgrimages, and they remain our only documentary sources concerning what individuals thought and did on a pilgrimage. The origins of pilgrimage are hotly debated, but there does seem to be verifiable evidence of pilgrimage practices dating earlier than the legalization of Christianity

76. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) fol. 14; (Greek, ed. Tsames) 11: "Ἐν τούτῳ τοίνυν τῷ ὄρει πολλοὶ τῶν ἀναχωρητῶν εἶχον τὴν οἴκησιν . . . ἔχοντες τὸ Κυριακὸν οὐκ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὄρει."

77. *Apophthegmata Patrum, Alphabetical Collection, PG* 65, col. 377: "Ἔλεγον περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Πέτρου καὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Ἐπιμάχου, ὅτι συμφωνηταὶ ἦσαν εἰς Ῥαϊθοῦ. Ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἐβιάσαντο αὐτοὺς ἐλθεῖν εἰς τὴν τράπεζαν τῶν γερόντων."

78. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) fols. 22–23; (Greek, ed. Tsames) 16: "ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων δύο εἰς τὸ πεδιάσιμον, οἰκείαις χερσὶν κτίσας τὸ οἴκημα . . . μαθητὴν ἔχων οἰκοῦντα οὐ μετ' αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ πλησίον εἰς ἕτερον οἴκημα."

79. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 121 (*PG* 87.3, 2983–84).

80. Dahari 2000, 140–46.

81. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA, ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff) fol. 32; (Greek, ed. Tsames) 20: "δρομαῖοι καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸ λεγόμενον Κάστρον. . . ."

82. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 119 (*PG* 87.3, 2984): "Ἔλεγεν ἡμῖν ὁ ἀββᾶς Εὐσέβιος ὁ πρεσβύτερος τῆς λαύρας Ῥαϊθοῦ παραβαλοῦσιν αὐτῷ, ὅτι δαίμων ἀπῆλθεν εἰς κελλίον γέροντος ἐν σχήματι μοναχοῦ. Καὶ κρούσαντος αὐτοῦ τὴν θύραν. . . ."

83. Caner 2010, 36.

84. Justin first used the term "Holy Land" in the middle of the second century (Wilken 1992, 57; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 119: "καὶ σὺν τῷ Ἀβραὰμ τὴν ἁγίαν κληρονομήσομεν γῆν").

in 313.[85] Origen's works reveal that Christians were already touring the places mentioned in the Bible in the third century. For example, he mentions that the cave and manger at Bethlehem where Christ was born were displayed by the locals.[86] Other sites, such as the Mount of Olives, also seem to have been visited by traveling Christians in Origen's time.[87]

The voyage of Helena, Constantine's mother, in 326 marked the beginning of an intensification of pilgrim traffic.[88] She sought to experience and visit the places where Jesus walked.[89] According to Eusebius, Helena ordered churches to be built at Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives.[90] Later, she was forever linked to Constantine's other constructions in Jerusalem, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but there is no contemporary evidence of this connection. Sources written about fifty years after her journey describe how Helena discovered the True Cross when the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was constructed. Such stories spread quickly, being repeated across the empire by the end of the fourth century.[91] After Helena, pilgrims traveled to the Holy Land in ever-increasing numbers. The first extant pilgrimage account is that of the Bordeaux pilgrim, who visited the Holy Land in 333.[92]

The spiritual draw for pilgrims must have been exhilarating, in view of the long distances and harshness of travel that they would have endured to reach their destination.[93] Just the journey by land from Constantinople to Jerusalem would have required over two months of daily travel to cover the twelve-hundred-mile distance, and any travelers from the western Mediterranean would have faced equally long travel times to get to Constantinople. Beyond the mere length of the journey, pilgrims had to face chronic insecurity on the roads and on the high seas, squalid conditions on ships, and problems acquiring provisions.[94] The journey of The-

85. See for example, Wilkinson 1990, 52; Holum 1990.

86. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 51: "κατανοησάτω ὅτι ἀκολούθως τῇ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ περὶ τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἱστορίᾳ δείκνυται τὸ ἐν Βηθλεὲμ σπήλαιον, ἔνθα ἐγεννήθη, καὶ ἡ ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ φάτνη, ἔνθα ἐσπαργανώθη."

87. Hunt 1999, 31–34.

88. See Hunt 1982, 28–49; also see Drijvers 1992, 55–72.

89. See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.42–45, esp. 3.42.2: "ὡς δὲ τοῖς βήμασι τοῖς σωτηρίοις τὴν πρέπουσαν ἀπεδίδου προσκύνησιν, ἀκολούθως προφητικῷ λόγῳ, φάντι 'προσκυνήσωμεν εἰς τὸν τόπον, οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ,' τῆς οἰκείας εὐσεβείας καρπὸν καὶ τοῖς μετέπειτα παραχρῆμα κατελίμπανεν."

90. Ibid. 3.43.

91. Drijvers 1992, esp. 79–180.

92. *Itinerarium Burdigalense* (ed. Geyer and Cuntz 1975); see Elsner 2000, 181–86, for a modern introduction to the text.

93. On the motivations of pilgrims, see Maraval 1985, 137–51.

94. See Hunt 1982, 36–82, who gives a good introduction on the logistics of pilgrim travel. The length of the journey can be seen in the list of resting places in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense.* Also see Maraval 1985, 163–76.

ophanes, a contemporary traveler but not a pilgrim, demonstrates that food and supplies were obtained at each staging point (whether *mutatio, mansio,* or *civitas*) along the way. At Antioch, for example, Theophanes' retinue shopped daily and was responsible for the preparation of meals.[95] This was probably also true for pilgrims except when being sheltered by church officials or monks.[96]

Pilgrims wished to visit the holy places mentioned in the Bible and to see and learn from holy men.[97] The testimony of Egeria aptly demonstrates the pilgrims' goals. Her underlying objective was to understand the Scriptures better by seeing the holy places and learning from the holy men.[98] She was prepared to end her journey only when she "had seen all the holy places . . . [that she] had hoped to visit . . . [and she] had visited all the holy men who lived there."[99] To facilitate this goal, the appropriate passage from the Bible was read at each holy site.[100] At the end of her journey, Egeria had undoubtedly fulfilled her goals of better understanding the Bible by seeing the holy places and encountering the powerful spiritual lifestyle of the ascetics.

The existence of a holy place was considered proof that the events of Scripture actually happened. By visiting a holy site, therefore, the pilgrims confirmed for themselves the physical truth of the Gospel and the Old Testament.[101] As Paulinus of Nola wrote, "no other feeling draws men to Jerusalem, save to see and touch the places in which Christ was bodily present."[102] Jerome felt that pilgrimage allowed one to understand the Bible better through seeing the holy sites,[103]

> just as Greek histories are better understood by those who have seen Athens, and the third book of Vergil by those who have sailed from Troy through Leucates and Acroceraunia to Sicily and finally to the ports of the Tiber: so, too, will he gaze with greater clarity upon holy Scripture who has contemplated Judaea with his own eyes and has come to know the memorials of ancient cities and the places by both their indigenous and their successive appellations.

95. On the journey of Theophanes, see Matthews 2006. Despite its potential for comparative evidence, Theophanes' journey was very different from what is described in the surviving pilgrimage accounts, because he traveled using the imperial post, the *cursus publicus.* (On the imperial post, see Di Paola 1999 and Kolb 2000, esp. 46–220.) Theophanes traveled by carriage, probably employing two carriages for eight passengers and a wagon loaded with supplies.

96. See, for example, Egeria 3.1 and below, "Pilgrimage and the Sinai."

97. Wilkinson 1971, 14.

98. As Egeria mentions to her readers at 5.8; Hunt 1982, 88.

99. Egeria 5.11.61–65: "Ac sic ergo uisa loca sancta omnia, quae desiderauimus . . . uisis etiam et sanctis uiris, qui ibi commorabantur," trans. Wilkinson 1971, 98.

100. Hunt 1982, 88.

101. MacCormack 1990, 21–25.

102. Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 49.14.

103. Jerome, *Praefatio in Libro Paralipomenon (LXX), PL* 29, col. 401A, trans. Jacobs 2004, 67.

As demonstrated in this passage, Jerome "places great emphasis on 'seeing' the biblical sites, and concludes that the holy sites are places where Christians reach their intellectual and spiritual pinnacle *as* Christians."[104] As monasticism and hagiographic literature gained prominence and spread throughout the Near East and the Roman world, encountering holy men became one of the most important experiences for pilgrims. As detailed by Georgia Frank, pilgrimages were often conducted exclusively to visit holy men. These holy men were often seen as living examples of biblical personages.[105]

The spiritual benefits of pilgrimage were communicated through written accounts and souvenirs of a trip. Egeria, for example, makes clear that she wrote so that her sisters would see the people, places, and events of the Bible more clearly.[106] Pilgrims wished to take home souvenirs (*eulogiae*) of their journey, which they hoped would impart some of the holiness or miracles to their own lives.[107] The Piacenza pilgrim especially connected *eulogiae* with miraculous cures.[108] These *eulogiae* had the additional function of reminding the pilgrim about his or her journey and the spiritual knowledge gained.[109] The *eulogiae,* like pilgrimage accounts, also allowed armchair pilgrims to experience the journey.[110]

PILGRIMAGE AND THE SINAI

The Sinai Peninsula provided excellent opportunities to accomplish the pilgrims' goals of visiting holy sites and holy men. The region's attractiveness is illustrated by its longevity as a monastic site; without pilgrims to become monks, the monastic settlements would not have been able to sustain their populations.[111] The cosmopolitan nature of the Sinai monastic community was noted by the Piacenza pilgrim, who mentioned that monks at Mount Sinai spoke Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Bessan.[112] Sinai monks in the *Spiritual Meadow* hailed from Rome,

104. Jacobs 2004, 73; Jerome, *Epistula* 46.13 (CSEL 54: 343–44).

105. Frank 2000.

106. Egeria 5.8: "Sed cum leget affectio vestra libros sanctos Moysi, omnia diligentius pervidet quae ibi facta sunt."

107. On *eulogiae* and their spread, see Caner 2006. For examples, see Weitzmann 1979, 564–91, and Vikan 2010, 18–22, 31–44. On the spiritual benefits, see ibid. 13–17.

108. Leyerle 1996, 133–34.

109. Hahn 1990, 86–93.

110. Frank 2000, 4.

111. See Bitton-Ashkelony 2005, 140–83, on the connection between pilgrimage and monastic communities. Some monastic communities feared that monks who made a pilgrimage would decide to stay in the Holy Land.

112. PP 37. What "Bessan" is remains a mystery. Scholars have variously proposed a Thracian language (Devreese 1940, 214 n. 5), Arabic (Shahid 1984a, 320 n. 143), Georgian (Caner 2010, 257 n. 24),

Byzantium, Cilicia, Messina, Pelusium, and Pharan.[113] Ammonius reports that monks at Rhaithou came from Aila (modern Aqaba), Petra, Pharan, and Rome.[114]

From an early date, the monks of Mount Sinai created a hospitable environment for pilgrims. One of their most important acts was to supply the pilgrims with food and water. They provided lodging and dinners for Egeria, and she even ate dinner with the monks in front of the Burning Bush.[115] Egeria was also given *eulogiae,* which she explained was fruit grown by the monks.[116] In the fourth century, these *eulogiae* were intended for consumption on the spot. The custom evolved, and in the late sixth century the Piacenza pilgrim received *benedictiones*, which were placed in small ampullae. Unique to the Sinai, these ampullae were filled with manna. The monks distributed ampullae to pilgrims, who were directed to drink their contents.[117] The ampullae served two purposes: first, their contents provided sustenance to the visitor; and second, the receptacles functioned as souvenirs when the pilgrim left the Sinai.

In addition to the ampullae, the monks of Mount Sinai provided other spiritual services for their visitors. The monks often read passages from the Bible to the pilgrims to associate sites with biblical events. Egeria notes that she always desired to read the specific passages of Scripture that described the place she was visiting.[118] For example, when Egeria visited Mount Sinai, she was most impressed by the recitation from the book of Moses (Exodus) on top of Mount Sinai.[119] The monks also performed rituals at each site, including the giving of the Eucharist.[120]

The monks often acted as guides to the biblical locations, personalities, and events. Throughout Egeria's work, she describes how the monks pointed out or displayed certain spots and their divine importance. The location of these places

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and Ethiopian (Flusin 1992, 2.38 n. 130). There were several known monasteries in Palestine where Bessan was spoken and used in the liturgy: see Griffith 1997, 13; Caner 2010, 257 n. 24.

113. Dahari 2000, 23.

114. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek, ed. Tsames) 16, 21, 37.

115. Egeria 4.8: "Et sic, quia sera erat, gustavimus nobis loco in horto ante rubum cum sanctis ipsis, ac sic ergo fecimus ibi mansionem."

116. Ibid. 3.6: "dederunt nobis presbyteri loci ipsius eulogias, id est de pomis quae in ipso monte nascuntur."

117. These "blessings" are therefore different from the bread rations attested elsewhere at monastic communities. (See Caner 2006, 345–49.) PP 39: "quem manna appellant et coagulatur et fit tamquam granum masticis et collegitur et doleos exinde plenos habent in monasterio, unde et benedictionem dant ampullas modicas. . . . Ex quo etiam pro condito bibent et nobis dederunt et bibimus."

118. Egeria 4.3: "Id enim nobis vel maxime ego desideraveram semper ut, ubicumque venissemus, semper ipse locus de libro legeretur."

119. Ibid. 3.6, 4.6–8.

120. For example, see ibid. 3.6–7: "facta oblatione ordine suo, hac sic communicantibus nobis. . . . Hac sic ergo posteaquam communicaveramus." Also see ibid. 4.8: "Et alia die, maturius vigilantes, rogavimus presbyteros ut et ibi fieret oblatio, sicut et facta est."

must have been first "discovered" by monks in the region. These monks would often use distinctive topographical markers, including large or strangely shaped rocks, to signal the locations of biblical events. For example, a wide, distinctive rock marked the location where Aaron awaited Moses, and the location of the Golden Calf was also indicated by a large stone.[121] The implications of these identifications are discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to the holy sites, Egeria was fascinated by the holy men who dwelled in the Sinai.[122] She remarks that the monk who was in charge of the small church on top of the highest summit of Mount Sinai was "equal in dignity to the very place itself." She describes him as being elderly, healthy, long-serving, and an ascetic.[123] In doing so, she virtually equates the monks of the Sinai with the holy places themselves, and she uses the same grammatical expression (ablative absolute) in her summary of what she has seen in the Sinai, indicating that she views the monks and the sites equally. She says "after we saw all the places that we desired, and even all the places that the sons of Israel touched in their comings and goings to the Mountain of God, and after we had seen the holy men who dwell there, we went back to Pharan, in the name of God."[124]

In addition to the evolution of *eulogiae,* the Piacenza pilgrim describes several new rituals at Mount Sinai. Perhaps the most interesting custom concerned the summit of Mount Sinai. The Piacenza pilgrim describes how it was the custom for visitors to show their devotion by cutting their beards and hair and then throw it from the mountain. He was so moved by the event that he also cut his own beard.[125] As shaving the head was one of the rites involved with joining a monastic community, it seems that this ritual granted visitors temporary initiation into the Sinai monastic life.[126] Though the Piacenza pilgrim did not remain to become a monk, it is possible that experiences like these proved persuasive to many pilgrims who decided to remain.

121. Ibid. 4.4: "id est ad eum locum ubi steterat sanctus Aaron cum septuaginta senioribus cum sanctus Moyses acciperet a Domino legem ad filios Israhel. In eo ergo loco, licet et tectum non sit, tamen petra ingens est per girum, habens planitiem supra se, in qua stetisse dicuntur ipsi sancti; nam et in medio ibi quasi altarium delapidibus factum habet." Also 5.3: "Monstraverunt etiam locum ubi factus est vitulus ille, nam in eo loco fixus est usque in hodie lapis grandis."

122. Hunt 1982, 60.

123. Egeria 3.4: "senex integer et monachus a prima vita et, ut hic dicunt, ascitis, et . . . qualis dignus est esse in eo loco."

124. Ibid. 5.11: "Ac sic ergo, visa loca sancta omnia quae desideravimus, nec non etiam et omnia loca quae filii Israhel tetigerant eundo vel redeundo ad montem Dei, visis etiam et sanctis viris qui ibi commorabantur, in nomine Dei regressi sumus in Faran."

125. PP 37: "In quo loco omnes pro deuotione barbas et capillos suos tondent et iactant, ubi etiam et ego tetigi barbas."

126. See Hirschfeld 1992, 71–72, on the process of becoming a monk. In the Sinai, the ritual is specifically mentioned by Daniel of Rhaithou (*PG* 88, col. 608).

It would be impossible to enumerate how many pilgrims visited the Sinai in the fourth through seventh centuries. In addition to the major pilgrimage accounts already mentioned, several other named pilgrims can be detected in the sources.[127] For example, two inscriptions commemorate the journey of Christian soldiers (Leon, Sergius, and Kyriakos) to the Sinai from the small fortification at Zadacatha (modern Es-Sadaqa), located between Petra and Aila.[128]

After the Islamic Conquest, it was possible for the Sinai monastery to feed six hundred pilgrims at the same time, and there was one occasion when eight hundred Armenian pilgrims visited Mount Sinai.[129] It seems likely that the facilities that provided services for these pilgrims existed before any Islamic Conquests, even if we are not aware of the exact structures. The number of pilgrims must have brought wealth into the Sinai monastic communities, and it has been suggested that several of the icons that survive from the sixth and seventh centuries were donated by pilgrims.[130] Examples of donations and Sinai wealth appear in the Nessana Papyri (*P.Ness.*), which describe the donation of seventeen golden *solidi* to Mount Sinai, and a caravan was entrusted with 270.5 *solidi* by Abba Martyrius of Mount Sinai. Nothing more about this sum is stated in the document, but it is possible that it was given by the monks for deposit elsewhere.[131]

ROUTES TO THE SINAI

Three major routes linked the Sinai with the pilgrimage centers of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The least-developed route began at Elusa, in the Negev Desert, and cut across the northern Sinai desert. It was an unmarked route, which required a guide. The two other routes provided access to the Sinai interior from the ports of Aila and Clysma.[132] They appear to have been more developed, with the route from Clysma to Pharan to Mount Sinai being the most traveled.

The least-traveled route connected Jerusalem with Mount Sinai through the desert of Tih.[133] Pseudo-Nilus traveled over open desert from Pharan to Elusa, where there was neither any established path nor any proper road. Not only did the journey take the travelers through a desert lacking water and established rest

127. See Caner 2010, 19 no. 75.

128. Negev 1977a, nos. 72 and 104.

129. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.7, 38 (ed. Nau 1902, 64, 81). These numbers may be exaggerated.

130. Caner 2010, 31.

131. *P.Ness.* 89.23; Mayerson 1994, 239.

132. For an elaborate discussion of the possible stopping places along these routes, see Dahari 2000, 12–15.

133. Mayerson 1963, 45, and 1982, 46.

areas, but the chance of encountering nomadic tribes was high.[134] In the late sixth century, the Piacenza pilgrim took this route by traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza.[135] From there he traveled to Elusa, which he described as the head of the desert that stretched to Mount Sinai.[136] If he did not hire a guide at Gaza, he must have done so at Elusa. Thus far, the journey took place on established roads, with ample accommodations along the way. After staying at a *castrum* (the Monastery of Saint George) twenty miles away from Elusa, he began his journey through the interior of the desert.[137] After eight days of travel through the desert, including a chance encounter with somewhat friendly Saracens, the Piacenza pilgrim came to Mount Sinai.[138] The journey was made while the Saracens were celebrating a festival, an occasion that prevented them from engaging in hostile acts.[139]

The Tih desert is waterless and dangerous, with no archaeological evidence of roads. Most important, no account "mentions a single *mansio, castrum, castellum,* or *xenodochium*" between the Negev communities, such as Elusa and the Negev, and the Sinai.[140] Additionally, it is not represented on a (probably) third- or fourth-century road map, the Peutinger Table.[141] This omission suggests that the route was little used during this period and that traversing it required specialized knowledge of the region. Guides could provide this knowledge, and the papyri discovered at the Negev community at Nessana mention guides several times. Even the merchant caravan mentioned in Nessana Papyrus (*P.Ness.*) 82 hired a guide at Nessana for the crossing to Mount Sinai.[142] Nessana continued to supply guides for the desert crossing to Mount Sinai after the Islamic Conquest, as two papyri indicate.[143]

The second route from Jerusalem to the Sinai took advantage of facilities that supported merchant activity between the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean coast.[144] There is extensive evidence for reconstructing much of the route from Jerusalem to Aila, which served as the entrance to the eastern side of the Sinai. Pilgrims taking this path would get to the Sinai in only eighteen days, as

134. Mayerson 1963, 163–64.

135. PP 31.

136. PP 34.1–2: "Et inde uenimus in ciuitate Elusa in caput heremi, qui uadit ad Sina."

137. PP 35; inside there was hostel (*xenodochium*), which provided "something of a refuge for passers-by and [gave] food for hermits," trans. Wilkinson 1977, 87. The association of the Monastery of St. George with the modern site at Mitzpe Shivta has recently been confirmed by an inscription (Figueras 2007).

138. PP 36–37.

139. PP 36, 39; on the connection between pre-Islamic Arab religious festivals and the forestalling of violence, see Hoyland 2001, 161–62.

140. Mayerson 1963, 165

141. For more on the Peutinger Table, see Salway 2005; Talbert 2010.

142. *P.Ness.* 82.

143. *P.Ness.* 72, 73.

144. Ward 2009, 191.

compared with the twenty-two or twenty-five days that the route took through Egypt.[145] The journey from Jerusalem to Aila took ten stops (days), with an additional eight to Mount Sinai. The first leg of the journey included three stops from Jerusalem to Elusa and then seven stops from Elusa to Aila.[146] This path seems to follow the route shown on the Peutinger Table connecting Jerusalem and Aila. One monk, Barsauma, may have taken an alternative route that involved traveling through Hebron and then Petra on the way to Aila.[147]

The route between Aila and the Sinai was better established than the one that crossed the northern Sinai desert. This route connected Petra and the Nabataean heartland with the religious sanctuaries of the Sinai.[148] Its use in the Nabataean period is reflected by hundreds of Nabataean inscriptions discovered in Wadi Haggag.[149] As Christians began to travel in the area, they also left behind graffiti, perhaps engaging in a war of symbols in which they attempted to efface non-Christian evidence.[150] Egeria does not mention the route between Aila and Mount Sinai, but members of the Piacenza pilgrim's party did travel to Aila.[151]

Archaeological surveys have confirmed the use of the road from Aila in the Nabataean and Roman periods; however, archaeology has found few established bases for travelers apart from the Nabataean community at Dahab and possibly the Nabataean site at Wadi Tuweiba, near Aila.[152] Therefore it appears that the stopping places along the route were not permanent hostels; instead, the travelers probably spent the night under the stars. The Peutinger Table may confirm this view, as it shows no stops between Aila and Pharan. This route may have been the most traveled at the turn of the seventh century, as the sources indicate several connections between Aila and the monks in the Sinai; and there are also reports of large numbers of Armenian travelers then, who must have gone through Aila, as is confirmed by Armenian inscriptions along the route.[153]

145. Hunt 1982, 58–59; Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* 27: "De Aila usque in monte Suna mansiones VIII, si compendiaria uolueris ambulare per heremum, sin autem per Aegyptum mansiones XXV."

146. Ibid.; Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 166.15, erroneously reports that the journey between Pharan and Aila took three days. The Piacenza pilgrim (39) confirmed that Aila lay eight rest stops from Mount Sinai.

147. Nau 1927, 190.

148. Rothenberg 1972, 18, calls it the "Aila-Feiran Highroad" because of its importance in both the Nabataean and the Roman period.

149. See Negev 1977a.

150. The inscriptions mark the journeys of many pilgrims, especially those from Armenia and Georgia, during the Islamic period. See Rothenberg 1972, 19, and Mayerson 1982. The texts are printed in M. E. Stone 1982.

151. PP 39.

152. Rothenberg 1972, 18–19; For Dahab see Meshel 2000. For Wadi Tuweiba, see Rothenberg 1972, 5, 9.

153. Dahari 2000, 11; for example, Anastasius of Sinai, *Relationes de Patribus Sinai* 12 (*Narrationes,* ed. Nau 1902, 67): "ἔπεμψεν τινὰ Σαρακηνόν εἰς τόν Ἀιλά. . . . ἦν δὲ τὸ διάστημα τῆς ὁδοῦ μίλια διακόσια."

The route to Mount Sinai through the Egyptian port Clysma appears to have been the most established. Part of this route, through Wadi Mukattab, was utilized extensively in the Nabataean period for transport from Pharan, when it allowed the extraction of copper from the mines near Bir Nasb.[154] In the Christian period, both Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim traveled this route. Egeria's journey to Mount Sinai took her along the Mediterranean road between Gaza and Pelusium before turning toward the Sinai. This journey took twenty-two days to arrive at Mount Sinai from Jerusalem.[155] Another traveler, the monk Epiphanius, took two additional days on a return trip from Mount Sinai to Jerusalem.[156] He traveled from Mount Sinai to the Thebaid in Egypt in eight days. From there, his party continued on to Jerusalem, which took another sixteen days.

Beginning at Clysma on her way to Mount Sinai, Egeria crossed a desert until she came to a place called Marah (Ayn Musa?), which possessed two springs.[157] After three additional days she came to Arandara, identified with Elim, which possessed an abundant supply of water.[158] The Piacenza pilgrim reported that there were two forts there, a church with two hostels, and an additional *xenodochium* below one of the forts.[159] Egeria then traveled to a rest stop "halfway," near the sea, where she turned into the mountains, then into Wadi Mukattab, and then to Pharan.[160] On the return trip, she reports that her entourage exited the mountains at the same place where they had entered and that she returned to Clysma by the

154. Rothenberg 1972, 21.

155. Hunt 1982, 58–59.

156. Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita, *Syriae et Urbis Sanctae Descriptio* 8.1–5 (ed. Donner 1971, 76): "ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ σινὰ ὄρους, ὁδεύεις ἡμέρας ὀκτὼ, καὶ εἰσέρχεσαι εἰς θηβαίδα· ἔνθα κεῖται ὁ ἁβας ποιμὴν καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ· καὶ πολλοὶ ἕτεροι τῶν μακαρίων καὶ ἁγί(ων) π(ατέ)ρων· ἀπὸ δὲ θηβαίδας ὁδεύεις ἡμέρας ις˙καὶ πάλιν ὑποστρέφεις εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν."

157. These identifications will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Petrus Diaconus, *Liber de Locis Sanctis, Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae* Y.11.109–110 (v. 117, preserving Egeria's description): "A deserto autem Sur usque ad Maran est mansio una per ripas Maris. . . . sunt illic et duo fontes, quos indulcauit sanctus Moyses."

158. Ibid. Y.12.101–6 (preserving Egeria's description): "Inde autem per triduum de sinistro heremus est infinitus usque in locum, qui dicitur Arandara; Arandara autem est locus, qui appellatus est Helim. Ibi fluuius currit, qui tamen tempore aliquo siccatur, sed ipsius alueum siue iusta ripam ipsius inueniuntur aquae."

159. PP 41.4–6, 9: "In quo loco est castellum modicum, qui uocatur Surandala; nihil habet intus praeter ecclesiam cum presbytero suo et duo xenodochia propter transeuntes. . . . et illic similiter castellum modicum, infra se xenodochium." Although he calls the place Magdalum, it is clear that it also should be associated with Elim because of the twelve springs and numerous palm trees as accounted in Exodus 15:27. See "Marah, the Wilderness of Sur, Elim, and the Desert Sin" below in chapter 3.

160. Petrus Diaconus, *Liber de Locis Sanctis, Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae* 12.109–10: "Inde ergo media mansio iusta mare est."

same rest stops as on their outbound journey.[161] In addition to the fort at Elim, the Piacenza pilgrim mentions that there was another fort with a hostel and a church with two hostels along the route.[162] As shown on the Peutinger Table, Pharan and a place whose name ends in –deia (or –dela? Arandela?) were listed as *mansiones* along the route from Clysma to Mount Sinai.[163] The sources indicate that this route possessed the best facilities; this must be why it was so popular, despite the fact that it was not the shortest of the routes into the Sinai.

One final route to the Sinai is attested in Epiphanius Monachus's *Syriae et Urbis Sanctae Descriptio,* written after the Muslim Conquest. Epiphanius began his journey at Saint Antony's Monastery in Egypt's Eastern Desert. From there, he crossed the Gulf of Suez, possibly at Clysma, and came to Rhaithou. From Rhaithou, it was a five-day journey to Mount Sinai.[164] This text confirms continuity of the monastic communities in the Sinai and the continued attraction of the peninsula for pilgrims even under Muslim rule; but it is unknown how popular this route was.

CONCLUSION

Monasticism and pilgrimage were tied together at an early point in the history of Christianity. The protomonk Antony, for example, was forced deeper and deeper into the desert as more and more people sought him out to experience his spiritual power. Over time, Egypt became the home of many monastic communities as a result of Antony's inspiration, but others, such as Pachomius, can take credit for organizing monks and convincing them to congregate together. Their monasteries began to attract more and more pilgrims, some of whom stayed on. Others returned home and composed accounts of their journeys, inspiring still others to make the trip.

The origins of monasticism in the Sinai remain shrouded in mystery, but by the second half of the fourth century a small number of monks had taken up their calling at Mount Sinai. When Egeria visited in the late fourth century, a large community had already formed, and the monks had already picked out many of the locations where events in Exodus took place. The Sinai monasteries continued to expand, with large concentrations around Mount Sinai, Pharan, and Rhaithou. In

161. Egeria 6.3.19–21, 4.28–29: "In eo ergo loco de inter montes exiuimus redeuntes, in quo loco et euntes inter montes intraueramus. . . . Nos autem eodem itinere et eisdem mansionibus, quibus ieramus, reuersi sumus in Clesma."

162. PP 41.

163. On this route, see Mayerson 1981 and Dahari 2000, 9–10.

164. Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita, *Syriae et Urbis Sanctae Descriptio* 6.20–7.7 (ed. Donner 1971, 74–75): "ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ ἁγίου ἀντωνιου, ὡς ἀπὸ ἡμερῶν ϐύο, ἔστιν ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα· . . . ἐξελθὼν δὲ ἐκεῖθεν, κατήντησεν εἰς ῥαιθοῦ . . . καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τόπου ὡς ἀπὸ ἡμερῶν ε΄, ἔστι τὸ σινὰ ὄρος." On the problems of this route, see Wilkinson 1977, 118, and Dahari 2000, 11.

the late sixth century, Justinian ordered the construction of a fortified monastery, which has been the center of the monastic community until the present day.

The monks and their holy deeds attracted pilgrims in ever-increasing numbers after the pilgrimage of Helena. Two, Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim, visited the Sinai and wrote detailed accounts. In these works, the pilgrims described their elation at seeing the locations where biblical events occurred and at witnessing the piety of the monks. They gratefully received *eulogiae* (or *benedictiones*) from the monks and excitedly participated in rituals with them. Without the monks, pilgrims would not have made the arduous journey to the Sinai. Without the pilgrims, the monastic communities would not have been able to survive. Their relationship was symbiotic. Monks provided food, shelter, and religious services, whereas the pilgrims brought new monks, wealth, and religious donations. The spiritual rewards for pilgrims and monks in the Sinai must have been ample.

In the next two chapters, I examine how the Sinai monks justified their colonization of the Sinai. In chapter 3, I argue that monks identified late-antique sites in the Sinai as biblical locales, obscuring indigenous understandings of the region. Pilgrims also shared the monastic zeal in associating biblical events with then-contemporary sites. By recording these associations, the pilgrims preserved a wealth of information about how the monks perceived the new, Christian topography of the Sinai. By identifying biblical locations, the monks worked to link themselves to those very events. The sanctity of the monks was thereby enhanced, creating an even greater draw for pilgrims. In this way, monks and pilgrims jointly participated in the process of the Christianization of the Sinai and the dissemination of the knowledge of it throughout the Mediterranean world.

3

The Sinai as Christian Space

When John of Damascus (d. 749) discussed the things that Christians in his time venerated, he ranked several holy objects and places just below the majesty of the Lord, describing them as "receptacles of divine energy." Of those receptacles, he considered two locations especially holy: Mount Sinai and Nazareth, because the former is where God made himself manifest and the latter the site where Christ was granted flesh. (Where Mary became pregnant, that is, not where Jesus was born.) Lesser objects and locations of veneration included the Manger, Golgotha, and even the True Cross.[1] The Sinai, which had remained a barren wilderness until the middle of the fourth century, had in just four centuries come to stand even above the sites of Jesus's birth and death as a location of intense spiritual power. The importance of Mount Sinai was clear even on the other side of the Christian world, as the Exodus account's description of the Sinai was used to create sacred Christian space in Ireland.[2]

In this chapter I will examine how sites in the Sinai were identified and associated with biblical events and people, and how these identifications were transmitted, modified, and enhanced throughout the three centuries of Christian rule of the Sinai Peninsula. I chiefly analyze the mental associations of three prominent locations there—Elim, Pharan, and Mount Sinai—with locations and events recorded in the book of Exodus.[3] These traditions were invented by the early

1. John of Damascus, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores* 3.34; see Maraval 1985, 146–48.

2. *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (ed. Wasserschleben 1885, 44.6a and 6b); Jenkins 2010, 90–91.

3. In Exodus, Sinai is the name of the mountain and Choreb the name of the region; whereas Choreb appears as the mountain of God in Deuteronomy (e.g., 1:6; also see 5:1–5) and 1 Kings 19:8 (Maraval 1985, 308–10; Hoffmeier 2005, 114–15). Many Christian sources in late antiquity confuse the

Christian monks and pilgrims and developed into a social memory of the Sinai as a Christian space.[4] These social memories were constructed for the specific purpose of enhancing the sanctity of the Sinai and the monks practicing there. They were then passed on to the wider Mediterranean society through the voyages of pilgrims and the dissemination of pilgrimage accounts and other Christian texts.

Pilgrims provide our most important evidence concerning the topographic Christianization of sites in the Sinai, although other ecclesiastical sources and iconographic depictions also reflect the association of sites with biblical descriptions. The pilgrims consciously sought out places from the Old and the New Testament that allowed them to "see" the events of the Bible.[5] According to E. D. Hunt, "there was no limit to the possibilities of bringing the Bible to life before his [the fourth-century Bordeaux pilgrim's] eyes; the biblical associations (no matter how fragile) constituted the credentials of a pilgrim site, distinguishing it as a holy place."[6]

A few decades after the journey of the Bordeaux pilgrim, Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem, advocated for the importance of visiting holy sites in a speech to his catechumens at the time of their baptism.[7] Cyril's holy places, although rooted in Jerusalem, where he was bishop, encompassed all the regions in which Christ lived.[8] Cyril argued that the holy places were direct proof of the events of the Gospel, as the following statement makes clear: "He was truly crucified for our sins. For if you would wish to deny it, the fact that this place is visible, this blessed Golgotha, proves you wrong, in which we are now assembled on account of Him who was crucified on this very spot; and the whole world has since been filled with pieces of the wood of the Cross."[9] According to Cyril, the association of physical places with biblical events served to add credence to the truth of biblical accounts.[10]

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terms "Sinai" and "Choreb," and some use them interchangeably. For example, Eusebius's *Onomasticon* considers Sinai and Choreb different mountains, whereas they are the same mountain in Jerome's translation. See below, "Mount Sinai."

