

di Ahmed Shams

ABSTRACT: Over 1400 years of continuous inhabitation for Justinian's fortress in Sinai Peninsula which was built in 530-545 CE, the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai houses a collection of 3,307 multilingual manuscripts (i.e. the world's second largest collection of Greek manuscripts after the Library of the Vatican), 7,000 copies of old prints and 2,048 icons; other than the sacred vessels, vestments and jewelry. Owing to several potential factors (i.e. holiness of the site for Judaism, Christianity and Islam; royal trustees of protection; fortification; geographical remoteness; and environmental setting), the works of art survived through history, providing the scholars an outstanding material for scientific research, a living landmark of Byzantium. From the treasury of 6th century CE, via the initial catalogues of mid-late 19th

century CE and the transfer of the possession of Codex Sinaiticus in the 2nd

half of 19th

century CE to Alexander II (1818-1881 CE) the Czar of Russia (i.e. Old Testament and the world's oldest complete copy of the New Testament, dated back to mid 4th

century CE), until the need to display the works of art in the 21st

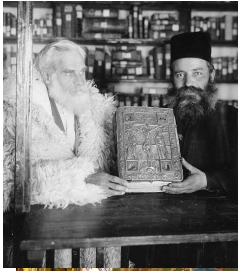
century CE inside a Museum (2001 CE); this paper discusses how the perspective towards the collection was developing through history in terms of functionality, study and display; being influenced by religious, scientific, geo-political and economical factors.

1 Introduction

Since the monastic book of the ‘Ladder of Divine Ascent’, written by the Syrian-born Sinaitic monk St. John Climacus (March 30, 525-606 CE), also known as John of the Ladder, John Scholasticus and John Sinaites, who joined monastic life by the age of sixteen and he was selected to be the abbot of Mount Sinai in 600 CE (Catholic Encyclopedia Reports, 1909), there is no doubt that the movable-immovable collection of the works of art of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine is being accumulated over 1450 years of existence (545-21st century CE). The immovable works of art are mainly represented in mosaics, frescos, marble floors, engraved wooden doors, icon-stat and platform, which are being housed inside the main buildings of the monastery (i.e. basilica, chapels, chapter-house, refractory, library- scriptorium, monastic

cells...etc.) (Attia, 1952) (Fig. 1). On the other hand, the movable works of art are mainly represented in manuscripts, old prints, icons, sacred vessels, vestments, jewelry, crosses, candlesticks and bells (Fig. 2). Actually, the collection of the monastery is mixed between the works of art of a Sinaitic origin (i.e. created by the Sinaitic monks using local and/or imported material); ones were reused by the Sinaitic monks; ones were gifted by emperors, kings, czars and sultans; ones were hidden inside Justinian's fortress for protection during periods of mono-religious-political tensions (i.e. tensions between sects) due to its fortification and geographical remoteness, as such works of art ended up as a part of the collection; and others were taken away from the monastery under mono-religious-political influence. Among the most significant works of art in terms of artistic value, age and number are the manuscripts, old prints, icons and the Transfiguration Mosaic of Mount Sinai.





2 The treasury age

According to the historical accounts, Mount Sinai ‘Gebel Musa or Mosses Mountain’ was identified as the Mountain of Law by Julian Saba the Syrian pilgrim in 363 CE, initiating a Christian pilgrimage tradition to the wilderness of Mount Sinai; while in 383-384 CE, Egeria the pilgrim identified the early Sinaitic monastic settlements (i.e. Early Pilgrimage Period ‘EPP’ 363-545 CE). After the construction of the monastery in 530-545 CE, the works of art ‘collection’ started to get accumulated within the walls of the fortress. In 1336 CE, Wilhelm Baldensel and Ludolf Von Suchem were the first Western travelers to Mount Sinai. For 800 years of Post Early Pilgrimage Period ‘PEPP’ (545-1336 CE), several mono-religious-political and interreligious-political events enriched and threatened-protected the precious collection: the

200 Byzantine soldiers who were ordered by Emperor Justinian for the protection of the monastery; the trustee of Prophet Mohamed of the Muslims in 7th century CE; the Byzantine Iconoclasms in 730-787 and 814-842 CE which caused the flow of a number of icons into the monastery from Byzantium; the unexecuted violation and the trustee of the Fatimid king Hakim Be-amr Allah (996-1020 CE); the refusal of Mount Sinai monks to welcome the visit of Baldwin I the Crusader of Jerusalem in 11th century CE, in order not to be counted by the Arabs as an allies of the Crusaders; and the trustee of the Fatimid king El 'Adid Li-Din Allah (1160-1171 CE) in 1169 CE (Shuqier, 1917).