4. The same process occurred in Palestine: see Halbwachs 1941. I've replaced Halbwachs's "collective memory" with "social memory" via the criticisms of Olick and Robbins 1998. On this period as ushering in the invention of a tradition, see Caner 2010, 4.

5. Frank 2000.

6. Hunt 1982, 85.

7. Walker 1990.

8. Wilken 1992, 120.

9. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses ad Illuminandos* 4.10: "Οὗτος ἐσταυρώθη ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἀληθῶς. Κἂν γὰρ ἀρνήσασθαι βουληθῇς, ὁ τόπος ἐλέγχει σε φαινόμενος, ὁ μακάριος οὗτος Γολγοθᾶς, ἐν ᾧ νῦν, διὰ τὸν ἐν αὐτῷ σταυρωθέντα, συγκεκροτήμεθα. Καὶ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ σταυροῦ πᾶσα λοιπὸν ἡ οἰκουμένη κατὰ μέρος ἐπληρώθη."

10. And it was not only places that became associated with the biblical accounts. Monks could be described as "Moses" or "Aaron," effectively joining the past with the present (Frank 2000, esp. 165–82). The lives of biblical figures were reworked to conform to hagiographic conventions of the sixth century(?), and such reworkings served to appropriate further locations for the Christian faith. See Satran 1995.

Cyril had an ulterior motive in promoting Jerusalem as a holy place, for by encouraging believers to visit the sites associated with Christ, Cyril also promoted his authority as bishop of Jerusalem and the importance of the bishop of Jerusalem over his local rival at Caesarea.[11]

The priority given to John of Damascus's Sinai demonstrates the success of venerating holy places in the early Christian world. Just as the institutions and people of the Roman Empire became more Christian throughout the fourth century, so too did the topographic landscape become increasingly Christian. Regions that lacked biblical connections tended to focus sacralization through the construction of Christian edifices (often to local martyrs) and the destruction or co-option of the structures of rival faiths.[12] This is not to say that previous rituals or beliefs were not incorporated into Christian practice, as was the case at the famous Oak of Mamre, but the construction of a monumental Christian structure there demonstrated the "superiority" of the new faith.[13] The transition from pagan to Christian structures also involved the shifting of urban life and topography, as was the case in Jerash, where the previous focal point of the city had been the Temple of Artemis.[14] In the Sinai, Christianization was based on a conscious imprinting of biblical places and events onto fourth-century (and later) locations. The erection of Christian structures at sites that became associated with biblical events was of only secondary importance, though these churches and memorials indicate the codification of biblical identifications.

As noted by John of Damascus, the most important event of the Exodus, the transfer of divine Law to Moses by God himself, resulted in Mount Sinai's becoming one of the holiest places for Christians. In contrast to other sites in the Holy Land, which had been the focus of Jewish veneration and pilgrimage traditions, there was no such Jewish tradition of pilgrimage that Christians could follow in the veneration of Mount Sinai.[15] What evidence exists for Jewish locations of Mount Sinai places it either in northwest Arabia or else at other locations in the southern Sinai different from where Christians came to venerate the site.[16] Christians could therefore superimpose their own conceptions of the Exodus onto their contemporary Sinai without worrying about prior traditions.

Because there was no Jewish tradition of venerating the physical Mount Sinai, Sinai Christians did not have to use rhetoric to fight the claims of the Jews to the region, as was the case with holy sites in Palestine. According to Andrew Jacobs,

11. Drijvers 2004, 154–64.

12. MacCormack 1990, 8–20; Curran 2000, 116–57; Caseau 2004; Jenkins 2010, 105–46.

13. E. Fowden 2002, 125–29.

14. See Wharton 1995, 64–73, 94–100.

15. On Christian adoptions of Jewish holy places, see Sivan 1990.

16. Kerkeslager 1998, 146–213; Hoffmeier 2005, 116–48. Hoffmeier concludes that Mount Sinai, according to information from Exodus, was most likely located in the southern Sinai, perhaps at Jabal Sufsafa near Jabal Musa or at Jabal Serbal near Wadi Feiran and not at its later Christian location.

"by layering biblical place-names over contemporary toponyms Eusebius [in the *Onomasticon*] transforms the Jewish present [in Palestine] into the Christian past, initiating a sort of linguistic and historical telescoping. . . . In this way Eusebius simultaneously absorbs the holy land Jews into a facet of Christian identity."[17] Through supersession, reading the Exodus account was a Christian act. In the Sinai, the Old Testament connections served to sacralize Sinai space as proof of ownership against a different opponent—the nomads, whose land the Sinai monks and pilgrims had intruded on. Eusebius and Egeria make this connection clear, as both indicate that the Sinai belonged to the Saracens.[18] Through renaming and associating Sinai sites with Christian events, the Christians erased indigenous understandings of the land. In this way, the Sinai monks and pilgrims acted like other colonizers in world history, as for example in North America and in Israel.[19]

However, just as Cyril's promotion of the holy places of Jerusalem had the effect of increasing the stature of his see against Caesarea, the association of biblical sites in the Sinai was influenced by local concerns, especially regarding the location of Elim and the ethnic status of the Pharanites. According to Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim, Elim was located in the northwestern Sinai, whereas Ammonius and Cosmas Indicopleustes placed it at the monastic center at Rhaithou. That different sites were associated with the same biblical events is not particularly rare—several examples are known from the Holy Land—but this disagreement provides a window into understanding the role of biblical associations in the Sinai.[20] Both Ammonius and Cosmas Indicopleustes seem to be promoting the spiritual power of the monks of Rhaithou by connecting them with the Exodus account. At Pharan, which was linked to the biblical Raphidim, the inhabitants appear to have crafted an identity connecting them with Moses and not to Ishmael. This identification may have been motivated by an attempt to separate themselves from the nomads of the Sinai and to reinforce Pharanite connections with the monastic communities.

IDENTIFYING BIBLICAL SITES IN THE SINAI PENINSULA

The methods used to associate late-antique Sinai locations with biblical events were quite simple. Monks associated biblical events with prominent landmarks such as mountains, caves, and large or interesting rocks. When guiding pilgrims,

17. Jacobs 2004, 35–36.

18. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 166.12–17: "πόλις ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τὴν Ἀραβίαν, παρακειμένη τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου Σαρακηνοῖς." Egeria 3.8: "Egyptum autem et Palestinam et mare Rubrum et mare illut Parthenicum, quod mittit Alexandriam, nec non et fines Saracenorum infinitos ita subter nos inde videbamus, ut credi vix possit."

19. On this idea, see the Introduction, pp. 6–8.

20. Halbwachs 1941, 184–91.

the monks stopped at these locations. The monks or pilgrims then read out and quoted specific passages from Exodus that they believed described the places where they were then standing or the events or people associated with them. Like Cyril, they believed that these writings proved that the contemporary locations of the Sinai were the actual sites mentioned in the Scriptures.

Marah, the Wilderness of Sur, Elim, and the Desert Sin

Just as the ancient Israelites had entered the Sinai from Egypt, the majority of pilgrims began their journey to the Sinai at Clysma.[21] As the pilgrims traveled across the Sinai, they visited locations that they believed were mentioned in the Old Testament. They then conflated the contemporary late-antique sites in the Sinai with the people and events of the Exodus account. From Clysma, the pilgrims visited four locations that they believed had also been visited by the ancient Israelites before reaching the town of Pharan: Marah, the wilderness of Sur, Elim, and the desert Sin.

The portions of Egeria's *Itinerarium* describing her journey from Clysma to Mount Sinai, which would have included an account of Elim, do not survive, though some of her testimony has been preserved by Peter the Deacon.[22] Beginning her account after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Egeria describes the desert of Sur (Latinizing the Septuagint's reading Σουρ) as stretching for an "infinite" distance, with an immense amount of sand. Her comment that "they [the Israelites] walked for three days without water" repeats the Exodus account, although in her day there was only one stopping place (*mansio*) in the wilderness of Sur. After traveling along the shore, Egeria came to the place she called "Marra" (Μερρα).[23] She equated this site with Marah, describing two fountains and a

21. See chapter 2 for a lengthier discussion of pilgrimage routes. The most detailed modern discussion of the Israelite route is Hoffmeier 2005, 159–71, which includes a catalogue of modern attempts to identify the locations of biblical events.

22. Egeria believed that she was guided through the desert along the same route that the Israelites took when they fled from Egypt. When she returned to Clysma from Pharan, she described the journey along the shore and mistakenly mentioned that the Israelites traveled this same path after they had left the valley of the Sinai, despite the fact that the Israelites went east away from Mount Sinai, not west. C. Weber (1994, 21) says she must have erroneously thought about Numbers 10:12, which mentions the desert of Paran. Numbers 12:16 suggests that the Israelites traveled through Paran; however, the itinerary at Numbers 33:16–37 does not describe a journey to Paran. Egeria 6.3: "Filii etiam Israhel, revertentes a monte Dei Syna, usque ad eum locum reversi sunt per iter quod ierant, id est usque ad eum locum ubi de inter montes eximus et iunximus nos denuo ad Mare Rubrum et inde nos iam iter nostrum quo veneramus reversi sumus: filii autem Israhel de eodem loco sicut scriptum est in libris sancti Moysi, ambulaverunt iter suum." Egeria has clearly confused the desert of Paran, which surrounded Mount Sinai, with the town of Pharan west of Mount Sinai.

23. The name Maran seems to be related to a tribe mentioned by Agatharcides and quoted by Diodorus Siculus (3.43.1–2). According to Diodorus, the Maranites were killed at a festival by their neighbors, the Garindanes.

number of small palm trees there.[24] She mentions both the bitter water and the tree that Moses threw into the water to make it potable.[25]

After a three-day journey from Marra, Egeria arrived at a place called Arandara, which she equated with Helim (Elim, Αιλιμ).[26] Arandara lies between Clysma and Pharan in the northwestern region of the peninsula, along the shore. Egeria noted a small stream there providing an abundant supply of water. Many plants grew around the oasis, and many palm trees. She does not mention the exact number of seventy palm trees and twelve fountains as in Exodus and later authors, but this omission may result from the transmission of the passage through Peter the Deacon.[27] Alternatively, the lack of an exact quote from Exodus regarding the number of trees and fountains suggests that this identification was based on its location in the northwestern Sinai. Later writers who placed Elim off the Israelites' track felt that it was necessary to cite the exact wording of the biblical passage in order to justify the geographic incongruities of their identification of Elim.

After leaving Elim, Egeria described two large mountains that she believed marked the point where the Israelites first received manna from God.[28] She must have identified her location as the desert of Sin. She claims that the place was "called the desert of Pharan," a much different location than the town of that name.[29] The surrounding mountains were dotted with small caves, which Egeria described as offering excellent bedchambers. These, she claimed, were marked by Hebrew letters, suggesting that she was now in Wadi Mukattab.[30] To Egeria, the inscriptions created a tangible connection between the desert and the Scriptures. The place also had a well with water, but it was not so abundant as at Elim. This was

24. No biblical source mentions two fountains (Caner 2010, 215 no. 21).

25. Exodus 15:22–27. Petrus Diaconus Y.11 (v. 117): "Desertum uero Sur heremus est infinite magnitudinis, quantum potest umquam homo conspicere, et arena solitudinis illius inestimabilis, ubi triduo ambulauerunt sine aqua. A deserto autem Sur usque ad Maran est mansio una per ripas maris. In Maran uero arbores palmarum paucissimi sunt; sunt illic et duo fontes, quos indulcauit sanctus Moyses."

26. Exodus 15:27. The name Arandara seems to be related to a tribe mentioned by Agatharcides and quoted by Diodorus Siculus (3.43.1–2).

27. Petrus Diaconus Y.12 (vv. 117–18): "Inde autem per triduum de sinistro heremus est infinitus usque in locum qui dicitur Arandara; Arandara autem est locus, qui appellatus est Helim. Ibi fluuius currit, qui tamen tempore aliquo siccatur, sed per ipsius alueum sive iusta ripam ipsius inueniuntur aque. Erba uero illic satis habundat, arbores autem palmarum illic plurime sunt. A transitu autem maris Rubri, id est Sur, non inuenitur tam amenus locus cum tanta et tali aqua et tam habundante nisi istum. Inde ergo media mansio iusta mare est."

28. Exodus 16:1–36. Petrus Diaconus Y.13 (v. 118): "Demum uero apparent duo montes excelsi ualde, a parte uero sinistra, antequam ad montes venias, locus est, ubi pluit Dominus manna filiis Israhel; montes uero ipsi excelsi et erecti ualde sunt." On manna, which may be tamarisk, and quails, see Hoffmeier 2005, 171–75.

29. See the discussion in the following section.

30. They were actually Nabataean: see Caner 2010, 214 no. 27.

a poor land, unable to grow crops or grapes, and the water could support only a few palm trees.[31]

Whereas Egeria associated Elim with a site in the northwestern Sinai Peninsula, Ammonius's *Relatio* places Elim at Rhaithou, which is located on the southwestern shore of the Sinai. Though Ammonius does not explicitly mention the name Elim, he does describe the site as having once had twelve springs and seventy palm trees, as Elim does in the book of Exodus.[32] In Ammonius's time, the site had many more palm trees.[33] Since he directly quotes the Exodus account, it can be assumed that he associated Elim with Rhaithou.[34]

Cosmas Indicopleustes' account begins in the desert of Sur at a place that he identified as Phoinikon (Palm Grove).[35] His description of the desert of Sur describes how the sun was so unbearably hot that God gave the Israelites shelter with a cloud and directed their passage at night. The fact that he chooses to quote Psalm 105:39, "He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light by night," helps to identify this location with the desert of Sur. The Psalms verse further enhances the scriptural connections of the desert of Sur, layering biblical associations and increasing the sacredness of the site.

Cosmas's identification of Phoinikon may be related to that given by Diodorus Siculus, quoting Agatharcides. Diodorus explained how Phoinikon supplied abundant water and supported numerous palm trees.[36] This Phoinikon seems to be

31. Petrus Diaconus Y.14 (v. 118): "Montes uero toti per girum excauati sunt, taliter autem facte sunt cripte ille, ut, si suspendere uolueris uela, cubicula pulcherrima sint; unumquodque cubiculum est descriptum lidteris hebreis. Aque etiam ibi nonae et habundantes satis in extrema ualle sunt, sed non quales in Helim. Locus uero ipse uocatur desertus Pharan, unde missi sunt exploratores a Moyse, qui considerarent terram; ab utris uero partibus locus ille munitus est montibus. Non fert autem locus ille agros aut vineas nichilque aliut illic est nisi aqua et arbores palmarum."

32. Exodus 15:27.

33. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fols. 10–11; (Greek) 8: "ἔνθα αἱ δώδεκα πηγαὶ καὶ οἱ ἑβδομήκοντα φοίνικες κατὰ τὴν Γραφήν, νυνὶ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ πλεονάσαντες."

34. Caner 2010, 153 no. 56.

35. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.13–14: "Παρελθόντων οὖν τῶν Ἰσραηλιτῶν εἰς τὸ πέραν, εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον Φοινικῶνα, ἤρξαντο βαδίζειν τὴν ἔρημον Σούρ, τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμέρας νεφέλην αὐτοῖς εἰς σκέπην διαπεταννύντος ἀπὸ τοῦ καύσωνος τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ ὁδηγῶν αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ νυκτὸς ἐν στύλῳ πυρὸς φαίνων καὶ καθοδηγῶν αὐτοὺς πᾶσαν τὴν ἔρημον, καθὼς γέγραπται· 'Διεπέτασε νεφέλην εἰς σκέπην αὐτοῖς καὶ πῦρ τοῦ φωτίσαι αὐτοῖς τὴν νύκτα.'Ἔστιν οὖν καταγράψαι καὶ τοῦτο τοιῶσδε. Εἶτα πάλιν ὁδεύσαντες ἀπὸ τῆς Μερρᾶς ἦλθον εἰς Ἐλείμ."

36. Diodorus Siculus 3.42. His account also contains fantastical features such as that the people make their beds in the trees because they are afraid of the wild beasts that live in the area. It may also be of interest that he mentions an altar and writing on the rocks that no one understood. He clearly associates these places with the Nabataeans and other Arabs who transported incense from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean Sea. This report suggests that the Nabataeans had settled the area before the first century C.E.: "ἑξῆς δὲ τοῦ μυχοῦ τόπος ἐστὶ παραθαλάττιος ὁ τιμώμενος ὑπὸ τῶν ἐγχωρίων διαφερόντως διὰ τὴν εὐχρηστίαν τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ. οὗτος δ' ὀνομάζεται μὲν Φοινικών, ἔχει δὲ πλῆθος τούτου τοῦ φυτοῦ πολύκαρπον καθ' ὑπερβολὴν

associated with the biblical Marah; however, Cosmas does not mention the biblical events associated with Marah here. Instead, during his description of Elim, he mentions that God commanded Moses to celebrate the Sabbath at Marah.[37] Cosmas must be referring to Exodus 15:26, where it is stated that God gave Moses instructions, but the passage does not specifically mention the Sabbath.[38] Phoinikon may or may not be the same place as Egeria's Marra.[39]

Agreeing with Ammonius, Cosmas Indicopleustes connected Elim with "the place we now call Rhaithou," stating that Rhaithou is the location where the Israelites stopped while they were following the shore and that it marked the point where they finally turned into the desert.[40] Geographically, this makes sense only in the context of the sixth-century monastic settlements, for Rhaithou is not on the Israelites' path. Cosmas, echoing similar comments by Ammonius, mentions that the place had twelve fountains and had once had seventy palm trees but that in his day the palm trees were more numerous.[41]

καὶ πρὸς ἀπόλαυσιν καὶ τρυφὴν διαφέρον. πᾶσα δ' ἡ σύνεγγυς χώρα σπανίζει ναματιαίων ὑδάτων. . . . καὶ γὰρ ὕδατος οὐκ ὀλίγαι πηγαὶ καὶ λιβάδες ἐκπίπτουσιν ἐν αὐτῷ, ψυχρότητι χιόνος οὐδὲν λειπόμεναι· αὗται δ' ἐφ' ἑκάτερα τὰ μέρη τὰ κατὰ τὴν γῆν χλοερὰ ποιοῦσι καὶ παντελῶς ἐπιτερπῆ τὸν τόπον. ἔστι δὲ καὶ βωμὸς ἐκ στερεοῦ λίθου παλαιὸς τοῖς χρόνοις, ἐπιγραφὴν ἔχων ἀρχαίοις γράμμασιν ἀγνώστοις. ἐπιμέλονται δὲ τοῦ τεμένους ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή, διὰ βίου τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἔχοντες. μακρόβιοι δ' εἰσὶν οἱ τῇδε κατοικοῦντες, καὶ τὰς κοίτας ἐπὶ τῶν δένδρων ἔχουσι διὰ τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν θηρίων φόβον. παραπλεύσαντι δὲ τὸν Φοινικῶνα πρὸς ἀκρωτηρίῳ τῆς ἠπείρου νῆσός ἐστιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐναυλιζομένων ἐν αὐτῇ ζῴων Φωκῶν νῆσος ὀνομαζομένη· τοσοῦτο γὰρ πλῆθος τῶν θηρίων τούτων ἐνδιατρίβει τοῖς τόποις ὥστε θαυμάζειν τοὺς ἰδόντας. τὸ δὲ προκείμενον ἀκρωτήριον τῆς νήσου κεῖται κατὰ τὴν καλουμένην Πέτραν καὶ τὴν Παλαιστίνην τῆς Ἀραβίας· εἰς γὰρ ταύτην τόν τε λίβανον καὶ τἄλλα φορτία τὰ πρὸς εὐωδίαν ἀνήκοντα κατάγουσιν, ὡς λόγος, ἐκ τῆς ἄνω λεγομένης Ἀραβίας οἵ τε Γερραῖοι καὶ Μιναῖοι."

37. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.14: "ἔνθα καὶ πρώτως ἐσαββάτισαν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολάς, ἃς δέδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Μωϋσῇ ἀγράφως ἐν Μερρα."

38. Both use the word ἐντολή (order, commandment). Exodus 15.26: "καὶ εἶπεν, Ἐὰν ἀκοῇ ἀκούσῃς τῆς φωνῆς κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ ποιήσῃς καὶ ἐνωτίσῃ ταῖς ἐντολαῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ φυλάξῃς πάντα τὰ δικαιώματα αὐτοῦ, πᾶσαν νόσον, ἣν ἐπήγαγον τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, οὐκ ἐπάξω ἐπὶ σέ· ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ ἰώμενός σε.'"

39. Solzbacher 1989, 160.

40. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.14–5: "Εἶτα πάλιν ὁδεύσαντες ἀπὸ τῆς Μερρᾶς ἦλθον εἰς Ἐλείμ, ἣν νῦν καλοῦμεν Ῥαϊθοῦ, ἔνθα ἦσαν δεκαδύο πηγαὶ καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα στελέχη φοινίκων· αἱ μὲν πηγαὶ εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν σῴζονται, οἱ δὲ φοίνικες πολὺ πλείους ἐγένοντο. Ἕως δὲ τῶν ἐνταῦθα δεξιᾷ τὴν θάλασσαν εἶχον καὶ ἐξ εὐωνύμων τὴν ἔρημον· ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἐνταῦθα τὴν ἄνω ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος βαδίζουσιν ὀπίσω λοιπὸν τὴν θάλασσαν ἐάσαντες, τὰ πρόσω δὲ τὴν ἔρημον βαδίζοντες. Ἔνθα γενομένων ἀνὰ μέσον Ἐλεὶμ καὶ τοῦ Σιναίου ὄρους, ἐκεῖ κατελήλυθεν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τὸ μάννα· ἔνθα καὶ πρώτως ἐσαββάτισαν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολάς, ἃς δέδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Μωϋσῇ ἀγράφως ἐν Μερρᾷ. Ἔστιν οὖν καὶ ταῦτα διαγράψαι οὕτως. Καταντήσαντες ἐνταῦθα εἰς Ἐλεὶμ ἀπὸ τῆς Μερρᾶς καὶ πάλιν ὁδεύσαντες ἀνὰ μέσον Ἐλεὶμ καὶ τοῦ Σιναίου ὄρους εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, εἰς ἣν ἐκεῖ καὶ ὀρτυγομήτρα κατῆλθεν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς εἰς ἑσπέραν καὶ εἰς τὸ πρωῒ τὸ μάννα· ἐκεῖ πάλιν ἤρξαντο πρῶτον σαββατίζειν, τοῦ μάννα διατηρουμένου ἀπὸ τῆς ἔκτης καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου, ἐν ἄλλῃ δὲ ἡμέρᾳ μὴ δυναμένου μεῖναι, ἀλλ' ἐπόζοντος καὶ ἀφανιζομένου· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διδασκόμενοι σαββατίζειν· ἠθέλησαν γάρ τινες καὶ τῷ σαββάτῳ συλλέξαι καὶ οὐχ εὗρον, καθὰ γέγραπται."

41. Caner 2010, 249 no. 15.

The Piacenza pilgrim, visiting the Sinai approximately twenty years after Cosmas's composition of the *Christian Topography,* placed Elim along the route between Pharan and the coast of the Red Sea. He names the site Magdalum and mentions the existence of a fort there called Surandala, which should perhaps be associated with Egeria's Arandara.[42] Apparently he considered this place Elim, because he specifically mentions seventy-two (*sic*) palm trees and twelve fountains. That he does not locate Elim on the southern coast, as Ammonius and Cosmas did, suggests that the Piacenza pilgrim followed the same route as Egeria.[43] He does not mention Marah or Phoinikon in his account, nor either the desert Sur.

These four authors, Egeria, Ammonius, Cosmas Indicopleustes, and the Piacenza pilgrim, each saw the late-antique topography of the Sinai through a lens crafted by the Old Testament. Although each author may not be responsible for creating the Christian cognitive associations that each reflects, they all preserve a significant contribution to the understanding of the late-antique Sinai. Of the attributions described here, the shifting location of Elim proves the most interesting. Whereas Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim placed Elim on the route between Clysma and Mount Sinai, Ammonius and Cosmas located it on the southwestern shore, at the monastic center of Rhaithou. This cannot be a matter of simple chronological variations, because Cosmas wrote between the time of Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim. Rather, it seems that Ammonius and Cosmas connected Rhaithou with Elim because of the existence of the large monastic community there.[44] Cosmas visited the site, and Ammonius claims to record the narrative of a monk from Rhaithou. This report suggests that the monks at Rhaithou actively cultivated a biblical heritage for themselves, known to those who visited the site or encountered monks from there. They would have done this in order to give biblical justification for their monastic settlement and to enhance their own spiritual journeys, also increasing their own sanctity as well. As discussed above, monks were seen as the equals of the holy places and biblical figures.[45] Thus by associating their site with biblical Elim and the prophet Moses, the monks at Rhaithou could

42. Solzbacher 1989, 152, 160; Caner 2010, 261 no. 43.

43. Exodus 15:27; PP 41: "Exinde venimus in Sochot et exinde descendimus in Magdalum, etiam et ad locum ad LXXII palmas et XII fontes . . . in quo locum est castellum modicum, qui vocatur Surandala . . . Exinde uenimus ad locum, ubi filii Israhel transeuntes mare castra metati sunt . . . et inde uenimus ad locum ad ripam, ubi transierunt filii Israhel. Ubi exierunt de mare, est oratorium Heliae, et transcendentes in locum, ubi intrauerunt in mare, ibi est oratorium Moysi." All the manuscripts attest the number seventy-two, which must be a mistake for seventy.

44. Another possibility is that one of the two accounts copied the other. Compare Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fols. 10–11; (Greek) 8: "ἔνθα αἱ δώδεκα πηγαὶ καὶ οἱ ἑβδομήκοντα φοίνικες κατὰ τὴν Γραφήν, νυνὶ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ πλεονάσαντες," with Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.14, "ἣν νῦν καλοῦμεν Ῥαϊθοῦ, ἔνθα ἦσαν δεκαδύο πηγαὶ καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα στελέχη φοινίκων· αἱ μὲν πηγαὶ εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν σῴζονται, οἱ δὲ φοίνικες πολὺ πλείους ἐγένοντο."

45. Egeria 3.4.

themselves be associated with biblical events and personages. Furthermore, such an association suggests a spiritual competition between the monks at Rhaithou and those at Mount Sinai, one in which those at Rhaithou felt inferior and required a significant biblical connection in order to enhance and justify their spiritual discipline.

Pharan and the Creation of a Biblical Identity

After Elim, the next major site on the Israelite itinerary was a place called Raphidim, located in the desert of Sin.[46] When Egeria visited the Sinai in the fourth century, she wrote that Raphidim was located at the town Pharan, which lay in the Wadi Feiran approximately equidistant from the western shore of the Sinai Peninsula and Mount Sinai. This site, Pharan, was originally founded in the late first century B.C.E. by settlers of the Nabataean Kingdom, which claimed control over the Sinai at that time. Little is known of the town prior to the fourth century, even after several seasons of excavations.[47] The Pharanites converted to Christianity, possibly in the late fourth century.[48] It became one of the most important Christian locations in the Sinai, as it was the home of Sinai's only bishop before the Islamic Conquest, and several churches were constructed there.[49]

During late antiquity, the biblical identity of Pharan and the Pharanites was in flux. Eusebius connected Pharan to Paran, the desert where Ishmael roamed in Genesis, but he also associated the site with biblical Raphidim. Ammonius took the connection of Pharan with Paran to the next logical step: that the Pharanites were descendants of Ishmael, and therefore he called them Ishmaelites.[50] Egeria, Cosmas Indicopleustes, and the Piacenza pilgrim instead associate Pharan with Raphidim, not Paran. This connection linked Pharan and the Pharanites with Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, and denied any connection between Pharan, Ishmael, and the Saracens. Accordingly it is implied that the Pharanites upon converting to Christianity actively sought to associate themselves with the Christian monks, transforming their own self-image.

As with the site of Elim, late-antique Christian authors used evidence from Exodus to identify contemporary sites with biblical events. The testimony of Eusebius in the *Onomasticon* concerning the location of Raphidim is ambiguous. Although he links Pharan with Raphidim, it seems that he did not locate Raphidim at Pharan. He described Raphidim as a site near Mount Choreb where water

46. Exodus 17–18.

47. On the archaeology of Pharan, see Grossman 1984, 1992, 2000, 2001b; Grossman, Jones, and Reichert 1998.

48. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek) 14.

49. On Pharan, see Dahari 2000, 15–20.

50. For more on this topic, see below and chapter 1, pp. 25–27.

flowed out of a rock, and he asserted that the name meant "Temptation." Finally, he added that Joshua fought Amalek near Pharan.[51] Locating Raphidim with this description can be quite confusing, because Eusebius seems to identify two different places as Raphidim. First, he locates it "next to Mount Choreb," whereas later he implies that Raphidim was actually located "on" Mount Choreb. The problem seems to be that Eusebius considered Choreb to be a mountain, whereas the Septuagint text of Exodus simply uses the term "Choreb" (Χωρηβ) to describe the entire peninsula.[52] Elsewhere in the *Onomasticon,* Eusebius says that Raphidim is located "near Pharan." Since Pharan lies about fifty kilometers away from Mount Sinai today, either Eusebius was confused about the topography and location of sites within the Sinai or he believed that Mount Sinai was located elsewhere than in the place that later became accepted. This too is possible, since the first known monks and pilgrims did not venture into the Sinai until after the *Onomasticon* was composed. Most likely, Eusebius confused the toponym "Choreb," referring to the entire peninsula, with Mount Sinai. Because Eusebius did not in fact travel to the Sinai, he had no need to ensure that his descriptions matched the actual geography of the place.

In the *Onomasticon* entry on Pharan, Eusebius does not mention Raphidim or the events that occurred there. Instead, Eusebius describes how Pharan was a city in the Saracen desert, which was the dwelling place of Ishmael, from whom the Ishmaelites originated. He adds that the Israelites passed through this region (the Saracen desert), marching "from Mount Sinai."[53] He then situates Pharan into the fourth-century geography of the region by locating it in the south of the province of Arabia and three days' journey from Aila. Here Pharan is connected to Paran, which appears in the Hebrew Bible as the roaming ground of Ishmael, who was sent away by Abraham to please his legitimate wife, Sarah.[54] According to patristic sources, the various Arab tribes, whom Roman sources generally called "Saracens," were all descended from Ishmael.[55] Eusebius's description of Pharan, therefore, implies that he believed that the inhabitants of Pharan were Arab descendants of Ishmael. That the city of Pharan is located "in the Saracen desert" implies that the city was inhabited by Saracens and demonstrates their occupation

51. Exodus 17:8–16; Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 142.22–25.

52. Exodus 17:5–6.

53. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 166.12–17: "πόλις ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τὴν Ἀραβίαν, παρακειμένη τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου Σαρακηνοῖς, δι' ἧς ὥδευσαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραήλ, ἀπάραντες ἀπὸ Σινᾶ. κεῖται δὲ καὶ ἐπέκεινα τῆς Ἀραβίας ἐπὶ νότον, ἀπέχει δὲ Ἀϊλὰ πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ὁδὸν τριῶν ἡμερῶν, οὗ, φησὶν ἡ γραφή, κατῴκησεν Ἰσμαήλ, ὅθεν οἱ Ἰσμαηλῖται. λέγεται δὲ καὶ Χοδολλαγόμωρ κατασκῆψαι τοὺς ἐν τῇ 'Φαράν, ἥ ἐστιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.'"

54. Genesis 21:14–21.

55. This is stated most explicitly in Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.37. Also see the discussion in chapter 1, pp. 27–28.

of the Sinai prior to the arrival of Christian monks.[56] These were the groups that were dispossessed as a result of monastic development and the linking of Sinai sites with biblical locales.

Egeria's travelogue demonstrates that monastic traditions had already established the Sinai locations of Exodus sites. Her account unambiguously associates Raphidim with Pharan. She knew Pharan as the place where Amalek fought the sons of Israel, where people murmured for water, and where Moses met with Jethro. She mentioned that a church was erected on the spot where Moses directed the battle against Amalek and erected an altar to commemorate the victory.[57] The fact that the church was erected on the spot where she reports that Moses stood during the battle indicates that the inhabitants of Pharan were consciously using the Exodus account in the Christianization of their town. The connection with Raphidim is further enhanced by the fact that this hill (with its church) overlooks Pharan. Egeria could not have got her information from Eusebius, who as pointed out above did not strongly associate Raphidim with Pharan. One may imagine that her Pharanite guides described the importance of the site and told her that the church was built to commemorate the event.[58]

Two centuries later, Cosmas Indicopleustes also connects Pharan with Raphidim but elaborates on the earlier biblical associations with quotations from Psalms and the New Testament to reflect a further Christianization of the site. Cosmas notes that the Israelites came into Raphidim, which was now called Pharan, and then relates an embellished story about how Moses made water flow from the rock of Mount Choreb. (It may be of interest that he connects this event to three verses in the Psalms that are not mentioned by any other source.)[59] Then he connects the

56. Shahid (1984a, 326) and Dahari (2000, 17–18) assume that the population of Pharan were "Saracens" and Arabs, possibly from a tribe connected to the Judham. An analysis of the morphology of skeletons buried outside the town of Pharan concluded that the bodies were those of Near Easterners, but the analysis could not determine whether the population was more related to modern Bedouin in the region or ancient dwellers of Palestine (Hershkovitz 1988).

57. Petrus Diaconus Y.15 (vv. 118–19): "Ibi appellatur locus ille Raphidin, ubi Hamalech occurrit filiis Israhel, et ubi murmurauit populus pro aqua, et ubi Iethro socer Moysi ei occurrit. Locus uero, ubi orauit Moyses, quando Iesus expugnauit Amalech, mos excelsus est ualde et erectus imminens super Pharan; ubi autem orauit Moyses, ecclesia nunc constructa est. Locus autem ipse, quem admodum sedit et quemadmodum lapides sub cubitu habuit, hodie parent. Ibi etiam Moyses deuicto Hamalech edificauit altare Domino. In tantum autem locus iste usque ad quingentos passus erectus est, hac si per parietem subeas."

58. Egeria reports in 5.12 that monks at Mount Sinai showed her around the biblical sites there, and in 6.2 she mentions how the Pharanite guides navigated by desert markings. From this we can assume that she used locals as guides along her journeys, specifically inhabitants of Pharan when in the area. Wilkinson (1971, 18) notes that Egeria was "shown places which were hallowed by local tradition."

59. Cosmas Indicopleustes 3.16; Psalms 78:15–16, 105:41. These verses clearly refer to the events at Raphidim. It is interesting that no other source mentions them in connection with the site.

spring of Raphidim with Paul's Rock of Christ, thereby associating events from the Old Testament with the New.[60] Finally, he mentions the battle between Amalek, the meeting between Jethro and Moses, and the circumcision of Moses' second son.[61] This last event is not connected elsewhere with the Raphidim story in the book of Exodus. Probably it was a local invention, possibly devised to further associate the inhabitants of Pharan with the Israelites' religion. Not only is Pharan connected with Raphidim of the Exodus account, but it became associated with the rite of circumcision and the Israelite religion through Psalms (78:15–16, 105:41) and the New Testament.

Later in the sixth century, when the Piacenza pilgrim described Pharan, he did not specifically use the name Raphidim, even though he clearly associates the events of Raphidim with Pharan. He mentions that Moses fought Amalek at Pharan, and that there was an *oratorium* set up above the rocks where Moses stood, echoing the description by Egeria.[62] He also adds new details connecting Moses with the site. The Piacenza pilgrim claims that Pharan was inhabited by the descendants of Jethro, who visited his son-in-law Moses from Midian.[63] Although the Latin word that the Piacenza pilgrim used, "dicitur," is impersonal and does not mention his source, there seem to be three possibilities. First, the story could have been a local tradition told to him by inhabitants of Pharan. Second, the genealogy of Pharanites may have been promoted by the monks of the Sinai, and either accepted or not by the Pharanites. Or, last, the descent of the Pharanites may have been imposed by outsiders and disseminated via pilgrimage accounts like this one. Within these possibilities, there was an opportunity for the Pharanites to shape their own self-image; but it is also possible that the image of the Pharanites in our sources has nothing to do with the Pharanite self-image. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that the inhabitants of Pharan would have opposed the identification of Pharanites as descendants of Jethro, since this would connect them directly to Moses. As there were several church constructions at sites associated with Moses at Pharan, it seems likely that the inhabitants of Pharan acted, perhaps unconsciously, to enhance their connection with Moses by adopting an identity that established their descent from Jethro.

It is of interest that the Piacenza pilgrim locates the fountain of Moses on Mount Sinai and not at Pharan.[64] He is most likely interpreting Exodus 17:6, which

60. Cosmas Indicopleustes 3.17; 1 Corinthians 10:4.

61. Cosmas Indicopleustes 3.18.

62. PP 40: "et venientes in Fara ciuitatem, ubi pugnauit Moyses cum Amalec, ubi est oratorium, cuius altare positum est super petras illas, quas subposuerunt Moysi oranti." Caner 2010, 259 no. 37.

63. Exodus 18; PP 40: "Ipsa est terra Madian et ipsi inhabitantes in ea ciuitate dicitur, quia ex familia Iethro, soceri Moysi, descendunt."

64. Ibid. 37: "Qui perambulantes per heremum octaua decima die venimus ad locum, ubi Moyses de petra eduxit aquas. Exinde alia die venimus ad montem dei Choreb, et inde mouentes, ut ascenderemus Sina. . . ."

Egeria located at Pharan. This passage mentions the rock "at Choreb," and therefore he must have thought that it was located on or near Mount Sinai and not at Pharan.[65] Here the author has confused Choreb meaning the Sinai Peninsula with Mount Sinai itself. At this point in the pilgrimage account, the Piacenza pilgrim has not mentioned meeting monks, and thus he may have located the fountain entirely on his own, explaining the discrepancy with Egeria.

Among these authors, Eusebius and Ammonius (both of whom called the Pharanites "Ishmaelites") mention Pharan in connection with Ishmael. The remaining authors—Egeria, Cosmas, and the Piacenza pilgrim, mention Pharan only in connection with Raphidim. The linkage of Pharan and Raphidim suggests that these authors did not view the Pharanites as Ishmaelites or Saracens, since they never use these terms to describe the Pharanites. It seems that the Pharanites actively cultivated an alternative identity by erecting churches to commemorate biblical events. Pharanite guides may have actively promoted the connection of the city with Raphidim by teaching pilgrims about the site. This process was so successful that by the sixth century "it [was] said that the Pharanites are the descendants of Jethro."[66]

Mount Sinai

Eusebius's testimony in the *Onomasticon* seems confused about the location of Mount Sinai, echoing the problems mentioned above regarding Pharan.[67] Eusebius writes that Choreb "is the mountain of God located in Midian. It lies next to Mount Sinai in the desert beyond Arabia."[68] From this sentence alone, it appears that Eusebius does not know whether Mount Choreb was Mount Sinai or a nearby mountain. Jerome's translation of the *Onomasticon* states that the two mountains (Mount Choreb and Mount Sinai) were the same but that two different names were used for it.[69] Since neither author visited the Sinai, there was no need for their descriptions to match physical locations; nor were they able to personally verify the physical locations.

On the other hand, Eusebius's description of another location, Kata ta Chrusea, suggests that he located Mount Sinai near its later-identified location. According to Eusebius, Kata ta Chrusea "is a mountain full of gold dust in the desert, lying eleven days away from Mount Choreb and next to which Moses wrote Deuteronomy; and it is said that a long time ago the mountain of gold mines [i.e., Kata ta Chrusea] lay next

65. Exodus 17:6: "ὅδε ἐγὼ ἕστηκα πρὸ τοῦ σὲ ἐκεῖ ἐπὶ τῆς πέτρας ἐν Χωρηβ· καὶ πατάξεις τὴν πέτραν, καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐξ αὐτῆς ὕδωρ, καὶ πίεται ὁ λαός μου. ἐποίησεν δὲ Μωυσῆς οὕτως ἐναντίον τῶν υἱῶν Ισραηλ."

66. PP 40.

67. The Mount Sinai narrative is recorded in Exodus 19–34.

68. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 172.9–10: "Χωρήβ—ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν χώρᾳ Μαδιάμ. παράκειται τῷ ὄρει Σινᾶ ὑπὲρ τὴν Ἀραβίαν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου."

69. Jerome, *Onomasticon* 173.9–10.

to the copper mines at Phaino in the Wadi Araba."[70] Here Eusebius is essentially quoting Deuteronomy in the use of "eleven days" and the term "Mount Choreb," but Deuteronomy mentions Kadeshbarnea, not Kata ta Chrusea.[71] Jerome adds that the mines at Phaino, famous for the numbers of Christians martyred there during the Great Persecution, were still being worked in his time.[72] An interval of eleven days is mentioned in Deuteronomy, but it also approximated the time that Christian pilgrims would have spent traveling between Phaino and Mount Sinai. By mentioning Mount Choreb in connection with still-existing copper mines, this description helps situate Mount Sinai as a tangible place instead of a purely spiritual location.

As with the other sites mentioned in this chapter, Egeria wrote the first surviving eyewitness description of Mount Sinai. She was guided by two different factors, the Bible and local traditions, when identifying the various locations at Mount Sinai. Her most important source was Exodus itself, which she cites with the phrase "quae scripta sunt." When present at a specifically biblical location, such as the summit of Mount Sinai, she would consult her Bible and read about it.[73] Her other source for information was either guides or monks who pointed out important locations. When she wondered which mountain was Mount Sinai, she questioned one of the monks in the area.[74] In another passage, while on Mount Sinai, she says explicitly that she asked the monks to show her the important places mentioned in the Bible.[75] Monks pointed out the cave in which Moses rested while ascending the mountain so that he could receive the tablets of the Law, then the place where he broke the tablets because of the Golden Calf, and the other places that Egeria wished to see.[76] (She is not more specific.) Elijah's cave was shown to her, and she noted that a church had been erected in front of this cave to commemorate his refuge. In the same place, the monks pointed out the altar that Elijah built as an offering to the Lord.[77] There she read the specific passage from the

70. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 144.1–4: "ὄρη ἐστὶ χρυσοῦ ψηγμάτων ἔμπλεα ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου, ια΄ ἡμερῶν ὁδὸν ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄρους Χωρήβ, παρ' οἷς Μωϋσῆς τὸ Δευτερονόμιον γράφει. λέγεται δὲ ἐν Φαινὼν χαλκοῦ μετάλλοις τὸ παλαιὸν παρακεῖσθαι ὄρη χρυσοῦ μετάλλων."

71. Deuteronomy 1:1–2.

72. Jerome, *Onomasticon* 145.1–5; Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestinae* (*Recensio Brevior*) 7.2.

73. For example, Egeria 3.6: "lecto ergo ipso loco omni de libro Moysi."

74. Ibid. 2.7: "hoc autem, ante quam perveniremus ad montem Dei, iam referentibus fratribus cognoueram, et postquam ibi perveni, ita esse manifeste cognoui."

75. Ibid. 3.7: "tunc statim illi sancti dignati sunt singula ostendere. Nam ostenderunt nobis. . . ."

76. Exodus 32:16–20; Egeria 3.7: "nam ostenderunt nobis speluncam illam ubi fuit sanctus Moyses cum iterato ascendisset in montem Dei ut acciperet denuo tabulas, posteaquam priores illas fregerat peccante populo, et cetera loca, quaecumque desiderabamus vel quae ipsi melius noverant, dignati sunt ostendere nobis."

77. 3 Kings 18:31–36; Egeria 4.2: "ostenditur etiam ibi altarium lapideum, quem posuit ipse sanctus Helias ad offerendum Deo, sicut et illi sancti nobis ostendere dignabantur." Strangely, Elijah seems to have built the altar before he went to Mount Sinai.

Bible, prayed, and took the Eucharist.[78] Egeria was also able to identify sites on the basis of memorials erected to mark biblical events, such as when she saw the site of the Golden Calf.[79] Upon climbing higher on Mount Choreb, Egeria was shown the place where Aaron and the seventy elders awaited Moses while he received the Law. A huge stone marked the place that the monks associated with Aaron.[80] Once again, to cement the connection with Moses, the appropriate passage in the Bible was read aloud with the addition of suitable psalms.[81]

Egeria approached Mount Sinai from Pharan, which she reckoned to lie thirty-five Roman miles away from Pharan.[82] She notes a wide plain in which the tribes of Israel waited for Moses for forty days and nights while he ascended and remained on the mountain of God.[83] She also links this valley to his exile when he was a shepherd and God first spoke to him from the Burning Bush.[84] The path from Pharan required Egeria's entourage to climb part of Mount Sinai to reach the Burning Bush, which they admired for a long time.[85] On the other side of the mountain they were joined by monks who pointed out places mentioned in the Bible.[86]

Egeria's description of Mount Sinai vividly conveys her impressions of the mountain. Throughout her text she describes Mount Sinai as the holy mountain of God; however, once she arrived in the region of Mount Sinai, she realized that the area was covered with many mountains.[87] She later learned that Mount Sinai was not the tallest mountain, but nevertheless she describes the other mountains as "small hills" compared with the height of Mount Sinai.[88] At the top, she wrote

78. Ibid. 4.3: "fecimus ergo et ibi oblationem et orationem impensissimam, et lectus est ipse locus de libro Regnorum."

79. Exodus 32:7–8; Egeria 2.2.

80. Exodus 24:1–2; Egeria 4.4: "id est ad eum locum ubi steterat sanctus Aaron cum septuaginta senioribus cum sanctus Moyses acciperet a Domino legem ad filios Israhel. In eo ergo loco, licet et tectum non sit, tamen petra ingens est per girum, habens planitiem supra se, in qua stetisse dicuntur ipsi sancti; nam et in medio ibi quasi altarium de lapidibus factum habet."

81. Ibid. 4.4: "lectus est ergo et ibi ipse locus de libro Moysi et dictus unus psalmus aptus loco."

82. Ibid. 6.1. See Caner's notes (2010, 217–19) for a discussion of the modern locations she passed through to reach Mount Sinai from Pharan.

83. Egeria 2.2: "haec est autem vallis ingens et planissima in qua filii Israhel commorati sunt his diebus quod sanctus Moyses ascendit in montem Domini et fuit ibi quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus."

84. Exodus 3–4; Egeria 2.2: "haec ergo vallis ipsa est, in cuius capite ille locus est, ubi sanctus Moyses, cum pasceret pecora soceri sui, iterum locutus est ei Deus de rubo in igne."

85. Ibid. 2.3: "id est ubi rubus erat. . . . itaque ergo hox placuit ut, visis omibus quae desiderabamus, descendentes a monte Dei, ubi est rubus veniremus."

86. Ibid. 2.3: "rediremus ad iter cum hominibus Dei, qui nobis singula loca, quae scripta sunt, per ipsam vallem ostendebant."

87. Ibid. 1.1: "mons sanctus Dei Syna."

88. Caner (2010, 219 no. 51) notes that from her location, Mount Sinai would have looked smaller than Jabal Katarina. Egeria 2.5–6: "mons autem ipse per giro quidem unus esse videtur: intus autem

about being able to see Egypt, Palestine, the Red Sea, the eastern Mediterranean, and the vast lands of the Saracens; so great was the view that she "could hardly believe it."[89]

Egeria ascended the mountain on a Sunday, describing it as "where the Law was given and the very place where the majesty of God descended on the day when the mountain smoked."[90] Its chief features were a small church and the Cave of Moses. Although a monk was present in the small church when Egeria arrived, no one resided on top of the mountain, because of the sacred nature of the site and the lack of provisions.[91]

It is easy to see why Eusebius would have been confused about the location and the name of Mount Sinai, because when Egeria visited she noted the large numbers of high mountains in the area. One, in fact, was the location of a church and was located right next to Mount Sinai.[92] Egeria reported that its name was "In Choreb," a translation from the Septuagint's ἐν Χωρηβ.[93] Later she refers to the mountain simply as Choreb. This place was connected with the biblical story of the prophet Elijah, who fled from King Ahab. Egeria quotes directly from the translation of the Septuagint the words of God: "Quid tu hic, Helias?"[94]

After so much travel, climbing up and down the mountains in the region, Egeria and her party finally reached the largest concentration of monastic cells. This community grew up organically around the remains of a bush, which they identified as the Burning Bush from Exodus. This bush was shown to Egeria, who

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quod ingrederis, plues sunt, sed totum mons Dei appellatur; specialis autem ille, in cuius summitate est hic locus, ubi descendit maiestas Dei, sicut scriptum est, in medio illorum omnium est. Et cum hi omnes, qui per girum sunt, tam excelsi sint quam nunquam me puto vidisse, tamen ipse ille medianus, in quo descendit maiestas Dei, tano altior est omnibus illis ut, cum subissemus in illo, prorsus toti illi montes, quos excelsos videramus, ita infra nos essent ac si colliculi permodici essent."

89. Ibid. 3.7: "Egyptum autem et Palestinam et mare Rubrum et mare illut Parthenicum, quod mittit Alexandriam, nec non et fines Saracenorum infinitos ita subter nos inde videbamus, ut credi vix possit." On the identification of the "mare Parthenicum," see Caner 2010, 221 no. 67.

90. Ibid. 3.2: "hora ergo quarta pervenimus in summitatem illam montis Dei sancti Syna, ubi data est lex in eo, id est locum, ubi descendit maiestas Domini in ea die, qua mons fumigabat."

91. Ibid. 3.5: "verum autem in ipsa summitate montis illius mediani nullus commanet; nichil enim est ibi aliud nisi sola ecclesia et spelunca, ubi fuit sanctus Moyses." The cave is also mentioned by Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* 2.13.

92. Caner (2010, 222 no. 69) believes this is modern Jabal Sufsafa.

93. Egeria 4.1: "completo ergo omni desiderio, quo festinaueramus ascendere, cepimus iam et descendere ab ipsa summitate montis Dei, in qua ascenderamus, in alio monte, qui ei periunctus est, qui locus appellatur in Choreb; ibi enim est ecclesia." On Choreb, Exodus 17:6, which Egeria has already linked with Raphidim and Pharan. See Egeria, *Itinerarium* (ed. Maraval 1997), 138–39 no. 1.

94. Egeria 4.2: "nam hic est locus Choreb ubi fuit sanctus Helias propheta qua fugit a facie Achab Regis, ubi ei locutus est Deus dicens: 'Quid tu hic, Helias?' sicut scriptum est in libris Regnorum." The Septuagint (1 Kings 19:9) reads, "Τί σὺ ἐνταῦθα Ἠλίου;"

remarked that it was still alive and sending out shoots of new growth.[95] She described it as "the Bush . . . from which the Lord spoke to Moses in the fire."[96] Almost as important, the monks pointed out the very spot where Moses stood before the Burning Bush and the place where God commanded Moses to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground.[97] She mentions this location and the quote twice in her account, perhaps symbolizing the profound importance of the location and associating the words of God with her own journey to the Holy Land. This event and its commemoration in front of the Burning Bush provides the most tangible and explicit indication that the Sinai was *terra sancta*.

These associations were later made apparent by the Moses mosaics on a wall directly in front of the supposed Burning Bush. One shows Moses standing in front of the Burning Bush.[98] He is resting his foot on a rock, and his hands are reaching for the straps of his sandal. One shoe is already removed from his back foot and is lying on the ground. Moses is averting his gaze from the Burning Bush and staring into the sky. The scene clearly recalls the passage in Exodus stating that he was standing on holy ground.[99] As Kurt Weitzmann inquires, "Who, in looking at Moses loosening his sandals, would not be aware that right behind this wall there is the Chapel of the Burning Bush, the *locus sanctus* of the monastery?"[100] Clearly this scene was selected to impress upon the monks and pilgrims that they too stood before the Burning Bush of lore and that they too were standing on holy ground. The scene works to enhance the already-known biblical importance of the site by giving a visual reminder of what had previously only been read. By seeing the site (and the sight) with their own eyes, the importance of the Burning Bush was ingrained into the minds of visiting pilgrims.

Egeria's guides showed her numerous other places in the area—for example, the place where the Golden Calf was built, marked by a large stone, and the place

95. Egeria 4.6: "quoniam ibi errant monasteria plurima sanctorum hominum et ecclesia in eo loco ubi est rubus, qui rubus usque in hodie vivet et mittet virgultas."

96. Exodus 3:2, 6; Egeria 4.7: "hic est autem rubus quem superius dixi, de quo locutus est Dominus Moysi in igne, qui est in eo loco ubi monasteria sunt plurima et ecclesia in capite vallis ipsius. Ante ipsam autem ecclesiam hortus est gratissimus, habens aquam optimam abundantem, in quo horto ipse rubus est."

97. Ibid. 4.8: "locus etiam ostenditur ibi iuxta ubi stetit sanctus Moyses quando et dixit Deus, 'Solve corrigiam calciamenti tui' et cetera." Ibid. 5.2: "nam in primo capite ipsius vallis ubi manseramus et videramus rubum illum de quo locutus est Deus sancto Moysi in igne, videramus etiam et illum locum in quo steterat ante rubum sanctus Moyses quando ei dixit Deus, 'Solve corrigiam calciamenti tui; locus enim in quo stas terra sancta est.'"

98. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pls. CXXVI–CXXVIII.

99. Exodus 3:5.

100. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, 15.

FIGURE 2. Mosaic in the basilica church at Saint Catherine's Monastery depicting Moses removing his sandal. (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pl. CXXVI; reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai.)

where the Israelites awaited Moses while he was on Mount Sinai.[101] The monks pointed out the place where Moses, descending from the mountain, saw them dancing around the Golden Calf and in anger threw down and smashed the tablets

101. Egeria 5.3: "nam et monstraverunt locum ubi fuerunt casta filiorum Israhel his diebus quibus Moyses fuit in montem. Monstraverunt etiam locum ubi factus est vitulus ille, nam in eo loco fixus est usque in hodie lapis grandis."

containing the original Law.[102] The locations of many other events were shown to Egeria and her party, including the dwellings of the Israelites and the place where the Golden Calf was destroyed on the order of Moses.[103] She saw where Moses erected the earliest form of the Tabernacle and where the Israelites celebrated Passover for the first time after they had left Egypt.[104] Finally, Egeria saw in the valley below Mount Sinai the graves of the people who lusted and were killed by a plague.[105] This is one of the few places in her account where she directly mentions the "sins" of the Israelites.

It may be of interest that Egeria places events that do not occur around Mount Sinai in the biblical account around the valley beneath Mount Sinai. In one instance, she mentions a fountain that Moses created so that the people could drink; however, according to Exodus, and even Egeria, this event appears in the valley near Raphidim, not below Mount Sinai. This passage from Exodus mentions Mount Choreb in the same chapter and therefore may have confused Egeria, who had already cited this passage at Raphidim.[106] In another instance, she mentions a place called Incendium, where a fire destroyed a number of the people's tents but Moses was able to put out the fire with prayer. In Exodus, this took place after the Israelites had left the valley beneath Mount Sinai.[107] Egeria also mentions the place where the people begged Moses for food and where quails and manna fell from the

102. Ibid. 5.4: "de contra videbamus summitatem montis . . . de quo loco sanctus Moyses vidit filios Israhel habentes choros his diebus qua fecerant vitulum. Ostenderunt etaim petram ingentem in ipso loco ubi descendebat sanctus Moyses cum Iesu, filio Nave, ad quem petram iratus fregit tabulas quas afferebat."

103. Ibid. 5.5–6: "ostenderunt etiam quemadmodum per ipsam vallem unusquisque eorum abitationes habuerant, de quibus abitationibus fuerunt lapide girata. Ostenderunt etiam locum ubi filios Israhel iussit currere sanctus Moyses 'de porta in porta' regressus ad montem. Item ostenderunt nobis locum ubi incensus est vitulus ipse, iubente sancto Moyse, quem fecerat eis Aaron."

104. Ibid. 5.9: "haec est ergo vallis ubi celebrata est pascha, completo anno profectionis filiorum Israhel de terra Egypti, quoniam in ipsa valle filii Israhel commorati sunt aliquandiu, id est donec sanctus Moyses ascenderet in montem Dei et descenderet primum et iterato; et denuo tandiu ibi immorati sunt donec fieret tabernaculum et singula quae ostensa sunt in montem Dei. Nam ostensus est nobis et ille locus in quo confixum a Moyse est primitus tabernaculum et perfecta sunt singula quae iusserat Deus in montem Moysi ut fierent."

105. Numbers 11:34; Egeria 5.10: "vidimus etiam in extrema iam valle ipsa Memorias concupiscentiae, in eo tamen loco in quo denuo reversi sumus ad iter nostrum."

106. Exodus 17:6: "ὅδε ἐγὼ ἕστηκα πρὸ τοῦ σὲ ἐκεῖ ἐπὶ τῆς πέτρας ἐν Χωρηβ· καὶ πατάξεις τὴν πέτραν, καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐξ αὐτῆς ὕδωρ, καὶ πίεται ὁ λαός μου. ἐποίησεν δὲ Μωυσῆς οὕτως ἐναντίον τῶν υἱῶν Ισραηλ." Egeria 5.6: "item ostenderunt torrentem illum de quo potavit sanctus Moyses fiolios Israhel, sicut scriptum est in Exodo." It is possible, however, that this passage refers to the water that was used to put out the fire of the Golden Calf, which Moses made some of the people drink (Exodus 32:20). See Egeria, *Itinerarium* (ed. Maraval 1997), 147, and C. Weber 1994, 16–17.

107. Numbers 11:1–3. Egeria 5.7: "nam ostenderunt nobis etiam et illum locum qui appellatus est Incendium, quia incensa est quedam pars castrorum tunc qua, orante sancto Moyse, cessavit ignis."

sky. Though this happened twice during the Exodus account, neither event took place at Mount Sinai.[108] In two other places, Egeria mentions that she saw the place where the seventy elders took the spirit of God into their souls, but this event also occurred after the Israelites had left Mount Sinai.[109] It seems therefore that events in the Exodus account that did not take place in a specific location were located at Mount Sinai. This could have been for convenience, for commemorating these events would be easier if they were located near the settlements. One could also argue that these other events layered additional biblical connections to Mount Sinai.

Although Egeria's account of Mount Sinai is the longest, other sources also describe the late-antique Mount Sinai through biblical passages. Procopius's short description of Mount Sinai indicates that he was aware of the legends surrounding it, but it mentions the religious significance of the site only in passing. He writes, "the steep and awesomely wild mountain called Sinai hangs somewhere near the place called the Red Sea."[110] This mountain seems imbued with spiritual power because of the terrible noises heard continuously at night. He repeats Egeria's comment that no human being is able to remain on top of the mountain after dark.[111] Procopius reminds the reader that Mount Sinai is the place where God gave Moses the divine Law, but this seems to be an afterthought in his account.[112] Procopius was more interested in the natural and supernatural (fantastic but not divine) features of Mount Sinai rather than in the theological importance of the site. Having never visited Mount Sinai, he is not very instructive about the local traditions and identifications there.

Finally, the Piacenza pilgrim stresses the spiritual importance of the journey to Mount Sinai. When he visited the Sinai Peninsula, his party approached Mount Sinai from the north after traveling through the Negev Desert; therefore, his account of the Sinai Peninsula's Christian locations begins with Mount Sinai. His first association of the peninsula with biblical events occurs immediately upon his arrival in the region around Mount Sinai. As mentioned above, he describes

108. Exodus 16:13–15; Numbers 11:31–32. Egeria 5.7–8: "item ostenderunt locum ubi filii Israhel habuerunt concupiscentiam escarum. . . . Ostenderunt etiam et illum locum ubi eis pluit manna et coturnices."

109. Numbers 11:25. Egeria 4.4. Also see Egeria 5.7: "ostenderunt etiam nobis locum ubi de spiritu Moysi acceperunt septuaginta viri."

110. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8.1 (ed. Haury 1962): "καὶ ὄρος ἀπότομόν τε καὶ δεινῶς ἄγριον ἀποκρέμαται ἄγχιστά πη τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς καλουμένης θαλάσσης, Σινὰ ὄνομα."

111. Ibid. 5.8.7: "ἀνθρώπῳ γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἀκρωρείᾳ διανυκτερεύειν ἀμήχανά ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ κτύποι τε διηνεκὲς καὶ ἕτερα ἄττα θειότερα νύκτωρ ἀκούονται, δύναμίν τε καὶ γνώμην τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν ἐκπλήσσοντα."

112. Ibid. 5.8.8: "ἐνταῦθά ποτε τὸν Μωσέα φασὶ πρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοὺς νόμους παραλαβόντα ἐξενεγκεῖν."

the place where Moses drew water out of the rock on the day before he went to Mount Choreb prior to ascending Mount Sinai. Whereas Egeria places this event at both Pharan and Mount Choreb, the Piacenza pilgrim places it before (i.e., north of) Mount Sinai. We are not informed how he identified this location, only that he was following Exodus 17:6.[113] At this point in the narrative, he has not mentioned meeting monks, and he does not say that the location was pointed out. It seems most likely that he based his identification of the site entirely on the Exodus account and the confusion of Choreb with Mount Sinai.

After crossing the mountains, monks led the Piacenza pilgrim through the valley between Mount Sinai and Mount Choreb and brought his party to the place "where Moses saw the sign of the Burning Bush." This place was marked by a fountain that provided water for sheep.[114] By the time of the Piacenza pilgrim's visit, the monastery that we now know as Saint Catherine's had been constructed around the Burning Bush and this fountain.[115]

On the top of Mount Sinai, the Piacenza pilgrim identified a cave as the place where Elijah hid himself when he fled from Jezabel.[116] Strangely, when Egeria mentions that cave, she places it on Mount Choreb, not Mount Sinai. At the top of the mountain stood a small *oratorium,* but the Piacenza pilgrim does not mention the event that it was said to commemorate. He also notes that no one was able to remain at the top of the mountain overnight, and that a monk would ascend each day and "perform the work of God."[117]

The Piacenza pilgrim makes a distinction between Mount Sinai and Mount Choreb in terms of their relationship to the divine. He creates a dichotomy in which Mount Sinai is "divine ground," whereas Mount Choreb is "worldly ground."[118] For this reason, Mount Sinai is surrounded by many monastic cells, but the monks do not physically dwell on the mountain.

113. Exodus 17:6: "ὅδε ἐγὼ ἕστηκα πρὸ τοῦ σὲ ἐκεῖ ἐπὶ τῆς πέτρας ἐν Χωρηβ· καὶ πατάξεις τὴν πέτραν, καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐξ αὐτῆς ὕδωρ, καὶ πίεται ὁ λαός μου. ἐποίησεν δὲ Μωυσῆς οὕτως ἐναντίον τῶν υἱῶν Ισραηλ."

114. Caner (2010, 257 no. 23) notes that the Piacenza pilgrim does not mention seeing the Burning Bush, only a fountain.

115. For more on the construction of Saint Catherine's, see chapter 5, pp. 121–24. PP 37: "Et introducerunt nos in uallem inter Choreb et Sina, ad cuius pede montis est fons ille, ubi Moyses uidit signum rubi ardentis, in quo oues adaquabat. Qui fons inclusus est intra monasterium, quod monasterium circumdatum muris munitis. . . ."

116. Ibid.: "et ascendimus in monte continuo milia tria, et venimus ad locum ad speluncam, ubi absconditus fuit Helias, quando fugit ante Iezabel. Ante ipsa spelunca surgit fons, qui inrigat montem."

117. Ibid.: "inde ascendimus milia continuo tria in summum cacumen montis, in quo est oratorium modicum, plus minus pedes sex in latitudine et in longitudine. In quo nullus praesumit manere, sed orto iam die ascendant monachi et faciunt opus dei."

118. Ibid. 38: "Mons Sina petrosus, raro terram habet. In quo per circuitum cellulae multae seruorum dei et in Choreb similiter et dicunt esse Choreb terram mundam."

FIGURE 3. Mosaic in the basilica church at Saint Catherine's Monastery depicting Moses receiving the Law. (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pl. CXXVII; reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai.)

CONCLUSION

One of the mosaics in Saint Catherine's depicts Moses standing in a chasm between two rocks. The mosaic is a graphic reminder that the monastery stands between two mountain ranges.[119] Moses is seen stretching his hands toward the sky. He holds a tablet that is being handed to him by an arm thrust out of a cloud—clearly meant to be God's. Moses averts his gaze and is staring down toward the rocks and

119. Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, 15.

the viewer. The scene invites the viewers also to avert their eyes in imitation of the prophet's basking in the divine presence. This scene must have powerfully rewarded the pilgrims and monks with an immediate feeling of connection with the divine, stressing the importance of the site on which they stood. It invited the pilgrims and monks to act as witnesses of biblical events, and it blurred the distinction between the late-antique and Old Testament worlds.[120]

The Sinai tested the faith of all who traveled and lived there, but the journey and harshness of the conditions merely enhanced the Sinai Peninsula's sanctity. Egeria's monks were almost as holy as the Sinai itself, providing a link between the ancient Israelites and the fourth century. The Piacenza pilgrim was particularly interested in the manna and other fantastic spiritual details of the Sinai. He also sought to associate the sixth-century Sinai with the Exodus and believed that the people inhabiting the Sinai (as reflected in his discussion of the Pharanites) tangibly displayed the truth of the Exodus account. The fact that the Pharanites were Christian only further enhanced the transformation of the Sinai from a place inhabited by Saracens into a Christian landscape.

Cosmas Indicopleustes' journey served to reinforce his belief in the superiority of the Christian message. He thought that the Sinai desert stood as a constant reminder of the truth of the Gospels for all people, especially the unbelievers, to see. The proof, in his eyes, was the strange writing on many of the rocks throughout the desert, which he believed were the writings of the wandering Israelites.[121] The fact that the sites of the Sinai existed was proof that the Exodus account was true. The locations of the Bible were filled with Christians, and these Christians proved their superior claim to the Sinai through their holy lifestyles.

Although some of the events of Exodus shifted locations around the Sinai according to the needs or interpretations of the various authors, these discrepancies did not bother the pilgrims. In the end, they were not interested in assigning

120. Coleman and Elsner 1994, 81–84.

121. Cosmas Indicopleustes 5.53–54: "Λαβόντες δὲ καὶ παρὰ Θεοῦ τὸν νόμον ἐγγράφως καὶ διδασκόμενοι γράμματα νεωστί, καὶ ὥσπερ παιδευτηρίῳ ἡσύχῳ τῇ ἐρήμῳ χρησάμενος ὁ Θεὸς τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη εἴασεν αὐτοὺς καταλαξεῦσαι τὰ γράμματα. Ὅθεν ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἐρήμῳ, λέγω δὴ τοῦ Σιναΐου ὄρους, ἐν πάσαις ταῖς καταπαύσεσι πάντας τοὺς λίθους τῶν αὐτόθι, τοὺς ἐκ τῶν ὀρέων ἀποκλωμένους, γεγραμμένους γράμμασι γλυπτοῖς ἑβραϊκοῖς, ὡς αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πεζεύσας τοὺς τόπους μαρτυρῶ. Ἅτινα καί τινες Ἰουδαῖοι ἀναγνόντες διηγοῦντο ἡμῖν λέγοντες γεγράφθαι οὕτως· Ἅπαρσις τοῦδε, ἐκ φυλῆς τῆσδε, ἔτει τῷδε, μηνὶ τῷδε,' καθὰ καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν πολλάκις τινὲς ἐν ταῖς ξενίαις γράφουσιν. Αὐτοὶ δὲ καί, ὡς νεωστὶ μαθόντες γράμματα, συνεχῶς ατεχρῶντο καὶ ἐπλήθυνον γράφοντες, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς τόπους ἐκείνους μεστοὺς εἶναι γραμμάτων ἑβραϊκῶν γλυπτῶν εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν σῳζομένων διὰ τοὺς ἀπίστους, ὡς ἔγωγε οἶμαι. Ἐξὸν δὲ τῷ βουλομένῳ ἐν τοῖς τόποις γενέσθαι καὶ θεάσασθαι, ἤγουν ἐρωτῆσαι καὶ μαθεῖν περὶ τούτου ὡς ἀλήθειαν εἴπαμεν. Πρώτως οὖν Ἑβραῖοι παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ σοφισθέντες καὶ γράμματα διὰ τῶν λιθίνων πλακῶν ἐκείνων παραλαβόντες καὶ μεμαθηκότες τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ γειτνιῶσι τοῖς Φοίνιξι παραδεδώκασι κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, πρώτῳ Κάδμῳ τῷ Τυρίων βασιλεῖ, ἐξ ἐκείνου παρέλαβον Ἕλληνες, λοιπὸν καθεξῆς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη."

biblical events to exact locations in the Sinai. They desired only the spiritual benefits of the journey, but their accounts shaped outside perceptions of the Sinai. Through these writings, the experience of the pilgrims was spread throughout the Roman Empire, and the conception of the Sinai as a holy land was also dispersed.[122]

By the sixth century, the perception of the Sinai had been completely transformed from a virtual terra incognita to one of the most prominent locations in the Roman Empire.