During these 800 years, the works of art were increasing in the form of a treasury, being housed inside several buildings, as the movable works of art were used by the monks, and displayed for both monks and pilgrims for religious purposes. During that period, the pilgrims were the only visitors of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine; Justinian's Basilica was the central worship place, while the Burning Bush was the keystone of the fortress. The manuscripts were stored in the old library-scriptorium (Fig. 3), as several ancient codices are dated back to the Post Early Pilgrimage Period - Treasury Age, such as Codex Sinaiticus in mid 4th century CE, Syrian Codex or Codex Syriacus in 400 CE (i.e. it was rewritten in 7th-8th centuries CE), St. Mark's Gospel in 6th century CE, the text of John Climacus in 7th

century CE, the Golden Greek Gospel of the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius III in 717 CE, a copy of Homer's Iliad in 8th

-9

th

centuries CE and Codex Arabicus in 9

th

century CE (Attia, 1952).

Actually, twenty four of the icons are Byzantine, produced at Constantinople in 5th-6th centuries CE and seventeen other were produced in the Levant in 6th-7th centuries CE (Dahari, 2000); another group ranges between 6th

-10

th

centuries CE and the majority are dated back to 11

th

-15

th

centuries CE. The icons were drawn according to different art styles; Greek, Georgian, Syrian, Coptic and Cretan (Aphanglous, 1984). The main icons of Post Early Pilgrimage Period 'PEPP' are Encaustic Virgin, Ascension, and Sacrifice of

Jephthah's Daughter of 6

th

century CE; St. Peter the Apostle, and Christ Pantocrator of 6

th

-7

th

centuries CE, Abraham Sacrificing his Son Isaac, and Nativity

of 7

th

century

CE; Miracle of Chonae of 11

th

-12

th

centuries CE; Archangel Michael, Transfiguration, Baptism, Archangel Gabriel, Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Theoptes, Great Deesis, Deesis, Raising of Lazarus, Crucifixion and Annunciation of 12

th

century CE; Ladder to Heaven, Archangels Michael, Theoptes, Life of Christ, Crucifixion and Gabriel of 12

th

-13

th

centuries CE; Anastasis and the Ascension, Nativity, St. Sergius and Bacchus, St. Theodosia, St. George x2, Three Saints,

Christ Enthroned in Glory, Virgin and Hagiologion Calendar Icon of 13

th

century CE; Apostles Paul, Andrew and Peter of 13th

-14th

century CE (Waston, 2009).

Since 6th century CE, the apse is the most remarkable immovable work of art of the entire monastery, with its wall mosaic of the Transfiguration (Fig. 4) which dominates the whole scene inside Justinian's Basilica: «

The mosaic inscription yields the names of Longinus the Abbot, John the Deacon and Theodore

the Dutereuon or Deuterarios, "the second in command". All were alive

at the time of the mosaic's execution, but we know nothing about them

» (Sevcenko, 1966). The mosaic covers an area of 46 square meters; it is made out of more than half a million pieces (i.e. 11,700 pieces per square meter). Precious materials were used in its execution; gold/silver papers and glass paste (Nerdy et al., 2006).

Between 1336 the first half of the 20th century CE (i.e. Travelers Period 'TP'), dozens of scholars of different scientific backgrounds were visiting the monastery, along with pilgrims. Those scholars were biblical researchers, historians, archaeologists, geographers, geologists, botanists, naturalists and artists, indicating an increasing interest in the monastery, reaching its peak in the 19

th century CE. For 700 years of the Travelers Period, other trustees were granted to the monastery by the Ottoman Sultan Mustafa Khan I (1617-1618 CE) in 1618 CE; the Republic of France, Napoleon Bonaparte (1798-1804 CE) on 20

th of December 1799 CE; the Republic of France, commander Dames on the 1

st of November 1800 CE; and the Ottoman Sultan Abd El Hamid on the 23

rd of December 1904 CE. Those trustees guaranteed the security of the treasury and the flow of additional works of art to the monastery (Shuqier, 1917).