Mount Sinai became a symbol of Christian piety and God's love for the New Israel. If the monks who toiled "in a careful rehearsal of death," as Procopius put it, were threatened, then it was important for the emperor to respond to those threats. According to Procopius, the emperor Justinian did just this by constructing a fortified monastery around the Burning Bush at the foot of Mount Sinai. Stories had circulated about how the monks faced martyrdom in the Sinai at the hands of people called Saracens, Blemmyes, and barbarians. These martyrdom accounts enhanced the spiritual characteristics of the Sinai monks, just as the prominent identifications of Sinai locations with biblical events had served to do so as well.

As the monks moved into the Sinai Peninsula, they came into contact with the indigenous population, whom the monks called Saracens and barbarians. In effect, the monks were taking this land from the locals and unconsciously needed to justify this act of colonization. By stressing biblical connections, the monks could claim to be the original inhabitants of the Sinai, just as Christians claimed to be the True Israel. In doing so, the monks deepened the antagonistic relationship between themselves and the locals, an antagonism that eventually led to the creation of martyrs in the Sinai.

122. Markus 1990, 151–52, comments on the role of pilgrims in spreading the ideology of holy places throughout the empire.

4

Martyrdom in the Sinai

"Why did the dreadful terror of Mount Sinai remain quiet, and why did it not frighten the lawbreaking hordes with a crash of thunder, with the cover of darkness, and with uncountable strikes of lightning?" asked Pseudo-Nilus when he had escaped an attack on the monks around Mount Sinai.[1] To the marytrs in heaven, he cried out, "Is this the crown you have received for your many struggles?"[2] Despite his cries, no supernatural force reached down in protection, and monks died near the Burning Bush and the Law-Giving Mountain (Mount Sinai). Even more were enslaved.[3] A few monks survived by fleeing into the nearby wadis and up the mountain for safety. As Pseudo-Nilus recounts, it was a terrifying circumstance that compelled him to briefly question God's will. In just a moment, however, he regained his composure, noting that God caused such tribulations in order to demonstrate the remarkable resolve of the persecuted.[4] The perpetrators were nomads—"barbarians" according to Pseudo-Nilus. This tale and others from the Sinai sources accused the nomads of committing atrocities against the monks. The impression created by a reading of these sources was that the nomads—Saracens in the common parlance of the day—were violent, dangerous, subhuman creatures who had no rightful claim to the Sinai as a result of their pagan religious beliefs and violent, wild nature. It is ironic, but not unparalleled in world history, that the

1. Pseudo-Nilus 4.8: "πῶς δὲ ἡσύχασαν οἱ τοῦ Σιναίου ὄρους τερατώδεις φοβερισμοί, βροντῶν ἤχῳ καὶ κατηφείᾳ γνόφου καὶ ἀστραπῶν ἐκλάμψεσιν ἀμέτροις οὐ καταπλήξαντες τοὺς παρανόμους . . . ;"

2. Ibid. 4.7: "τοῦτον στέφανον τοῦ πολλοῦ ἀγῶνος ἐδέξασθε;"

3. Ibid. 4.8.

4. Ibid. 4.9.

monks displaced the nomadic groups from their lands, then suffered nomadic resistance, only to blame the nomads for the violence.[5]

The sources construct a representation of the nomads as a constant threat to the monastic communities of the Sinai, and the texts imply that the monks there faced a persistent threat of martyrdom. This makes the Sinai almost a unique zone within the Roman Empire of the fourth century. For after 313, when Christianity became legalized, its followers were no longer persecuted, and the creation of Christian martyrs, the exemplars of the faith, largely disappeared from the core of the Mediterranean world.[6] The Sinai, because it was an inner *limes* where most of the terrain was suitable to nomads, was one of the few regions in which violence against orthodox Christians could occur on a large scale.[7] The monks there could obtain both kinds of martyrdom—an actual, violent death and the social death of the ascetic.

Such experiences were highly honored by contemporary and later Christians. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, remembrance of the Sinai Martyrs demonstrates continued interest in the Sinai relics brought to Constantinople in the reign of Justin II (565–78).[8] Even today, according to the Greek Orthodox liturgical calendar, the deaths of the monks at Mount Sinai and Rhaithou are remembered on 14 January.[9]

Although there is no evidence that Christians permanently relocated to the Sinai until five decades after the legalization of Christianity, the earlier illegality of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the resulting martyr traditions had pro-

5. See Cave 2008, Hitchcock and Koperski 2008, and Zimmerer 2008 (all in D. Stone 2008).

6. This is not to say that there were no new martyrs. Christians who were labeled as heretics, such as the Donatists, continued or at least claimed to face persecution by the newly Christian authorities (Gaddis 2005, 49-58, 68–130; Shaw 2011; translations of Donatist martyr stories are available in Tilley 1996). Orthodox Christians were also occasionally victims, but this was largely on the frontiers, or even beyond them, and was often associated with missionary activity. (Although there were incidents within Italy itself at the end of the fourth century! See Gaddis 2005, 173.) Christian violence against pagans also resulted in Christian martyrdom. After the fourth century, martyrdoms were more likely to happen at or beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, as for example with the martyrs of Najran, who were killed in Arabia in 524 (Shahid 1971; Detoraki 2007).

7. On the "inner *limes*" see Mayerson 1988, 44–45.

8. *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae,* col. 217; Theophanes A.M. 6064 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 361–62); Solzbacher 1989, 225–26.

9. The calendar of feast days for the American Greek Orthodox Church can be accessed at http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/calendar.asp. The earliest calendar mentioning the Sinai monks is the tenth-century *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopoleos, Synaxarium Mensis Januarii.* The celebration of the Sinai Martyrs is also attested in the eleventh century in the *Monachorum in Sina Interemptorum Passio in Menologio Imperiali* and *Menologium Basilii Imperatoris.* A possible ninth- or tenth-century manuscript from Athos (Kutlumus 38) and a tenth-century manuscript from Jerusalem (Sanctae crucis 41) also list the Sinai Martyrs on 14 January (Ehrhard 1937–39, 2.727, 734).

found effects on the Sinai monks and the pilgrims who visited them.[10] The monks and pilgrims invented, elaborated, and consumed the Sinai Martyr tradition within the context of previous Christian experience with persecution. The early Christian martyr accounts, even the ones written close in time to the actual events that they describe, were written from a particular viewpoint of Christian persecution and eventual triumph, and therefore, "it is necessary to keep their rhetoricity in full view."[11] The Sinai monks shifted the rhetoric of martyrdom, which had originally been directed against their imperial persecutors, onto the nomads by continuing to emphasize violence and a pagan persecutor but dropping the coercive, apostatizing nature of the imperial persecutions.

THE RHETORIC OF MARTYRDOM

The martyrs were seen as imitators of Christ, and in this they were the embodiment of Paul's exhortations to live according to the example of Jesus.[12] This is true even in the earliest accounts—for example, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* which states that "the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord. . . . God grant that we too may be their companions and fellow-disciples."[13] Innumerable other examples could be cited, but the overall impression is clear: as imitators of Christ, martyrs came to be seen as equals and co-heirs to Christ, despite the fact that they remained entirely human. It was only later, after the legalization of Christianity, that some theologians became worried about the conflation of martyrs with Christ.[14]

In addition to being portrayed as imitators of Jesus, the martyrs were described as athletes and soldiers.[15] Occasionally, this comparison is taken to the extreme, such as when Perpetua dreamed that she was transformed into a male wrestler and fought against an Egyptian. God (Jesus?) appeared in the dream as a man attired like a producer (*editor*) of the games, holding the rod of a gladiator's trainer (*lanista*).[16] Tertullian's *Letter to the Martyrs* compares his duty as a Christian to that of a soldier who has learned to march, fight, dig trenches, and form a testu-

10. Scholarship on early Christian martyrdom and the persecutions is understandably vast. Some of the more important works include Grégoire et al. 1964, Frend 1967, Lane Fox 1986, Bowersock 1995, Perkins 1995, Grig 2004, Gaddis 2005, Moss 2010.

11. Castelli 2004, 28.

12. Moss 2010, 23–28, 102–9. Cf. Phil. 3:17.

13. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.3, trans. Lake 1912.

14. Moss 2010, 156–72; for example, the martyrs in Lyon (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.2.2).

15. For example, Blandina in Lyon (ibid. 5.1.19): Malone 1950, 64–111. The images of games and victory first appear in Christian works in the book of Revelation (Seesengood 2006, 72–81).

16. Perpetua 10; see Seesengood 2006, 92–109, for an analysis of the role of gender and the sexual nature of the athlete and gladiator in the descriptions of the martyrdoms of Perpetua and Blandina.

do.[17] He continues with another analogy, in which Christians trained as athletes compete for the prize of existing in the heavenly kingdom. In this training, God presides over the contest (*agōnothetēs*), and the Holy Spirit is the trainer (*xystarchēs*).[18] It is no coincidence that early Christian rhetoric relied on the tropes of athletic contests and military victory, for these were the two chief avenues for obtaining male glory in traditional Greco-Roman culture.[19]

Descriptions and understanding of martyrdom were profoundly influenced by the martyrdom described in the books of the Maccabees, especially 2 and 4.[20] Only occasionally do the martyr *acta* make such a comparison explicit, such as when Marian's mother is directly compared to the mother of the Maccabees after Marian's martyrdom.[21] Even if the *acta* do not explicitly refer to Maccabean antecedents, a close reading of martyr texts reveals the books of the Maccabees as fairly commonly known among early Christians. Such knowledge can be confirmed by the Cappadocian Fathers' allusions to the books of the Maccabees, in which these Jewish martyrs were shaped into the form of more contemporary Christian ones.[22]

In 4 Maccabees, an old man, Eleazer, is brutally tortured and executed. Despite his infirmity in old age, he is described as "like a noble athlete . . . victorious over his torturers," obtaining "immortal victory."[23] Next, seven brothers and their mother are martyred. Because of the mother's stoicism in the face of the death of her children, she is called "a soldier of God."[24] The account concludes with the statement:[25]

> Truly the contest in which they were engaged was divine, for on that day virtue gave the awards and tested them for their endurance. The prize was immortality in endless life. Eleazar was the first contestant, the mother of the seven sons entered the competition, and the brothers contended. The tyrant [here Antiochus IV] was the antagonist, and the world and the human race were the spectators. Reverence for God was victor and gave the crown to its own athletes.

One of the most common features of the early martyr accounts focuses on the violence inflicted on the martyrs. The use of the rack or burning-hot pincers was

17. Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 3, trans. Bindley 1900, 55–56.

18. Ibid.

19. See C. Williams 1999, 132–18; Scanlon 2002; McDonnell 2006; A. Cohen 2010.

20. On these texts, see van Henten 1997. Frend 1967, 19–57, argues that it would be impossible to imagine Christian martyrdom developing in the same way without the influence of the books of the Maccabees and the book of Daniel, and their transmission through Hellenistic Judaism. On the other hand, Bowersock 1995 argues that these texts were actually Christian in composition.

21. *Martyrdom of Marian and James* 13.1.

22. Limberis 2011, 50.

23. 4 Macc. 6:10, 7:3, 7:13 (RSV).

24. Ibid. 16:14.

25. Ibid. 17:11–15.

not uncommon. In one of the first recorded martyrdom accounts (ca. 155/6), Polycarp was stabbed with a dagger and burned alive.[26] In Lyon in 177, a pagan mob beat Christians, threw stones at them, and dragged some on the ground before they were tortured by the authorities with red-hot metal devices and the rack.[27] A martyr at Nicomedia during Diocletian's persecution was whipped and had salt and vinegar poured into his wounds, and then each part of his body was slowly burned. Before eventually killing him, the torturers stopped after each assault to give him time to recant his faith in Christ.[28] Throwing Christians "to the beasts" in the arena was a common style of execution, as when a heifer killed Perpetua in Africa or lions, bears, bulls, and seals are said to have attacked Thecla (unsuccessfully).[29] Other execution methods included searing the flesh with fire or boiling pitch.[30] Despite the pain that their bodies endured, according to the sources the martyrs themselves were unharmed, and their souls were admitted into Paradise.[31] For example, Perpetua envisioned a ladder that led directly to a gardenlike Paradise.[32] The martyr Cyprian was seated to the right of God in heaven and invited Marian to climb higher on the ladder to sit with him.[33] Such descriptions were intended to emphasize the spiritual power of the martyrs to overcome the most horrible kinds of physical punishment.

The martyr descriptions demonstrate the role of rhetoric in creating or "making martyrs," as Lucy Grig put it.[34] The reading of a martyr's *acta* represented a performance; just reading the text "constitutes a repeat performance of the miracle which it records."[35] The martyr accounts helped to produce a collective memory of Christians as a persecuted but ultimately victorious group who were able to subvert the impious ruling authorities of the empire and their spectacles of power.[36] In reading these texts and holding festivals oriented around remembering the martyrs, Christians invited the martyrs into their daily lives.[37] For early Christians, even those living in a post-Constantinian, postmartyr world, these memories became the way of understanding the world. For Christians of the late fourth and the early fifth century, the Council of Nicaea (325) was legitimate precisely

26. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13–16. See Buschmann 1998, 39–40, for a convincing argument that the text dates to the middle of the second century.

27. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.7, 5.1.21, 5.1.24.

28. Ibid. 10.5.

29. On Perpetua, see Shaw 1993 and Salisbury 1997. On Thecla, see Davis 2001.

30. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.5.

31. Lane Fox 1986, 438–39. Cf. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.3.

32. *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4.1–10.

33. *Martyrdom of Marian and James* 6.10.

34. Grig 2004.

35. Hopkins 2000, 148.

36. Castelli 2004.

37. Limberis 2011.

because those bishops had experienced persecution, and their trials "preserved the primordial essence of Christianity and kept it from novelty and error."[38] The rhetorical tropes evident in this discussion of martyrdom can be detected beneath the surface of the Sinai Martyr accounts that will be the focus of this chapter.

THE SINAI MARTYRS

The monks who moved into the Sinai employed the established theology of martyrs and used those topoi to construct their own tradition of martyrdom. Extensive descriptions of the martyrdoms in the Sinai desert are found in Ammonius's *Relatio* and Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes*. Furthermore, an inscription from Saint Catherine's demonstrates the elaboration and commemoration of the Martyrs of the Sinai. Finally, one of the letters written by Saint Nilus of Ancyra reveals the attractiveness of reshaping the distant Sinai experience for personal agendas.

Scholarly discussion of these sources has tended to focus on the historical accuracy of the events portrayed in the *Relatio* and the *Narrationes*.[39] The martyr tradition in particular is often thought to be an invention of the sixth century, despite the earlier purported compositional dates of those two sources.[40] There is currently no way to conclusively prove whether or not the events in these two accounts happened as they are described; in fact, there are a number of reasons to doubt their authenticity. Nevertheless, as the inscription from the Chapel of the Sinai Saints demonstrates, the trials and tribulations described in these sources were commemorated as key events in the formation of the monastic community at Mount Sinai.[41]

Ammonius's Relatio

According to Ammonius, the violence at Mount Sinai started when a Saracen chief died and the Saracens attacked with no warning.[42] Some outlying monks, living in places called Gethrambe (or Gethrabbi), Choreb, and Kodar, were slain.[43] The surviving monks near Mount Sinai fled into a tower, possibly the one that was later

38. Sizgorich 2009, 55–56.

39. See above, "Note on Sources," pp. xvi–xix.

40. Most modern scholars have followed Devreesse 1940 in arguing that the martyr tradition was an invention of the sixth century. (See, for example, Ševčenko 1966, 258; and Solzbacher 1989, 242.) Caner (2010, 73–76) believes that the *Narrationes* was written in the fifth century.

41. One of the monasteries in Wadi el-Leja at Mount Sinai is called Deir al-Arba'in (Monastery of the Forty). Dahari (2000, 66) dates the name to the fifteenth century, suggesting that the memory of the Sinai Martyrs continued to be honored.

42. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fol. 5; (Greek) 3: "ἄφνω ἐπιρρίπτει ἡμῖν πλῆθος Σαρακηνῶν, ἀποθανόντος τοῦ κρατοῦντος τὴν φυλαρχίαν."

43. Ibid. (CPA), fols. 5–6; (Greek) 3–4.

included within Saint Catherine's Monastery, mentioned by Eutychius.[44] These monks, including Ammonius, would have died had Mount Sinai not burst into flames. Black smoke was seen, and the earth shook; the Saracens dropped their weapons, left their camels, and fled.[45] Thirty-eight monks died that day, followed by Isaiah and Sabas, who both expired later because of their wounds.[46]

Four days after the Saracen attack, news arrived that a similar incident had taken place at Rhaithou.[47] According to a survivor of that attack, this assault was perpetrated by the Blemmyes, who had captured a merchant vessel originally from Aila. The Blemmyes intended to sack Clysma but stopped at Rhaithou to raid the monastery there.[48] A number of Pharanites who happened to be at Rhaithou tried to stop the Blemmyes, but they were defeated.[49] The monks then fled into a place called a *castrum,* but the Blemmyes approached it, thinking that the monks had hidden money there.[50] Since the fort was undefended, the Blemmyes easily knocked down the door and burst in, bearing long spears and swords.[51]

After raiding the *castrum,* the Blemmyes rushed into the church shouting and swinging their swords, and they began slaughtering more monks. They searched frantically for loot, but "the Martyrs did not have any worldly valuables except their bodies."[52] Coming up empty-handed, the Blemmyes returned to the captured merchant vessel intending to sail to Clysma, but in the interim the merchants had cut the ropes and wrecked the ship. The Blemmyes became enraged and killed many women and children. Then they burned the date grove at the landing site.[53] At this point, six hundred Pharanites arrived and slaughtered all the Blemmyes.[54] In total, all the monks were killed except three, equaling the forty dead from Mount Sinai.[55] The Pharanites buried thirty-nine monks in noble garments and placed them in a tomb close to the *castrum.* In the evening, another monk died, Domnus of Rome, and was buried separately.[56] According to the text,

44. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 4; (Greek) 3; Eutychius, *Annales* 164 (*PG* 111, 1071–72). On this tower, see Grossman 1988, 556–58; and Dahari 2000, 59.

45. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fol. 6 (missing a folio at this point); (Greek) 4.

46. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 8; (Greek) 7.

47. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 10; (Greek) 7–8.

48. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 29; (Greek) 18.

49. Ibid. (CPA), fols. 30–32; (Greek) 19.

50. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 32 (missing a folio at this point); (Greek) 20.

51. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 32 (the document becomes increasingly fragmentary here); (Greek) 23.

52. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 47; (Greek) 30: "καὶ οἱ μὲν ὠμοὶ καὶ θηριώδεις βάρβαροι, ὡς ἤδη λοιπὸν πάντας ἀπέκτειναν, πάντα τόπον ἐψηλάθλιοι νομίζοντες εὑρεῖν τινὰ πράγματα ἀποκείμενα, ἀγνοοῦντες οἱ ἄθλιοι ὅτι οὐδὲν εἶχον ἐπὶ γῆς οἱ Μάρτυρες, εἰ μὴ τὰ σώματα μόνα."

53. Ibid. (CPA), fols. 48–49; (Greek) 31–33.

54. Ibid. (CPA), fols. 49–50; (Greek) 33–34.

55. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 51; (Greek) 35.

56. Ibid. (CPA), fols. 54–55; (Greek) 37.

the events took place on 14 January, the same day mentioned in Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes*.[57]

After the description of the martyrdoms at Rhaithou had been recited, the monks at Mount Sinai were amazed to hear that the same number of monks had been killed on the same day at Mount Sinai and Rhaithou.[58] The head (προεστώς) of the Sinai monks, Doulas, rose and asked the survivors to allow the dead monks to be exemplars for their imitation.[59]

Pseudo-Nilus's Narrationes

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Pseudo-Nilus, like Ammonius, described an attack on the monks around Mount Sinai as completely unexpected. It occured when a band of nomads ("barbarians") approached the monks when they were finishing their morning hymns.[60] The nomads first raided the winter provisions that the monks had stored.[61] Then they forced the monks out of the church in which they had taken shelter and began to kill them.[62] The "priest of the holy place" was killed first, and then the nomads murdered his companions.[63] The survivors were told to flee, but the nomads kept their bloody swords in their hands, threatening the monks.[64] All the remaining monks fled into the wadis, seeking to reach the mountain (Sinai?), but Pseudo-Nilus hesitated because he feared losing his son.[65] When he eventually followed the other monks, he watched from a distance as his son was led away into captivity.[66]

The barbarians then went on a rampage in the surrounding area before departing. When the coast was clear, the survivors came down from the mountain and began to bury the dead.[67] In his conclusion to this tale, Pseudo-Nilus mentions

57. Ibid. (Greek), 38: "Ἐτελειώθησαν δὲ οἱ ἅγιοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ Μάρτυρες μηνὶ Ἰανουαρίῳ ιδ'." Another Greek edition (Combefis 1660), which was not available to me, includes the date Tubi 2, which would correspond to 28 December (Tsames 2003, 327 no. 68). Solzbacher 1989, 224–25, suggested that the events in Rhaithou actually occurred on 28 December and that the date was later shifted to 14 January. Also see Caner 2010, 169 no. 156.

58. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fol. 57; (Greek) 39: "Εἶτα ἡμῶν εἰρηκότων πάντα κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ καὶ θαυμαζόντων πάντων τὰ παράδοξα ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅτι ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἅπαντες ἐτελεύτησαν ἅμα οἱ ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ Ὄρει καὶ ἐν τῇ Ῥαϊθοῦ καὶ ὅτι ἐξίσου εὑρέθη ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἀποθανόντων ὧδε κἀκεῖ, ἀρχὴ πάλιν ἐγέντο κλαυθμοῦ καὶ πένθους ἐπὶ τοῖς διαγήμασιν."

59. Ibid. 40.

60. Pseudo-Nilus 4.1.

61. Ibid. 4.1.

62. Ibid. 4.1–2.

63. Ibid. 4.2–3: "τῷ ἱερεῖ τοῦ ἁγίου τόπου."

64. Ibid. 4.4.

65. Ibid. 4.4.

66. Ibid. 4.4–4.5.

67. Ibid. 4.11.

three monks by name who died at Mount Sinai: Paul, John, and the presbyter Theodoulos. They died seven days after Epiphany—that is, they died on 14 January.[68] He finished the fourth *Narratio* with these words: "For pious men are always interested in learning the names and date because they want to participate in the remembrance of holy ones. But others were also slain many years earlier. Their commemoration is celebrated on the same day, due to the length of the journey and the number of people who attend."[69]

The last line suggests that there were at least two separate martyr incidents that were commemorated together, even though they did not take place on the same day. Because the ceremony attracted such a large number of distant pilgrims, it was more convenient to honor the martyrs together. As Daniel Caner notes, the "others" mentioned in this sentence could "refer either to the martyrs recorded in the Sinai martyr inscription [see below], to those described in the Ammonius *Report* [i.e., *Relatio*], or to both."[70] Quite possibly, the date of the martyrdoms in Ammonius's account was shifted to 14 January to coincide with the date presented by Pseudo-Nilus.[71]

That Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus describe very different martyrdoms is apparent. Whereas Ammonius includes the actions of both Saracens and Blemmyes, Pseudo-Nilus focuses entirely on "barbarians." In addition, the Pharanites are conspicuously absent in the *Narrationes,* and the nature of the town of Pharan is more civilized. According to Ammonius, the Pharanites were a tribe ruled by its chief Obdianos, and the tribe had only recently converted to Christianity. Conversely, in the *Narrationes* Pharan possesses a town council (*boulē*), and the population is portrayed as zealously Christian, wholeheartedly supportive of the ascetic lifestyle. Pseudo-Nilus, that is, describes an attack much different from the one narrated by Ammonius, although they share many rhetorical features, as discussed below.

The Inscription from the Chapel of the Sinai Saints

In the present day, an undated inscription in the Chapel of the Sinai Saints in St. Catherine's commemorates the Martyrs of the Sinai.[72] The English translation of the inscription is debated, but the Greek reads:[73]

68. Ibid. 4.14: "τῶν δὲ ἀνῃρημένων οἱ μὲν δύο ἐκαλοῦντο Παῦλος καὶ Ἰωάννης, ὁ δὲ πρεσβύτερος Θεόδουλος. τεθνήκασι δὲ τελειωθέντες μετὰ τὰ θεοφάνια τῇ ὀγδόῃ ἡμέρᾳ, ἥτις ἐστὶν τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτη τοῦ Ἰαννουαρίου μηνός."

69. Ibid. 4.14 (trans. Caner 2010, 109): "πάντως γὰρ τοῖς εὐλαβέσιν ἡ μάθησις καὶ τοῦ καιροῦ καὶ τῶν ὁμομάτων σπουδάζεται κοινωνεῖν τῆς μνήμης τῶν ἁγίων ἐθέλουσιν. ἀνῃρέθησαν δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι πρὸ πλειόνων ἐτῶν, ὧν καὶ αὐτῶν τὴν μνείαν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ διὰ τὸ μῆκος τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ τῶν συναγομένων τὸ πλῆθος ἐπιτελοῦσιν."

70. Ibid. 109 n. 150.

71. See "Note on Sources" above.

72. See Caner 2010, 51 no. 226, on the possible dates.

73. Ševčenko 1966, 263 no. 6.1.

+ Τῆς δ δεκάδος τὴν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος κολυμβήθραν ζηλώσαντες οἱ ἰσάριθμοι ὅσιοι π(ατέ)ρ(ε)ς

ἐνθάδε κατάκεινται, ὧν ἡ εὐφροσύνη ἡ βάτος ἡ ἀληθινὴ ὑπάρχει. δι' ὧν ὁ θ(εὸ)ς σῶσον ἡμᾶς. +

The inscription thus honors the "equal in number holy fathers" who were baptized in blood. These monks were honored with the "true Burning Bush." Nevertheless, the first three words, τῆς δ δεκάδος, are problematic. Ihor Ševčenko argued that this phrase indicated four times ten martyrs and that the number forty was a reference to the martyrs mentioned in Ammonius, who Ševčenko thought imitated the more famous Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.[74] He described the inscription as "an epigraphic pendant of literary fabrications" of the sixth century, designed to give the Sinai a martyr tradition of its own.[75] This interpretation of τῆς δ δεκάδος seems convoluted, as there are no known epigraphic parallels to arrive at such a number through multiplication. Mayerson instead proposed that this phrase referred to a date, 14 January, which the *Relatio* and *Narrationes* specifically mention, and when the Eastern Orthodox Church honors the Sinai monks. Mayerson translates the passage as: "The Holy Fathers lie here, equal in number to those who were killed on the 14th [of January], and imitating them through a baptism of blood. Theirs is the joyous and true Burning Bush; through them, O God, save us."[76] However, this inscription would be the only one to present a date in this fashion, so Pierre-Louis Gatier suggested that it refers to the martyrs killed in four different locations according to Ammonius.[77] Recently, Caner has argued that the inscription means "forty" not "fourteen" and was written in this way because of space constraints. However, there is no evidence that any martyrs were buried in this chapel, suggesting that the stone came from somewhere else, perhaps Rhaithou.[78]

In sum, there is no consensus about the exact translation of the inscription, but the overall impression is that there were at least two martyrdoms of monks that were "equal in number."

This inscription cannot commemorate those killed in the *Narrationes,* because of the small number of deaths reported by Pseudo-Nilus. Most likely, the "equal in number" refers to the monks killed by the Saracens and Blemmyes in the *Relatio,* since the same number of monks (40) was reported from both massacres on the same day.

Whether this inscription is historically "true" or not is immaterial and largely misses the point. Regardless of its veracity, the inscription proves that the Sinai

74. On these martyrs, see Leemans 2001.

75. Ševčenko 1966, 258. He follows Devreesse (1940) in viewing the *Relatio* and *Narrationes* as fictions of the sixth century.

76. Mayerson 1976; Solzbacher 1989, 216, accepts Mayerson's theory.

77. Gatier 1989, 518–19.

78. Caner 2010, 61–62.

monks embraced the martyr stories and perpetuated the memory of the martyrs. It is intended strictly to praise the monks and marginalizes the perpetrators of the martyrdoms, who are not even mentioned. Whereas the accounts of Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus revel in the gory details, this inscription simply rewards the suffering of the monks with Paradise.

Letter from Nilus Ancyranus to Heliodorus

One final source elaborates on attacks on the monks at Mount Sinai—a letter from Nilus of Ancyra (early fifth century) to the *silentiarius* Heliodorus. Nilus describes two Galatians, a father and son who were monks at Mount Sinai when a group of "pagan barbarians" suddenly attacked the monastic community there.[79] Although Nilus does not mention any martyrdoms, he does recount that the Galatian son was abducted by the barbarians while his father hid in a cave. When the boy was a captive, he was visited by a vision of the martyr Plato, who helped him escape on a phantom horse and brought him to the cave where his father hid. Although other monks were captured, only the son was rescued. (Nothing is told of the fate of the other monks.)

Because of this letter's superficial similarities to the story described in the *Narrationes,* it probably served as the basis of assigning the *Narrationes* to Nilus of Ancyra.[80] A close reading of the letter reveals that the differences in the accounts are too great for Nilus to be describing the events of the *Narrationes.*[81] Nilus's letter does show, nonetheless, that stories about Sinai monks were disseminated, although the extent of this distribution cannot be determined. The focus of the letter is not on Sinai monasticism, however, but rather on the intervention by Saint Plato, who was active around Ancyra and actively supported by Nilus.[82] It should therefore be taken not as a confirmation of the Sinai martyrdom accounts but as a reflection of their spread and appeal. In spreading tales of violence against monks by "pagan barbarians" the letter helped to reinforce in the outside world the representation of the hostile nature of the Sinai nomads.

THEMES OF VIOLENCE

Both Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus provide extremely vivid, gory details about the attacks. The thick description in the sources helps create the image of an insatiable

79. Nilus, *Epistula* 4.62 (*PG* 79, 580C): "Καὶ δή τινε ἡμέρᾳ αἰφνίδιον ἐπιῤῥέψαντες τῷ εἰρημένῳ ὄρει βάρβαροί τινες Ἕλληνες τὴν θρησκείαν. . . ." On this source and a translation, see Caner 2010, 138–40.

80. Solzbacher 1989, 214–15.

81. *Contra* Caner 2010, 75. The likelihood is small that the *Narrationes* and this letter were based on a prior Sinai text (Solzbacher 1989, 213–15; Link 2005, 12).

82. Simeon Metaphrastes, *Vita Platonis* (*PG* 115, 403–28).

thirst for violence among the nomads. According to Ammonius, the Saracens viciously attacked the monks at Mount Sinai: one monk's head remained attached to his body only by skin; another's body was cut in half; one's eyeballs were knocked out with repeated blows, and yet another monk's hands and feet were amputated.[83] Later in the narrative, the Blemmyes attacked the monks of Rhaithou "like wild beasts" while waving their unsheathed swords.[84]

As at Mount Sinai, the Blemmyes committed a number of atrocities against the holy men. The Blemmyes used one naked, bound monk for target practice "until there was not one uninjured place on his body."[85] They also hurled rocks at another monk, Paul, and then shot his face with arrows.[86] When he did not die, they tortured him for a long time seeking to learn where they could find the monks' wealth. When he revealed nothing, they cut his head in two with a sword and the halves fell, wrapping around his shoulders.[87] When the Blemmyes entered into the church, they attacked whoever they found, slicing one monk in the head, stabbing another in the stomach up to the sword's hilt, and thrusting a spear into a monk's heart from behind.[88] While the narrator hid, the Blemmyes filled the entire church with blood.[89]

The deaths of the monks are also narrated in great detail by Pseudo-Nilus. The "priest of the holy place," for example, was cut twice: one cut sliced from the back

83. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (CPA), fol. 7; (Greek) 6: "καὶ τὸν μὲν ἔχοντα τὴν κεφαλὴν κρεμαμένην ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑπὸ τοῦ δέρματος κρατουμένην καὶ μόνου, ἄλλον κατὰ τοῦ μέσου τμηθέντα, ἕτερον ὑπὸ τῆς ἄγαν πληγῆς τῆς οὔσης κατὰ κεφαλῆς τοὺ βολβοὺς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἔχοντα ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω κρεμαμένους, ἄλλον ἀφῃρημένον χεῖρας καὶ πόδας καὶ ὡς ξύλον ἄψυχον κατακείμενον."

84. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 32 (the document becomes increasingly fragmentary here); (Greek) 23: "οἱ βάρβαροι μηνδενὸς ἀνθισταμένου, μηδὲ κωλύοντος αὐτούς, ἐνέγκαντες ξύλα μακρά, δι' αὐτῶν ἀνῆλθον εἰς τὸ τεῖχος καὶ ἔνδον εἰσελθόντες καὶ τὰς θύρας ἀνοίξαντες εἰσέρχονται καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ὡς θῆρες ἄγριοι καὶ ἀνήμεροι ἔχοντες τὰ ξίφη αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς παλάμαις γεγυμνωμένα."

85. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 37 (very fragmentary); (Greek) 24: "ἐσχάτως κρατήσαντες αὐτὸν ἔδησαν χεῖρας καὶ πόδας καὶ στήσαντες, μέσον αὐτῶν γυμνόν, ἐτόξευον ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον, ἕως οὐχ ὑπελείφθη τόπος ὑγιὴς ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ."

86. Ibid. 26: "Οἱ δὲ λίθοις κατὰ τοῦ τραχήλου τύπτοντες αὐτὸν καὶ τοῖς βέλεσι τιτρώσκοντες τὰς σιαγόνας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον. . . ."

87. Ibid.: "Ὡς δὲ ἐπὶ ὥραν πολλὴν βασανίζοντες αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμπαίζοντες οὐδὲν εὕρισκον, τελευταῖον κατὰ μέσον τῆς κεφαλῆς παίουσιν αὐτὸν τῇ μαχαίρᾳ. Καὶ διχασθεῖσα ἡ ἁγία ἐκείνη κεφαλὴ εἰς δύο μέρη, ἔρεσεν κατ' ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ὤμων ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν αὐτοῦ."

88. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 41 (this version does not mention the church; rather, the killings take place on the plain); (Greek) 28: "ὁμοθυμαδὸν ὥσπερ θῆρες ἄγριοι εἰσεπήδησαν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ὀλολύζοντες καὶ τοῖς ξίφεσι τὸν ἀέρα δέροντες καὶ τὰς χεῖρας κινοῦντες καὶ ἀρχὴν ποιοῦντες τῶν φόνων, ἄλλος μὲν γὰρ ἄλλως ἔπληττεν τὸν εὑρισκόμενον, ὡς ἂν τύχοι φονεύων τὸν ἐμπίπτοντα. Ὁ μὲν κατὰ κεφαλῆς, ἄλλος εἰς τὴν γαστέρα μέχρις τῆς λαβῆς εἰσενέγκας τὸ ξίφος ὅλον καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ σύρας ἔξω πᾶσαν τὴν ἔσω οἰκονομίαν, ἄλλος κατὰ τῶν μεταφρένων μέχρι τῆς καρδίας τὴν λόγχην βαλὼν πρὸ τοῦ ἐλκύσαι αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω, τῆς ζωῆς τὸν ἅγιον ἀπεστέρησεν."

89. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 42; (Greek) 30.

to the ear and the jaw, and the other slashed his shoulder as far as his chest.[90] While a boy gathered fruit as commanded by one of the barbarians, another approached him from behind, drawing his sword from its sheath. When the boy realized this, he ran toward the first barbarian. The other nomad sliced the boy from collarbone to chest. Pseudo-Nilus uses phrases such as "barbaric cruelty" to describe the actions of the nomads.[91]

The monks at Mount Sinai were not the only ones who were killed by the nomads in the *Narrationes.* After leaving the area around the Burning Bush, the nomads captured other travelers in the desert. One of these travelers, the slave of a retired *stratēgos,* escaped and brought stories of the nomads' actions.[92] The nomads ambushed the *stratēgos*'s party, killing many, but they initially left the *stratēgos,* his young son, and his slave alive.[93] They promised to ransom the *stratēgos* and his son but then killed the son in front of his father. The slave heard the terrible cries of pain as each blow landed.[94] On the night before the son was killed, a different slave was hacked to pieces and cooked in an orgy of cruelty.[95] After killing the son, the nomads traveled into the desert and stopped for the night at a place offering an abundant water supply.[96] While there, they spotted a cave, which they soon realized was a dwelling with a few rocks blocking the entrance.[97] (This must have been a rock-cut hermitage like those that are fairly common in the southern Sinai.)[98] They stormed into the hermitage, dragged out the holy man, and stoned him to death.[99] Nearby they found another pious monk and dispatched

90. Pseudo-Nilus 4.2: "καὶ ἡ μὲν πληγὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ μεταφρένου ἕως μέχρι τῆς σιαγόνος ἐχώρησε διελθοῦσα τὸ οὖς, ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα ἀπὸ τοῦ ὤμου κατέλαβε τὸν μαζόν."

91. Ibid. 4.3: "ἄλλος γὰρ ὄπισθεν παρεστὼς τοῦ κολεοῦ τὸ ξίφος εἵλκε λαθραίως, ὁ δὲ εἴτε αἰσθόμενος τούτου σπωμένου εἴτε καὶ ὑπονοήσας τὴν ἀναίρεσιν, ὡς ἐπτοημένος τῷ θορύβῳ πρὸς τοῦτο περιάγει μικρὸν εἰς τοὐπίσω τεταραγμένον τῷ φόρῳ τὸ πρόσωπον, καὶ ὁ ἐφεστὼς ἐφόβησε κραυγῇ τε αὐτὸν βαρβαρικῇ καὶ τῇ τῆς ὄψεως διαστροφῇ, καὶ οὕτως ὁ μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς κατακλεῖδος ἐρείσας τὸ ξίφος ὀρθὸν ὦσεν πολλῇ δυνάμει ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡπατικοῦ κρεμαστῆρος ἐπὶ τὸν θώρακα, ὁ δὲ πρὶν ἀνασπασθῆναι τοῦτο ἀνατραπεὶς ἔκειτο νεκρός, εἴτε δειλίᾳ προθανὼν. . . ."

92. Ibid. 5.3–4.

93. Ibid. 5.5.

94. Ibid. 5.6: "προθύουσι τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν παῖδα. . . . εὐθὺς δὲ κἀκεῖνον πολλοῖς ἀναιροῦσι τραύμασι. . . . ἤκουον γὰρ τοῦ μὲν κλαυθμυρίζοντες ἐλεεινῶς, τοῦ δὲ βοῶντες ἐπ' ἄλγει καὶ πρὸς ἑκάστην πληγὴν ὀδυνηρῶς τῇ φωνῇ οἰμώζοντος καὶ τὰς σφαγάς. . . ."

95. Ibid. 5.9.

96. Ibid. 5.10–11.

97. Ibid. 5.11: "ἄλλος ἄλλον τοῖς δρόμοις φθάσι φιλονικοῦντες, καὶ πλησιάσαντες περιεχύθησαν τῷ σπηλαίῳ· τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν τὸ οἴκημα λίθοις ὀλιγοις περὶ τὸ στόμιον ᾠκοδομημένον, ὡς ἂν μὴ τῷ ἀχανεῖ τοῖς θηρίοις εὐμαρῆ παρέχῃ τὴν εἴσοδον."

98. See, for example Dahari 2000, 46, mentioning 23 hermit cells (some were rock-cut; others were underneath boulders) in the Wadi Shreji, near Mount Sinai.

99. Pseudo-Nilus 5.12: "εἶτα εἰσδραμόντες, ὀλίγοι καθ' ἕνα—οὐ γὰρ ἐχώρει πολλούς—ἐξάγουσιν ἄνδρα καὶ τῷ εἴδει καὶ τῇ καταστάσει σεμνόν, καὶ ἤγον σύροντες οὐ θορυβηθέντα, οὐκ ὠχριάσαντα,

him with their swords.[100] Leaving, the nomads came to another location, distinguished by the growth of a few trees. There they discovered a small cell (οἴκημα μικρὸν), and the monk inside refused to exit.[101] The monk enraged the barbarians with a courageous speech, and they burst into his cell, killing him.[102] Still angered by the monk, they discovered three additional travelers and quickly slew them.[103] With the blood of these travelers still on their swords, they discovered two other monastic cells (δύο μοναστήρια).[104] The nomads split into two groups and surrounded the cells. One of the monks was shot full of arrows. When he was dead, the barbarians split him open from groin to chest and ripped out his organs.[105]

From this discussion, it is clear that both sources present the martyrdom events in a sensationalist way, a treatment that would be consistent with exaggeration and embellishment. Such rhetoric is not out of place in a hagiographical context, but it should not be viewed as accurately representing how the events actually transpired. Instead, the importance of the account lies in its creation of two diametrically opposed groups, the heroic Christians and the villainous nomads—Saracens and Blemmyes. Pseudo-Nilus in particular presents an image of violence lurking behind every mountain, where bands of nomads wander, hunting for victims.

THEMES OF PRAISE

All the Sinai martyrdom sources spin a tale of pathos while praising determination and Christian triumph against oppressors. The influence of previous martyr literature can be seen in the words and phrases used to describe the Sinai monks after their deaths. In Ammonius, Pseudo-Nilus, and the Sinai Martyr Inscription, the monks are universally lauded for confronting their oppressors and triumphing through their spiritual superiority.

For example, according to Ammonius, one monk (who had been shot with arrows) "competed [like an athlete] and struggled courageously against Satan, and he was worthy of the crown first among all. Until death, he struggled virtuously and trampled on the head of the snake. Since the 'first fruit is holy,' he became a

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καὶ καταθέντες ἐπί τινος πέτρας λίθοις—οὐ γὰρ εἶχον τὰ ξίφη—κατακτείνουσι γελῶντες καὶ τῇ θωνῇ παιανίζοντες."

100. Ibid. 5.13: "Εἶτα ἐλθόντες ἐκεῖθεν ὀλίγον διάστημα ἕτερον συλλαμβάνουσι νεανίαν, ὠχρόν, ἐκτετηκότα καὶ τῆς πολιτείας τὰ ἴχνη ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως φέροντα· καὶ αὐτὸν ὁμοίως ξίφει διεχειρίσαντο."

101. Ibid. 5.14: "εὗρον δὲ πλησιάσαντες οἴκημα μικρὸν καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μειρακίσκον, οὗ τὴν γενναιότητα καὶ μεγαλοψυχίαν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐθαύμασαν οἱ βάρβαροι."

102. Ibid. 5.17.

103. Ibid. 5.18.

104. Ibid. 5.19.

105. Ibid. 5.19.

beautiful exemplar for anyone who is holy."[106] The monk Paul gave himself willingly to the Blemmyes without fear as a noble servant of Christ.[107] Paul became "another victor" and raised the trophy against Satan.[108] The monk Sergius was compared to a noble soldier when he wrestled a sword away from one of the Blemmyes so that he would be martyred.[109] After his death, it was clear that he was "an amazing man and servant of Christ."[110] In the texts, the monks willingly accept their martyrdom, even praising God for the opportunity to die for Him. They become citizens of heaven and a "temple of the highest Lord." They "leave behind everything transitory and perishable in life in order that they can follow God alone."[111] In the Greek version, the narrator concludes his story of the monks' deaths by specifically naming them martyrs who "had entirely obtained heaven."[112] In the Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) version, the text goes a little farther, saying, "if I call them martyrs I will not be wrong, because they suffered oppression. . . . They were cut completely into pieces like martyrs."[113] When the monks killed at Rhaithou are buried by the Pharanites, they are praised as servants and martyrs of Christ.[114] The exaltation of the monks by the Pharanites ends with the statement "all their lives they conducted themselves in a goodly manner pleasing to God, and at the end of their lives they received an additional virtue, for they were washing by their own blood and enlisted among the martyrs, since all had died for the sake of the Lord and His eternal kingdom."[115]At Mount Sinai, Doulas praised the martyrs as the "holy and chosen servants of Christ who were worthy

106. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek), 24: "Καὶ οὕτως ἀθλήσας καὶ ἀγωνισάμενος ἀνδρείως κατὰ τοῦ Διαβόλου, πρῶτος πάντων τὸν στέφανον ἀνεδήσατο, μέχρι θανάτου γενναίως ἀγωνισάμενος καὶ καταπατήσας τὴν τοῦ ὄφεως κεφαλήν, 'ἀπαρχὴ ἁγία' καὶ καλὸν ὑπόδειγμα τοῖς ἁγίοις γενόμενος." Cf. Rom. 11:16.

107. Ammonius Monachus, *Relatio* (Greek) 25: "Καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν τοῖς βαρβάροις ὁ γενναῖος τοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος Παῦλος μηδὲν δειλιάσας."

108. Ibid. (CPA) fol. 40; (Greek) 26: "καὶ δεύτερος νικηφόρος καὶ καὶ τροπαιοῦχος κατὰ τοῦ Διαβόλου γενόμενος. . . ."

109. Ibid. (CPA) fol. 43; (Greek) 29: "δραμὼν ὥσπερ τις γενναῖος στρατιώτης, ἀπέσπασεν, ἐξ ἑνὸς τῶν βαρβάρων ξίφος καὶ ἔκρουσεν ἑνὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν κατὰ τοῦ ὤμου, ἵνα κἂν οὕτως ὀργισθέντες ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτόν, ὅπερ καὶ γέγονεν."

110. Ibid.: "ὁ θαυμάσιος ἀνὴρ καὶ δοῦλος τοῦ Χριστοῦ."

111. Ibid. (CPA) fols. 44–45; (Greek) 30: "ἀλλὰ χαίροντες καὶ εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ Κύριῳ ἐπὶ τοῖς συμβάσιν καὶ γεγενημένοις αὐτοῖς, εἰς οὐρανὸν τὸν νοῦν ἔχοντες πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτῶν Δεσπότην καὶ Κύριον ἐπὶ γῆς καλῶς πολιτευσάμενοι καὶ ναὸς ὄντες Θεοῦ τοῦ Ὑψίστου, πάντα καταλιπόντες τὰ τοῦ βίου τούτου πρόσκαιρα καὶ φθαρτὰ καὶ Θεῷ μόνῳ ἀκολουθήσαντες. . . ."

112. Ibid.: "ὅλον τὸν οὐρανὸν κεκτημένοι."

113. Ibid. (CPA), fol. 46.

114. Ibid. (Greek) 36: "οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλοι καὶ Μάρτυρες."

115. Ibid.: "Πάντα τὸν βίον αὐτῶν καλῶς καὶ εὐαρεστως τῷ Θεῷ πολιτευσάμενοι καὶ πέρας τοῦ βίου λαβόντες προσθήκην ἀρετῆς, τὸ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἅιμασιν λαμπρυνθῆναι καὶ ἐν Μάρτυσι καταταγῆναι, ὅτι οὗτοι πάντες διὰ τὸν Κύριον καὶ τὴν αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν ἐτελειώθησαν."

even of the Lord's joy. For after such suffering, atrocities, and the most extreme tribulations, they obtained the crown of martyrdom. They are held in great esteem and worth in heaven."[116]

Similar themes appear in Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes.* During a speech in which Pseudo-Nilus asks not to be compared to Job, he states that God prepared the monks' deaths as prizes of piety in which the victors overcame toil and achieved the crown.[117] The speech supports the theme of the martyrdom accounts by asserting that God grants his favor to those who serve him faithfully.[118]

The monks in the *Narrationes,* like those in the *Relatio,* willingly face death and conquer their primal fears. The "priest of the holy place" neither groans in pain nor turns his head. Instead, he simply makes the sign of the cross and whispers, "Blessed be the Lord."[119] Neither the murder nor his nakedness mark him as indecent, because his body is covered by Grace.[120] However, the most explicit description of the monks' enhanced esteem appears near the end of the fourth *Narratio.* As Pseudo-Nilus has it:[121]

> And since those surviving did not wish to abandon the desert, and they chose death rather than living an indifferent life in the cities, in this way, the victims thought that it was better to die than to live a wicked life in the mundane world. For they knew that the death of the soul is worse than the death of the body and that a death in sin is more dangerous than death through the sword, because the latter has a small pain and is transitory, but the former is great and everlasting.

One of the clear influences on Pseudo-Nilus was 4 Maccabees, as described above. The order in which he describes the deaths of several monks, for example, parallels

116. Ibid. 40: "ὡς ἄξιοι δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ ὑπηρέται κατηξιώθησαν τῆς χαρᾶς καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ· μετὰ γὰρ τοσούτους ἀγῶνας καὶ θλίψεις καὶ πειρασμοὺς ἔσχατον πάντων τὸν τοῦ μαρτυρίου στέφανον ἀναδησάμενοι, ἐν μεγάλῃ τιμῇ καὶ δόξῃ ὑπάρχουσιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς."

117. Pseudo-Nilus 4.12: "ταῦτα ἡτοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ἠγωνιομένοις τοὺς ἄθλους τῆς εὐσεβείας, καὶ αἴσθησιν καὶ νοῦν ὑπερβαίνοντα. Οὕτως γὰρ ἔπρεπε τῷ μεγαλοδώρῳ θεῷ ὑπερβῆναι τοὺς πόνους ταῖς ἀμοιβαῖς καὶ νικῆσαι τοῖς στεφάνοις τοὺς ἀγῶνας κἀκεῖνα παρασχεῖν τοῖς ἀθλοῦσιν."

118. Mayerson 1975, 63–64.

119. Pseudo-Nilus 4.2: "οὔτε προσοιμώξαντα τῇ ὀδύνῃ οὔτε διαστρέψεντα τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ ἴχνος επὶ τούτου τοῦ ἀλγήματος ἐμφήναντα, σφραγισάμενον δὲ μόνον καὶ 'εὐλογητὸς κύριος' προσειπόντα ψιθυρισμῷ τοῦ στόματος. . . ."

120. Ibid.: "οὐδὲν οὔτε ἀναιρέσεως οὔτε γυμνότητος ἐπιδειξάμενος ἄσχημον, χάρις δέ τις ἦν ἐπανθοῦσα τῷ σώματι καὶ σκέπουσα τὸ τῆς γυμνώσεως ἀκαλλές."

121. Ibid. 4.10: "Ἐπεὶ καὶ οἱ περιλειφθέντες ἀναχωρεῖν τῆς ἐρημίας οὐ βούλονται, τῆς ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἀδιαφόρου διαγωγῆς ἑλόμενοι μᾶλλον τὸν θάνατον, οὕτως καὶ τοῖς ἀνῃρημένοις δέδοκτο ἀποθανεῖν ἢ τῆς ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ πολιτευομένης ἀνασχέσθαι κακίας· ᾔδεισαν γὰρ τοῦ σωματικοῦ θανάτου τὸν ψυχικὸν χαλεπώτερον καὶ τὸν ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτιᾳ τοῦ διὰ ξίφους ἐπικινδυνότερον, ὅτι ὁ μὲν μικρὰν ὀδύνην ἔχει καὶ πρόσκαιρον, ὁ δὲ μακρὰν καὶ ἐπίμονον κόλασιν." My translation is influenced by Mayerson's (1975, 63) summary of the speech.

the death of the Jewish priest Eleazar.[122] Furthermore, the most obvious allusion is the speech of a mother praising the death of her son, who was "an athlete."[123] She describes the wounds, as "prizes, I count the blows as victory wreaths. . . . With those wages, repay me for my pregnancy; with those wreaths, requite me for my birth pangs; with those prizes, honor me for nursing you! Share with me the trophies of your toils." Continuing, she compares her son's martyrdom in terms of a "contest . . . against the Barbarian's wrath" to the danger of giving birth, echoing the speech of the mother in 4 Maccabees 16.[124] At the end of her speech, she describes the spiritual advantages that the martyrs received, recalling the role of martyrs as intercessors, as for example were Perpetua and her brother Dinocrates. The mother notes that she now has a "patron before God" who can defend her in her old age.[125]

CONCLUSION

The slow codification of the cognitive Christianization of the Sinai described in chapter 3 associated biblical events with late-antique sites, but this process was just one source of the holiness of the Sinai. According to Sinai writers, the Sinai presented a unique opportunity for monks in a Christianized Roman Empire—a true martyrdom through a violent death at the hands of an impious persecutor. The descriptions of the honors received by the martyrs and their celebration provided additional spiritual support in the practice of the ascetic life in such a barren location. Eventually the martyrs became known throughout the Mediterranean world, although it appears that the martyrs were not an important attraction to Egeria or the Piacenza pilgrim.

I have argued that the Sinai Martyrs were repeatedly remembered in various types of media, including Ammonius's *Relatio,* Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes,* the inscription at the Chapel of the Sinai Saints, and a letter written by Nilus of Ancyra. These accounts document many different nomadic attacks, among them the actions of the Blemmyes, who disappear from the later records.

It is hard to believe that the monks of the Sinai felt as if they needed to fabricate a martyrdom narrative to increase their sanctity, which was already based on the

122. Caner 2010, 78–80.

123. Pseudo-Nilus 6.6: "ἀγωνιστὴν."

124. Ibid. 6.4 (trans. Caner 2010, 118.4): "ἐγὼ βραβεῖα τὰς σφαγὰς ἀριθμῶ, ἐγὼ τὰς πληγὰς στεφάνους μετρῶ. . . . εἴθε καὶ πλείονας ἐχώρει τὸ σῶμα τὸ σόν, ἵνα σοι πλείονες γεγόνασιν οἱ μισθοί. ἔνθεν μοι τῆς κυοφορίας ἀπόδος τοὺς μισθούς, ἔνθεν τῶν ὠδίνων παράσχε τὰς ἀμοιβάς, ἔνθεν τῆς τιθηνίας ὄρεξον τὰς τιμάς. συμμέρισαί μοι τοὺς ἄθλους τῶν πόνων· κοινὸς γάρ ἀμφοτέρων κάματος. σὺ ἠγώνισαι, κἀγὼ τοῦ ἀγῶνος ἔστερξα τὰ τραύματα· σὺ ἤθλησας, κἀγὼ τῆς ἀθλήσεως συνήδομαί σοι· σὺ πρὸς βαρβαρικὸν ἔστης θυμόν." Cf. 4 Maccabees 16:6–11.

125. Perpetua 7–8. See Salisbury 1997, 104–6. Cf. Pseudo-Nilus 6.7: "προστάτην ἔχουσα τοιοῦτον παρὰ θεῷ."

association of Sinai sites with biblical events from Exodus. No other location, except perhaps Jerusalem, could claim such a close connection to the divine, because the Law was transferred directly to Moses by God on the top of Mount Sinai. As pilgrims and monks filled the Sinai desert, the locations of the Exodus account became codified.

Although the accounts could have been exaggerated and transformed to fit the literary topoi of martyrdom, it seems likely that the martyrdom accounts reflect a threat truly observed.[126] The Sinai monks took precautions to defend themselves from the nomads. Where possible, individual hermit cells and small *laura*s in the Sinai were constructed along paths that could not be traversed by camels, often by using overhanging cliffs that camels could not travel beneath.[127] Such obstacles suggest that the monks were purposely trying to prevent the nomads from having access to their cells, implying that they presented a threat accepted as real. Comparative evidence from elsewhere in the Near East demonstrates that "Saracen" raids were an occasional part of life.[128] For example, Jerome's *Life of Malchus* describes a nomadic raid on a group of travelers and the subsequent kidnapping and enslavement of Malchus and a woman companion.[129]

Ransoming captives, as happened to Theodulus, and enslavement may have been a lucrative economic adaptation by the nomads to meet changing economic circumstances.[130] The raids against the monks may be seen in a similar light, as means of obtaining food, money, or other supplies. It is possible that the influx of monks and pilgrims to the Sinai Peninsula changed the nomads' economic behavior. The monks established themselves at locations that afforded the best water supplies, and they imported the means of agricultural production, which required the construction of water-capturing installations. Perhaps these new settlements indicate that the nomads were deprived of their access both to the best water sources of the Sinai and also to the locations with the most abundant wildlife, which the nomads would have hunted. When facing the loss of ancestral grazing and hunting grounds to the Christian colonizers and confronted with the inability to feed themselves, as reported by the Piacenza pilgrim,[131] it is small wonder if some groups occasionally lashed out and attacked the Sinai monks and pilgrims. After all, raiding is always an important economic and social factor within nomadic societies, an important avenue for advancement. Power dynamics within nomadic

126. Though Solzbacher's (1989, 222–42) suggestion that there were three historical attacks (two by Saracens and one by Blemmyes) seems reasonable.

127. Patrich 2004, 438.

128. See Parker 1986, 41–46, and Lenski 2011, 243–49, for examples; see also the section "Nomads in the Late-Antique Near East according to the Literary Sources" above in chapter 1, pp. 24–31.

129. Jerome, *Life of Malchus,* esp. 4–6.

130. On kidnapping and enslavement by nomads, see Lenski 2011.

131. PP 36.3-4.

communities also changed, as some nomads (such as Ammanes, who was paid tribute by Pharan in the *Narrationes*)[132] benefited from their relationships with sedentary populations. Thus the nomads may have viewed the monks and pilgrims as usurping the traditional power structure, as transforming traditional modes of living in the Sinai, and responded accordingly. Such actions seemed frightfully shocking to the monks, resulting in the composition and elaboration of the martyr tradition in the Sinai.

The fame of the Sinai Martyrs spread significantly during the reign of Justin II (565–78), when relics from the Sinai were interred in Constantinople.[133] (Though a Sinai official, an *apocrisarius,* was based in Constantinople as early as 536, which suggests that there may have been knowledge of the Sinai Martyrs prior to the time of Justin II.) Later the Sinai accounts were mined in order to learn whom the relics commemorated.[134] The perception that the nomads represented a threat to imperial order, like the resulting increase in security described in the next chapter, was an unintended side effect of the spread of the accounts of Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus. Another unintended consquence occurred later, when Christians commemorated the Sinai Martyrs. By the mid-seventh century, the word "Saracen" had come to be applied to Muslims. By the reading of the Sinai Martyr accounts and their descriptions of violence, these texts reinforced Byzantine hostility toward Muslims.

132. Pseudo-Nilus 6.9.

133. *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (ed. Delehaye 1902), col. 217; *ACO* III.1.1.146; Theophanes A.M. 6064 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 361–62); Solzbacher 1989, 225–26; Caner 2010, 32 n. 129.

134. Ibid. 52.

5

Imperial Response to the Saracen Threat

In an incident reported in several sources, a tribe of "Saracens" led by the woman Mavia revolted against Roman rule sometime between 375 and 378, at the same time when an Arian persecution of Nicene Christians was occurring in Alexandria.[1] Under the rule of Mavia's husband, her tribe (Tanukh?) was allied to the Romans, but on his death, the tribe is said to have devastated Egypt and Palestine, and as embellished in later accounts, "the whole of the East," including Phoenicia. She refused to surrender until her daughter was married to a high-ranking Roman official, and a local monk, Moses, was consecrated as bishop to her tribe.[2] Moses championed the orthodox cause among tribal members, converting most to Christianity. Through this conversion, Mavia's tribe was reincorporated into the Roman military apparatus and defended Constantinople against the Goths after the death of Valens at the battle of Adrianople in 378. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, one of the "Saracen" warriors from Mavia's tribe cut the throat of a Gothic warrior and then drank the blood out of the Goth's throat. This so outbarbarized the barbarian Goths that their morale plummeted.[3]

In many ways, Ammonius's *Relatio* echoes several of the key points of Mavia's revolt—persecution in Alexandria, the rebellion of a tribe at the death of its phylarch, the attacks in the Sinai, and the monk Moses—suggesting that either the

1. Rufinus 11.6; Socrates 4.36; Sozomen 6.38; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.20; Bowersock 1980; Mayerson 1980a; Sartre 1982, 142; Shahid 1984a, 140–202; Graf 1989, 348–49. Mavia's revolt is not mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, the best historian for this period.

2. The excavators of the fort at Yotvata have recently argued that it was heavily damaged in Mavia's revolt (Davies and Magness 2011, 478).

3. Sozomen 7.1; Ammianus Marcellinus 31.16.

Relatio describes the local Sinai experience of Mavia's revolt or, more likely, that aspects of Mavia's revolt were incorporated into the *Relatio* in order to provide an air of authenticity.[4] As Philip Mayerson long ago demonstrated, the accounts of Mavia's revolt describe it in such a vague manner that writing a history of the revolt is practically impossible. Instead, all the accounts converge on a conflict between orthodox Christians and Arians, suggesting that Mavia's revolt was simply a backdrop for highlighting the evils of Arianism and the ultimate triumph of orthodoxy.[5]

Mavia's revolt is the best-attested of several raids that some modern scholars have argued constituted a "Saracen threat" to imperial security to the Near East beginning in the fourth century, though other historians remain skeptical. The scholarly arguments about the nature of the Saracen threat have been engendered by both the lack and the biased nature of the literary sources, which incidentally mention nomadic attacks of some kind but often do not provide extensive or verifiable details.[6]

Epigraphic evidence written by the nomads themselves, the Greco-Roman literary sources, and archaeology all suggest that there was only a minor nomadic threat to the sedentary populations of the southern Levant until Diocletian's accession in 284.[7] At that point, however, the Roman administration created a fortified frontier (*limes*) known as the *limes Arabicus* and the *strata Diocletiana*, stretching from the Gulf of Aila in the south into Mesopotamia in the north.[8] Several of these fortifications, especially legionary bases at Udhruh and Lejjun in southern and central Jordan, have been extensively excavated.[9] When the fortified zone was abandoned in the southern Levant is debated, but it lasted at least until the early fifth century and possibly into the sixth.[10]

In addition to the *limes Arabicus,* some scholars have long suggested that there was also a *limes Palaestinae*—a string of fortresses running from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean as a fortified border—to protect central Palestine from a southerly invasion.[11] Two of these forts have now been extensively

4. Grossman 2001a, 181; Caner 2010, 144–45.

5. Mayerson 1980a.

6. See Caner 2010, 42–43.

7. *Contra* Parker 1987; Graf 1989; M. MacDonald 2009b, 323–46.

8. Brünnow 1909; Bowersock 1976; Parker 1986. Kennedy 2004 provides an updated guide to the archaeological remains.

9. Lejjun: Parker 2006b (final report). Udhruh: Killick 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1987a, 1987b (preliminary reports).

10. *Notitia Dignitatum, Oriens* 34, 37. See Parker 2000, 2002, 2009; Fisher 2004.

11. Originally proposed by Alt 1930. For a history of research on the *limes Palaestinae,* see Gichon 2002.

excavated and published (Upper Zohar and Ein Boqeq).[12] Surprisingly, a reevaluation of the archaeological evidence of these forts revealed that they dated to the late sixth century, and not to the fourth or fifth century as postulated by the excavators.[13] This suggests that the *limes Palaestinae* may have been a scholarly invention instead of a fourth-century imperial policy of defense.

The existence of these fortifications leads to an obvious question: What was their strategic importance? Mordechai Gichon maintains that the *limes Palaestinae* was intended to prevent an invasion of Palestine by nomadic tribes, whereas S. Thomas Parker views the *limes Arabicus* instead as a monitoring zone for nomadic movements and a defense against incursions by them. Both scholars agree that the forts in the region were directed against the Saracens and argue that a strong governmental presence created the necessary preconditions for cooperation between the sedentary and nomadic populations. They argue, however, that in periods of disorder and when left unsupervised, nomadic groups threatened security along the frontier.

In contrast, E. B. Banning, Benjamin Isaac, and David Graf have argued against these assessments regarding the frontier and the Saracens. Banning suggests that the relationship between the sedentary (Roman) and nomadic (Saracen) populations was not antagonistic but a mutually beneficial symbiosis.[14] Isaac believes that the forts along the frontier were intended to monitor the sedentary population and control communication routes against internal threats.[15] Graf argues that since there is no evidence of hostile nomadic groups to the east and south of the *limes Arabicus* the forts must therefore have been directed against internal threats.[16] Mayerson wisely tempered these extreme positions by pointing out that the sedentary and nomadic populations could be both antagonistic and cooperative at the same time; however, although he suggested that the *limes Arabicus* was not intended to prevent or control nomadic invasions or movements, he offered no plausible explanation of its purpose.[17] Parker subsequently argued that the fortifications were not located primarily among population centers but were placed on the frontier, suggesting their use against outside threats.[18] Finally, Ariel Lewin has suggested that the military garrisons could be used for a variety of purposes, including monitoring the internal and external populations.[19]

12. Upper Zohar: Harper 1995. Ein Boqeq: Gichon 1993.

13. Magness 1999.

14. Banning 1986, 1987, 1992; Also see Parker's (1987) response to these views. See "Nomads in the Late-Antique Near East from an Anthropological and Archaeological Perspective" above in chapter 1.

15. Isaac 1984, 1990.

16. Graf 1989.

17. Mayerson 1989.

18. Parker 2000, 373–79.

19. Lewin 2007.

Thus, the debate on the Saracen threat has largely centered on the role of the fortifications along the desert frontiers of Palestine and Arabia. The major problem with current scholarship on the Saracen threat, both pro and con, is that scholars have ignored the importance of a "perceived" threat while debating the verisimilitude of any threat. Social scientists, especially after 9/11, have examined the roles of perceived threats in making security-based decisions.[20] Their studies argue that people who feel threatened by future acts of violence are much more likely to support drastic military operations, even when the threat of future violence is minimal. Though it is hard to translate the workings of a modern democratic state's decision making to the Roman period, it seems likely that the perception of a threat was a major factor in planning imperial defensive positions. Therefore, it is immaterial whether the nomads actually could invade and conquer the Roman territories of the East; it was important only that members of the imperial government and the local sedentary communites feared that the nomads might do so.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the sources about the Sinai, such as the martyr accounts, explicitly describe the nomads as a threat to security. Additional sources, such as Procopius, describe the erection of fortifications in the Sinai Peninsula to defend the monks there against the nomads. Archaeology has also demonstrated that several of the pilgrimage routes to the Sinai were reinforced in the sixth century. Because the traditional frontier with Arabia was dismantled at this time, the only logical conclusion is that the imperial government was attempting to protect pilgrimage traffic into and out of the Sinai.[21] In making this attempt, the imperial authorities altered the balance of power in the Sinai in favor of the monks and pilgrims. By posting garrisons inside the Sinai and along the pilgrimage routes in the sixth century, the empire had truly come to the peninsula. At this point, the nomads lost their last vestige of power there, for their raids could quickly be countered. The fortifications allowed the future patriarch of Antioch Gregory to withstand a siege at Mount Sinai in the last recorded attack (sometime in the period 565–69) on the monks before the Islamic Conquests. No martyrs were reported, suggesting that the nomads were now powerless in the face of the new situation in the Sinai.

SECURITY IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

Several forts were positioned along the pilgrimage routes to the Sinai in the fourth and fifth centuries, though most were placed there in the Tetrarchic period (293-

20. Gordon and Arian 2001; Huddy et al. 2005; Huddy, Feldman, and Weber 2007.

21. I have argued elsewhere (Ward 2007) that security threats caused merchants to use the Red Sea ports of Aila and Clysma, which were located on the pilgrimage routes. Thus an increase of imperial security for pilgrims also resulted in increased security for merchants.

305) and therefore were not related to pilgrimage traffic. Many of these forts were concentrated along the Wadi Araba, which runs from the Dead Sea to Aila. These forts would have secured the Jerusalem-Aila–Mount Sinai route in the late fourth century (if we may assume that they continued to be garrisoned). In the northern Wadi Araba, a fort was reconstructed at Hatseva during the reign of Diocletian.[22]At Yotvata, about forty kilometers north of Aila, another fort was constructed during the reign of Diocletian, as attested in a building inscription.[23] Occupation lasted until sometime in the fourth or fifth century.[24] Across the Araba from Yotvata, Arieldela (modern Gharandal) guarded the wadi leading up to Kastron Zadacatha, between Petra and Aila.[25] At the end of the Wadi Araba, Eusebius attests that Aila was the base of the *Legio X Fretensis* around the year 325.[26] The city wall at Aila was constructed in the late fourth or early fifth century and may or may not reflect the continued presence of the Tenth Legion there.[27]

There are few archaeologically confirmed fortifications in the Negev from this period.[28] The only fortress certainly in use in the early fourth century was located at Oboda (modern Avdat).[29] Its citadel may have been constructed in the early fourth century, but since none of the pottery from the excavation of the citadel has been published, it is impossible to test the excavator's conclusions.[30] More recent investigations suggest that this citadel was constructed in the late fourth or early fifth century.[31] The same caveat about published dating material applies to Avraham Negev's suggestion that the city wall of Mampsis and the citadel at Nessana were constructed in the early fourth century. Both of these may possibly date later.[32] The other confirmed forts in the region, those forming the so-called *limes Palaestinae,*

22. R. Cohen and Israel 1996, 110–16.

23. See Kindler 1989; Meshel 1989; Roll 1989; Avner, Davies, and Magness 2004. G. Davies and Magness (2011) have recently argued that the fortress was constructed under Valens.

24. Avner, Davies, and Magness 2004, 412.

25. See Kennedy 2004, 209–11; Darby, Darby, and Shelton 2010. An inscription found in 2013 confirms the site as the base of the *Cohors Secunda Galatarum,* mentioned in the *Notitia* (Darby, personal communication) as a construction of the Tetrarchy.

26. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 8.1; Ward 2012, 293.