One of the significant icons of the Travelers Period are the ones of St. Catherine of 15th century CE; St. Catherine Enthroned, St. Catherine, Archangel Michael, and Virgin of the Passion of 16th century CE; Prophet Moses, Topographical Icon of Mount Sinai, and St. Catherine and her

Life of 17th century CE; Monastery of St. Catherine, and Martyr St. Paraskeve 18th

century CE; in addition to another ones of St. Catherine, and St. Catherine Enthroned of unknown date (Waston, 2009). By late Travelers Period 'TP', the appearance of the German scholar Constantine von Tischendorf on the Sinaitic theatre announced the start of the Catalogues Age (1844-2001 CE).

3 The catalogues age

There is no doubt that the name of the German scholar Constantine von Tischendorf is attached to two major issues: the first serious attempt to archive-study the manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine; on the other hand, his name is attached to the transfer of the possession of the world's most ancient codex – Codex Sinaiticus (i.e. Old Testament and the world's oldest complete copy of the New Testament, dated back to mid 4th century CE) – from the monastic community of Mount Sinai to the Czar of Russia.

Between 1859 CE when Constantine von Tischendorf borrowed Codex Sinaiticus under the Russian Czar Alexander II, until the discovery of the letters of the Russian Archive which were studied by A. V. Zakharova of the National Library of Russia in 2009 CE, it was believed that «Tischendorff visited the monastery and found a manuscript that was recognized by the monks as being very precious, He asked for permission to borrow it so he could study it in Cairo....saying: “this manuscript I promise to return safely”....The monks generously allowed him to borrow the manuscript and retained his letter with the promise to return it soon. Tischendorff left with the manuscript never to return» (Charlesworth, 1979). By arriving to the old city of St. Petersburg in Russia, Tischendorff became a wealthy man by selling the manuscript (Charlesworth, 1979). In 1933 CE, the British Museum bought Codex Sinaiticus for 100,000 pounds sterling; currently, it settled in the British Library. Several scholars of different backgrounds approached the history of the possession of Codex Sinaiticus from different perspectives, leading to several interpretations for the events. A. V. Zakharova provided the most recent study about the codex in the light of the newly discovered documents ([Tab. 2](#)).

«Recent findings generally support the version repeatedly described by Constantine Tischendorf. Published research (by I. Ševčenko above all) questioning the legitimacy and honesty of Tischendorf and the Russian Government in their dealings with Mt Sinai Community depended on the ambiguous behavior of Cyril Archbishop of Sinai. The documents reported in this work indicate that eventual purchase of the Sinai Bible by the Russian Government in 1868-1869 was formalized by Archbishop Callistratus and the Holy Council of Mt Sinai Community on their own free will, in accordance with the law, and without pressure from Count N.P. Ignatyev. The role of Count Ignatyev in the settlement of the conflict between the brethren and former Archbishop Cyril in 1870 and 1871 indicates that he enjoyed the confidence and amicability of Mt Sinai monks» (Zakharova, 2009).

«The Russian archimandrit, Prophyrius Osphanski took some Sinai icons to Kiev in 1845-1850 CE» (Dahari, 2000): these works of art were being transferred to the possession of other individuals, religious authorities or states under the influence of mono-religious-political influence like the one which was exerted by the Russian government on the monastic community of Mount Sinai (i.e. the Most Holy Synod of Russian Orthodox Church)

Not all the scholars who traveled to the Holy Monastery of

Mount Sinai were out there for dual purpose like Constantine von Tischendorf (i.e. archive-study and collect ancient manuscripts); the first published catalogue was the one of the Greek manuscripts, as it was published in Oxford by Grandsons in 1886 CE. In 1893 CE, Agnes Smith Lewis archived the Syrian manuscripts; in 1894 CE, Margaret Gibson archived the Arabic manuscripts (Shuqier, 1917). Early tourists started to show up in Sinai Peninsula in early 20th century CE. In 1950 CE, «The American Foundation of for the Study of Man, on behalf of the Library of Congress and in conjunction with Farouk I university in Alexandria, launched the Mount Sinai Expedition to microfilm those ancient works of reference which will change the face of biblical and other studies....In less than six months, nearly a million folios of manuscripts in twelve languages were microfilmed, a record hitherto unattained in the history of mankind» (Attia, 1952). In 1951 CE, Farouk I the king of Egypt established a new building adjacent to the southern walls of the monastery which currently houses the new library of the ancient manuscripts and the library of the old prints. (Fig. 5)