27. Parker 2002, 80.

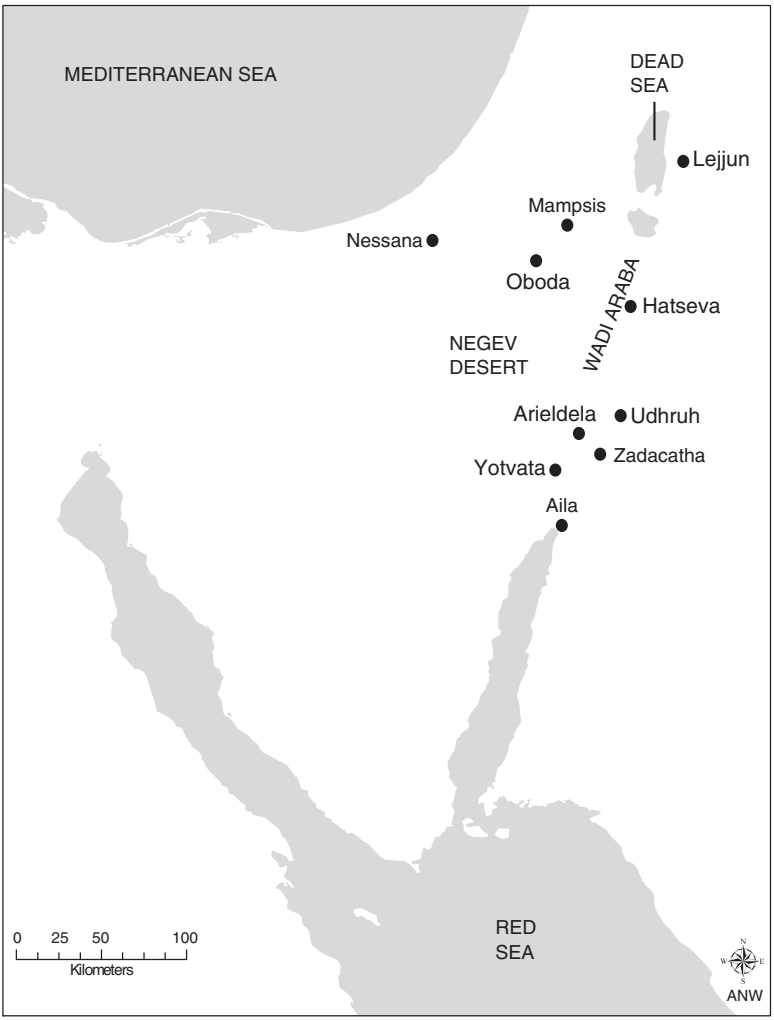
28. For the third century and the impact of Diocletian, see Erickson-Gini 2007.

29. Erickson-Gini 2002.

30. Negev 1997, 104–5.

31. Erickson-Gini 2002, 119.

32. Negev 1988, 2.1–3. The excavations of the city wall of Mampsis are presented ibid. 9–27. Although Negev published no pottery supporting his dating proposal, he publishes (ibid. 24) a number of coins ranging from the rule of Constantius II (337–61) up to Honorius (395–423) and Arcadius (395-408). The provenance of the coins is not specified, but Negev's plan 7 (ibid. 28) suggests that the city wall was founded on top of a soil layer containing the later fourth-century coins. Without a more detailed stratigraphic record, it is impossible to tell if Negev's dates are correct or if the wall should be dated later, possibly to the fifth century.



MAP 3. Fortified sites in the Sinai Peninsula and the southern Levant in the fourth century C.E. (Map: Amy Ward.)

run along and just north of the border of Third Palestine, from Gaza to the Dead Sea.[33] Only a few of these forts have been excavated, and those that have been call into question the existence of a *limes Palaestinae* in the fourth century.

33. Parker 2002, 79; Gichon 1997; 2002, 196–97.

In the fourth century, soldiers and officers (*praepositi*) escorted Egeria during her pilgrimage, but not while she was in the Sinai.[34] When Egeria left the Sinai, a fort guarded each stop along a four-day journey from Clysma to Egypt, and soldiers from these forts accompanied her during the journey.[35] She notes that the fort at Clysma was erected to defend against the Saracens.[36] Egeria mentions no armed escorts in the Sinai (possibly the Pharanite guides served as guards, but this is not explicitly stated), and their absence probably reflects the fact that there were no forts or military installations known in the Sinai in the late fourth century. It also demonstrates that the monastic communities there were left unguarded in this period by the imperial government.[37] Some scholars have connected Egeria's escorts with the revolt of Mavia, but such escorts are attested at other pilgrimage sites in the Near East, a fact implying that Egeria's guards were not a response to Mavia's revolt.[38]

SECURITY IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

In the fifth century, there are no records of pilgrimages to the Sinai through the Negev, and only the garrison at Nessana in the Negev is known to be new in the fifth century. Evidence for its establishment appears in the richly documented soldier's archive from Nessana, which was garrisoned by "the very loyal Theodosians" perhaps at the beginning of the fifth century.[39] This garrison must have been created during the reign of Theodosius I (379–95) or Theodosius II (408–45). That the unit does not appear in the *Notitia Dignitatum* suggests that it was created under Theodosius II; however, the unit may have been transferred to Nessana from another province. The unit remained at Nessana until at least the later part of the sixth century.[40] The *Notitia Dignitatum* also mentions the existence of a garrison at Birsama, between Beersheva and Gaza.[41] Furthermore, many of the other forts in the Negev, mentioned above for the fourth century, may have been garrisoned in the fifth century.

34. Detached legionaries were used for local security and police purposes by the second century at the earliest, but several other types of policing officials are known. Individual praetorians known as *praepositi* were used during the Augustan period to suppress banditry, but the title in Egeria's time seems to simply indicate a commanding officer. See Jones 1964 640; Fuhrmann 2012, 136–37, 201–23.

35. Egeria 7.

36. Petrus Diaconus Y6 (v. 116): "pro defensione et disciplina pro incursione Saracenorum."

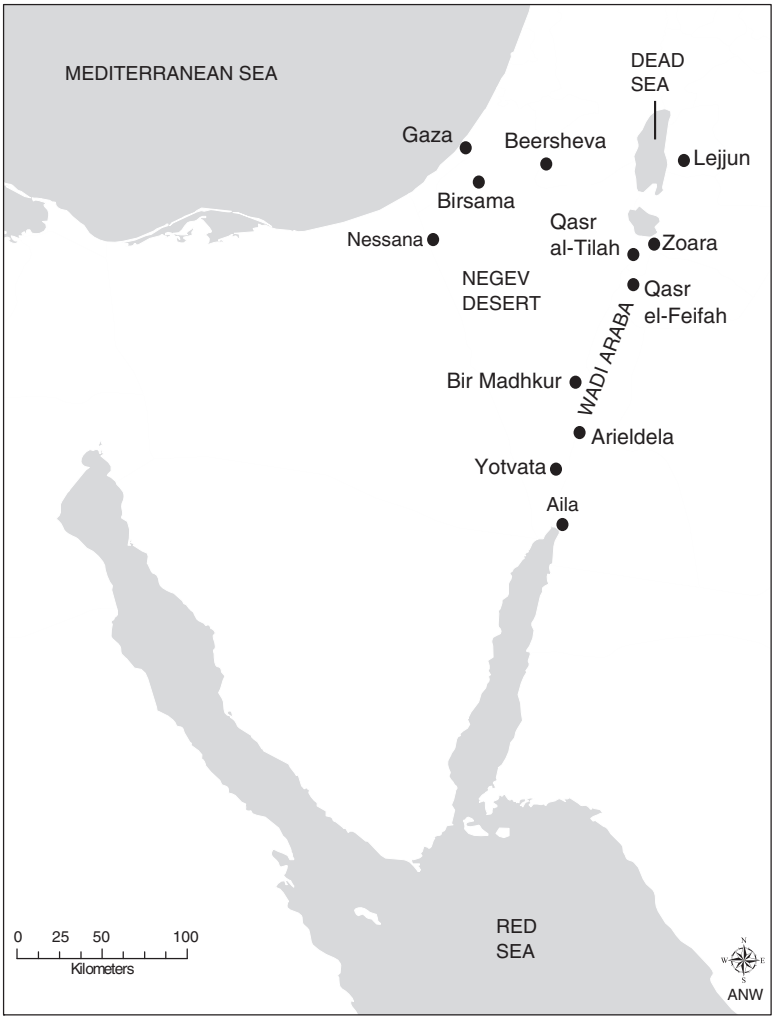
37. If Ammonius truly dates to the fourth century, then it would appear that the Pharanites helped to defend the monks at Rhaithou.

38. Caner 2010, 213 no. 11; Davis 2001, 69–70.

39. Colt 1962, 16–17. *P.Ness.* 15.3: "ἀριθμοῦ τῶν καθοσιωμ(ένων) Θεοδοσιακῶν."

40. Kraemer 1958, 5, 19–24. The soldier's archive contains documents dated between 505 and 596 C.E.

41. Dolinka 2007.



MAP 4. Fortified sites in the Sinai Peninsula and the southern Levant in the fifth century C.E. (Map: Amy Ward.)

Several forts are known from the Wadi Araba at the beginning of the fifth century, as attested in the *Notitia Dignitatum,* though few have been excavated and fewer have been published.[42] For example, Arieldela, the modern Gharandal, is currently under excavation, and it will be some time before the final report is pub-

42. *Notitia Dignitatum, Oriens* 34.

lished.[43] The small fortress at Bir Madhkur, which provided access to Petra from the Wadi Araba, may also be mentioned in the *Notitita Dignitatum,* but there has currently been little dating evidence published.[44] If the fortress at Qasr al-Tilah was known as Toloha, as many scholars think, then it was mentioned in both the *Notitia* and the Beersheva Edict, discussed below.[45] The same is true for Qasr el-Feifeh, equated with ancient Praesidium of the *Notita* and Beersheva Edict.[46] One final fort, at Zoara, just south of the Dead Sea, has not been located but is also known from the *Notitia.*[47] There is, therefore, some evidence of military garrisons in the Negev and at Wadi Araba in this period, but none from the Sinai.

SECURITY IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

The construction of fortified monasteries in the Sinai during the reign of Justinian I (527–65) parallels a major increase in fortifications in the Negev and Sinai in the sixth century. This is completely at odds with the known history of the "Arabian" frontier, where there was a major abandonment of military sites during this period.[48] The most likely reason for the increase of fortifications in this zone was the need to protect pilgrimage traffic and the monastic communities of the Sinai from the perceived threat of the nomads.

Although few of the forts of the *limes Palaestinae* have been extensively excavated and published, two of them, one at Ein Boqeq, just west of the Dead Sea, and the other at Upper Zohar, located between Ein Boqeq and Malatha, have been subject to extensive study and are now thought to date to the sixth century.[49] Whereas Gichon originally proposed an early to mid-fourth-century date for the fort at Ein Boqeq, Jodi Magness has now convincingly redated the occupation phases to the mid-sixth through the seventh century.[50] Richard Harper, who excavated Upper Zohar, insisted on a fifth-century date for both Upper Zohar and for Ein Boqeq.[51] Magness's analysis also suggests that Upper Zohar was founded in the

43. See Kennedy 2004, 209–11; Darby, Darby, and Shelton 2010.

44. Smith 2005; Perry 2007. A single coin (dating to Constantius II, 337–61) has been published, and no pottery.

45. Kennedy 2004, 214; Niemi 2007.

46. Kennedy 2004, 214–15.

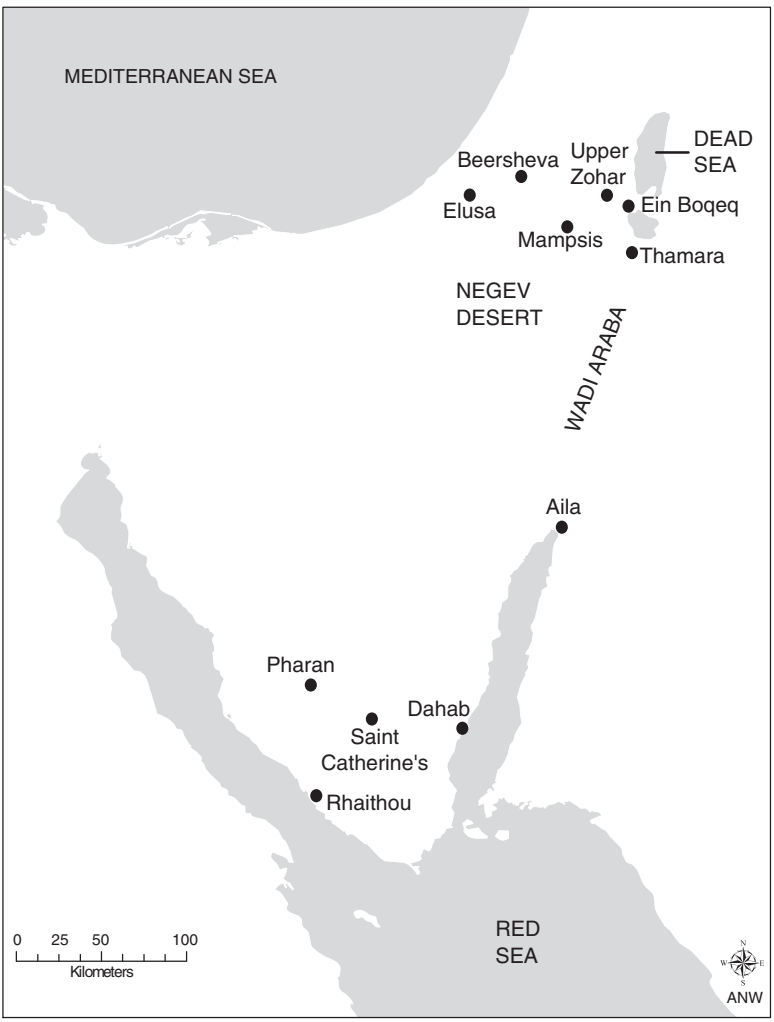
47. Ibid. 215–17.

48. The standard view is Parker 1986, 143–55; updated in Parker 2000, 379–83; 2002; 2006b, 552–69; and 2009, 149–50. Parker's analysis has been questioned by Isaac 1995, 137–45, who argues that there was little reduction of military forces until the Muslim Conquest in the Negev, and by Fisher 2004, who argues for a much earlier date for the abandonment of military sites along the "Arabian" frontier.

49. See Gichon 1993 for Ein Boqeq and Harper 1995 for Upper Zohar.

50. Magness 1999, 191–95.

51. Harper 1995, 115.



MAP 5. Fortified sites in the Sinai Peninsula and the southern Levant in the sixth century C.E. (Map: Amy Ward.)

mid-sixth century.[52] These forts seem to have been designed for police functions, such as protecting caravans or pilgrims traveling near the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.[53] Other forts are attested on the sixth-century Madaba Map at Mampsis, Arad (unidentified), and Gerara (unidentified) in the Negev, and at Praesidium,

52. Magness 1999, 195–99.
53. Harper 1995, 1.

Thamara, and Moa in the Wadi Araba. Additionally, the town of Elusa is depicted on that map with a curtain wall, suggesting that it was a fortified city.[54] Closer to the Sinai, the city wall at Aila was still in use in the late sixth century, when small mud-brick installations were built just inside it, possibly to buttress a section that was in danger of collapsing.[55] Another fort, at Dahab, along the eastern coast of the Sinai, may have been inhabited during the sixth or early seventh century.[56]

In addition to these forts, which are now known to have been entirely new constructions, the southern Sinai was fortified and garrisoned for the first time in the sixth century during the reign of Justinian. Fortresses were constructed at both Mount Sinai and Rhaithou, and a cavalry unit was placed at Pharan for patrolling the southern Sinai desert. Two accounts describe the construction of Saint Catherine's Monastery, both noting that it was intended to protect against "Saracens," though the impetus for the construction differs in the two sources.

The monastery, later known as Saint Catherine's, was constructed during the reign of Justinian, as confirmed both by Procopius and by inscriptions from inside the basilica of the monastery.[57] Procopius, Justinian's contemporary, attributed the structure to a larger frontier policy directed against the Saracens. According to Procopius's account, Justinian constructed two structures at Mount Sinai, a church dedicated to Mary Theotokos and a fortress. [58] Most important here is Procopius's claim that "at the foot of the mountain, this emperor [Justinian] also constructed a most secure fortress, and he established there an extremely noteworthy garrison of soldiers lest the barbarian Saracens be able to invade the countryside of Palestine in utter secrecy, because, as I have said before, that region is deserted."[59]

On the other hand, according to the tenth-century patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius, possibly following local Sinai legend, the construction of the monastery was initiated by the monks of Mount Sinai.[60] According to his account, the Sinai

54. Alliata 1999, 84 (nos. 98–101), 88 (no. 105), 89 (no. 109). Fabian 1995, 239, argues that Beersheva is depicted as a military camp and argues from this point that the *dux* was located there. Beersheva, however, does not appear to be fortified on the Madaba Map, negating Fabian's conclusion, and it seems doubtful that the *dux* was based at Beersheva.

55. Parker 2003, 326.

56. Meshel 2000, 30–31 (plate 1.17–19). The large four-handled storage jars are common in sixth-century sites in Third Palestine; *contra* Meshel 2000b, 34–35 (plate 3.7–8).

57. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8. Ševčenko 1966, 256, 262 nos. 4 and 5.

58. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8.5–7.

59. Ibid. 5.8.9–10: "ἐς δὲ τοῦ ὄρους τὸν πρόποδα καὶ φρούριον ἐχυρώτατον ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος ᾠκοδομήσατο, φυλακτήριόν τε στρατιωτῶν ἀξιολογώτατον κατεστήσατο, ὡς μὴ ἐνθένδε Σαρακηνοὶ βάρβαροι ἔχοιεν ἅτε τῆς χώρας ἐρήμου οὔσης, ᾗπέρ μοι εἴρηται, ἐσβάλλειν ὡς λαθραιότατα ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Παλαιστίνης χωρία."

60. Eutychius's work of history (the *Annales*) was originally composed in Arabic but has traditionally been known in the Western world only through the Latin translation, which appears in *PG* 111. The Arabic text was published in the early twentieth century with a translation into German (ed. Cheikho

monks directly appealed to the emperor to construct a monastery because they were being attacked by the "Ishmaelite Arabs," who would enter their cells and churches and consume their food and the Eucharist.[61] Justinian acceded to their wishes and sent orders that the prefect of Egypt should construct a church at Clysma, a monastery at Ras Raya (Ras Ra'iya; i.e., Rhaithou), and a fortified monastery at Mount Sinai "so that no better could be found in the entire world, and to make it so strong that the monks or the monastery would not fear or suffer from any quarter."[62] The legate intended to build the monastery directly on Mount Sinai, but because there was no water there he built it close to the Burning Bush. This location, however, was criticized by the emperor, because the structure could be attacked from the mountains with projectiles.[63] Justinian then ordered another legate to establish a different structure (the place was called Deir al-Abid, the "Monastery of the Slaves") and to staff it with two hundred men and their children, half from the imperial government and half from Egypt. These men were to be supplied with the *annona* (official rations) from Egypt. Later, when the descendants of these people converted to Islam during the reign of Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685–705), the second structure was destroyed.[64]

Scholars disagree over which of these two sources was the "more accurate." For example, George Forsyth concluded that Procopius was not well informed about Justinian's constructions in the Sinai, arguing that the surviving structures show little resemblance to a fortress and could not have housed a large number of troops.[65] Mayerson argues that Procopius's narrative about the creation of the monastery is "entirely misleading," arguing that the nomads of the Sinai presented no security threat to Palestine and that the monastery lacked places to garrison

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1906–9; ed. Breydy 1985) and now into English (Caner 2010, 277–82. I have quoted from the Latin text, since it remains the most accessible. On the sources of Eutychius, see Solzbacher 1989, 254–55; Caner 2010, 277–79.

61. Eutychius, *Annales* 160–61 (*PG* 111, 1071): "Cum autem audiissent monachi montis Sinae de bona imperatoris Justiniani intentione, quamque condendis ecclesiis et monasteriis struendis delectaretur, ad ipsum profecti, conquesti sunt Arabes Ismaelitas ipsis damnum inferre, penum ipsorum devorando locaque diruendo, cellasque ingredientes quidquid ibi esset diripere, et in ecclesias irruentes Eucharistiam deglutire. Rogante ergo imperatore, quid vellent, 'Rogamus,' inquiunt, 'o rex, ut nobis monasterium exstruas in quo muniamur.'"

62. Ibid. 161–63 (*PG* 111, 1071, trans. Mayerson 1978, 36–37): "Misit ergo imperator una cum ipsis legatum opibus multis instructum, scriptis etiam ad Aegypti praefectum litteris, ut eidem quantum vellet nummorum traderet, ac viros etiam suppeditaret, ipsisque annonam ex Aegypto deferendam curaret; legato in mandatis dato ut ecclesiam in Kalzem exstrueret, mecum monasterium Rayae, utque in monte Sina monasterium aedificaret, idemque permuniret, adeo ut non alibi in tot mundo magis munitum reperiretur adeoque firmatum daret, ut non aliubi locus aliquis esset unde vel monasterio vel monachis damnum inferendum metueretur."

63. Ibid. 164 (*PG* 111, 1071–72).

64. Ibid. 165–68 (*PG* 111, 1072).

65. Forsyth 1968, 5–6.

troops. Furthermore, he believed that Mount Sinai was too remote from Palestine to be a strategic location for its defense.[66] Peter Grossman also believes that Procopius was completely mistaken about the nature of the monastery. He points out that the towers were too small and the location itself was unsuitable for defensive purposes, and that it was possible that Procopius's source mistook the soldiers' building of the structure as evidence that it would be a fortress housing military personnel.[67]

Despite these arguments, Procopius's account can be defended on several points. First, Procopius was aware of the legends concerning Mount Sinai, as he mentions the thunder and lightning associated with the mountain and the transfer of the Law to Moses. Although Mayerson doubted the role of Mount Sinai in defending the province of Palestine, this does not mean that Procopius did not believe what he wrote. After all, when Theophanes described how the first Islamic invaders approached Gaza, which he called the "mouth of the desert," he specifically mentioned that the route was in the region "near Mount Sinai."[68] Additionally, Procopius never visited the Sinai and worked within the heart of imperial power; it makes sense that he would understand defense in terms of broader strategic importance. As Caner points out, Procopius makes a similar statement about the construction of fortified monasteries in North Africa, which he claims were to defend the region "from the Blacks."[69]

Finally, several scholars now believe that Saint Catherine's Monastery was originally designed to garrison soldiers and withstand a siege. The current walls appear to be only the "outer shells" of the ancient walls and not indicative of the original fortifications.[70] The gates were even equipped with vats that could pour burning oil onto attackers or water onto a fire intended to burn the door down.[71] Although the Piacenza pilgrim does not mention soldiers in conjunction with Mount Sinai, he does say that the monastery possessed very strong walls.[72] During the reign of Justin II (565–78), Gregory, the future patriarch of Antioch, "endured" a nomadic siege at Mount Sinai.[73] Presumably the monks took refuge in the monastery.[74]

66. Mayerson 1978, 33–37.

67. Grossman 2001a, 196–97.

68. Theophanes A.M. 6123 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 466): "θλιβέντες οὖν οἱ Ἄραβες ἀπῆλθον πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοφύλους, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡδήγησαν αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν Ἰάζης στομίου οὔσης τῆς ἐρήμου κατὰ τὸ Σιναῖον ὄρος πλουσίας σφόδρα."

69. Compare Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 6.2, "πρὸς Μαυρουσίων"; Caner 2010, 274–75.

70. Grossman 1988, 544–45; Dahari 2000, 57.

71. Grossman 2001a, 184–85.

72. PP 37: "quod monasterium circumdatum muris munitis."

73. Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.6 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier 1898, 202; trans. Whitby 2000, 262).

74. Ibid. 262 no. 20.

Therefore it seems possible that Procopius's account was more accurate than some scholars have assumed.

Even though both Procopius and Eutychius describe troops stationed at Mount Sinai in the reign of Justinian, none are attested at later dates. Perhaps the unit of cavalry troops at Pharan mentioned by the Piacenza pilgrim was originally based at Mount Sinai but later transferred to Pharan.[75] That the troops at Pharan were provisioned from Egypt echoes what Eutychius said about the troops at Mount Sinai.[76]

Just as Procopius's account has been called into question, determining the accuracy of Eutychius's tenth-century description is also difficult. Mayerson argues that Eutychius was more reliable than Procopius, whereas Rudolf Solzbacher believes the opposite.[77] Since there was a representative of the Sinai based in Constantinople by 536, the idea that the monks communicated directly with the imperial government is not far-fetched.[78] Caner has recently argued that Eutychius reports what Sinai monks believed in the tenth century.[79] Although Eutcychius probably reports Sinai tradition accurately, that is not proof that the tradition is correct. No source other than Eutychius mentions the slaves who were stationed at Mount Sinai to protect and serve the monks; however, units of servile status that defended and served at hostels are known from the period.[80] (See below.) To date, no remains of the Deir al-Abid have been discovered. Regardless of who initiated the construction, both the accounts further reinforce the perception that the Saracens were a threat to the settled communities of Palestine and to the monks at Mount Sinai in particular.

Eutychius also mentioned that Justinian ordered the construction of a monastery at Rhaithou, most likely to be identified with the fort at Ras Raya.[81] The only other source for this construction is also late—John of Nikiu (turn of the eighth century). John explained how "impious barbarians, who eat human flesh and drink blood, arose in the quarter of Arabia, and approaching the border of the Red Sea they seized the monks of Araite" during the reign of Anastasius I (491–518). These barbarians, probably Saracens (from Arabia) but possibly Blemmyes, killed

75. Solzbacher 1989, 256.

76. Ammonius notes that some of the monks in the Sinai also received grain from Egypt: (CPA) fols. 17–18; (Greek) 13, "φέροντες γὰρ οἱ ἄνδρες τοῦ τόπου σῖτον ἀπὸ Αἰγύπτου ἐχορήγουν αὐτοῖς ὀλίγους ἄρτους."

77. Solzbacher 1989, 256–58.

78. *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae,* col. 217; *ACO* 3.1.1.146; Theophanes A.M. 6064 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 361–62); Solzbacher 1989, 225–26; Caner 2010, 32 n. 129.

79. Ibid. 277–79.

80. Di Segni 2004, 148.

81. Eutychius, *Annales* 161–63 (*PG* 111, 1071; see "Other Monasteries in the Sinai" above in chapter 2, pp. 52–55; Dahari 2000, 141, 146; Kawatoko and Shindo 2009, 9, 23.

or enslaved the monks. Because of this attack, the emperor Anastasius ordered "strong forts constructed as a defense to the dwellings of the monks."[82] "Araite" is commonly thought to be a corruption of Rhaithou.[83] Because the remains of a square fortified enclosure with rectangular towers at Ras Raya closely resemble the plan of Saint Catherine's, John of Nikiu may have been mistaken about the date of the structure. It seems likely that the fortress and monastery were the same building, built by Justinian. Caner notes that John of Nikiu may be reporting an actual attack later embellished by Ammonius.[84]

When the Piacenza pilgrim visited the Sinai in sixth century, he noticed the security enhancements there. As mentioned above, he does not mention seeing soldiers at Saint Catherine's, but he noted that the building was strongly fortified.[85] After leaving Mount Sinai, he traveled to Pharan, which he said was also surrounded by walls.[86] Most important, he remarked that a unit of cavalry was based at Pharan. The manuscripts place the number of the soldiers at either eighty or eight hundred, but eighty is a more reasonable size, in line with the other small garrisons in the region.[87] The Piacenza pilgrim specifically states that the soldiers were intended to guard the monasteries and ascetics in the region.[88] Although he does not mention the protection of pilgrims, this assignment must have been included in these soldiers' mandate.

A recent interpretation of the Beersheva Edict adds another layer to our understanding of the relationship between the state and the defense of pilgrimage and commercial traffic in Third Palestine.[89] It sets the amount of taxation for various communities in Third Palestine (and a few in First Palestine) to pay for the establishment and upkeep of paramilitary units (*douloi*). These units should be associated with the *bugarii* mentioned in the Theodosian Code, whose social status equaled the *servi publici.* Troops stationed as police were considered low-ranking as early as the second and third centuries (known then as *milites stationarii*); thus the *douloi* should be seen as a continuation of this policy.[90] The *douloi* served at state-run hostels (*xenodochia*) under the command of a *dux.* Leah di Segni suggests that the duties of the *limitanei* (units deployed to garrison the frontier) were reduced in 532 after the signing of the Eternal Peace with the Persians, and the duty

82. John of Nikiu, 89.33–34.

83. Dahari 2000, 141.

84. Caner 2010, 146–47.

85. PP 37: "monasterium circumdatum muris munitis."

86. Ibid. 40: "In ipso loco ciuitas munita muris de lateribus."

87. Troop numbers are hard to estimate, but it is possible that the garrison at Nessana numbered two hundred soldiers at most (*P.Ness.* 37; Kraemer 1958, 21–22).

88. PP 40.

89. See the bibliography collected by Di Segni 2004, 148 nos. 63 and 64.

90. Fuhrmann 2012, 250–51.

of escorting of travelers was switched from the *limitanei* to the *douloi.* This reassignment meant that the government no longer subsidized the safety of travelers, whose costs were now borne by the local communities; and it could also explain why soldiers are never mentioned as escorting the Piacenza pilgrim, unlike Egeria.[91]

Perhaps the soldiers in some forts garrisoned in the sixth century are to be identified with these paramilitary troops, such as the supposed garrison at Saint Catherine's Monastery. Eutychius believed that the soldiers placed at Mount Sinai were slaves. These "slaves" converted to Islam in the seventh century, but the region still maintained the name Deir el-Abid (Monastery of the Slaves).[92] It seems likely that his use of the Arabic word *'abd* (slave) was employed as a translation for the Greek *doulos,* which the *Patrologia Latina* translates here as *servus.*[93]

It therefore appears that fortifications in the Negev and Sinai were built and garrisoned in increasing numbers in the middle of the sixth century, and the Beersheva Edict demonstrates how the communities in the region were responsible for the upkeep of these new units. The purpose of the forts seems directly related to the pilgrim traffic and the monastic communities in the region that many sources, as for example the Sinai Martyr Narratives, describe as facing a threat from nomadic groups in the region.

CONCLUSION

The Sinai Martyr Narratives created an image of the Saracens as presenting a threat to the Christians in the region. This image was particularly compelling because the Saracens had already been marginalized in accordance with their nomadic, anti-Greco-Roman-Christian culture. The construction of the monastery later known as Saint Catherine's at Mount Sinai during Justinian's reign proves that the imperial authorities believed that the Saracens presented a threat to the monastic communities. Additionally, a number of military installations were founded along pilgrimage routes in Third Palestine in the sixth century, in stark contrast to the decline of the imperial border along the so-called *limes Arabicus.* These defensive structures were occupied in the region to protect not only the monks but also the pilgrims who visited them. Such constructions were a direct result of the perception that the Saracens constituted a threat to imperial stability and Christian communities in the region, fears that could have been brought to the attention of the

91. Di Segni 2004.

92. Eutychius, *Annales* 167–68 (*PG* 111, 1072); also see Mayerson 1978, 36–37; and Dahari 2000, 56–57.

93. E.g., *PG* 111, 1072C, "qui locus ad hoc usque tempus Dir al Abid, seu, monasterium servorum appellatur."

imperial authorities through an embassy or through the *apocrisarius* based in Constantinople as early as 536.

When the Piacenza pilgrim visited the Sinai after the improvements in security, he described large numbers of Saracens who lived in poverty and begged his party for food.[94] Instead of appearing as bloodthirsty marauders, these nomads seemed impotent and worthy of pity. Is it possible that the improved security in the area prevented them from raiding the monks and pilgrims? The Piacenza pilgrim states that the Saracens had been celebrating a festival; once the festival was over, the pilgrims were advised not to take the desert route back through the Negev.[95] Instead, some of his party went to Aila, and others to Clysma.[96] These routes were now defended and presumably were safe, whereas the open desert, away from the garrisons, was not. In effect, the increase in imperial security had pushed the nomads out of the most water-rich regions of the Sinai and into the arid el-Tih Plateau. The monks, by commemorating the Sinai Martyrs in literature and by helping to create a pejorative image of the Saracens, had won control of the Sinai, at least until a new imperial power—the Muslims—arrived on the scene.

94. PP 36.

95. Ibid. 39: "et quia iam se complebant dies festi Saracenorum, praeco exiuit: ut, quia non subsisteret per heremo reuerti, per quo ingress sumus, alii per Aegyptum, alii per Arabiam reuerterentur in sanctam ciuitatem."

96. Ibid. 40.

6

The Murderous Sword of the Saracen

In early 633, the monk Sophronius traveled to Jerusalem, where he was selected as patriarch of the city.[1] He was actively involved in the theological disputes of his age, and one of his letters, probably composed in the spring or summer of 634, indicates trouble with a group he calls "Saracens." Rhetorically asking the emperor Heraclius to smite the pride "of all the barbarians, and especially of the Saracens, who on account of our sins have now risen up against us unexpectedly and ravage all with cruel and feral design, with impious and godless audacity," Sophronius describes the Saracens in ways that are remarkably similar to the Sinai Martyr Narratives; however, these Saracens were not the local nomadic inhabitants of Palestine, but instead one of the first advances of the Muslim invasion.[2]

It is unclear whether Sophronius understood or could even differentiate these new "Saracens" from those whom Greco-Roman writers had been targeting since the fourth century.[3] The letter quoted above does not provide enough specific details to determine whether Sophronius was more knowledgeable about the situ-

1. For a summary of Sophronius's life, see Hoyland 1997, 67–69. For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 120–27.

2. Sophronius, *Epistola Synodica, PG* 87.3, 3197D (trans. Hoyland 1997, 69): "Βαρβάρων μὲν ἀπάντων, μάλιστα δὲ Σαρακηνῶν, ὀφρὺν καταθράττοντα, τῶν δι᾽ ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀδοκήτως νῦν ἡμῖν ἐπαναστάντων, καὶ πάντα λῃζομένων ὠμῷ καὶ θηριώδει φρονήματι, καὶ δυσσεβεῖ καὶ ἀθέῳ τολμήματι." Sahas 1999, 80–84, interprets the Saracens as locals who were just conducting a traditional raid. The evidence is ambiguous.

3. Donner 2010, 110, suggests that Sophronius refers to nomadic groups who were taking advantage of the early expansion of the Believers' movement (which would later be altered to create the new religion of Islam) to cause trouble.

ation. In the eyes of the locals in early 634, incursions by the nomads of the Arabian Peninsula may have been interpreted simply as yet more intransigence by the local troublemakers.[4] Regardless, the lasting implications of the association between the Saracens and the Muslims would stretch far beyond Palestine in the seventh century. As Christians came to identify the Muslims as Saracens, the negative image that was constructed before Islam was directly transferred to the Muslims. For hundreds of years, the actual beliefs of Muslims played little role in how they came to be portrayed by Christians, and the implications of this pejorative representation profoundly affected Christian-Muslim relationships.