In 1970s CE, the tourists started to visit the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine and the vicinity of Mount Sinai in relatively mass numbers (i.e. Tourists Period 'TS'). On 26th of May 1975 CE, «a fire damaged the church of St. George. The monks then decided to clear the debris beneath this church in the northern wall of the monastery. In the process....while repairing a wall in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai

workers

have inadvertently broken through to unknown room in which were seen boxes full of ancient scrolls and books» (Agourides et al., 1978; Charlesworth, 1979); 3,000 items were found, including manuscripts and icons (i.e. all the discovered icons are not ancient): 18 folios from Codex Sinaiticus have been recovered (i.e. 412 of 730 original folios are now distributed between the British Library, Leipzig University Library, the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine and the National Library of Russia), 10 of the discovered manuscripts are complete and another 50 incomplete codices (Charlesworth, 1979).

Upon the rising interest of tourists in the vicinity of Mount Sinai in 1970s CE, a museum for the collection of the works of art was not obviously needed, as the treasury of Justinian's Basilica was and still being displayed for the pilgrims who are the original visitors of the monastery; during that period (i.e. Tourists Period), the tourists were flowing along with pilgrims to the monastery in an increasing number. All the works of art are represented by similar ones of its kind in Justinian's Basilica, with an exception to the manuscripts. The interest of the majority of pilgrims, travelers and tourists was in Justinian's Basilica and the Burning Bush, as the accessibility to other buildings of the monastery was limited to the monks and specialized scholars. In 1978 CE, 50,000 tourists visited the vicinity of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine. During the same year, the first museum was introduced in the vicinity; El Melga Ethnographic Museum was established outside the monastery

in the newly established Bedouin settlement of the town of St. Catherine, as Justinian's Basilica was still the only display building for the ancient works of art. In 1981 CE, 200 visitors/day were allowed inside the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine (Dames & Moore 'USAID', 1981). In 20th century CE, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the number of the newly introduced works of art to the collection of the monastery was tremendously declining, simultaneously with an increasing number of pilgrims, travelers and tourists; in addition to a simultaneous increase in the cataloguing and documentation projects which reached its peak by the end of the 20th century CE.

Among the most important catalogues of the 2nd half of the 20th century CE, the Catalogue of all Manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai by Kamil Murad; the Catalogue of Slavonic Manuscripts by Ioannes Chr Tarnanides in 1988 CE 'Hellenic Association for Slavic Studies'; the Slavonic Manuscripts Project in 1992-contemporary CE («43 Slavic codices and fragments of the 10th/11th-18th century, most of them written in Church Slavonic of various redactions, both in the Cyrillic and the Glagolitic script..... new findings of 1975 added further 42 units, among them six Glagolitic ones of the 10

th

-12

th

centuries

.....Serbian codices predominate, and the core of the collection came into being during the 13th and 14th centuries»: Miklas, 2007); Sinaitic Manuscripts Documentation Project by the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine in 2002-contemporary; and the Library Conservation Project - Manuscripts Survey by St. Catherine Foundation in 2001-2008 CE.

4 The Museum age

Under a demanding mass tourism industry, reaching 300,000 tourists in early 21st century CE, and the relatively significant increase in the publications about Sinai Peninsula (i.e. more than 1,500 scientific publications, as the majority directly-indirectly mentioned the manuscripts-icons of the monastery); accordingly, the need for a museum for the collection of the works of art became a necessity in order to display the most significant-ancient possessions. In 2001 CE under the supervision of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 'MET-New York', a small museum was established inside the monastery in a small building adjacent to the northern wall of Justinian's fortress. The ticket of the museum offers a moderate contribution in the conservation-restoration activities of the works of art, as the entrance of the pilgrims, travelers and tourists to the monastery is free as it has always been since the

establishment of the monastery at the holy site of the Burning Bush.

In July 2009 CE, via a joint project cooperated between the current possessors of the folios of Codex Sinaiticus (i.e. British Museum '347 folios', Leipzig University Library '43 folios', Holy Monastery of St. Catherine '18 folios' and National Library of Russia '5 folios'), an online website was launched after the conservation of the gospel 'Codex Sinaiticus Project', reviving and providing the world's most ancient codex to the humanity under the theme *Experience the Oldest Bible* after 1650 years of its inscription.