The momentum of the Islamic Conquest of the Roman Near East had been building before 634, even if the inhabitants of the region did not recognize that fact. In 630, the same year that Heraclius was celebrating his supreme triumph over the Persians by returning the True Cross to Jerusalem, three communities in southern Jordan—Aila, Jarba, and Augustopolis (Udhruh)—surrendered to Muhammad himself.[5] These capitulations were made in response to the conquest of the important oasis at Tabuk, a town in the northwest Arabian Peninsula that was vitally important for commerce in the region. Yuhanna bin Ru'ba (John son of Ru'ba) represented the city of Aila in the surrender to Muhammad.[6] John is often thought to have been the bishop of the city, as one source mentions that he wore a golden cross.[7] The incident implies a deep weakness in the imperial control of the region, as the agreement demonstrates that Aila was seeking the protection of its commerce (on both land and sea), a duty that should have been handled by the imperial administration. It suggests that local communities began to see themselves not as part of a larger idea of *Romanitas,* but divided into smaller foci of identity, such as sectarian concerns.[8] Alternatively, Yuhanna (and the citizens of Aila) may have viewed Muhammad as just another Arabian phylarch like Abu Karib, who was an important figure around Petra in the mid-sixth century.[9] In this case, the cities that surrendered likely did not understand the implications of Muhammad and his message.

4. The narrative concerning the Muslim Conquest in the southern Levant is based on Mayerson 1964; Donner 1981, esp. 91–155; Kaegi 1992a, esp. 66–111; Schick 1995, 49–84; Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 240–43; Howard-Johnston 2010. Whittow 1996, 82–86, argues that constructing a narrative out of the surviving sources is virtually impossible.

5. Al-Baladhuri 12 (trans. Hitti 1916, 92–94). Recent evidence suggests that the Persian Conquest of the Near East did not result in destabilization; rather, the Persians left much of the Roman administration and local elites in place after the initial violence of conquest (Bowersock 2012, 46–49; Foss 2003).

6. Ibn Ishaq 902 (trans. Guillaume 1955, 607); al-Baladhuri 12 (trans. Hitti 1916, 92–94). Schick (1992, 111–12) cites evidence that he is also called *malik* (king) in some sources.

7. Mayerson 1964, 175–76; Schick 1994, 151–52, suggests that this may be a literary topos intended to show Christian recognition of Muhammad.

8. Lamoreaux 1996, 6–7; Foss 2003, 170.

9. *P.Petra* 39; Caldwell 2001, 111–49; Arjava et al. 2011, 41–120; also see chapter 3.

In Sophronius's first year as patriarch, Muslim troops invaded the province of Palaestina Prima and completely devastated Roman defenses there.[10] Theophanes describes how the Roman-allied Christian Arabs who helped guard the desert around Gaza were denied their subsidy for cooperation. These same soldiers then led the Muslim armies to Gaza, passing near Mount Sinai.[11] After Muslim victories near Gaza (at Dathin?) in 633 or 634 and then at Ajnadin farther north in 634, Roman control of the southern Levant was effectively at an end.[12]

As Roman losses increased, Sophronius and his contemporaries began to employ tougher rhetoric. For example, the *Doctrina Iacobi,* which should be dated to the summer of 634 or shortly thereafter, indicates that rumors circulated about a prophet among the "Saracens." This anti-Jewish tract was written in response to the fear that Jews who had earlier been coerced into baptism would revert to their old religion and convince other Christians to become apostates. The account mentions joy among the Jews that a Roman official, a *candidatus,* had been killed. It continues:[13]

> And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was claiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in the scrip-

10. Howard-Johnston 2010, 465–66.

11. Theophanes A.M. 6124 (ed. de Boor 1883, 335–36): "ἦσαν δέ τινες τῶν πλησίον Ἀράβων λαμβάνοντες παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ῥόγας μικρὰς πρὸς τὸ φυλάξαι τὰ στόμια τῆς ἐρήμου. ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ καιρῷ ἦλθέ τις εὐνοῦχος δίδων τὰς ῥόγας τῶν στρατιωτῶν, καὶ ἐλθόντες οἱ Ἄραβες κατὰ τὸ ἔθος λαβεῖν τὴν ῥόγαν αὐτῶν, ὁ εὐνοῦχος ἀπεδίωξεν αὐτούς, λέγων ὅτι 'ὁ δεσπότης μόγις τοῖς στρατιώταις δίδωσι ῥόγας, πόσῳ μᾶλλον τοῖς κυσὶ τούτοις;' θλιβέντες οὖν οἱ Ἄραβες ἀπῆλθον πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοφύλους, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡδήγησαν αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν Ἰάζης στομίου οὔσης τῆς ἐρήμου κατὰ τὸ Σιναῖον ὄρος πλουσίας σφόδρα."

12. Constructing the earliest encounters between the Roman and Arab armies remains rather difficult. The sources for the battles around Gaza describe an encounter between a *patrikios,* the son of YRDN, and Sergius *patrikios* of Caesarea. (See *Chronicle of 640*, A.G. 945 [trans. Palmer 1993, 19]; Theophanes A.M. 6125 [ed. de Boor 1883, 336], and *Chronicle of A.D. 1234*, 49–51 [trans. Palmer 1993, 146–47].) Palmer (ibid.) suggests that there may have been several separate battles around Gaza and near Caesarea that have become confused in the sources.

13. *Doctrina Iacobi* 5.16 (ed. Dagron and Déroche 2010, 209; trans. Hoyland 1997, 57): "Καὶ λέγουσιν ὅτι ὁ προφήτης ἀνεφάνη ἐρχόμενος μετὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν καὶ κηρύσσει τὴν ἔλευσιν τοῦ ἐρχομένου Ἠλειμμένου καὶ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἀπελθόντος μου εἰς Συκάμινα ἀπεθέμην τινὶ γέροντι γραφίκῳ πάνυ καὶ λέγω αὐτῷ· 'Τί μοι λέγεις, . . . , περὶ τοῦ προφήτου τοῦ ἀναφανέντος μετὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν;' Καὶ λέγει μοι ἀναστενάξας μέγα ὅτι· 'Πλάνος ἐστίν. Μὴ γὰρ οἱ προφῆται μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἅρματος ἔρχονται; Ὄντως ἀκαταστασίας ἔργα εἰσὶ τὰ σήμερον κινούμενα, καὶ φοβοῦμαι μήπως ὁ πρῶτος ἐλθὼν Χριστός, ὃν προσκυνοῦσιν οἱ Χριστιανοί, αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ πεμφθεὶς καὶ ἀντὶ αὐτοῦ δεξόμεθα τὸν Ἑρμόλαον.' . . . Καὶ περιεργασάμενος ἐγὼ Ἀβραάμης ἤκουσα ἀπὸ τῶν συντυχόντων αὐτῷ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἀληθινὸν εὑρίσκεις ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ προφήτῃ, εἰ μή αἱματεκχυσίας ἀνθρώπων. λέγει γάρ ὅτι καὶ τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ παραδείσου ἔχει, ὅ ἐστιν ἄπιστον." For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 117–19.

> tures, and I said to him: "What can you tell me . . . about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?" He replied, groaning deeply: "He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive the Anti-Christ." . . . So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.

Here again, Christians identified the Muslims as "Saracens," but the characterization of them as "ungodly" is taken a step further. Instead of merely rejecting Christianity, now they are associated with the Antichrist; Muhammad is described as a false prophet, and the Muslim faith appears antithetical to Christianity. Furthermore, the growth of the Muslim faith is connected to the violent use of weapons.[14]

The later works of the patriarch Sophronius reinforce the related image of the Muslims as Saracens wielding their brandished swords. In his *Christmas Sermon* of 634, Sophronius describes how Christians could not even travel to Bethlehem to celebrate the Nativity, for fear of that barbarous Saracen sword.[15] In opposition to the doctrine of Monoenergism (a compromise formulation of the nature of Christ considered heretical by many orthodox Christians of the day), Sophronius stated that only the orthodox faith could "blunt the Ishmaelite sword and shatter the Hagarene bow."[16] In other words, Sophronius was claiming that if Christians accepted the heresy of Monoenergism, then they would be crushed by the newly emergent Muslim invaders and only a return to orthodoxy could prevent Christian loss of the Holy Land.[17] The Muslims were brought up as an extreme form of evil only in order to ward off heretic Christian views. The rhetoric had virtually nothing to do with the Muslims themselves.

In 636/37 Sophronius stepped the rhetoric up even further, asking,[18]

> Why do the barbarian raids abound? Why are the troops of the Saracens attacking us? Why has there been so much destruction and plunder? Why are there incessant outpourings of human blood? Why are there birds of the sky devouring human bodies? Why have churches been pulled down? Why is the cross mocked? Why is Christ, who is the dispenser of all good things and the provider of this joyousness of ours, blasphemed by pagan mouths so that he justly cries out to us: "Because of you my name is blasphemed among the pagans." . . . That is why the vengeful and God-hating

14. Though early Muslims seem to have been proud of their military campaigns, it was their memory of the refusal to engage in Roman gift-giving agreements that allowed them to demonstrate a break with pre-Islamic Arab groups who had accepted Roman control (Sizgorich 2007).

15. Sophronius, *Christmas Sermon* 506–14.

16. Ibid. 508: 22–31.

17. Booth 2013, 20–22.

18. Sophronius, *Holy Baptism* 166–67 (trans. Hoyland 1997, 72–73).

> Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries. . . . Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemy of Christ and the church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. These God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrainedly imitating their leader, who is the devil.

Here the Muslims are described in ways reminiscent of the *Doctrina Iacobi* and the Sinai Martyr Narratives. Recall the use of rhetorical questions voiced by Theodulus when he described the Saracens who were planning to sacrifice him to the Morning Star, or Jerome's description of the cult of Saracens that was devoted to the goddess Venus, whom he also identified as the Morning Star.[19]

The evolution in Sophronius's language must be related to the catastrophic (at least in his eyes) events that had taken place between 634 and 636/37. At the battle of the Yarmuk River, in 636, Heraclius's army was so badly routed that the Eastern Roman Empire could no longer effectively block Muslim movements; Damascus's bishop quickly surrendered the city, located near the Yarmuk, to the Muslims.[20] Heraclius was concerned with regrouping and stabilizing the frontier between the Near East and Anatolia, leaving the defense of most of the Near East to individual communities.[21] Though Jerusalem had not fallen when Sophronius wrote *Holy Baptism,* its capture must have seemed imminent.[22] Heraclius and the imperial army did almost nothing to defend the city, and the people of Jerusalem wanted to surrender quickly in order to make favorable terms and to spare the population another round of such massacres as had occurred when the Persians took the city, now partially confirmed by seven mass graves found around Jerusalem.[23]

With Muslims in control of the countryside, Sophronius was left with little choice but to surrender the city, which he did in February 638.[24] Sophronius agreed to surrender, but only to Caliph Umar himself. Tradition holds that Umar entered the city as a pilgrim, not as a conqueror (despite the large army behind

19. See "The Religion of the Saracens" above in chapter 1, esp. pp. 35–37.

20. Sahas 2006, 35–36. The date of the battle of the Yarmuk River is confirmed by a contemporary fragmentary Syriac source (Palmer 1993, 1–4).

21. Kaegi 1992b.

22. See Hoyland 1997, 64 n. 31, on the date of the fall of Jerusalem.

23. Sahas 1999, 84–97; Avni 2010, esp. 36–40; Magness 2011. Levy-Rubin 2011, 8–57, demonstrates that cities often found negotiations with enemies preferable to surrender by conquest. Both Howard-Johnston (2010, 165–67) and Bowersock (2012, 41–46) argue that the damage to the city was much less than is reported in the literary sources. This minimization of damage, however, does not negate the evidence from the mass graves, which indicate that a mass slaughter did take place.

24. On the surrender of Jerusalem, see Hill 1971, 79; Busse 1984, 1986; Sahas 2006; Levy-Rubin 2011, 52–53. For a more hostile discussion of Umar in Jerusalem, see Constantelos 1972, 348–49. Hill (1971, 59–60) has collected the texts describing the treaty of surrender.

him), and that Sophronius and Umar treated each other with respect and courtesy.[25] Umar also reportedly refused to pray at Christian churches in the city for fear lest he set a precedent that would allow later Muslims to annex the churches for their own use. Whether or not such stories are true, later Christians clearly had an incentive to repeat them as a means of protecting their holy sites.[26]

Having witnessed both Heraclius's stunning victories over the Persians and the rapid collapse of Roman power against the Muslim armies, Christians slowly began to understand the impact of this new world on them. Sophronius, conjuring Saint Augustine, increasingly preached that Christians should turn away from the temporal world and toward their own salvation, abandoning the dream of a triumphant Christian Empire.[27] After Sophronius, Christian rhetoric stressed the belief that it was the sins of the Christians themselves (especially the sexual sins described in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius) that brought the wrath of the Muslims as Saracens down upon them—or perhaps it was merely the sins of the rulers: Heraclius's incestuous marriage to his niece, or his support for a doctrine (Monoenergism) thought to be heretical, or Constans II's persecution of recalcitrant clergy.[28] In drawing upon the Old Testament model of the destruction of the divided Hebrew kingdoms by the wicked Assyrians and Babylonians, Christians could explain how their empire was defeated despite their belief in Christianity as the one True Faith.

Several of the earliest reactions to the Muslim invasions can be seen in apocalyptic literature, and it is easy to understand why.[29] It surely must have felt like the end of days to Christians as they watched the defeat of the imperial forces and the quick surrender of most of the cities of the Near East. Any ambiguity surrounding the identity of the Muslims as Saracens disappeared, and all the previous negative characteristics associated with the Saracens began to be applied to all Muslims. The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Ephraem demonstrates what vitriolic hatred the Christians directed toward the Muslim invaders in this genre. The Muslims are described as the offspring of Hagar, handmaiden of Sarah, whose coming would be a forerunner of the Son of Perdition.[30] They are described as thieves who enslave women, children, and men, and who love death and destruction. The phrases used remind one of the Sinai Martyr Narratives, such as how "they take the wife away

25. Eutychius, *Annales* (*PG* 111, 1099–1100).

26. Sahas 2006, 40.

27. Olster 1994, 99–111.

28. Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse* 11.5–8 (trans. Palmer 1993, 231–32); Jeffreys 1986, 313–15; Lamoreaux 1996, 16–18; Hoyland 1997, 523–31; Tolan 2002, 40–44. For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 245–52.

29. See Hoyland 1997, 257–335.

30. Pseudo-Ephraem, *Sermon on the End of Times* 61–62 (ed. Suermann 1985, 15–17). For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 1163–71.

from her husband and slay him like a sheep. . . . They throw the babe from her mother and drive her into slavery; the child calls out from the ground and the mother hears. . . . And so [the child] is trampled under the feet of the horses, camels, and infantry."[31]

Almost universally, Christian writers, including those in Western Europe, in the centuries after the Muslim Conquests continued to refer to the Muslims with derogatory terms.[32] The western Frankish chronicle attributed to Fredegar, written in the 650s, generally uses the word "Saracens" for the Muslims, but also calls them *Agarini*—that is, Hagarenes.[33] Later Latin writers continued to employ "Saracen," including Adomnan, who narrated Arculf's pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the late seventh century, and the eighth-century pilgrimage account of Willibald, where they are called "pagan Saracens."[34] Pope Martin I denied that he had had any diplomatic, spiritual, or economic contact with the "Saracens."[35] Presumably, association with Muslims was the worst accusation that could be used to discredit Martin, and such words as "Saracen-minded" (*saracēnophrōn*) or "Saracen-lover" (*saracēnophilos*) became some of the greatest insults in seventh- and eighth-century Byzantium. Iconoclasts used such terms to defame John of Damascus, the most prominent defender of the use of icons in Christian worship.[36] That Christians chose to refer to the Muslims using words like "Saracens," which already had a derogatory connotation, provides an early indication of Christian views of Muslims and their new religion. In the words of Daniel Sahas, "more often than not the name Saracens played the role of a signal and catch word . . . which in a particular context contained in hiding such meanings as easterners, Bedouins, tent dwellers, invaders, pillagers, uncovenanted people, Arab-related, robbers, barbarians, and the like."[37]

Christian writers also rhetorically attacked the prophet Muhammad. Theophanes called him the "leader and pseudoprophet of the Saracens."[38] Similar denunciations toward Muhammad and his revelation can be found in later works

31. Pseudo-Ephraem, *Sermon on the End of Times* 62 (ed. Suermann 1985, 17–19; trans. Hoyland 1997, 262). See the section "Themes of Violence" above in chapter 4, pp. 102–5.

32. See Rodinson 1987, 3–82; Tolan 2002, 2008; Quinn 2008. See Berkey 2003, 73–76, for a more favorable view of the Christian use of these terms for Muslim believers.

33. Fredegar, *Chronicle* 153 (ed. Wallace-Hadrill 1960, 54): "Agarrini, qui et Saracini." For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 137–38. On these terms, see the section "Nomads in the Late-Antique Near East according to the Literary Sources" above in chapter 1.

34. Adomnan, *De Locis Sanctis* 2.28, 220. *Vita Willibaldi* 95, 162: "ad paganis Sarracinis." For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 154–56.

35. Martin, *Epistola* 14, *PL* 87.199A (= *PL* 129.587C).

36. For example, Theophanes A.M. 6218 (ed. de Boor 1883, 405); *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (ed. Mansi 1758–98) 13.356; Sahas 1972, 9–13; Hoyland 1997, 75–76.

37. Sahas 1998, 408.

38. Theophanes A.M. 6122 (ed. de Boor 1883, 333): "Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει ἀπεβίω Μουάμεδ, ὁ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀρχηγὸς καὶ ψευδοπροφήτης."

from medieval Western Europe, where Muhammad is described as a liar, a thief, a heretic, a magician, a sexual pervert, and so on.[39] Even when medieval Christians possessed accurate knowledge about the beliefs of Muslims, Christian authors could not accept the basic tenets of Islamic revelation and the relegation of Jesus to the status of a merely mortal prophet, often leading to caricature and the promotion of degrading images of Muhammad, Muslims, and Islam for polemical purposes.[40]

John of Damascus's account of the Muslims serves as a fitting end for this brief examination of early Christian conceptions of Islam. John is often considered the last of the Church Fathers, particularly for his impassioned defense of the use of icons, and his passing represents the seal of early Christian theology. John's grandfather, Mansur, served as the governor of Damascus after the Muslim Conquest, perhaps continuing a prominent role he had held previously. Mansur later obtained the highest position in the administration of the caliphate, and his son, Ibn Mansur, the father of John, held offices in charge of financial matters. Both were Christians. Around the year 700, John became secretary (then the highest bureaucratic office) to Caliph Abd al-Malik (684–705) before deciding to become a monk.[41] The careers of John's relatives demonstrate the open toleration of Christians within the early Umayyad Caliphate and indicate that John witnessed Muslim religious practice at the highest levels of the Umayyad court.[42]

Despite his important role in the Islamic government, it is pointless to look in John's account for sympathy for or appreciation of Islam. Rather, John repeats Christian polemic against Islam based on the pre-Islamic Saracen image. John describes the Muslim faith in his book on Christian heresies: he begins by indicating the names used for Muslims in his day—Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, Saracens. Following early Christian precedent, he repeats the false etymology of "Saracen" from "Sarah."[43] John describes the Muslims as the forerunners of the Antichrist. They worshipped idols of the Morning Star and Aphrodite, whom they called Chabar.[44] He says that Muhammad was a false prophet who invented a new heresy,

39. Tolan 2008, 1–65.

40. Daniel 1960.

41. On the life of John of Damascus, see Sahas 1972, esp. 2–48. For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 295–301.

42. Meyendorff 1964, 116, argues that the traditions about John of Damascus are late and may not accurately indicate that he was extensively exposed to Islamic practice.

43. See "Nomads in the Late-Antique Near East according to the Literary Sources" above in chapter 1, esp. pp. 27–28. John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus* 100.1–6: "Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἡ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κρατοῦσα λαοπλανὴς θρησκεία τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν πρόδρομος οὖσα τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου. Κατάγεται δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰσμαὴλ τοῦ ἐκ τῆς Ἄγαρ τεχθέντος τῷ Ἀβραάμ· διόπερ Ἀγαρηνοὶ καὶ Ἰσμαηλῖται προσαγορεύονται. Σαρακηνοὺς δὲ αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν ὡς ἐκ τῆς Σάρρας κενοὺς διὰ τὸ εἰρῆσθαι ὑπὸ τῆς Ἄγαρ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ· Σάρρα κενήν με ἀπέλυσεν."

44. Ibid. 100.7–9: "Οὗτοι μὲν οὖν εἰδωλολατρήσαντες καὶ προσκυνήσαντες τῷ ἑωσφόρῳ ἄστρῳ καὶ τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ, ἣν δὴ καὶ Χαβὰρ τῇ ἑαυτῶν ἐπωνόμασαν γλώσσῃ, ὅπερ σημαίνει μεγάλη."

pretending he learned it from an Arian monk, probably referencing the legend of the monk Bahira.[45] At points, John accurately presents information from the Koran, such as its strict monotheism, Islam's assertion that the Koran was received from heaven, the Islamic understanding of Jesus as a prophetic forerunner of Muhammad, and the significance of the Ka'aba.[46] Yet he also turns authentic knowledge of the Ka'aba into a polemical attack that developed out of the image of the Saracens as reported by Jerome and Pseudo-Nilus. John boldly states that the Muslims were idolaters because they venerated "a stone" (*lithos*), by which he means the Ka'aba.[47] John claims to have learned that some Muslims venerated it because Abraham had sex with Hagar on it, whereas others said that a camel was tied to it when Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac.[48] Both points directly echo the description of the religious practices of the nomads in Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes.* Theodulus, for example, feared being sacrificed on "rocks" dedicated to perverse sexuality, and the sacrifice of the camel demonstrated the barbarity of the nomads. John then repeats the accusation that the Muslims worship Aphrodite, and that this stone (the Ka'aba) was really an image of Aphrodite.[49] These associations continued to be referenced by later Byzantine authors such as Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.[50] John of Damascus, therefore, codifies the standard descriptions of Saracens developed in the pre-Islamic period, dresses them up with the rhetoric of heresy, and packages the polemical rhetoric to be reused by future generations of Christians.

Stephen Mansur, a relative of John, received spiritual instruction at the same monastery, Mar Saba, where John had retired to write his theological works.[51] By Stephen's time, in the late eighth and the early ninth century, it was clear that Islam was not a transient phenomenon, and many, including Christians, began adopting the Arabic language.[52] Stephen's writings reveal little acceptance of the changed political and religious circumstances of the Christian communities.[53] His account

45. Ibid. 100.10–13: "ἀφ' οὗ χρόνου καὶ δεῦρο ψευδοπροφήτης αὐτοῖς ἀνεφύη Μάμεδ ἐπονομαζόμενος, ὃς τῇ τε παλαιᾷ καὶ νέᾳ διαθήκῃ περιτυχών, ὁμοίως ἀρειανῷ προσομιλήσας δῆθεν μοναχῷ ἰδίαν συνεστήσατο αἵρεσιν." See Sahas 1972, 73–74.

46. See ibid. 74–89.

47. John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus* 100.78–80: "Διαβάλλουσι δὲ ἡμᾶς ὡς εἰδωλολάτρας προσκυνοῦντας τὸν σταυρόν, ὃν καὶ βδελύττονται. Καί φαμεν πρὸς αὐτούς· Πῶς οὖν ὑμεῖς λίθῳ προστρίβεσθε κατὰ τὸν Χαβαθὰν ὑμῶν καὶ φιλεῖτε τὸν λίθον ἀσπαζόμενοι;"

48. Ibid. 100.80–82: "Καί τινες αὐτῶν φασιν, ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἀβραὰμ συνουσιάσαι τῇ Ἄγαρ, ἄλλοι δέ, ὅτι ἐπ' αὐτὸν προσέδησε τὴν κάμηλον μέλλων θύειν τὸν Ἰσαάκ."

49. Ibid. 100.92–94: "Οὗτος δέ, ὅν φασι λίθον, κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἐστίν, ᾗ προσεκύνουν, ἣν δὴ καὶ Χαβὰρ προσηγόρευον, ἐφ' ὃν καὶ μέχρι νῦν ἐγγλυφίδος ἀποσκίασμα τοῖς ἀκριβῶς κατανοοῦσι φαίνεται." Also see "The Religion of the Saracens" above in chapter 1, esp. pp. 36–37.

50. Meyendorff 1964, 118–19.

51. On Stephen, see Hoyland 1997, 366–67, 480 n. 85; D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 388–96.

52. See below, pp. 143–44.

53. Vila 2003.

of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba displays many of the same features as Ammonius's *Relatio* or Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes,* despite the fact that Stephen's works postdate the Islamic Conquest of the Near East by over 150 years. The Muslims are still called "barbarians," "Saracens," and "Godless ones."[54] They still attacked monks in cruel and heinous ways.[55] They even pillaged the countryside of important cities like Gaza and Ashkelon.[56] At the end of the document, a Muslim leader, called a "Saracen king," killed a Christian by slicing off his head with a sword.[57] In short, the pre-Islamic images of the Saracens lived on, and the image of the Muslims that was fashioned in the first century after the Muslim Conquest, based on pre-Islamic views of the Saracens, continued to have resonance, even down to the twenty-first century.[58]

THE SINAI AFTER THE ARAB CONQUEST

The reactions to the conquest in the Sinai were understandably intense. Although it was not directly between the zone of initial conquests and the Arabian Peninsula, a few Arab armies seem to have passed through the desert surrounding Mount Sinai, as if reiterating the concerns of Procopius that Mount Sinai needed to be defended against the Saracens in order to protect Palestine.[59] At a later date, the monks at Mount Sinai claimed to have received a special treaty with the prophet Muhammad. This treaty safeguarded Saint Catherine's Monastery from Muslim meddling throughout the centuries.[60] At least some early Muslims considered Mount Sinai to be one of the four holy mountains of their faith.[61] After the Islamic Conquest, the monastic community of the Sinai, located far from any conflict, survived beyond the conquest, continuing operations until the present day, despite suffering cyclical periods of growth and contraction.

54. Stephen Mansur 2, 32 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1907, 2, 24): "οἱ ἄθεοι."

55. Compare Ammonius (Greek) 26, "Οἱ δὲ λίθοις κατὰ τοῦ τραχήλου τύπτοντες αὐτὸν," with Stephen Mansur 14 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1907, 12–13), "ἦσαν δὲ οἳ καὶ λίθοις τὰς κεφαλὰς τραυματισθέντες."

56. Stephen Mansur 3 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1907, 3).

57. Stephen Mansur 52 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1907, 40–41): "ἐπὶ αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἄνακτος καὶ πρωτοσυμβούλου ἀχθέντα καὶ τὴν καλὴν ὁμολογίαν ὁμολογήσαντα, καὶ ξίφει τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτμηθέντα διὰ τὴν εἰς Χριστὸν πίστιν τε καὶ εὐσέβειαν τῇ τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ Ἀπριλίου μηνός."

58. See Tolan 2002; Quinn 2008; Frakes 2011.

59. Theophanes A.M. 6124 (ed. de Boor 1883, 335–36); Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.8.

60. Hobbs 1995, 159–62. Over 1,700 firmans have been discovered in the Mount Sinai archive, attesting to the continued reissue of Mount Sinai's dispensation. The earliest dates to 1040 (Clark 1953, 34; Atiya 1955, xxix). The text itself recalls the instructions of Abu Bakr not to harm Christian communities at the beginning of the Muslim invasions.

61. E. Fowden 2002, 132.

Sinai authors continued writing in Greek after the Islamic Conquest. Perhaps the most famous of these writers was John Climacus, of the seventh or perhaps the late sixth century, author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (*Scala Paradisi*). This work shaped monasticism throughout Eastern Europe.[62] The most prolific writer of the Sinai after the Islamic Conquest was the theologian Anastasius of Sinai, who obtained fame by defending orthodox beliefs in the face of Monophysitism and Monotheletism.[63] Of his works, the *Relationes* is the most important for understanding the general conditions of the Sinai monks after the Islamic Conquest.[64]

Two collections of the *Relationes* have been preserved. The first collection, *Tales of the Sinai Fathers,* appears to date to the 660s, whereas the second, *Edifying Tales,* was written nearly thirty years later. There seems to have been a shift in worldview between these two texts as it became clear that Islam's rule would be a lasting phenomenon. Whereas the first concentrates solely on Sinai monasticism, the second expands its horizons to the wider world of Palestinian monasticism.[65] The *Tales of the Sinai Fathers* largely ignores the Muslims (whom the author calls "Saracens"), and when they do appear in the narratives, they are only incidental to the plot. Anastasius mentions, for example, that Mount Sinai was desecrated by the Muslims but leaves the offense unspecified.[66] He calls the Muslims "an *ethnos,*" perhaps implying that he viewed them as pagans or unbelievers.[67] At one point, a barbarian (i.e., Saracen) incursion deprives the monastery of oil, but in another narrative Saracens are seen visiting the *hēgoumenos* for advice when they are hungry.[68] A Saracen was sent by a dying monk as a messenger to bring back someone dwelling in Aila.[69] The monks allowed another to pick fruit.[70]

62. Ware 1982; Chryssavgis 2004; Müller 2006; Zecher 2013. See Müller 2002 on the *vita* of John written by Daniel of Rhaithou, which is a particularly late and perhaps untrustworthy source.

63. On Anastasius, see Haldon 1992. Several of the works ascribed to him are now known to be spurious. Also see Hoyland 1997, 92–102, for a discussion of his depiction of Muslims. For bibliography, see D. Thomas and Roggema 2009, 193–202. See Müller 2006, 29–32, on the date of Anastasius's *Relationes.*

64. The *Relationes de Patribus Sinai* may have been written by another monk rather than the famous Anastasius (Haldon 1992, 109). For a more in-depth look at the *Relationes de Patribus Sinai,* including commentary on the various manuscripts, see Flusin 1991.

65. Caner 2010, 172–73.

66. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.2 (ed. Nau 1902, 61): "Ἄλλοτε πάλιν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἁγίᾳ κορυφῇ πρὶν ἢ μολύνθη ἢ καταῤῥυπωθῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ παρόντος ἔθνους." Caner (2010, 177 no. 30) suggests that the pollution of the site should be connected with blasphemies spoken by Saracens at the summit of Mount Sinai.

67. Ibid.

68. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.9, 10 (ed. Nau 1902, 65–66): "Βαρβαρευθείσης ποτὲ τῆς Παλαιστήνης ὁδοῦ. . . ."

69. Ibid. 1.12 (ed. Nau 1902, 67). The Nau text does not describe the Saracen as a "Christian," as Caner (2010, 185) translates it.

70. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.24 (ed. Nau 1902, 74–75).

Relations between the two groups were clearly not amicable, because in one narrative a monk, thinking that he is about to encounter a Saracen, transforms himself into a palm tree to avoid detection.[71] In another instance, a Saracen assumes that monks will hide from him because he is not a Christian.[72] Anastasius describes a miraculous fire on Mount Sinai that is witnessed by some "Saracens" and Armenian pilgrims, the tale suggesting that both groups could visit the site at the same time. Anastasius attacks these Saracens for not recognizing the importance of the vision and for not believing in Christianity.[73] Although Anastasius views the Saracens unfavorably, they do not seem to represent an existential threat to the monastic community of the Sinai.[74] At one point, he mentions "prisoners" and "captives" in the desert, perhaps suggesting Christian prisoners of war.[75] Alternatively, these phrases may be metaphorical and refer to the lifestyle of monks.[76]

On the other hand, in the *Edifying Tales* the Saracens are portrayed as oppressors. In one narrative, for example, several Saracens shoot arrows at the icon of Saint Theodore (and in doing so die).[77] Demons appear throughout the texts, tormenting the monks. Overall, the tales create an impression that demons and Saracens are allied in order to oppress the pious Christian monks.[78] One story even suggests that the monks can expect better treatment from demons than from the Muslims[79] Perhaps this harder stance against the Muslims should be related to the policies of Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, who promoted Arabic and Islam to the detriment of Greco-Roman influences.[80] One feature of his policy was the construction of the Dome of the Rock, an attempt to mimic Byzantine imperial "propaganda in stone."[81] It was also in his reign that the inhabitants of the Deir al-Abid were said to have converted to Islam, as mentioned in chapter 5.

Anastasius uses a variety of terms for the Muslims. He occasionally calls them "Arabs," though "Saracen" appears more frequently.[82] As noted above, he uses the

71. Ibid. 1.23 (ed. Nau 1902, 74): "Καὶ νομίσας αὐτὸν Σαρακινὸν εἶναι μετεμορρώθη εἰς φοίνικα διαλαθεῖν βουλόμενος."

72. Ibid. 1.25 (ed. Nau 1902, 75).

73. Ibid. 1.38 (ed. Nau 1902, 81).

74. Hoyland 1997, 99.

75. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.30 (ed. Nau 1902, 77–80): "αἰχμαλώτοις ἐκείνης τῆς ἐρήμου . . . οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί. . . ." Also see Caner 2010, 191–92.

76. Solzbacher 1989, 297.

77. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 2.44 (ed. Nau 1903, 64–65).

78. Flusin 1991, 400–409.

79. Hoyland 1997, 100–101.

80. Caner 2010, 197.

81. See Griffith 1992, 121–34, on the public competition between Islam and Christianity in the Near East in this period. On the Dome of the Rock, see Grabar et al. 1996, 52–116; Grabar 2006.

82. See *Viae Dux* 1.1 (*PG* 89.41A).

word "barbarian" in a context where it must mean an Arab nomad.[83] The term "Saracen" is occasionally embellished, as when Anastasius describes the Saracens in one narrative as "entirely filthy and spiritually unclean."[84] He also appears to be the first to call the Muslims "Amalek."[85] This would be a particularly important term for a monk living in the Sinai, since the battle between Amalek and the Hebrews was remembered and venerated in the nearby oasis of Pharan, as recounted by Egeria.[86] That only a few other authors employ this term—for example, Stephen the Sabaite, Cosmas of Jerusalem, and Theophanes (following Anastasius)—suggests that it was used by Anastasius because of Amalek's association with the Sinai.[87] Several passages mentioning demons may refer to the Muslims, but since the texts are open to interpretation, I have not included them here.[88]

Perhaps the most interesting and revealing tale describes the martyrdom of a "Saracen" whom Anastasius called "a Christlover" (*philochristos*).[89] According to Anastasius, the "Saracen *ethnos*" (i.e., the Muslims) had come to Mount Sinai to force the local "Saracens" to apostatize away from Christianity and become Muslims. Most of the local "Saracens" gathered at the fortress of Pharan and Saint Catherine's Monastery (here called the "Monastery of the Holy Bush") and tried to resist. The majority ended up converting, but the "Christlover" refused to apostatize, instead killing his family and then throwing himself off Jabal Musa.[90] Before killing himself, several long-dead Sinai Martyrs visited the "Christlover" and strongly urged him to resist the Saracens. These martyrs were killed by "barbarians," a clear reference to Pseudo-Nilus's description of the local nomads.