5 Conclusion

Although the works of art of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine is considered one of the most significant collections worldwide, as it is one of the landmarks of Byzantium, there is no doubt that the geographical remoteness of the of the monastery which lasted for 1425 years since its establishment in 545 CE till 1970s CE, played a potential role in the development of the aspects related to the works of art. Till the second half of the 19^t
h

century CE, it is important to highlight the fact that the holiness of the site dominated the interest of pilgrims and travelers (i.e. among them scholars of different backgrounds), relatively dragging their attention away from the works of art, considering the functional perspective of the collection and its contribution in Mount Sinai monastic life, than being considered as a collection to be displayed for other purposes (i.e. global cultural perspective).

On the other hand, the number of pilgrims and travelers was increasing over Post Early Pilgrimage Period 'PEPP' and Travelers Period 'TP', but not in significant numbers which would not allow the personnel of interest to access the works of art. Along the same two periods, the collection was mentioned in brief via the writings of those pilgrims and travelers without mentioning many details about the collection and its value due to the lack of a scientific approach, with an exception to late Travelers Period 'TP' when the first catalogues were accomplished by scholars like Grandsons, Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Gibson. The catalogues of Mount Sinai treasury-collection were accomplished in a relatively late period compared to their European equivalent. Probably the loss of the possession of Codex Sinaiticus, it also relatively contributed in raising the suspiciousness of Mount Sinai monastic community towards the scholars and their real intentions. In the case of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine, the real factor which triggered the establishment of the museum of the works of art is the demanding mass tourism industry which introduced different

type of visitors who are neither pilgrims nor travelers or scholars, but just visitors of cultural interest in modern exhibitions for the works of art, as Justinian's Basilica, the library-scriptorium and the gallery of icons have always been playing their role as the houses of the treasury-collection of Mount Sinai.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Holy Monastery of St. Catherine, the vicinity of biblical Mount Sinai, W.
El Dier - the Holy Valley Tuwa
—
April 23, 2009
:
Sinai Peninsula Research 2000-2010 CE

2. Justinian's Basilica 530-545 CE, the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — April 23, 2009: Sinai

Peninsula Research 2000-2010 CE

3. The old library-scriptorium of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine: the American Colony of Jerusalem 1898-1946 CE

4. The Mosaic of the Transfiguration of 6th century CE – April 23, 2009: Sinai Peninsula Research 2000-2010 CE

5. The Library of the Ancient Manuscripts, established by King Farouk I of Egypt – April 23, 2009: Sinai Peninsula Research 2000-2010 CE

Tab. 1. Treasury, Catalogues and Museum Ages - Early Pilgrimage Period, Post Early Pilgrimage Period and Tourism Period: Sinai Peninsula Research 2000-2010 CE

Tab. 2. Codex Sinaiticus Timeline

References

Agourides, S. & Charlesworth, J. H., March 1978. *A New Discovery of Old Manuscripts on Mt. Sinai: A Preliminary Report*, in «The Biblical Archaeologist», Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 29-31.

Attia, A. S., October 1952. *The Monastery of St. Catherine and the Mount Sinai Expedition*, «Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society», 96(5), pp. 578-586.

Charlesworth, J. H. Summer 1979. *St. Catherine's Monastery Myths and Mysteries*, «The Biblical Archaeologist», 42(3), pp. 174-179.

Catholic Encyclopedia Reports. 1909. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company.

Dahari, U. 2000. *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period*, Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, IAA Reports 9.

Dames & Moore (USAID). October 1981. *Sinai Development Study Phase I, Volume I: Project List*. Los Angeles.

Justin. 2009. *The Library at Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt: Hieromonk Justin of Sinai*, Eternal Egypt 1, pp. 78-99.

Miklas, H. 2007. *St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai and the Balkan-Slavic Manuscript-Tradition*, University of Vienna.

Sevcenko, I. 1966. *The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in the Light of Its Inscriptions*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 20, pp. 255-264.

Shams, Ahmed. June 2010. *Integrated cluster of centralized heritage-based nano-economies in the High Mountains of Sinai Peninsula*, In: R. Amoêda, S. Lira and C. Pinheiro (Eds), *Heritage 2010: Heritage and Sustainable Development*, Barcelos: Green Lines Institute for Sustainable Development, pp. 421-430).

Zakharova, A. V. 2009. *Codex Sinaiticus and the Manuscripts of Mount Sinai in the Collections of the National Library of Russia*, St. Petersburg: National Library of Russia.

.(□□□□□□ □□□□) 1984.□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□
:□□□□□
□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□
.

.2006 .□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□
□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□

CCA

• • • • •

.(1995 年 10 月) 1916 . 年 月 日 出生

年 月 日 至 年 月 日

[illegible]