If this passage can be trusted, it suggests that most of the local "Saracens" were indeed Christians by the middle of the seventh century. They are also said to have spoken Arabic.[91] It is strange to see a "Saracen" being praised for obtaining martyrdom at the hands of "Saracens"—a "Saracen" who is being urged on by the holy victims of previous barbarians, "Saracens" themselves. Some phrases in the account, such as when the "Christlover" chooses "the death of the body rather than to renounce his faith in Christ and to endanger his soul," repeat similar lan-

83. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.9 (ed. Nau 1902, 65–66).

84. Ibid. 2.44 (ed. Nau 1903, 64): "πάντα ῥύπον καὶ ἀκαθαρσίαν."

85. Anastasius of Sinai, *Sermo III in Imaginem Dei* (*PG* 89.1156B).

86. Preserved by Petrus Diaconus, *Liber de Locis Sanctis, Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae* Y.15; see chapter 2.

87. Hoyland 1997, 103 n. 133.

88. As interpreted by Caner 2010, 173. Hoyland 1997, 100–101, understands "demons" to mean precisely that, not Saracens.

89. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.41 (ed. Nau 1902, 87–90).

90. Caner 2010, 198 no. 134.

91. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.41 (ed. Nau 1902, 88): "τῇ ἀραβίδι γλώττῃ."

guage from Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes*.[92] There seems to be no better proof of the rhetorical nature of the Sinai Martyr accounts than this passage, where Anastasius is displaying his skill in manipulating topoi for his own subversive purposes. The whole point of this passage is that *even* the local "Saracens" had embraced Christianity and were willing to resist the "Saracen *ethnos*"; thus even "Saracens" who had been "persecuting" the monks of the Sinai for centuries could recognize the evil of these new "Saracens." What better way was there to discredit the Muslims than to show that even the age-old enemy of the Sinai Christians opposed them?

In addition to the martyr account mentioned by Anastasius, several later martyr stories circulated mentioning Mount Sinai and Christian-Muslim relations. An Arab Christian associated with Mount Sinai, Abd al-Masih (Qays al-Ghassani), was killed at al-Ramlah.[93] Abd al-Masih was born a Christian in Najran, fought with the Arabs in the initial conquests, but decided to become a Christian monk under the influence of a priest at Baalbek. He served as both the steward (*oikonomos*) and later the abbot (*hēgoumenos*) of the monastery at Mount Sinai before demanding a reduction of taxes from the Islamic government. In another account, the cousin of the caliph converted to Christianity and moved to Mount Sinai before returning to court to denounce Islam. An angry mob attacked and killed him.[94] These stories helped to delineate the Christian community from the Muslims and to inform contemporary Christians about the possibility of redemption in order to prevent apostasy.[95] By creating new martyrs, Christians could attempt "to reconcile themselves to the continuing presence of the Muslims," casting the Muslims into the role of persecutors. Christians could then play the role of an oppressed but spiritually superior group.[96] This was an understanding that Christians could deal with, in terms of both their own history but also their future, as demonstrated in apocalyptic works, in which Christianity would be triumphant.

An apocalyptic work of the beginning of the ninth century describes the vision of the monk Sergius-Bahira, which was said to have occurred on Mount Sinai.[97]

92. Ibid. (ed. Nau 1902, 87–88): "αίρετισάμενος μᾶλλον τὸν τοῦ σώματος θάνατον, ἢ προδοῦναι τὴν πίστιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ψυχικῶς κινδυνεῦσαι." Solzbacher (1989, 284) also suggests that the ideas in the passage refer back to the Sinai Martyrs Inscription. Caner (2010, 199 n. 145) detects another similarity, comparing the phrase "Righteous Ones of old" with Pseudo-Nilus 2.13.

93. See Griffith 1985; Swanson 2001.

94. Gregorius Decapolita, *Sermo Historicus;* Sahas 1986.

95. Swanson 2001, 121–29.

96. Lamoreaux 1996, 22–24.

97. Bahira 139 (ed. and trans. Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950). I have cited only the Latin text, but I also consulted the Syriac editions edited and translated by Roggema (2009). A Christian monk Bahira is mentioned in several early Islamic texts. (For example, Ibn Ishaq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* 115–17 [trans. Guillaume 1955, 79–81; see Gero 1992; Roggema 2009, 37–60].) Bahira gives shelter to a group of merchants, including a young Muhammad, and says that Muhammad would be a true prophet. It is easy to interpret this as a way for Muslims to indicate that Muhammad's revelations surpass those of

This text describes the Muslims as "the sons of Ishmael" and "the sons of Agar [Hagar], barbarous men."[98] It outlines the history of the end of the world, in which Muslim figures make up several series of persecutors, such as the sons of Ishmael (the Umayyads); the sons of Hashim (the Abbasids); a Mahdi (an Islamic messianic figure) son of Fatima (a wife of Muhammad); the sons of Sufyan (another Islamic messianic figure); the sons of Joktan (still another Islamic messianic figure, from southern Arabia); and a Mahdi son of Aisha (another wife of Muhammad).[99] Isaiah is cited to compare the sons of Hashim with the Assyrians, and the author goes to great lengths to describe the famine and catastrophes they caused.[100] The vision ends with standard scenes of the end times, with a Roman king who rules before the arrival of the Antichrist, who is in turn defeated by Elijah. Finally, Christ himself appears and inaugurates the Resurrection.[101] The Latin text concludes by reinforcing the importance of the revelation—it happened on Mount Sinai, the same place where Moses received the Law from God.[102] By stressing the site of its revelation, the author of the Sergius-Bahira apocalypse emphasizes that Islam is a part of God's divine plan, and Christian superiority over the Muslims should be assumed, since Muslims will later be destroyed. Like the martyrdom accounts, the Sergius-Bahira apocalypse was intended to provide comfort to Christians living under Muslim rule. As time passed, later recensions in Syriac attempted to make sense of how God could still be on the side of the Christians while allowing the Muslims to remain in charge.[103]

How much had changed in the Sinai after the Muslim Conquest?[104] Though the Muslims were in charge, Christian monastic life seems to have continued with little interference. The leader of the monastery later known as Saint Catherine's was still a *hēgoumenos.*[105] In general, Anastasius's *Relationes* demonstrates a monastic life little different from that in the earlier, pre-Islamic *Apophthegmata Patrum* or the *Lausiac History.* For example, in one incident described in the *Relationes,* two monks approach Mount Sinai, where they witness a heavenly spectacle, and their

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the Christians, but Sizgorich 2004, 26–29, notes that the stories also indicate that Muslims retained a fascination for Christian monks, even into the Abbasid period, when Ibn Ishaq's *sīra* of Muhammad was written.

98. Bahira 139–40 (Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950): "filiorum Ismael et . . . filiorum Agar hominum barbarorum."

99. On the vision and interpretations, see Hoyland 1997, 270–76; Roggema 2009, 61–93.

100. Bahira 141–42 (Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950).

101. Ibid. 146–47 (Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950).

102. Ibid. 147 (Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950): "Et dixi quod in montem Sinay in quo recepit Moyses legem Domini."

103. Roggema 2009, 203–8.

104. See Solzbacher 1989, 281–300.

105. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.4 (ed. Nau 1902, 62), "ὁ ἡγούμενος τῆς μονῆς."

faces shine with light "just as the face of Moses once shined."[106] The topos of the glowing face appears often in earlier texts.[107] The martyrs of Rhaithou continued to be honored there after the Arab Conquest, even if they were forgotten by the other monks in the Sinai. When the monk Epiphanius visited Rhaithou in the ninth century, he noted that seven hundred(!) monks were killed there by "barbarians." Paradoxically, he does not mention martyrs at Mount Sinai itself![108]

Apart from Epiphanius, there is plenty of other evidence that pilgrims still continued to visit the region. For example, the Syrian monk Theodotus of Amida traveled to Jerusalem, Egypt, and the Sinai in the late seventh century.[109] In the mid-eighth century, women could travel from Jerusalem to the Sinai without male companions to protect them.[110] The apocalypse of Sergius-Bahira assumes that Christians could still make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mount Sinai.[111] Anastasius also mentions that Armenian pilgrims continued to frequent Mount Sinai after the Islamic Conquest.[112] The Nessana Papyri contain two orders (both in Arabic and in Greek) for Nessana to supply a guide for the route to Mount Sinai, one for the wife of the governor.[113] A Muslim convert traveled to Mount Sinai for baptism according to a ninth-century text, ostensibly because Mount Sinai was distant from the Muslim authorities, who would have attempted to execute the convert for apostasy and kill the priest who performed the ceremony.[114] Monks in Anastasius's *Narrationes* hail from Constantinople, Africa, Iberia, Cyprus, and Cappadocia. One became bishop of Egyptian Babylon (Cairo); another became a stylite near Diospolis.[115] Monks appear to have traveled between Sinai and Aila quite regularly.[116] From this evidence, it appears that travel into and around the Sinai was not restricted.

Clearly the Muslim Conquest must have impacted the Sinai, but the transformation appears very slowly and quite late in surviving documents. Monks began to employ Arabic only in the eighth century, with the use of that language increasing

106. Ibid. 1.1 (trans. Caner 2010, 174).

107. Frank 2000, 160–65.

108. Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita, *Syriae et Urbis Sanctae Descriptio* 7.4, "ῥαιθοῦ· ἔνθα ἀνηρέθησαν οἱ ἑπτακόσιοι π(ατέ)ρες ὑπὸ τ(ῶν) βαρβάρ(ων)."

109. Palmer 1990, 89.

110. Stephen the Sabaite, *Greek Life* 9.133.

111. Bahira 139–40 (Bignami-Odier and Levi della Vida 1950).

112. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.38 (ed. Nau 1902, 81). On Armenian pilgrimage to Mount Sinai, see Mayerson 1982; M. E. Stone 1982, 1986. Anastasius mentions that one group contained 800 pilgrims.

113. *P.Ness.* 72, 73.

114. Gregorius Decapolita, *Sermo Historicus, PG* 100.1205B-C; see Sahas 1986.

115. Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes* 1.8, 20, 28, 35, (ed. Nau 1902, 65, 71–72, 76, 80); 2.45 (ed. Nau 1903, 65).

116. Ibid. 1.12, 19 (ed. Nau 1902, 67, 71).

in the ninth. Only a few Arabic manuscripts have been found at Mount Sinai from the eighth century, but these include a translation of Ammonius's *Relatio.*[117] The appearance of this text demonstrates the lasting value of the Sinai Martyr tradition to the Sinai monks themselves, since it was one of the first to be translated. Pharan has long been thought to have been destroyed during the Islamic Conquest, but there is currently no archaeological evidence of this putative destruction, and at least one later document attests its continued existence.[118] In the late seventh century, the bishop of Pharan relocated to Mount Sinai, and the bishopric of Pharan remained there permanently.[119] Over time, the monastic community shrank, until only the main monastery and a limited number of individual cells were inhabited. The monastery became known as Saint Catherine's in the eleventh century, when a tradition developed that the body of a fourth-century martyr, Catherine, was discovered on the mountain that would later bear her name.[120]

CONCLUSION

As a result of the al-Qaeda 9/11 attacks and America's War on Terror, American (and European) media and scholarship have become increasingly interested in examining the history of Islam, Islamic religious practice, and Christian-Muslim relations. Because some continue to dwell on the medieval Christian view that Islam is a violent religion and that "the Muslim and Christian worlds have been at war ever since a visionary merchant in Arabia composed the Koran," such a misinformed, unnuanced understanding of history is clearly problematic.[121] The relationship between Christianity and Islam is much more complex and entangled than the oversimplified and essentialized "clash" thesis would suggest.[122] Yet the rising surge of Islamophobia in Europe—and to a lesser extent in the United States—suggests that such complexities are lost in much public discourse, such as

117. See Blau 1962; Griffith 1985, 337-41, and 1997, 24–29.

118. Mayerson 1964, 161, 196–97. Mayerson's argument rests on the association of "Heran," mentioned by Theophanes (A.M. 6124 [ed. de Boor 1883, 336]), with Pharan. As argued by Kaegi (1992a, 93 n. 21), "Heran" is probably a transliteration of the Arabic word for "camp," *ḥīra.* Also see Solzbacher 1989, 281–87, and Caner 2010, 15 no. 59. The last known bishop of Pharan was Theodore, perhaps also known as Theodore of Rhaithou, who was condemned by the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 681 as a Monophysite for leading the Monoenergist movement in 633 (Amann 1946; Leclercq 1950, col. 1469; Shahid 1995–2002, 1.2.983–84). Abd al-Masih (Qays al-Ghassani) assisted in the transport of taxes from the Christians of Pharan to the Islamic authorities (Griffith 1985, 372).

119. Chryssavgis 2004, 43; Caner 2010, 15 no. 58.

120. Braun 1973, 28. Hobbs 1995, 79–95.

121. Binggeli 2007. See Peters 2010, xii–xiii, 10, 70, where he mentions "murderous caliphs" or describes the Middle East as a land of "wretched moral squalor and cruelty" caused by "perverted forms of Islam."

122. S. Huntington 1993. Also see Bottici and Challand 2010, esp. 1–2, 9–25, 95–110.

the debate in 2010 over the construction of an Islamic community center near "ground zero" of the 9/11 attacks or the 2011–12 debate about the construction of a mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.[123] It is my hope that this book helps to explain how some early Christian attitudes toward Islam were shaped by specific pre-Islamic conditions in the Sinai that resulted when Christians laid claim to indigenous nomadic land.

Before Christianity became legal, the Sinai had been a minor region of the Roman Empire. This status changed with the spread of Christianity, as Christians were attracted to the Sinai for two reasons: first, it was largely an uninhabited desert, allowing monks to obtain tranquility of mind (*hēsychia*), and second, the Sinai was sacred ground where the Israelites wandered for forty years and Moses acquired the divine Law from God. The same arid conditions that made the Sinai an excellent location for hermits also made it unappealing for agriculture and open for the movement of nomadic groups. By establishing settlements in the Sinai, Christian monks intruded into the areas traditionally inhabited by nomads.

Because of the remote nature of the Sinai, Christian monks were the first to spread imperial culture there. The monks began to reshape the landscape by importing agricultural methods used in the Negev, but they also remade the cognitive topography of the land as well. By identifying and renaming the newly rediscovered holy places of the Sinai, the monks transformed the landscape into something more mentally recognizable to Christians throughout the empire. These actions made the Sinai more important to Christians in general, and, with the increased attention, brought more visitors to the Sinai as pilgrims.

The Sinai became home to several important concentrations of monastic communities at Mount Sinai, Rhaithou, and Pharan. The first monks settled around Mount Sinai in the later fourth century, and by the time of Egeria's visit, in 381–84, a large community had been founded around the putative Burning Bush. These early monks lived in a *laura* style, in which they each lived separately but congregated together for worship. Estimates from archaeological remains suggest that about four hundred monks could have lived in solitary cells at peak occupation. This community continued to expand, and in the sixth century, with the founding of the fortress later known as Saint Catherine's Monastery, the coenobitic type of monasticism was introduced.

In addition to monks, the Sinai attracted pilgrims. They sought to encounter the living truth of the Gospel through direct connection with the holy men of the desert and to understand the written word of the Bible by viewing the sites associated with biblical events. Egeria's account is particularly important for understanding how pilgrims interpreted what they experienced in the Sinai. Her diary describes how monks pointed out topographic markers that revealed biblical

123. See Kauffman 2010; Nussbaum 2012, esp. 3–13 and 188–239.

events. For Egeria, reading the correct biblical passages and taking the Eucharist at putative biblical sites fulfilled a deep spiritual need. However, in some places, the monks proved an even greater attraction, for their rejection of society presented validation for Egeria's own religious beliefs. Other pilgrims—such as the Piacenza pilgrim and Cosmas Indicopleustes—are less verbose about their inner feelings but still provide invaluable accounts for understanding the Sinai communities and identification of biblical sites there.

Pilgrimage accounts demonstrate that the Sinai Peninsula was slowly transformed into a Christian space as late-antique locations became increasingly associated with biblical events. In chapter 3, I discussed the evidence related to three major sites in the Sinai—Elim, Raphidim, and Mount Sinai. Elim proved to be the site most contested for biblical identification. Each source (except Egeria) identifies Elim through Exodus 15:27, which mentions seventy palm trees and twelve springs. Both Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim locate Elim on the route between Clysma and Mount Sinai, a position that makes geographical sense when mapping the path of the Israelites. Ammonius and Cosmas Indicopleustes, on the other hand, identify the site at the monastic center of Rhaithou, on the southwestern shore of the Sinai, far from any possible Israelite path. I conclude that this placement was a conscious effort by the monks at Rhaithou to connect their community with Exodus in order to magnify the importance of their spiritual credentials. Furthermore, the Pharanites used biblical associations to connect their community with Moses. They sought to associate their site with biblical Raphidim, a location where the Israelites fought against Amalek. They cemented those connections with the construction of churches on the identified sites of Moses—for example, the rock on which Moses stood when he led the Israelites against Amalek. The Piacenza pilgrim mentions that the people there were descendants of Jethro, the son-in-law of Moses, whereas Cosmas connects the site with Paul's Rock of Christ and the circumcision of Jethro's sons. Finally, the sources mention the myriad associations used to identify the locations around Mount Sinai. In repeating the performance of rituals at these sites, pilgrims and monks were able to experience the joys of religious encounters.

Further, I have argued that these Sinai monks acted as colonists of imperial culture. The pre-Christian Roman authorities had a long history of supporting the spread of Greco-Roman culture to the "barbarians" as a form of social control. Christianity proved to be an even more popular ideology, spreading rapidly through northern Europe, into Persia, among the Arabs, and into Axum (modern Ethiopia).[124] This process brought more territories into the Roman sphere of influence: for example, the Romans and Axumites expected to receive assistance from

124. See G. Fowden 1993, 100–137

each other in Arabia, despite their differences in creed.[125] In the Sinai, Christian communities helped spread Christianity and maintained control over the region in lieu of a substantial commitment of imperial wealth and power. This role is perhaps most clear at the town of Pharan, where archaeological excavations have discovered several churches, and literary sources describe the economic development related to the movement of pilgrims to Mount Sinai. Furthermore, according to Ammonius, after the Pharanites converted to Christianity, they helped to defend and avenge the monks of Rhaithou. In the sixth century, there was a governmentally supported garrison at Pharan, which brought some additional economic improvements. The bishop of the Sinai was even located at Pharan, not at Mount Sinai, until after the Islamic Conquests. Thus, when the people of Pharan converted under influence of the Sinai monks, the Pharanites were able to obtain benefits by being participants in the new imperial culture.

As monasticism and pilgrimage grew, so too did the likelihood that conflict would break out between Christians and nomads. Christian sources declare that violence was most often directed against these monastic communities—such as with attacks on the monks of Mount Sinai and Rhaithou described by Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus. The descriptions of these events by Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus dwell on the cruelty and barbaric actions of the nomads. The grimmer the image of the Saracens, the greater the monks' holiness became as they lived constantly under the threat of attack. The sources create excessively violent images of monks being torn apart—their entrails ripped out of their bodies—and being tortured. These descriptions imitate previous Christian conceptions of martyrdom, except that in the Sinai the persecutors were not the imperial authorities but the local nomads.

Those monks who were killed during raids have been honored for their spiritual fortitude throughout the entire orthodox *oikoumenē* up to the present day. This commemoration began with initial texts by Ammonius and Pseudo-Nilus, and as with the descriptions of martyrdom, the sources used the already-existing rhetoric of martyrs to describe the monks. The sources were especially inspired by 4 Maccabees, which represented an archetypal stand against an impious persecutor. The monks are variously honored as athletes and soldiers of God, praised for giving up comfortable but immoral lives in urban centers. Several sources, including an inscription at Mount Sinai, suggest that there were several different groups of martyrs honored there; however, it is impossible to separate the historical details of these accounts from the rhetoric of martyrdom. It is important, furthermore, to realize that of the two pilgrim accounts—Egeria and the Piacenza pilgrim—neither one mentions the Sinai Martyrs at all. I suggest that this omission resulted because the Martyr Narratives were developed by Sinai monks for Sinai monks.

125. Bowersock 2013, 63–119.

Pilgrims were not attracted to the Sinai because of the martyrs; rather, pilgrims sought to experience the holy places of the Sinai and to see the monks who lived there. It was only after the removal of relics from Mount Sinai to Constantinople, in the reign of Justin II, that the Sinai Martyrs became world-famous.

In this tense atmosphere, Christian sources demonized the nomads, branding them with such terms as "Saracens," "Scenite Arabs," "Blemmyes," and "barbarians," which emphasized differences between the nomadic way of life and refined Christian and Greco-Roman culture. The nomads were effectively marginalized by rhetoric that suggested that they were uncivilized and predisposed to treachery and violence. In addition, as the region became more thoroughly Christianized, the Saracens were increasingly equated with paganism and abhorrent practices such as animal and human sacrifice. It was said that the Saracens worshipped the Morning Star and willingly sacrificed the most beautiful young virgins to Aphrodite (Venus). Pseudo-Nilus recounts how his own son, Theodulus, barely escaped such a sacrifice. To the monks, being sacrificed to the goddess of erotic love would have been an exceptionally troublesome occurrence that threatened the spiritual transcendence they achieved as monks.

Yet several sources describe the pagan religion of the Saracens while also narrating their conversion to Christianity. One of the best examples of this is Jerome's account of Hilarion at Elusa. Hilarion confronted the locals during a festival, and they decided to convert to Christianity. Thus, although the pre-Islamic Sinai accounts stress the nomadic beliefs of the nomads, including the worship of stones (probably betyls), a subversive current indicates that large numbers of ostensibly pagan nomads were probably actually Christians. Such appears to be the case in Anastasius's post-Islamic Sinai, where many nomads were converting to Islam not from pagan beliefs but from Christianity!

Because of the Saracens' violent reputation, the imperial government systematically tried to defend monks and pilgrims. Imperial defense in the fourth and fifth centuries focused on the protection of the Arabian frontier, running from Aila to the north, whereas the sixth century shows the fortification of the Sinai and pilgrimage routes. In fact, literary evidence links the construction of Saint Catherine's Monastery directly to the Saracen threat. Procopius attributes its construction to Justinian as a way to defend Palaestina Prima from Saracen raids, and Eutychius indicates that the monks themselves asked for protection from the Saracens. Forts were also constructed and manned in the Negev and along the Negev-Aila pilgrimage route. Two of these excavated forts, at Ein Boqeq and Upper Zohar, were initially garrisoned in the sixth century like Saint Catherine's, perhaps as part of a larger strategy to defend travelers. The Beersheva Edict further demonstrates the government's desire to protect travelers, even though it pushed responsibility for maintenance onto the local communities. At the same time, the garrison along the Arabian frontier was reduced, a demonstration of changed imperial priorities.

Until the 1970s, the only evidence available to scholars seeking to understand the nomadic peoples of the Roman Near East was in ancient literary sources, which described the nomads in negative ways. With the excavation of fortresses, especially legionary fortresses, new and impressive sources of information became available. In contrast to some frontiers of the Roman Empire—along the Rhine and the Danube and in Mesopotamia, for example—there seemed to be no major existential threat to Roman control along the Syrian and Arabian frontiers. However, convinced by the literary sources that the nomads of the Near East were threats to Roman security, archaeologists have viewed these fortifications and military bases as proof of the Saracen threat.

This Arabian frontier was largely abandoned during the reign of Justinian. This is the exact period when a number of fortifications appeared along the pilgrimage routes, indicating that imperial authorities viewed Saracens as an internal rather than an external threat. These outsiders were incapable of conquering Roman territories, but they could strike isolated settlements and travelers with impunity before the Roman military could react. Thus the Saracens did not represent the same kind of threat as the later victorious Muslims, who attacked from beyond the frontier.

In discussions about the Arabian frontier, the nomads themselves often play minor roles. Since they left essentially no records and few archaeological remains, scholars are left only with the perspective of the sedentary population, with its ample literary and archaeological sources.[126] Once archaeological evidence of nomads was discovered in the Negev, and scholars began to analyze nomadic source material more critically, attention shifted to understanding those nomads independently of hostile accounts developed by the sedentary populations.[127]

Anthropological literature argues that the dichotomy between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles presented in the ancient accounts is a gross oversimplification. Populations within the Near East subsisted on a range of lifestyles, and the so-called nomads of the Sinai likely practiced some form of agricultural production, at least before the arrival of Christian monks. These nomadic groups also interacted with the more sedentary populations in complex ways—finds of imported ceramics in nomadic camps and of animal remains within towns suggest a level of economic connection that the literary sources fail to mention. Some of the imported goods from nomadic sites, however, could have been acquired via raids, a time-tested method of increasing power, prestige, and wealth among nomadic communities. The Piacenza pilgrim, for example, describes the extreme poverty of

126. For example, Parker 1986 remains an essential guide to understanding the Roman system of defense along the Arabian and Syrian steppe, with extensive information about Roman fortifications; however, his entire discussion of the Saracens is limited to fewer than ten pages.

127. See especially Shahid 1984a, 1984b, 1989, 1995–2002; Fisher 2011 and forthcoming.

the nomadic population, and it is easy to imagine that plundering the Christians could become a lucrative occupation. Yet it would be incorrect to conclude that the relationship between these groups was only one of mutual hostility and violence. Reports of violence, in fact, obscure the normal daily activities that connected Sinai monks with nomadic inhabitants.

Although nomads may have been a minor threat to the more settled communities of the Near East, it is also true that nomads could protect these same communities. Large numbers of nomadic groups served within the imperial armies, as is attested in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Entire tribes, such as the Ghassanids, helped to defend the Romans' eastern frontier with Persia. Across that frontier, the Persians used their own nomadic group—the Lakhmids—to assist in offensive and defensive maneuvers. Within the Sinai in particular, Pseudo-Nilus describes how a local chief, Ammanes, contracted directly with the town council of Pharan to provide protection.

Such protection was not adequate to defend the region from the Islamic Conquests. Third Palestine, of which the Sinai was a part, was the first province of the Roman Empire to fall to the Islamic armies from the Arabian Peninsula. Long before the seventh century, sedentary populations, especially Christian monks, had encroached on the lands of nomadic peoples in the Sinai. This interaction and the creation of a threatening Saracen image had repercussions when the Islamic religion first erupted out of the desert. Most subsequent Christian sources used the term "Saracen" to describe Muslims, just as they had for the nomadic groups of the pre-Islamic Near East. Much of the image, or mirage, of the Saracen of the Islamic Near East had a direct precursor in the pre-Islamic period. For example, Christians continued to connect the etymology of the word "Saracen" from "Sarah" to frame the Saracens as both hostile and false, for Christians believed that the Saracens were attempting to disguise their connection to Hagar. Muslim veneration of the Ka'aba, as seen in John of Damascus's writings, was connected with the "rocks" of the pre-Islamic period. John even reuses the sexual overtones of the worship of Aphrodite (Venus) to insult the Ka'aba. Violence was considered a hallmark of the now-Islamic Saracens—Sophronius and the *Doctrina Iacobi* specifically mention the Saracens as wielding swords and other weapons; Stephen Mansur describes Muslims in the same language and the same situations as Ammonius's pre-Islamic Saracens. Later Christians, building on this pre-Islamic image, invented all sort of disparaging stories about Muhammad and Muslims in general. In short, the term "Saracen" kept its pre-Islamic emotional baggage and became an important signifier of the contempt and fear in which Muslims were held by some Christians then—and even up to the modern era.

In addition to reusing the Saracen image, Christians in the Near East explained their defeat by the Muslims in terms of their own sins and biblical history. As Thomas Sizgorich has noted, previously persecuted groups often interpret new con-

flicts in light of their history of repression and frame the conflicts in terms of victimization and a "persecuting Other."[128] Thus Christians were able to use their heritage as martyrs and their history with the nomads to reshape their understanding of and response to Muslims. In that way, Christians began to cast Muslims into the role of violent persecutors through both apocalyptic and edifying literature. Christians, for example, interpreted defeat by Muslims as punishment for Christians' sins rather than as evidence that God favored Muslims above them.

Despite early Christian renderings of Muslims as barbaric Others, nonorthodox Christians (such as Monophysites) and the Jewish population of the Near East praised the initial Muslim conquerors as being more tolerant than the Christian Byzantine Empire.[129] Similarly, several indications suggest that the Muslims were initially much more tolerant than the Christian Roman Empire of the time.[130] Whereas medieval Christians in Europe generally confronted polytheists and sought to eradicate their faiths, Muslims (at least before the Crusades) generally viewed fellow monotheists (or those whose religions had monotheistic characteristics, such as Zoroastrians) as potential converts through persuasion, not violence, even though those monotheists were believed to have an imperfect faith.[131] In the initial Muslim invasion of the Roman Empire, treaties such as that involving the city of Aila (modern Aqaba), which was negotiated directly with the prophet Muhammad, allowed conquered peoples to retain their ancestral religions and cultures.[132] Arabic and Syriac texts mention the instructions of Abu Bakr (the first successor to Muhammad) to the invading Arab armies, which guaranteed the right of monks to worship freely; the safety of women, children, and the elderly; and which protected the economic prosperity of conquered areas. Thus those who willingly paid tribute were allowed to live without harassment, whereas those who refused were attacked.[133] When the Muslims had to withdraw from Damascus before the battle of the Yarmuk, they even returned the *jizya* (poll tax applied to non-Muslims), because they could not defend the city![134] By the standards of the day, these actions were remarkably just and much more tolerant than in the seventh century's Christian Roman Empire.

Despite this comparative tolerance of early Muslim rule, I do not wish to suggest that religious intolerance, injustice, and violence were nonexistent throughout

128. Sizgorich 2009, 69–70.

129. Lamoreaux 1996, 11–14.

130. See, for example, the anti-Jewish polemics composed in the late sixth and the early seventh century or Heraclius's forced baptism of the Jews in Roman territory: Dagron and Déroche 2010, 275–312. Blumenkranz 1960, 97–138, describes the uses of force employed by Christians in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages against the Jews in an attempt to make them convert.

131. Bulliet 2004, 22–23.

132. Ibn Ishaq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* 902 (trans. Guillaume 1955, 607).

133. Tabari (ed. Goeje, 1879) 1.1850; Palmer 1993, 145; Hoyland 1997, 219–22.

134. Hill 1971, 74 no. 185.

Islamic history. The Muslim Caliphate slowly developed prohibitions against Christians and Jews over the first century of Islamic rule and codified these restrictions into law in the early eighth century.[135] Even in areas where Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived side by side, as in al-Andalus, they never lived together but remained in separate communities in a tense atmosphere.[136] Furthermore, public forms of Christian worship, such as the ringing of church bells, were prohibited and continued to be a source of friction in medieval Spain.[137]

And yet, even in areas of religious conflict, Christian beliefs strongly impacted the development of Islamic holy places and practice, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between religious beliefs and practices in the first few centuries after the Islamic Conquest. For example, the city of Damascus was the capital of the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads. One member of this dynasty, Caliph al-Walid I, constructed a mosque (now known as the Umayyad Mosque) that replaced a Christian church associated with John the Baptist. Instead of obliterating John the Baptist's connection with the site, Muslims claimed to discover the head of John the Baptist during the construction of the mosque. Muslims believed that this discovery validated their occupation of the site, but such validation required their acceptance of previous Christian beliefs and rituals. This example displays the complexity of the continuity of religious practice between early Christianity and early Islam.[138] Islamic practice thus owed much to seventh-century Christianity, and Islam should be understood as a late-antique religion: one whose development occurred vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity. It does not represent "a cataclysmic break with the classical and late classical past."[139]

The aforementioned is but one example. In fact, the earliest surviving biography of Muhammad (written in the eighth century) describes his chance encounter with a Christian monk, Bahira, who revealed that Muhammad had the gift of prophecy.[140] This encounter shows that the later Islamic imagination continued to recognize the spiritual power of Christian ascetics, and it suggests that Islamic tradition was able to employ a Christian motif "as a free-floating signifier that could take up residence in a variety of discourses."[141] It appears that formative Muslim authors, such as Ibn al-Mubarak, constructed *jihad* alongside familiar Christian themes of asceticism and martyrdom. Early Christian monks were often considered violent and intolerant, responsible for the destruction of dozens of

135. Fattal 1995, 1–69.

136. Fletcher 2004, 116.

137. Alibhai 2008, 144–64; Tolan 2008, 147–60.

138. Khalek 2011, 85–134.

139. Sizgorich 2009, 145

140. Ibn Ishaq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* 115–17 (trans. Guillaume 1955, 79–81); see Gero 1992; Roggema 2009, 37–60.

141. Sizgorich 2009, 158.

pagan and Jewish places of worship.[142] Thus the theological formation of *jihad* was also inspired by Christian monastic ideals.

Western European society was also influenced by Islam, though those links have often been forgotten or ignored. Richard Bulliet has even argued that the West could not exist in the same form as it does now without the complex relationship with Islamic history and intellectual borrowings from Islamic scholars during the medieval period.[143] To Bulliet, the importance of Islam in the formation of modern Europe was purposely erased to ensure that Islam was seen as an evil "Other," which did not contribute to Western society.[144] A similar pattern can be seen in the study of troubador culture, which was fundamentally shaped by unacknowledged Arabic influences. Even many modern scholars have refused to recognize the importance of these Arabic influences on the creation of what is typically considered a paramount exemplar of Western literature.[145] As Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen have demonstrated, the characteristics that are thought to define East and West do not withstand intellectual scrutiny, and such dichotomies should be rejected.[146]

According to the historian Harold Drake, there is nothing inherently intolerant about Christianity; rather, the interpretation of texts and traditions in particular periods produced intolerant versions of Christianity.[147] One can easily argue the like about Islam, which has proven to be both more and less tolerant, depending on particular circumstances and historical periods. In most periods of history, it has been the Islamic tradition, rather than the Christian tradition, that has been the more tolerant toward rival monotheist faiths. Despite hostile labels like "Saracen," Christian and Islamic history are indebted to each other, and the relationship between Christians and Muslims is much more complex than a simple conflict. Perhaps such discussions about the interconnectedness of the two faiths can lead to the "mutual understanding" called for by Vatican II and can help to bring about peace, freedom, and increased "social justice and moral welfare."[148]

142. Gaddis 2005, 151–207; Sizgorich 2009, 14–15, 108–43, 180–95.

143. Bulliet 2004, 1–45. The intellectual borrowings and economic cooperation are important topics in Fletcher 2004, esp. 100–130, and in Lockman 2004, 31–33.

144. Bulliet 2004, 30–33.

145. Menocal 1987; Lyons 2009; Freely 2011.

146. M. W. Lewis and Wigen 1997, 47–103.

147. Drake 1996 and 2000, esp. 402–40.

148. A good example of such discussions is the recent "Abrahamic trialogue" on reconciliation in Bieringer and Bolton 2011.

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